

Friday before Christmas – The medal of honour

Movie Reviews

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In the tern existence of the seventy- year- old Ion I. Ion (a retired nationalist that seeks reconciliation with himself, his wife and his son who left for Canada six years before), “the existential void” (amplified by the “small hell” in the family) turns into a deceptive state of fulfilment and “honesty” as a result of an error: in 1995 he is awarded, by mistake, a “medal of honour” for “bravery in action during the Second World War”. What remains, besides the local and (more or less) current socio-political connotations, is the embarrassing reactivation of the paternal and filial emotions during the face to face meeting – on a Friday, before Christmas – between father and son (and the latter’s family).

Given the present context of the Romanian cinematography, maybe the main quality of **The medal of honour** is – beyond the actors’ remarkable performance, seen also in other movies of the after-2000 “new wave”– the director’s desire to make (as he declared in an interview for *Adevărul* newspaper) “an amalgam of a minimalist script and a classical approach”. The result: a beneficial escape from the “minimalist movie stereotype”, refined by its author’s “own touch” and at the same time “an emotional and visual enrichment of the genre, while keeping the realistic key”. As expected, **The medal’s** pick up varies according to the spectator’s setting regarding the filmic poetics. Thus, those who have cultivated their taste for an exclusive and clearly defined “minimalistic“ approach, those who enthusiastically praise the “spearheads” of the “new Romanian cinema” (from **The merchandise and the money** to **Policeman, adjective**) might receive Netzer’s proposal ,*at best*, with a grain of salt. Likewise, the cinema-goers who do not forget that the “new Romanian wave” was not born from nothingness, can find enough occasions for amusement in this quasi-“minimalistic” serio-comic story.



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Therefore, what are the reasons why **The medal...** brings joy? First of all, its “emblem”: the actor Victor Rebengiuc, always matched by him only, in a role not lower than his greatest parts in other famous movies: **The forest of the hanged**, **Tănase Scatiu**, **Sand cliffs**, **The Moromete family** or **Niki the Transylvanian, retired colonel** (to mention just a few titles from a rich filmography covering half a century). Then, the “episodics”: Camelia Zorlescu, Ion Lucian, Radu Beligan, Tatiana Iekel, Mircea Andreescu, Cătălina Murgea, Mimi Brănescu, Tania Popa etc. And, as *special guest*, the former President of Romania, Ion Iliescu, whose short appearance heats, one way or another, the sensibility of the contemporaneous Romanian spectator, familiarized with “Uncle Nelu Cotrocelu”. Then, above all, the director’s gentle, sentimental-ironical vision (but never sarcastic), his concern for the audio-visual detail of each sequence – a vector pointing to “ahead”. That is, towards what was alive and real in the Romanian film industry before the “minimalist” trend.

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