



## INCIDENT AT SCHOOL

DIRECTED BY JACOB THOMAS PILGAARD

Boldly approaching an incredibly sensitive topic with stylistic panache and precise direction, *Incident at School* immerses its audience in the nerve-shaking horrors of a real-time school shooting. Not to be taken lightly, its chilling 23 minutes brim with tension doused in the residue of many dark realities. A tension that is further bolstered by its commitment to a powerful single take which effortlessly absorbs 21 minutes.

The setup is bleakly simple. We follow a young woman trapped inside during a school shooting. Struggling to find a suitable place to hide, she takes refuge in the conspicuous cover of the auditorium's seats. Out of direct line of sight, but fallible enough to rouse the question of whether she will make it through the abhorrent event unscathed.

While this could lead to a stale 20 minutes of silent sitting, Jacob Thomas Pilgaard and his team effectively build out the world, ensuring that the off-screen world feels as present and refined as Cecilie Elisabeth Bogø Bach's intimate performance.

This off-screen action is twofold. Most presently we feel the surrounding school. Precise sound design allows us to effectively locate action. From the shooter standing sweat-inducing metres away to the placement of police cars somewhere outside the building, it's hard not to feel totally immersed through the incredible sound design.

But, similarly, much of the narrative unfolds off screen—at least in part. With our protagonist, Eva, using her phone to call the police, her friend/sister Sofia and finally her mother. This final call is particularly well written and performed. After the scramble of the first calls, the mother subtly tries to calm Eva down through mundane, but relevant chatter. This works so well, in fact, that I could feel my muscles slowly relax all the tension they had built up in the minutes prior.

# FILM REVIEW



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A moment which undoubtedly marked how closely the film had located me to its protagonist and subject.

While such stylistic strengths abound, there are some shortcomings. The most complex which I immediately became aware of was the audio implemented to constantly remind us that we were amid a school shooting. Blasting the soundtrack full of voices and a number of gunshots which would feel at home in a wholly less serious Hollywood action flick. While this device certainly served its purpose, it drew me away from the reality of such tragic events making me acutely aware that this was a work of fiction. Given, such a buffer may have been necessary given the intensity the film reaches later on.

While some questions of reality and reference do surface throughout any viewing of Incident at School, from the somewhat force-fed question “why do people do something like this?” to the assumed references to the 1994 Aarhus University shooting and the dishearteningly high number of similar events worldwide, Incident at School’s strength comes in the fact that it focuses on experience instead of argument. There is no presentation of the why nor even a true image of the how. Instead, it confidently submerges into a singular perspective of an individual exposed to a true modern horror. As a result, Incident at School successfully sidesteps any voyeuristic glamourisation of such a tragic event—as can be somewhat common in cinematic retellings of similarly dark realities.

Bleak, tense and unwavering, Incident at School taps raw affect to immerse its audience in a short experience of true horror which, for many, will hit far too close to home.

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