

10th Inverness Film Festival

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Eden Court Cinemas, Inverness, 7-11 November 2012

2012 marks a significant milestone in the history of Inverness Film Festival which has emerged in recent years as a leading cultural event.

THE co-direction of Paul Taylor and Matt Lloyd from 2006-2008 and the vision of Eden Court Cinema Programmer Paul Taylor as director since 2009, have consistently raised the profile of IFF and of the Eden Court Cinema as a premier venue. Each November the quality and integrity of the Eden Court Cinema's annual programme is further distilled into five days of the very best in local, national and international cinema with features and shorts unable to be seen anywhere else.

In celebrating this year's 10th anniversary, IFF 2012 reflected the evolving language of world cinema from the silent era to the present day; featuring newly restored and hidden classics, special events bringing the earliest Scottish and Highland filmmaking to life and 20 Scottish premieres including; *Amour*, *The Hunt*, *I Wish*, *Kaddish For A Friend*, *Final Cut-Ladies and Gentlemen*, *Quartet*, *Great Expectations*, *Seven Psychopaths*, *Safety Not Guaranteed* and *Sightseers*.



Amour

Challenging subject matter and pure cinematic excellence defined IFF's opening gala with the Scottish premiere of Michael Haneke's *Amour* starring Jean-Louis Trintignant, Emmanuelle Riva and Isabelle Huppert. Nominated for 6 European Film Awards (to be announced in December) and the recipient of the Palme d'Or award at Cannes (2012), this is an intensely powerful and humane work, as emotionally affecting as it is confronting.

Austrian Director Michael Haneke (*The White Ribbon*, *Hidden*, *The Piano Teacher*, *The Seventh Continent*) delivers an unflinching study of unconditional love and mortality with extraordinary performances from Trintignant and Riva. Their portrayal of an elderly Parisian couple, George and Anne, succeeds in bringing the audience to awareness beyond the screen as we witness Anne's inevitable decline after a series of strokes, cared for at home by her devoted husband. In a world in constant denial of ageing and death Haneke presents the audience with a mirror, enabling transference from the two main characters and their predicament by framing them as part of a concert audience in the opening sequence. With the camera pulled back the central protagonists are as we are within the crowd, and the music they hear performed, Schubert's *Impromptu Op. 90 No. 1 in C Minor* with its tentative and singular melodic line, immediately establishes our inevitable participation individually and collectively in the unfolding narrative. The lone voice of the piano informs our reading of an audience dressed in uniformly grave tones and visually sets the tone of exploration for what follows.

What tempers Haneke's characteristically bleak vision is human warmth within the intimate domestic space of George and Anne's apartment, conveyed by subtle use of light and in the nuances of expression that allow us to witness George and Anne's love for each other in all its hues. As we witness the sadness and humiliation of daily routines trying to cope with failing body and mind, the minute details of their relationship; her growing despair at the indignity of her condition and his tested devotion in the face of death, our conception of love on screen and in life is consistently challenged, bound as it is here to suffering rather than Romance or sentimentality.

With the possible exception of Caspar Noe's *Enter The Void*, I have never seen an audience so utterly silent during and after the credits. In *Amour*, Haneke shows us ourselves; our fears, our loss of those we love and our own inevitable fate; thankfully he and his actors also powerfully convey what allows humanity to endure. In the midst of her decline whilst looking at photographs of their younger selves Anne remarks; "its beautiful – life – so long – long life" each pause poetic in its contemplation. As George seals up their interior life together and leaves the apartment, we know that while he still breathes Anne lives.

The final scene in which their daughter Eva (Isabelle Huppert) sits in her parent's apartment ambiguously contemplating their absence, or perhaps her own, seems to speak of a generation. Throughout the film Eva's dialogue; talking to the wall above her Mother about house prices, her shrug when she says that she thinks she loves her partner Geoff and her comment that her Mother needs more "efficient treatment" speaks of her concern, ultimately for herself. Never one to shy away from social critique, Haneke presents us with an image of a generation in George and Anne's ineffectual daughter and the nurse who George dismisses for her lack of care.

Haneke's acute way of seeing, the brutality and compassion distilled in *Amour*, creates a superbly crafted film of universal relevance with stunning performances from its two leads. Whilst easy crowd pleasing openers are the norm at most festivals, this bold choice was entirely justified by the audience reaction and the sheer quality of the

production. There are films that populate the cinema and those that need to be screened and it is gratifying to see the latter given prominence as an opening gala, setting a benchmark for the rest of the festival.



