Written by Samuel Zimmerman
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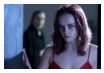

As Hollywood consistently scrambles to create the "feel-good movie of the year," sometimes there's nothing more life-affirming than horror. After all, Jigsaw, in his own warped and brutal way, has been teaching victims and audiences to appreciate what they've got for six years now. On April 9, Anchor Bay is set to give limited theatrical release to Agnieszka Wojtowicz-Vosloo's AFTER.LIFE, and while this film is nothing like SAW—or much else to come out of the genre lately—it should spark discussion and debate in viewers' minds about how much they're actually living.

Taking a look at what possibly happens…well, after life, Wojtowicz-Vosloo's feature debut stars Christina Ricci as Anna, a woman incredibly unhappy with herself and her situation. After a fight with her boyfriend Paul (Justin Long, playing more serious than usual), she takes off driving in the pouring rain and quickly ends up on the slab of funeral director Eliot Deacon (Liam Neeson)—and that's just the beginning. As Eliot explains it, he has a unique gift: He can communicate with the dead, and sees his job as helping them transition into and be at peace with their departed states. Confused and scared, Anna fiercely believes she is still among the living, and that Eliot is merely a psychopath. Whatever the case, he forces Anna to take a harsh look back, while Paul, suffering under the stress of grief and guilt, refuses to let her go.

Despite AFTER.LIFE being her first full-length movie, Wojtowicz-Vosloo has already attracted plenty of praise. Her short film PATÉ won accolades at the Sundance Film Festival, prompting CNN and *Filmmaker* magazine to do profiles on the young director, then just out of NYU's Tisch School of the Arts. It also announced the arrival of an auteur with intriguing genre sensibilities, which definitely assisted when she sought to launch her next project. "PATÉ was totally twisted, it was very dark and it got lots of buzz when it premiered at Sundance," she says. "That always helps, but I believe people judged AFTER.LIFE based on AFTER.LIFE. People really responded to the script, and then it just happened. I also had many different actors interested in the roles, which was another advantage, and the financing came together quickly."

The origins of AFTER.LIFE's meditation on the mortal state lie deep in Wojtowicz-Vosloo's childhood, she reveals. "My father died when I was 10 years old, so I've always had this morbid fascination with death. I believe we all do. Obviously, death is the deepest fear we have. People are different—some don't realize they actually have that fear, and others are kind of in denial.

Still others are maybe trying so hard to live life because they know there is an end. My father died very young at 33, so I've always been intrigued by what happens when you die. Where do you go? Is it just that that's it, or is there some sort of consciousness, some sort of spirit? Are you in your own bottle of consciousness for this transition period? That's what the movie is about. Is there an afterlife?"

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