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On My Mind

William L. Blizek

University of Nebraska at Omaha, wblizek@unomaha.edu

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Abstract

This is a review of the short film *On My Mind* (2021), directed by Martin Stange-Hansen.

Keywords

End of Life

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Author Notes

William Blizek is the Founding Editor of the *Journal of Religion and Film*, and is Emeritus Professor of Philosophy and Religion at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. He is also the editor of the *Continuum Companion to Religion and Film* (2009).



When we meet Henrik, his friend asks him: “So today is the day . . . are you ready?” Henrik responds that he is going for a walk. On his walk he stops in at an empty bar. He orders a whiskey and the bartender, Louise, pours him four shots. He drinks all four shots down in a couple of gulps.

As he is about to leave the bar, Henrik notices that the bar has a Karaoke machine. He asks if it plays “Always on My Mind” and learns that it does. The owner of the bar, Preben, behaves like a jerk and makes it difficult for Henrik to use the machine. Finally, Henrik gives the owner 500 Kroner and he sings the song while Louise films him on his phone. Henrik sings the song for his wife, Trine. It is her favorite song. She says that it makes the soul fly.

We next see Henrik’s phone playing through a headset. Trine is lying in a hospital bed as Henrik plays his version of the song for her. The doctor tells Henrik that she cannot hear anything, and that Henrik should not expect any miracles. Henrik tells the doctor that he doesn’t believe in miracles and that he knows exactly what brain death means.

Henrik tells the doctor that “it’s her soul. If it’s in there, it can hear it.” Henrik takes the headset off of Trine and the doctor turns off the life support machine and pronounces her dead. Henrik kisses her forehead and then opens the window to her room and says: “Just fly my love.” As he leaves the room, he leaves the window open.

This short film is first and foremost a movie about the soul. The soul may be the most important element of our humanity. Without a soul, we are nothing but a being. But the soul turns us into a human being. It is our most precious possession. It is how we understand ourselves. It gives us the strength to endure suffering and the ability to experience the greatest of joys.

But the movie is also about the importance of ritual in our lives—not necessarily the rituals we share with others, but our own rituals, unique to us. Recording the song and playing it for Trine is Henrik’s ritual. It is his way of dealing with loss and grief. Opening the window so that Trine’s soul can fly is also part of the ritual. Even though Henrik knows what brain death means and that there will be no miracles, there is something more to our humanity—the soul.

On My Mind was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Live Action Short Film.