The Hunt

Winner of three awards at Cannes in 2012, including Best Actor for Mads Mikkelsen, Thomas Vinterberg's *The Hunt* explores the emotive subject of a nursery teacher falsely accused of child abuse. Mikkelsen gives a career best performance as the teacher at the centre of this complex and riveting drama which in its conclusion reveals much about human behaviour and contemporary society. The fears and assumptions of the audience are consistently put to the test with our judgement of innocence or guilt subject to the same paranoia infecting the town. There is also inner conflict between the wider inference of potential innocence and the acute need for justice.

When resolution comes it is as ambiguous as select moments in the film in which judgement is made by a look or a shadow of doubt, engulfing reason within a closely knit Danish community and in the audience as witness. Set against culturally specific rituals of Christmas and the rite of passage first hunt, Vinterberg's treatment of the subject is broader than its immediate context. Whether a truth or a lie the scenario is sadly, entirely plausible and the truth an ever shifting mark. Although it is profoundly unsettling, this is a film which examines wider ramifications of its subject in terms of how we deliver justice, the nature of innocence and childhood denied by both the media and perpetrators of abuse.

The degree to which we are all complicit in some way is exemplified by the final scene in which the central protagonist's life remains irreversibly damaged and we are left with the feeling that we've been holding a gun all

along, either out of righteous protection, fear or paranoia. This is an extremely difficult subject but throughout the intelligence and sensitivity of Thomas Vinterberg and Tobias Lindholm's script prevails; innocence is championed – both that of the child and the falsely accused. The camera as our eye is beautifully directed by cinematographer Charlotte Bruus Christensen and adds psychological weight to every frame of unspoken dialogue. *The Hunt* is both a thriller and a powerful work of social realism, marking a significant comeback from Vinterberg; one of the founders of the Dogme 95 movement and recipient of multiple awards including the Jury Prize at Cannes for his 1998 film *Festen (The Celebration)*.

A consistently strong element of IFF is the screening of work by first feature directors which this year included Scott Graham, *Shell* (Scotland), Brandon Cronenberg *Antiviral* (Canada), Leo Khasin *Kaddish For A Friend* (Germany) and Tim Connery Easton's *Article* (USA).



Shell

Based on his award winning short of the same name, Scott Graham's *Shell* is an intense and promising debut. Filmed near Gairloch the story of the relationship between a teenage girl and her father living in remote petrol station combines the expansiveness of its setting with the intimacy of human relationships amplified in isolation. *Shell* feels internationally Northern and distinctly Highland in its aesthetic. Although the deer symbolism is laden and there is a feeling that international interest and perception of the region has had an influence on the creative trajectory in development, *Shell* is an accomplished piece of work and an important milestone for Graham as an emerging director.

Yoliswa Gärtig's adept cinematography is suffused with light and a muted palette drawn directly from the landscape. The human figure within the frame is beautifully composed, at times compressed like a Schiele drawing allowing the viewer to feel the emotional centre of core relationships. The camera moves in such a way to allow us to linger on details of the domestic interior as a powerful psychological space. When *Shell* sits in the bath with just her hands in close up, they tell us all that we need to know about that moment of her being.

Although this is a distinctly interior and sometimes claustrophobic film, the way the central character embodies the surrounding environment is visually poetic and expansive; a scene in which she lies in a field, her body becoming another layer we read within the landscape or a moment of shifting light across a field after her ill fated encounter with Adam become self reflexive. Within the beauty of this imagery there is also an ambiguous edge. Shell's comment at the dinner table that eating deer is "like eating your own flesh" turns the character and the environment in on itself. Stylistically Graham's restraint and sensitivity as a Director is to be applauded. When Shell emerges from the petrol station to confront tragedy she is filmed from behind, we do not witness her reaction through the shock of facial expressions but feel it viscerally the moment she opens the door – hit by an icy blast that catches her hair and our breath at the enormity of her loss.

Shell is a fascinating character for exploration; not understood by those around her, not a child but not yet a woman, living in an environment where passing customers are the only contact with a world beyond her own, intensifying the nature of her only constant relationship with her father. Despite her social isolation she is not naïve, there is an almost otherworldly knowing within the character and a longing misinterpreted significantly by the men she comes into contact with. Chloe Pirrie gives an exceptional performance as Shell, her awareness deeply embedded in her eyes, with excellent support from Joseph Mawle as her Father Pete, Michael Smiley as Hugh and Iain De Caestecker as Adam, conveying their character's motivations with great economy and skill.

