Review: 'The Moving Creatures,' Three Tales of Family Ordeals

The Moving Creatures

By DANIEL M. GOLDSEPT. 10, 2015

 "The Moving Creatures," written and directed by Caetano Gotardo, is a small-bore examination of three Brazilian families beset by wrenching ordeals.

In the first and least cohesive episode, Maria (Cida Moreira) learns of a son's secret when the police come to their home. In the second, a sound engineer (Rômulo Braga) grows increasingly sick at work, then makes a jarring discovery on his way to the doctor. <mark>The last and best follows João (Henrique Schafer) and Ana (an exceptional Fernanda Vianna)</mark> as they meet their long-lost 16-year-old, stolen from his cradle in the hospital and now living happily with another family.

Stripped of all but basic plot components, the stories focus on the core emotional demands of these events. Mr. Gotardo uses long, slowly unfolding shots and extended close-ups to aid our familiarity with each set of characters — almost by osmosis, we grasp their domestic dynamics, the rhythm of their routines.

Avoiding melodrama with its quiet portrayal of crushing losses, "The Moving Creatures" is a chilling reminder that a simple life is no shield against the disastrous or the devastating, and that the parent-child relationship is at least as essential to the parent as it is to the child.

Unfortunately, Mr. Gotardo ends each episode with the mother speak-singing a song to explain her grief. Perhaps a bid to transform the film's painstaking realism into something poetic or transcendent, this odd conceit instead undercuts the actors' restrained, affecting performances, almost shrugging at these tragedies of the everyday.

THE MOVING CREATURES

Opens on Friday

Directed by Caetano Gotardo

In Portuguese, with English subtitles

1 hour 37 minutes; not rated

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