

TONI ERDMANN

GERMANY 155 MINUTES

MAREN ADE

WINCHESTER
FILM SOCIETY

WINCHESTER
SCIENCE CENTRE
AND PLANETARIUM



Against all odds, the world cinema limelight was comprehensively stolen last year by a 69-year-old Austrian character actor in an epic situationist romp, who dressed up in a wig, phoney teeth and sometimes dark glasses that made him look like Bingo from the Banana Splits. Towards Christmas, critics who would generally rather hang themselves than be seen praising a comedy were rushing to do exactly this in the case of Maren Ade's fascinating film about a fraught father-daughter relationship, *Toni Erdmann*, making it their favourite. Was this because it was a comedy that was long, in German and at Cannes? Not exactly. I suspect it is more because it is not really a comedy, despite some big laughs – of which more in a moment.

"How ill white hairs become a fool and jester" is the Shakespeare line that occurred to me watching *Toni Erdmann* for the second time, for its UK release. This subversive film suggests that maybe dark hair ill becomes a solemn young person, and, though it is embarrassing and inappropriate for old people to clown around, it is just as jarringly wrong for younger people to affect insufferable seriousness. Yet the film also suggests that comedy and laughs are themselves not necessarily a wonderful, life-affirming thing. They can – certainly in a family context – be a power mechanism, the means of wheedling, needling and passive-aggressive demands for emotional submission.

Peter Simonischek gives a superb performance as Winfried Conradi, an ageing, retired German schoolteacher whose friends, relatives and former

colleagues have had to get used to his extraordinary fondness for japes and pranks and joke-shop false teeth. Without the wacky disguises, he has a strong, rather handsome face, but somehow you can see how that face is apt for exaggeration and inflation into a gargoyle; Winfried is a recognisable Jekyll to his alter ego, a hoax dress-up Hyde he calls Toni Erdmann.

At the very beginning, we see him masterminding a retirement concert for a former colleague, in which both he and the pupils are resplendent in Halloween-type horror corpse cosmetics, a giggling reminder to the retiree that this is just the prelude to death. Winfried has a difficult relationship with his elegant daughter Ines (Sandra Hüller). She is away from the country a lot, working as a management consultant in Romania and China, and her return for a family birthday makes their relationship even more frosty.

Put quite simply: Ines doesn't find her dad funny any more. And this long delayed realisation is part of what triggers a mysterious crisis in Winfried, who also senses something unhappy and unfulfilled in her.

Toni Erdmann is a long film. Writer-director Maren Ade has enough material here for an award-winning Netflix series, and sometimes it looks as if she just couldn't bear to lose any of the uproarious scenes and situations that she had devised. But it never loses your attention. The ending almost made me think of Lear and Cordelia. Only it's Cordelia who has to do the carrying.

Peter Bradshaw, The Guardian

WRITERS: Maren Ade **CINEMATOGRAPHY:** Patrick Orth **MUSIC:** Gabriel Grote

CAST: Ines Sandra Hüller | Winfried Peter Simonischek | Henneberg Michael Wittenborn | Gerald Thomas Loibl

VOTING FOR *Lady Macbeth* A67 | B55 | C7 | D1 | E1 | Rating 85.5% | Attendance 141

Next screening | **Get Out** | Tuesday 31 October 2017 8.00pm

'...a chilling satire of liberal racism in the US...'

FROM BLUMHOUSE THE PRODUCER OF THE VISIT, INSIDIOUS & THE GIFT

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY
JORDAN PEELE

GET OUT

"SMART, VISCERAL, TERRIFYING."

— Peter Sciretta, *Slashfilm*

Tuesday 31 October 2017 8.00pm