

**DORCHESTER FILM SOCIETY
2022/23 SEASON**



HOPE

(Language: Norwegian, Swedish/English)

Director: Maria Sodahl, 2021. Running time: 130 minutes.
Presented by Dorchester Film Society, 17th October, 2022.

“For audiences seeking escapism, this may not be the best time to tout a movie about terminal illness. Yet it might help to know that *Hope*, a largely autobiographical drama from the Norwegian writer and director Maria Sodahl, is neither miserabilist nor soppily sentimental. Instead, it’s an almost brutally honest observation of a calcified relationship forced to adjust to a terrifying new reality.

Anja (Andrea Braein Hovig) and Tomas (Stellan Skarsgard) have a comfortable Oslo home, six children between them and a two-decade domestic partnership. A talented choreographer, Anja has neglected her career while Tomas, a theater director, has worked and traveled tirelessly. By the time Anja learns that the lung cancer she endured the previous year has metastasized to her brain and is likely incurable, the two have drifted so far apart that the survival of the relationship is as uncertain as her prognosis.

“We couldn’t even stick together when times were good,” she reminds Tomas, bitterly. The diagnosis has freed her to speak the unspeakable, her candor leaving Tomas stricken and too often lost for words. But Skarsgard, filling his heavy features with pain and bewilderment, gives the character’s impassivity an unusual eloquence. And as nervy medical appointments alternate with bustling family celebrations (the movie unfolds over Christmas and New Year), the couple’s emotional distance remains a heartbreaking constant.

Self-centered without being at all self-serving, Anja’s story has the perfect medium in Hovig, whose huge eyes and mobile mouth draw us in. Raw, melancholy and unquestionably mature, *Hope* understands that some wounds may never be healed. Even so, it takes a brave movie to hold that stance until its very last second.”

Jeannette Catsoulis, *New York Times*, April 15th, 2021.

“Here is an intelligent and civilised film from Norway with two outstanding actors; directed by Maria Sødahl, it’s about love, grief and intimacy and it is conceived at a high creative standard. Yet for me it never quite ignites with the real passion or the real anger that it seems to be gesturing towards.

Andrea Bræin Hovig plays Anja, a successful fortysomething choreographer with an international career, in a relationship with Tomas, played by Stellan Skarsgård, and together they have a large and loving stepfamily. The previous Christmas, Anja had been given the all-clear from lung cancer, but one year on it has grimly returned with a metastasis in her brain; she has to have surgery but with a poor prognosis.

Yet agonisingly, the amount of hope that Anja is given seems to vary with differing doctors. She is told to emphasise this statistically negligible sliver of hope when speaking to her children, but this could simply be encouraging everyone to indulge in magical thinking about the whole thing. And now Tomas says he wants to marry Anja before the operation. Should she take comfort and hope from that? Or is this planned wedding closer to a bizarre funeral ceremony, a gesture that actually underscores Tomas’s solemn belief that she is going to die, and his infuriating reluctance to marry her before that?

This is a valuably intended study of two people who, despite their large family, have been utterly dedicated to their respective careers and have perhaps neglected their emotional lives: and yet there is something, for me, unrevealing about the drama, and almost sentimental about the final moments. But Hovig and Skarsgård are both very good.”

Peter Bradshaw, *the Guardian*, 7th December, 2021.