The modulation of Mawle and Pirrie's performances are perfectly pitched as father and daughter, although the relationship is predictably fated in its dramatic conclusion. There is comparatively little dialogue but great exchange between sound and image; "I Love you" as words spoken preceded by the sight of a frozen hook and chain hanging outside. The indifference of nature in relation to human scale and the film's design; vaguely modern times but no particular era, gives a feeling of timelessness and universality to the story. With a second project in development we will hopefully see Graham's next production at a future IFF.



Kaddish for a Friend

Selected and introduced by IFF Youth Programmers Laurie Paul and Alexander Scott, *Kaddish For A Friend* by Leo Khasin transfers the Palestinian conflict to Berlin in the story of the friendship between a 14-year-old Palestinian refugee Ali (Neil Belakhdar) and his elderly German/Jewish Neighbour Alexander (Ryszard Ronczewski). Ultimately it's the human element rather than politics that is central to this touching and very enjoyable film. The two lead performances have natural ease and charm and although idealised the heart of the production is resoundingly aspirational.



I Wish

The feel good film of this year's festival was *I Wish* by Hirokazu Koreeda (*Nobody Knows, Still Walking*), an uplifting, beautifully observed study of childhood in all its innocence, curiosity and exuberance. The humour in *I Wish* was an unexpected delight and the interactions between children and adults characterised by warmth and insight. In the hands of a less accomplished and empathic director the story of two brothers separated by their parent's divorce could so easily have descended into melodrama and sentimentality, especially with the added promise of a miracle; but the miracles here are the blissful everyday things all around us if we would only pause long enough to perceive them and the moment of growth that Koichi's wish embodies as two mythic/ordinary trains pass by.

Koki and Oshiro Maeda's performances as the irrepressible Ryunosuke and his older, more introspective brother Koichi are a total joy to watch and the way that Grandparents and a school nurse are co-conspirators in their adventure is knowingly compassionate and humorous. *I Wish* is a rejuvenating experience that doesn't subvert the difficulties of modern life in childhood fantasy, but presents the possibility of happiness and contentment in the smallest details of everyday life. Hopefully it will return in March 2013 when it is scheduled for national release.



The Pleasure Garden

New digital restorations of classic British films featured prominently this year, including David Lean's grand epic *Lawrence of Arabia* celebrating its 50th anniversary, Alfred Hitchcock's first complete silent film *The Pleasure Garden* (1925) and his final silent *Blackmail* (1929) (in its second version Britain's first talkie) with live accompaniment from Australian pianist Wendy Hiscocks. It is always fascinating to see the evolving vision of a director unfold in their earliest work; from the morality tale of two dancers in *The Pleasure Garden* to the stylistic development in *Blackmail* which contains all the burgeoning seeds and obsessions of Hitchcock's later and best known films.

From his first silent to his last, guilt and morality become progressively distilled in the heightened tonality of what would later define the psychological thriller. Hitchcock's live performance of *The Pleasure Garden* was seamlessly fluid, evoking the style and energy of the period, interpretative of the characters and their motivations without resorting to clichéd leitmotifs or the trappings of illustration. The expanded tonality of her playing is perfectly matched to the material and I would have loved to have seen her live interpretation of *Blackmail* which is arguably the more complex work of the two.



Aelita - Queen of Mars

A rare screening of Yakov Protazanov's 1924 silent film *Aelita: Queen of Mars* with live music Minima also featured at this year's festival; a curious hybrid of Soviet propaganda and Sci Fi fantasy whose design has influenced successive generations of artists and film makers. The rediscovery of this and other neglected gems was one of the great pleasures of IFF 2012, returning to the earliest surviving films as a wellspring of inspiration.

The documentary *Extraordinary Voyage* directed by Sege Bromberg and Eric Lange charting the twelve year colour restoration of George Méliès *Trip To the Moon* (1902) provided a wonderful introduction to Méliès as creator, the process of restoration and to the screening of the original work which followed. Restored by the Groupama Gan Foundation For Cinema and the Technicolor Foundation For Cinema Heritage with an original soundtrack by French band Air, *Trip To the Moon* like much of Méliès work is a mesmerising combination of film, theatre and magic, at a time when cinema was still in its infancy and special effects were created live on set.



