



REVOLUTION-MINDED: *Ane Dahl Torp* is *Nina*, a Marxist-Leninist doctor in "Comrade Pedersen."

Foreign films dissect human connection

By Robert Abele
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The Scandinavian Film Festival L.A. continues this weekend at the Writers Guild Theater, and if anything might emerge as a theme, it's the unexpected lengths people will go to to feel connected to something. In Danish filmmaker Pernille Fischer Christensen's claustrophobic but compelling two-hander "**A Soap**," unsentimental Charlotte (Trine Dyrholm), having ditched an abusive boyfriend, moves into an apartment above lonely, TV-soap-obsessed transsexual Veronica (David Dencik). A series of escalating favors brings these two naturally suspicious neighbors into each other's orbit, and eventually into a kind of companionship that starts to resemble love. But what kind of love? Christensen isn't the most sure-footed of storytellers, but she has a keen grasp of character tension.

In the Norwegian feature "**Comrade Pedersen**" — which spans the Mao-inspired radicalism of the late '60s through the '70s — the torrid hookup between Knut (Kristoffer Joner), a spindly, nervous high school teacher, and fervent Marxist-Leninist doctor Nina (Ane Dahl Torp), blond, athletic and armed for revolution, is a metaphor for the crash-bang temptations of ideology. In Hans Petter Moland's exquisitely shot but tonally offbeat effort, communism is the allure of a lover who promises a utopia of eroticism but who won't commit when it comes to the bourgeois indulgences of a real relationship. As a depiction of a Maoist cell's slow disintegration, "*Pedersen*" has certain potency, but the love story is a jumble.

The standout, however, is another Norwegian offering, Erik Richter Strand's "**Sons**," a nervy film that earns its genre shifts among dark comedy, drama and thriller because it deals in lives that seem trapped between childhood and adulthood, between a time of knowing nothing about the world and the age of being able to process its harshest realities. Twenty-five-year-old Lars (Nils Jorgen Kaalstad) is a temperamental public pool lifeguard spurred to outrage one day when he notices a notorious rumored molester named Hans (Henrik Mestad) splashing among the kids at the pool. Armed with a video camera, Lars embarks on an ill-thought-out hunt for proof to show his boss — who won't take action to bar the man without evidence — and in the process becomes the riskiest kind of crusader, one whose morality is wrapped up in long-unexamined layers of pain. The performances are complex, most especially those of Kaalstad and Mikkel Bratt Silset, as the hollow-eyed boy Lars fumblingly tries to protect. Strand's portrait of a society unable to care for its young is awash in tart ironies. Ultimately "*Sons*" plays like the appropriately messy vigilante thriller our times need, an antidote to the comfortable justice of predator-nabbing "*Dateline*" specials, and the idea that exposure is the same thing as closure.