

CHELMSFORD FILM CLUB

An independent film club based in Chelmsford

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Like Father Like Son

Japan (2013) 121 minutes

Director/Writer: Hirokazu Kore-eda

Cast: Masaharu Fukiyama (Ryota Nonamiya);
Machiko Ono (Midori Nonamiya);
Yoko Maki (Yukan Saiki);
Riri Furanki (Yudari Saiki).



Kore-eda's previous film, *I Wish*, (shown in February in last season's CFC programme) was a jewel: a tale of two young brothers torn apart by their parents' separation, who put their faith in a mythical vortex created by the passing of speeding bullet trains. The original title of that film was *Kiseki* – the Japanese word for miracle, which perfectly captured its transcendent, humanist charm.

Kore-eda returns to the subject of parents and children in this beautiful paean to paternity, which sifts through issues of nurture and nature as gently as a hand passing through drifting sand. The story is an old one: two babies accidentally swapped at birth, raised by families of differing social status, now faced with the heart-breaking prospect of having to exchange their six-year-olds, in whom each family has invested so much energy, ambition and love.

Masaharu Fukiyama is the affluent workaholic whose initial reaction ("Now it makes sense...") masks more complex inner turmoil. His aversion to the ramshackle family in which his biological son has been raised inevitably gives way to a realisation that he has been an absent father and husband, repeating the patterns of previous generations.

While the adults attempt to sort through the conflicting bonds of blood and water, the children flow from family to family like intermingling streams of effervescent life. As before, Kore-eda's facility for casting and directing young performers is phenomenal: watching these children as they watch their parents is utterly mesmerising, reminiscent of the finest work of the Dardenne brother; unobtrusive, intuitive, instinctive. Equally impressive is the refusal to reduce any of the adults to stereotypes. While a clichéd contrast between wealth and austerity beckons, Kore-eda invests his characters with believable flaws and strengths, regardless of class and situation. Even the nominal 'villain' of the piece (the nurse responsible for the switch) is given a sympathetic hearing – a lost soul with her own parental issues. The result is a deceptively rich and rewarding drama, small of gesture, huge of heart. (From a review first appearing in *The Observer*)

Interestingly, after seeing this film at Cannes in 2013, where it won the Jury prize, Steven Spielberg was so impressed that he bought the rights to make his own version of the film: a 're-make'. Whether this ever materialises is another matter, but it would be interesting to see whether the 'gestures' remain small, the drama doesn't become melodrama and the characters stay 'real'.

This is the opening film of what is CFC's 28th season. So welcome to all our members, new and long-serving, young and not so young. As ever, member recruitment will be crucial to the success of the 2015-16 season, and will determine whether we can keep going as a club in our present form. Do try to encourage friends, neighbours and family to join. Do bring your guests.

Our next film is the classic "M" on the 30 September.