Trip to the Moon

There is a naivety in Méliès which is enduringly appealing and it was wonderful to see the digital restoration preserve the imperfections of time and the brushstrokes of hand colouring in the final version, pieced together from 13,375 colour fragments and a comparative black and white print. What this film still inspires 110 years after it was made is the timeless wonderment of moving images; conjuring dreams, illusion and imagination out of fragile celluloid.

In the documentary *Side By Side: The Science, Art and Impact of Digital Cinema*, Keanu Reeves investigates photochemical film and digital production with interviews from cinematographers, film students, editors, exhibitors and directors including Steven Soderbergh, Christopher Nolan, Joel Schumacher, David Lynch and Martin Scorsese. With debate raging about the transition to digital both in the creation and delivery of cinema, director Christopher Kenneally presents the subject from all viewpoints, engaging with what we lose and gain in a period of accelerated technological change and consumption.

Significantly at this year's IFF only two films were 35mm prints, the rest were in digital format reflecting this global transition. With a younger generation increasingly watching film in a myriad of ways, often in isolation or in transit, on computer screens or iPhones, the experience of popular culture feels very much like endless Google searching, never remaining on any one homepage long enough to delve too deep. With cheaper access to equipment, telling stories about ourselves has become a cultural norm; however, the democratisation of this technology without being tempered by visual literacy or an understanding of the crafting of moving images arguably produces quantity rather than quality, sensation rather than understanding.



Side By Side

It is really a question about the function of art and why we need cinema in the first place. This is well articulated throughout the film on both sides of the debate, raising essential questions about the nature of digital production. Contemporary life is a continuous bombardment of digital images so disposable and transitory that we haven't actually stopped to conceive an adequate means of preserving them. While celluloid film stock could still capture and store images, maintaining the current trajectory, years from now there won't be a trace of anything we've expressed digitally. The choice to use film because it is the most appropriate medium to tell the story you need to tell is rapidly disappearing, like oil painting being perceived as obsolete simply because watercolours are cheaper and generate a higher volume of profit.

While the creative possibilities of digital are incredibly exciting, expanding the visual toolkit, crucially "you still need the eye of an artist to create the code". Artistry and technological innovation have always driven film as a means of expression, human aspiration and entertainment, sometimes creating work that is timeless and universally relevant, vastly outliving its maker. Martin Scorsese's comment about the continuation of culture in relation to the next generation – "where do you go to go back to the well?" – feels particularly apt, and education will be vital in the future as a source of cultural renewal in the face of digital and corporate takeover.

In spite of an electrifying programme that revealed everything film is and can be, the element of education beyond screenings was largely absent from the festival and needs to be addressed in future programmes. The social and cultural phenomenon of going to the movies has fundamentally changed but our need for Art, from shadow play on cave walls to the latest digital release, has always been constant. We need stories to make sense of ourselves and of the world. In a secular society, a contemporary culture of "Me" and "Now", we need those connections and imaginative space for reflection now more than ever.

The winner of the annual IFF Audience Award designed by Steve Dilworth was *Final Cut – Ladies and Gentlemen*, Hungarian director György Pálfi's euphoric homage to cinema, with *Amour* second and *The Hunt* in third place as the most popular films. (Sadly it is unlikely that *Final Cut* will be shown again outside the festival; however, *Amour* will be screening again from the 30th November and *The Hunt* from the last week in December.)



Final Cut

Final Cut – Ladies and Gentlemen plays out the age old story of boy meets girl, editing clips from 500 existing films together from all eras of world cinema and stripping the Romance genre down to its barest elements. The film begins with awakening followed by the ultimate visual film quiz delivered in rapid succession to the unfolding fortunes of love found, gained, lost and rediscovered. More akin to a feature length YouTube Mash Up than the sophistication of Christian Marclay, *Final Cut* operates on the principle of triggering memory and familiar

emotional responses. The simplicity of the story meets collective expectation, its arc resolved in a final reassuring embrace.

There are clever sequences such as the splicing of multiple screen goddesses to Hayworth's 'Put The Blame on Mame' from *Gilda* or the accelerated rhythm of pursuit, but the thrill and seduction of this film really lies in reading your own memories of cinema into it; the element of identification not just with the titles or stars but the whole emotional ride of self projection. Aptly described by IFF's Director as "the greatest mixed tape ever made", this is a work of pure nostalgia and reverie, a hit list of icons, film moments and personal memories that like a really good fairground ride once experienced you want to get straight back on again.



What Is This Film Called Love?

