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## 'The Judgement' a thought provoking movie from the Netherlands

By Sophie Braccini



Photo provided

Based on a true story still unraveling today, the movie presented in Orinda this month, "The Judgement (De veroordeling)," is a thriller/drama that will provoke reflection on our celebrity and social media driven society.

The Deventer's murder story, named after the city where it happened, has been in the news in the Netherlands for over 20 years. But the truth might be so hard to get at that by the end of "The Judgement," spectators might have divergent opinions on who did it. Beyond the pure murder mystery, the film exposes a chilling and shattering aspect of our time: how a celebrity can overcome the police and judicial systems and lead a real witch hunt. It was the first time in the Netherlands that people in the media were able to spread a conspiracy theory denying facts twice acknowledged by the judicial system.

Journalist Bas Haan had no idea what can of worms he was opening when he started digging into the clues that led to a guilty verdict against Ernest Louwes for the murder of Jaqueline Wittenberg. At first, he just tried to prove that an innocent man had been sent to jail. But his honest and good intended quest got hijacked by Maurice de Hond, a pollster, entrepreneur and TV-personality, who started a highly mediatised crusade not only to free Louwes, but turned the spotlight on another person with no real proof or investigation. That person, Michael De Jong, claimed his innocence with Haan's support. But his claims remained inaudible, deafened by the media circus conjured by de Hond.

Even if this story was pure fiction, it would still be sad: the lives of two families are shattered, either by police incompetence, or by the selfishness of a group of people with ulterior motives and no decency.

The scenario is complex and it is a bit difficult to follow the storyline at the beginning of the movie, especially for those who do not speak Dutch and have to read the subtitles. But it is worth sticking with it as everything falls into place and the magnitude of the drama is explored.

The cinematography is in keeping with the story: edgy, dark and contrasted. The fast rhythm and the excellent acting make this thrilling movie excellent entertainment. To the American viewer, the cultural differences between the Netherlands and the U.S. are interesting to observe and ponder, such as the sentence of 12 years of imprisonment given for first degree murder.

The movie is based on a book written by Haan, the journalist who is one of the story's protagonists. It is his version that is mostly presented here, but there are others. For example, Dutch philosopher of science Ton Derksen published a book in which he defends Louwes' innocence.

The movie was awarded the Grand Jury Prize at the 2020 Seattle Film Festival and six awards in the World Competition, including Best Director for Sander Burger; Outstanding Male Performance to Fedja van Hunt as Haan; Best Supporting Actor to Yorick van Wageningen as De Jong; Best Supporting Actress to Lies Visschedijk as as Meike Wittermans; and Best Screenplay adapted from a novel. The showing at the Orinda Theatre is a first in the U.S. to a general audience.

"The Judgement" opens in Orinda on April 15 for at least one week. For further information including tickets, check the website at [www.internationalshowcase.org](http://www.internationalshowcase.org)

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