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Film Reviews

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Berlin

On the Sly

A pas de loup (Belgium-France)

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A Ring Prod., Les Films d'Antoine production. (International sales: Delphis Films, Montreal.) Produced by Yves Ringer, Antoine Simkine. Directed, edited by Olivier Ringer. Screenplay, Olivier Ringer, Yves Ringer.

With: Wynona Ringer, Olivier Ringer, Macha Ringer, Ursula Noyer, Pierre Leroux. (French dialogue)

Tired of being ignored by her parents, a little girl hides in the woods in "On the Sly," a charming leap into the mind of a child that offers rewards for kids and adults alike. A true family affair (multihyphenate Olivier Ringer cast his daughter Wynona in the lead), the pic is informed by forest-set fairy tales and perhaps even a bit of Mark Twain, conjuring a young girl's perspective by almost exclusively using an interior monologue. The results are entirely winning and easily dubbable for maximum theatrical and DVD exposure across multiple territories.

Every Friday evening, 6-year-old Cathy (Wynona Ringer) gets strapped into the backseat of the family car for the drive with her parents (Olivier Ringer, Macha Ringer) to their country house. Each time, once securely buckled, she's ignored. Helmer Ringer captures the inner bargains kids make, the "if Mom notices me, then it means I'm important" sort of thing, focusing exclusively on Cathy's p.o.v. (her parents' heads are barely seen, or are seen only at a distance).

From the auds' standpoint as much as from Cathy's, her parents really do ignore her. When it's time to go back to their home in Paris, Cathy lets the car door slam without her, and her folks drive off. Once they realize she's not there and pull up to the house again, Cathy decides she's better off in the woods rather than risk an unholy scolding.

As viewers of all ages automatically summon up memories of Hansel and Gretel or Jack and the Beanstalk, Cathy takes to the woods with unsqueamish determination, befriendng a fish, building a small hut for herself and hiding from search parties. Things don't change until her father finally starts thinking with his daughter's kind of imagination.

Ringer's decision to focus everything on the little girl and her viewpoint pays off in spades, conjuring a world of the imagination grounded in reality -- no fairies, no talking animals. His woods bear the possibility of small dangers but no glowering glades, so even the smallest tots won't be frightened. They will, however, recognize their own particular methods of reasoning, and the yearning all kids feel for parents as playmates as well as nurturers.

Young Wynona Ringer is delightful, unaffectedly intelligent and eagerly plunging into the spirit of adventure. Widescreen visuals are classically attractive, whether lensing Paris at night or the sylvan brooks and hollows of the forest; the format's emphasis on the horizontal was the perfect choice to replicate a child's perspective. Unfortunately, the digital projection reduced tonal warmth and added an unwanted sharpness. Music slightly swells up at times, but avoids pushing sentimentality.

Camera (color, widescreen), Olivier Ringer; music, Bruno Alexiu; sound, Vincent Mauduit. Reviewed at Berlin Film Festival (Generation Kplus), Feb. 12, 2011. Running time: 77 MIN.

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