A homage of a different kind *What Is This Film Called Love?* by director Mark Cousins is the antithesis of his epic 15 hour series *The Story of Film: An Odyssey* in interest, depth and relevance. His declaration that his walking tour accompanied by a photograph of Sergei Eisenstein is "not trying to change the world in any way" is a self-fulfilling prophecy. Punctuated by self-conscious literary and artistic quotations, this is a strange hybrid of pretension and spontaneity, a hand-held ready made stream of consciousness of little interest to anyone but its maker.

There are moments of clarity amongst the self indulgence but not nearly enough to stave off boredom. Screened with *Ivan The Terrible Part 2*, selected by Cousins to accompany his film, *What Is This Film Called Love?* is an interesting premise but is ultimately too self-absorbed to lead the audience deeper into either of its human subjects or their imaginative territory. It is the kind of film celebrated by the internet where everyone's reality is up there to be shared and that's exactly where this film belongs, although its screening at festivals is sure to generate healthy debate.

IFF continued its commitment to the screening of short films from Scotland and the UK with a series of short fiction and documentaries including the apocalyptic *Saved* by Stuart Elliot, Eva Riley's insightful exploration of the relationship between two sisters in *Sweetheart*, Zachariah Copping's descent into addiction, love and loss, *Foxy and Marina*, and Paul Cox's incisive documentary *Steve Dilworth – A Portrait*, examining the relationship between the artist's environment and creative process on the Isle of Harris.

Originally commissioned for the centenary of the Hippdrome Cinema, Boness (1912-2012), Scotland's first purpose built cinema, *The Lost Art of The Film Explainer* brought the historical context of cinematic storytelling vividly to life in performance and discussion. A tradition that began in the UK during the silent era when cinema managers stepped in to say what was happening because not all members of the audience could read, the lost art of the film explainer has strong traditions in Germany and in Japan where foreign films required both cultural translation and translation of inter-titles.



Frank McLaughlin, Andy Cannon and Wendy Weatherby

Entertaining Scottish Storyteller Andy Cannon, cellist/composer Wendy Weatherby and piper/guitarist Frank McLaughlin performed live accompaniment to three films drawn from the Scottish Screen Archives; *Buy Your Own Cherries* (1904) *St Kilda: Britain's Loneliest Isle* (1923/1928) and *Mairi – Romance of a Highland Maiden* (1912), one of the earliest story films made in Scotland and first screened at the Central Hall Picture House, Inverness, on 20 May 1912. Amazingly the grandson of the romantic lead was in the audience having heard about the existence of the film just a week earlier. Filmed on the shores of North Kessock and featuring possibly the slowest chase in cinema history, the film was created by Andrew Paterson and re-edited in 1953 by local film maker and Playhouse Cinema Manager Jimmy Nairn. Nairn's legacy was also highlighted during the festival with the Inverness Local History Forum's 20th anniversary screening of films from Scottish Screen archive introduced by SSA curator Alistair Bell.

In performance *The Lost Art of The Film Explainer* reinterprets and invigorates archival material in a way that gives a modern audience the opportunity to experience human history live through music, spoken word and moving image. There is much scope for international research and exchange in relation to cinematic traditions of the explainer in the UK, Germany and the Benshi tradition of narration in Japan that will hopefully result in the development of future performances. The underscoring of traditional and original music/ song by Wendy Weatherby and Frank McLaughlin enhanced the images on screen allowing the images to them to speak for themselves, while Andy Cannon's commentary on the action, characters and social context illuminated the past in a way that a lone screening never could. There are many ways into cinema and this event illustrated beautifully the value of research, passion and live performance to bring archival material into the light, stimulating curiosity and connections between local and global traditions of storytelling and acknowledging the community of cinema.

In its tenth year IFF is an event that its Director and Eden Court can be immensely proud of. In each successive year the festival continues to showcase all that film can be; distinctive for the depth, range and quality of programming, committed in its support of local product and bringing excellence in world cinema to a growing audience. In the last 120 years our relationship to cinema has irrevocably changed, however within the scope and vision of IFF 2012 the magic of George Méliès or the miraculous everyday captured by Hirokazu Koreeda take us within and outside ourselves in a way that no other art form can. Cinema is limitless imagination projected on screen and this year's festival celebrated that restorative vision with intelligence and joy, reflecting innovation and new ways of seeing from the silent era to the latest releases and pre-release productions. In answer to Mr Scorsese's question about wells of inspiration, they are to be found right here.

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