

SWEAT Review

Star rating: 4 out of 5 stars - “An honest exploration of the isolation experienced by influencers in the spotlight”

Social media has exploded over the last decade and the vast majority of us have become reliant on it, constantly refreshing our news feeds and checking our Instagram accounts. We have cultivated an online world, where problems can be filtered out and imperfections can be airbrushed away, which we desperately cling to. Many filmmakers have attempted to encapsulate the formidability of this quickly-developing internet culture and how this form of hyper-connection may be affecting our lives. With films, such as Netflix’s *The Circle*, *Mainstream*, and the 2010 cinematisation of the genesis of Facebook, *The Social Network*, saturating the box office, you may think that this Generation Zero trope has become a tad overdone. However, the Polish-Swedish impressive drama *SWEAT* offers a refreshingly honest insight into what it means to have every aspect of your life scrutinised, while exploring the frightening reality of being completely consumed into a world obsessed with social media.

The film follows the life of protagonist, Swylia (Magdalena Koleśnik), a highly successful celebrity influencer and fitness guru, with piercing blue eyes, glistening white teeth, and over 600,000 followers of adoring fans. Koleśnik embodies the life of this social media star superbly, as she relishes in her avid sponsorships, modelling deals, and fast-growing platform and fame. However, despite oozing with confidence while addressing her enthusiastic online followers as “my loves” at fitness events and through her phone screen, Koleśnik’s portrayal of Swylia strips away this persona of popularity and exposes the difficult reality of internet fame.

Director and Screenwriter, Magnus von Horn, has creatively encapsulated the turbulent existence of social media stardom. When Swylia is hosting her fitness events, she enthusiastically and positively darts around the stage, engaging with the crowd and inspiring them, as she joyfully declares, “I can move mountains with you!”. All the while, cinematographer Michael Dymek scrupulously follows her every move at a dizzying pace, which cunningly immerses the audience into her serotonin-inducing world. However, these up-tempo, fast-paced scenes are cleverly contrasted with sombre and almost silent moments, which only amplify Swylia’s loneliness and isolation. As she retreats from her overpopulated meet and greets to an empty home, with only her dog Jackson for company, it becomes evident that the one thing that Swylia is desperately searching for is genuine human connection.

Despite Swylia's colossal fame and fortune, obsessive posting, and obnoxious fitness persona, *SWEAT* impressively creates a celebrity in the public eye which we can empathise with. As we observe Swylia's life, not only does it become evident that her all-consuming online persona and work-life has unconsciously warped her perspective of the real world, but also that there is little tenderness or support from the people around her to help her. She is pushed to the limit by her inconsiderate PR team, who blame and threaten her with loss of sponsorship when she doesn't behave as they wish, and her family dismiss her problems as being dramatised, just like her online alter ego. It is in these moments that Koleśnik's embodiment of Swylia's fragility and vulnerability shines, as her beautifully sensitive acting cunningly unpacks the intricacies of this Insta-queen's insecurities. However, it is the sudden arrival of a stalker who invades Swylia's life that cuts through the sparkle, sweatpants, and glamour to give the film a sense of seriousness, which the cinematographer captures perfectly through invasive camera angles. This shocking twist in the film's storyline brings to life the true threat that influencers experience to their privacy and safety.

SWEAT flawlessly encapsulates the brutal and harsh reality of the influencer world, as it does not trivialise the struggles of those forced behind the camera and a ring light. It looks beyond the spandex and protein powder to depict a story of fame, honesty, and loneliness.