

Penelope Buitenhuis' A Wake at the Cannes Film Festival

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Nicholas Campbell, Tara Nicodemo. - http://www.penelopebuitenhuis.com/a_wake.html

Selected by Telefilm for the Canadian Pavilion at the Cannes Film Market, *A Wake* draws from the art of improvisation taught at acting schools.

The story, the unconventional screenplay, the directing, and the acting merge into an emotional experience that subliminally brings viewers to the reality of their own mortality. "The film is an experiment in getting genuine emotion through improvisation," Buitenhuis says in an email before departing for Cannes.

[A Wake](#) is dramatic, disconcerting, and entertaining. The characters brilliantly convey the message that letting go of our inner pain is never as cataclysmic as holding on to it. When the wake is over, catharsis emerges from the release of the toxic emotions that had encumbered the characters' lives. Still, the ending is just the beginning.

A Screenplay by Penelope Buitenhuis and Krista Sutton

Gabor Zazlov (Nicholas Campbell), a famous theatre director, died suddenly. His widow, Hanna (Tara Nicodemo), invites the members of his last and ill-fated production of *Hamlet* to a wake at their country house. Resentment dramatically escalates as each thespian gives a personal account of life after *Hamlet*.

Tyler (Graham Abbey), who played *Hamlet*, is a minor Hollywood celebrity secretly in love with Maya (Krista Sutton), who played *Ophelia*. Raj (Raoul Bhaneja), who is still resentful to have lost the role of *Hamlet* to Tyler, is a successful real estate agent. Still composed as she prepares dinner, it is a matter of time until Hanna loses control of the gathering assembled at the dining-table. Enters Chad (Kristopher Turner), Zazlov's son who is unaware that his father died; hell breaks loose as he accuses Hanna to have killed him. He eventually takes the proceedings over and asks the actors to do a last reading of *Hamlet*, demanding the raw truth. Hanna suggests that it be filmed as a tribute to the late director. Adding oil on the fire is Danielle (Sarain Boylan) who, after being insulted by Sabina (Martha Burns), the patron of the company, discloses shocking facts. The night brings more twists and turns until morning comes. Everyone leaves unaware of what will still unfold.

The Filmmaking Techniques of Director Penelope Buitenhuis

The opening scene is an intimate close-up of Hanna's enigmatic face. The ground is covered by snow as white as death, yet there is an understated symbol of life as Hanna's breath evaporates in the cold air. She welcomes the guests, matter-of-factly, in an accented-voice that draws viewers in.

The dinner scene was Buitenhuis' vision, as the setting for this collective exercise in searching for the truth through confrontation. The truth is important to the film writer and director who is known as "an actor's director" for creating sets as devoid of obstacles as possible, so actors can freely express themselves.

Location scouting was simple: All was filmed at a country house. The script involved ad lib to remove artificial dialogue. The central dinner scene was rehearsed for two days to allow the continuity of the story, but was mostly improvised. And, the shocking confession was the impressive impromptu of an emotional meltdown. Buitenhuis, who spent time with the actors before the ten-day filming, kept the emotional momentum going so the actors could keep creating, instead of re-creating, at a different location on a different day. Some random frames were filmed by Chad, while the real life actor acted.

Telefilm Takes A Wake to the Cannes Film Market

The Canadian Pavilion at the Cannes film market is a Telefilm initiative to promote the audio visual Canadian industry.

After *A Wake* won best film at the Female Eye Festival in Toronto, and the Telefilm selection, [Penelope Buitenhuis](#) hopes to achieve theatrical release. "It is a film that requires attention and focus. The communal engagement of the audience would heighten the experience," she says.

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Film Director Penelope Buitenhuis. - *Marie-Claude Arnott*



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