



Patron: Jim Broadbent

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The Guilty (15)

Dir: **Gustav Möller**

Starring: **Jakob Cedergren**

Sponsor: **Paul Hancocks**

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Synopsis: Copenhagen the present. Asger is a police officer, working a shift at an emergency services call centre. A journalist contacts him, asking about a forthcoming disciplinary hearing at which he is to be questioned. A woman, Iben, phones the emergency line; it seems that she has been kidnapped by her husband Michael, and is phoning from his van under the pretence of calling her younger children, Mathilde and Oliver, at home. Asger manages to alert the local police without losing contact with Iben, but a patrol car fails to locate the van. Asger deduces Iben's home phone number, and speaks to Mathilde, who describes a violent argument between her parents. Asger's colleague urges him not to get personally involved, but Asger contacts his partner Rashid, who is preparing to provide Asger's alibi at the next day's hearing: Rashid goes to Iben's house and reports that baby Oliver has been murdered. Asger briefly manages to contact Iben and guides her so that she can escape from Michael's van. Eventually, however, he realises that she is mentally ill and has killed her own child. Iben calls, preparing to commit suicide. Asger tells her that he recently shot and killed a teenage criminal deliberately but what she did to Oliver was unintentional. The line goes dead, but Asger hears that local police have taken Iben into custody. He leaves the call centre, after telling Rashid to be truthful at the hearing.

happening somewhere else entirely. An arc of redemption for him duly takes shape.

That destination might not be too surprising given the film's title, and the same could be said of the setup itself for anyone who saw Caroline Bartleet's BAFTA winning short *Operator* (2015), in which Kate Dickie plays a 999 operator talking to a woman trapped by a house fire. Director Gustav Möller and his co-writer Emil Nygaard Albertsen rely on very effective audio atmospherics and the music-free soundtrack of stressed voices, sound effects and silence, rather than on visual flair. Asger's moment of breakdown is bathed by an infernal red light bulb, but only by means of having him angrily smash all the white ones in the traditional manner of screen stoics reaching snapping point. This particular snapping point involves a police officer who apparently used lethal force where none was warranted and is about to lie his way out of trouble, so you could ask whether the film's deliberate confinement and Cedergren's skillfully empathetic passage through boredom and annoyance on the way to self knowledge aren't standing in for any wider peer into a social quagmire, one worth a bit more volume than *The Guilty* cares to generate. But then you might also ponder whether those contrivances are truthfully cinematic, rather than theatrical or televisual, in the first place.

Cinema and telephony are almost contemporaries, and having grown up together and gone digital together they seem unlikely to fall out of love now. The possibilities available for actors threatening or cursing or wooing or misunderstanding one another on the phone are just too rich for a script writer to ignore. Moreover, a phone is the prop of an actor's dreams, now that cigarettes are out of the question. Mobile phones have allowed countless films to take this verbose variety act out on the road; but a few movies have also detected that cellular chat in an over-networked world is more intrusive, confessional and intimate than your average call box or landline, promising freedoms that might be no freedoms at all.

The Guilty is rooted to the spot, set in one location and playing out in something like real time as a troubled male character is prodded by events towards making a confession of his own down the phone. Police officer Asger (Jakob Cedergren) is working a shift at a Copenhagen emergency services call centre and juggling the various lines of telephonic communication available during an unfolding crisis, one that is conveyed to him- and to us - only by the voices on the other end of the line. The distressed Iben (Jessica Dinnage) appears to have been kidnapped by her husband Michael (Johan Olsen) and makes a covert call to Asger pleading for help. Brusquely preoccupied at first by his own issues, including a pending disciplinary case for some unspecified violent incident, Asger ends up talking to two different branches of the Copenhagen police, his partner Rashid (Omar Shargawi) and young daughter Mathilde (Katinka Evers-Jahnsen) in the course of trying to contain a tragedy

Credits

Asger Holm	Jakob Cedergren
Iben	Jessica Dinnage
Rashid	Omar Shargawi
Michael	Johan Olsen
Bo	Jakob Hauberg Lahmann
Mathilde	Katinka Evers-Jahnsen
Director	Gustav Moller
Screenplay	Gustav Moller, Emil Nygaard Albertsen
Director of Photography	Jasper J. Spanning
Editor	Carla Luffe
Sound design	Oskar Skriver
Costume	Ida Skov Gudmundsen-Holmgren
Music	Caspar Hesselager, Carl Coleman
	Denmark/Norway 2017.
	85 mins

Another View

“Do you know who the police are? We’re protectors. We protect people who need help.” Jakob Cedergren’s Asger, an alarm dispatcher at the end of his tether, is comforting a six-year-old-girl through the phone. Her mother’s been kidnapped by her ex-husband and it’s a race against time to catch the criminal before the situation shifts to murder. The young girl’s voice is muffled by the static, but to Asger, the case is clear. Unfortunately he couldn’t be further from the truth.

The advantage of binding a crime narrative to an office setting is how naturally you can withhold information from the protagonist, and in turn, the audience. Fear of the unknown is a powerful weapon, and director Gustav Möller wields it with gusto. He drip-feeds plot points and final stretch revelations that threaten to turn the whole procedure on its head. Until its last about-face, it works.

The plot progression rarely feels contrived, the twists are shocking without being exploitative, and the tension is dialled up to the point where Asger has to rip those dials from his desk. When he’s instructing the mother down the phone to breathe slowly and calm herself, you’re not sure whether it’s for her benefit, his, or yours.

This particular case is thrilling, but its specifics hardly matter. The *Guilty* is much more a character study of one man slowly unravelling across a taut 90 minutes. At one point, the grainy noise of windshield wipers forms a thumping soundtrack. He may be confined to a swivel chair, but his headspace is everywhere. A backstory revealed in jerks and jolts makes it clear that his role as a dispatcher is the only source of self-worth Asger has left.

Eventually, he sets his sights on salvation; the investigation recedes to background noise. Try as he might to help the little girl on the other end of the phone, he’s unable to help himself.

Gus Edgar-Chan: Little White Lies

Tonight’s film will be followed by the Society’s AGM. All members are invited to attend. The meeting will take place in the upper half of the theatre, will start at 9.15 and last for about 1 hour.

Our next screening: Friday October 25th, 7.30pm Capernaum (Lebanon 2018. Cert 15)

Nadine Labaki’s Oscar-nominated drama is a remarkably assured piece of cinema from a part of the world not usually associated with film but rapidly gaining a serious reputation for quality drama. It centres on Zain (a remarkable performance by young Zain Al Rafeea) who, at the age of 12, decides to sue his parents for bringing him into the world and condemning him to a life of bleakness and poverty as a street child. Shot on the streets of Beirut, it shows in unflinching detail the conditions such children endure, but Zain’s spirit, determination and resourcefulness are unquenchable and the optimism of the final shot lingers long in the memory.