

## The County

It took a while to get here, but the 2019 poker-face comedy-drama “The County” sneaked into streaming venues this spring after getting good reviews elsewhere. Written and directed by Grímur Hákonarson, this Icelandic whimsy, set in an isolated rural area, offers a worthy -- if understated—role for its sturdy protagonist.

At the beginning of the film, Inga (Arndís Hrónn Egilsdóttir) loses her husband in an accident and is on her own in running her threatened dairy farm in very rural Iceland. The dairy farmers in her area have become ever more suspicious of The Co-op, a local organization which holds monopolistic power over the individual dairy farmers and has been seen by many as hopelessly corrupt. Seeing her own business sinking, Inga begins, mostly against her own will and temperament, to take a stand against The Co-op, trying, fitfully, to recruit local milk suppliers to join her in opposing them.

Before long, the grieving Inga’s public stance makes her a pariah in her own community, setting up “The County’s” smart, oddly funny, and deeply involving tightrope walk: self-effacing Inga must cautiously bring her community over to her side while risking her safety and sanity along the way.

Egilsdóttir’s Inga is an altogether unforgettable character, committed to the thankless task of ruining her own life in order to rescue her livelihood. Her harebrained stunts (like spraying milk all over The Co-Op’s office building from her dairy truck) will either dismantle the local milk mafia or get her locked up, and Egilsdóttir’s singular presence brings compassion and integrity to Inga’s cockeyed fury.

Cinematographer Mart Taniel captures Iceland’s famously stark and stunning countryside, lending some pictorial grandeur to the film’s social realist ethos, which recalls the flavor of British proletarian director Ken Loach, notable for his treatment of underdogs.

“The County” cuts deep (if not **too** deep), putting a human face on an all-too-believable conflict, along with suspense, charm, and a touch of Scandinavian zaniness.

*(The film is not rated –though it might rate an “R”--and runs 92 minutes).*

(April 2021)