

## REVIEW

# *'Paradise is Burning': a poignant portrayal of three sisters*

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Mika Gustafson's "Paradise is Burning," that screened at the recent Venice International Film Festival, draws us into the lives of three siblings, all girls, whose carefree and happy-go-lucky existence spirals. The film won the Best Director Award in the Orizzonti section of the prestigious festival.

The eldest sister, Laura (Bianca Delbravo), barely 16, plays mother to Mira (Dilvin Asaad), 12, and seven-year-old Steffi (Safira Mossberg) in this Swedish work. Abandoned by their irresponsible mother, the girls enjoy the freedom to live and play



The film screened at the Venice International Film Festival. Supplied

and execute the odd prank that gets them in a little hot water.

However, their idyllic existence is all set to slip into a storm when they get a call from a social worker, who wants to make a routine visit. Laura

is distressed — how are they going to explain the absence of an adult at home and escape foster care that is bound to separate the sisters? The film runs like a roller coaster ride with Laura unable to cope and Mira

chipping in to help.

Gustafson keeps us glued to the screen with the conflicts and complexities of girls ready to step into womanhood on full display. Their struggle to grapple with the intensity of this transition is portrayed with subtle nuance. The actresses are first timers, but they adopt multiple emotions with alacrity. This transformation is beautifully shown and keeps the excitement level up and flying.

The director's debut feature film is incredibly strong in its portrayal of sorority. The Swedish filmmaker explains that the movie is "a declaration of love to sisterhood" and added

in a released statement that she wanted "to show what it's like to be a human being in those moments when euphoric freedom lies cheek to cheek with total despair."

Gustafson co-directed the deeply intimate music documentary "Silvana," following Swedish rap artist Silvana Imam, in 2017 and in "Paradise is Burning" she develops her observational eye. In less than two hours, we are presented with an amazing canvas of the girls' daily lives — there is never a dull moment with their laughter, longing, teasing and bickering. It is a great character study executed with sensitive finesse.