

THE DIVINE ORDER (Die göttliche Ordnung)

Switzerland (2017) 96 minutes

Director: Petra Biondina Volpe

Cast: Marie Leuenberger (Nora), Maximilian Simonischek (Hans),
Rachel Braunschweig (Theresa)



Screening 5 February 2020 at Swindon Arts Centre

Synopsis

Nora is a young housewife and mother who lives in 1971 with her husband and two sons in a quiet Swiss village. Here little is known about the social upheavals of the 1968 movement. The village and family peace, however, dwindles as Nora begins to work for women's voting rights and organizes the women of her town to petition for the right to vote.

Reviews



The year is 1970, and the suffragettes of Switzerland are marching for the vote. Yep. Swiss women only gained the vote in 1971 (and until 1985 a man could prevent his wife from working). With this good-humoured comedy-drama, writer-director Petra Volpe gives us the fictional story of a housewife who finds her voice during the Swiss referendum. Cleverly, her focus here is on small, ordinary lives, women who will never be remembered in the history books but who risk everything because something inside can't, won't allow them to remain silent.

Housewife Nora lives with her husband, two sons and miserable git father-in-law. "I don't need to be liberated," Nora says at the start of the movie. Her husband, Hans refuses to let her go back to work: "I won't have my sons eating tinned ravioli." At the same time, her teenage niece is branded a slut and sent to a young offender institution. Enough is enough: Nora teams up with a cigar-smoking elderly widow to campaign for a yes vote in the village. Her chief opponent is the local anti-women's rights organiser – a handbag-wielding, Mary Whitehouse-style battleaxe.

Cath Clarke, The Guardian

... The movie centres on Nora (Marie Leuenberger), who, like most of the town's women, has been cowed into keeping her opinions to herself. "The more we push, the more the men do what they want," she tells a pamphleteer encouraging approval of the referendum. Nora's days consist of caring for her children, indulging her proudly retrograde father-in-law and yearning to take a job that would break the monotony. If Nora's name weren't enough of a nod to Ibsen, her husband, Hans (Max Simonischek), addresses her as "my little bird."

But soon Nora is moved to act. Nora's rebellious teenage niece (Ella Rumpf) is sent to reform school and then, after she runs away, to prison. Nora reads up on the inequities of Swiss marriage law. A small act of defiance against the town's leading female anti-suffrage finger-wagger (Therese Affolter) wins her an ally in a feisty widow (Sibylle Brunner), and soon an Italian restaurant owner (Marta Zoffoli) joins them. Their growing movement culminates in a strike that brings the town to a halt.

The Divine Order illustrates how peer pressure can influence the political process. Collective silence, whether it's from women unwilling to publicly press for their rights or men afraid to voice agreement with their wives for fear of looking weak around co-workers, proves more of an obstacle than any opponent.

Ben Kenigsberg, New York Times

Film Facts

- Switzerland's submission to the Foreign Language Film Award of the 90th Annual Academy Awards.
- Winner of the Best Global Cinema award at the San Diego International Film Festival in 2017.
- Although Swiss women were granted the right to vote in 1971, it wasn't until 1981 that Swiss voters approved an equal rights amendment to their constitution. And, until 1985, women still had to legally obtain their husband's approval if they wanted to get a job.

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