

# ‘Summerlight And Then Comes The Night’: Tallinn Review

BY WENDY IDE 11 NOVEMBER 2022

Elfar Adalsteins returns home to Iceland to adapt the popular source novel by Jon Kalman



SOURCE: CITE FILMS

## ‘SUMMERLIGHT AND THEN COMES THE NIGHT’

*Dir/scr: Elfar Adalsteins. Iceland/Belgium/Sweden. 2022. 112mins.*

It’s tempting to assume that life in a small village in the agricultural hinterland of Iceland is uneventful. But, as this patchwork of interconnected stories shows, everyone, however reclusive, has a tale to tell. The second feature from Elfar Adalsteins, adapted from a celebrated novel by Icelandic author Jon Kalman Stefansson, has something of the folksy, homespun appeal of Garrison Keillor – part of it even takes place in a knitting factory. But there’s an icy, implacable element underneath the surface layer of cosiness. Grief and tragedy naturally co-exist with gentle comedy; and Adalsteins leans into both the eccentricity and philosophical density of the source material, with the village itself serving as a somewhat enigmatic narrator. The fabric of the storytelling is loosely woven – so much so that at times it seems at risk of unravelling into a series of superficial snapshots. But Adalsteins’ eye for detail and the picture’s persuasive sense of place and of community carries us along for the leisurely, meandering ride.

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The film represents the second feature by producer-turned-director Adalsteins, but his first Icelandic language project – his first film was the road movie *End Of Sentence*, which starred John Hawkes as a bereaved husband who embarks on a journey to Ireland at the behest of his late wife. Previously, Adalsteins won multiple awards with his John Hurt-starring short film *Sailcloth* (2011). This picture, which screens in Tallinn following a world premiere at the Reykjavik Film Festival, will appeal most successfully to audiences familiar with the source material, but should also enjoy a healthy festival run.

If there's a common theme in the stories, beyond their geographical location, it seems to be a journey towards fulfilment of some kind. The manager of the knitting factory dreams in Latin one night, which prompts him to step away from his prosperous career and enter the world of learning. His marriage fails, but, withdrawn into his autodidact exploration of astronomy and philosophy, he has found a new meaning in life. Meanwhile fourth generation farmer Kjartan (Olafur Darri Olafsson) seeks fulfilment of a more base variety, in a torrid al fresco affair with the wife of the neighbouring homestead. His own spouse, alerted by his reckless over-use of aftershave, sniffs out the infidelity and exacts a drastic retribution involving his cherished car renovation project.

Then there's Jonas (Siggi Ingvarsson), the pale, sensitive son of the widowed local policeman, known to all as Hannes The Mighty (Johann Sigurdarson). Hannes' dream is for his son to wear the same uniform and follow his footsteps into law enforcement. Jonas, a wisp of a character who struggles to make much of an impression, is more interested in drawing, whittling and watching the birdlife of the region. Perhaps most affecting is the brief connection between two lonely souls, Benedikt (Vikingur Kristjansson) and Puridur (Svandis Dora Einarsdottir), which promises much before Iceland's winter roads and an ill-placed boulder intervene.

The tonal variety in the stories is reflected in the wide range of music choices, which covers everything from melancholy strings to jaunty accordion, through to the energetic Icelandic rock played by Kjartan and his band. And Adalsteins' use of the landscape is equally effective – punctuating shots of sky and sea remind us that all the domestic upheaval is nothing compared to the drama of the backdrop.

Production company: Berserk Films, Silver screen, Pegasus Pictures

International sales: Cite Films [www.citefilms.com](http://www.citefilms.com)

Producer: Heather Millard, Elfar Adalsteins, Lilja Osk Snorraddottir, Olafur Darri Olafsson

Cinematography: David Williamson

Production design: Heimir Sverrisson

Editing: Stefanía Thors

Music: Gunnar Tynes

Main cast: Sveinn Olafur Gunnarsson, Ebba Gudny Gudmundsdottir, Olafur Darri Olafsson, Sara Dogg Asgeirsdottir, Heida Reed, Soggi Ingvarsson, Johann Sigurdarson, Vigdis Grimsdottir, Vikingur Kristjansson, Svandis Dora Einarsdottir

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