

# CHELMSFORD FILM CLUB

An Independent film society based in Chelmsford

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## SLOW WEST

**New Zealand/UK 2015 84 mins**

**Director/Writer : John Maclean**

**Cinematography : Robbie Ryan**

### CAST

|           |                     |
|-----------|---------------------|
| Silas     | Michael Fassbender, |
| Kodi      | Jay Cavendish       |
| Payne     | Ben Mendelsohn      |
| John Ross | Rory McCann         |
| Rose Ross | Caren Pistorius     |
| Maria     | Brooke Williams     |

Sundance 2015 Winner World Cinema Dramatic

Slow West is Maclean's full length debut. He had previously made two shorts, both involving Michael Fassbender, who had seen Maclean's music videos and suggested they did something together. One of these, Pitch Black Heist won a BAFTA. Maclean has previously been a member of Beta Band and The Aliens

Slow West has been described variously as an existential European road movie, a western, a buddy movie, a coming of age drama, a folk tale or a fairy tale – so take your pick! Other labels ascribed to it include part John Ford myth-making and Coen Brothers mischief-making, mixed with the sparseness of Sergio Leone and Eastwood, the slapstick of Laurel and Hardy's "Way out West" and Mel Brooks "Blazing Saddles."

Set in 1870's Colorado (although filmed in New Zealand) it is the story of a young Scottish man's journey across America, basically equipped only with a "How to travel across America" guidebook, in pursuit of the woman he loves. He attracts the attention of an outlaw who offers to act as his guide for a fee. Their journey to locate Rose Ross is the action of the film.

Maclean does not glorify the "wild west" despite the dream-like quality of some of the sequences in the film. He has said that having read a lot about the Scottish and Irish people who went out west, and known that the area was populated by first and second generation people from all over the world, he had been struck that Westerns are nearly all populated by 100% American speaking Americans. He was also motivated to show a view of the Native Americans not commonly portrayed. There is also no damsel in distress.

His pace is deliberately slow. "It's slow food compared to fast food. Slow should be something that's more enjoyable."

However Maclean doesn't hesitate to show that the west was unforgiving. People die with almost alarming suddenness and violence and not a single one gets a languishing death soliloquy. Slow West uses the chaotic landscape of the American frontier as an exploration of love and death. There is also

something slightly surreal about seeing the old west interpreted through the lens of New Zealand and this adds to the film's dreamlike tone.

The music too adds to this (as one might expect from a Maclean's former career). From the start the anti-heroes are accompanied by a gently waltzing three step, and at other times we encounter Congolese songs and banjo playing.

Fassbender is immensely watchable as he guides Cavendish through the unforgiving wilderness whilst trying to act as though he couldn't care less about anything but his own safety. His character Silas is attempting to instill Jay with enough savvy to get him through the journey, but unfortunately some lessons come more quickly and harshly than others.

The film however has a light touch of humour, often actually quite dark humour and is peppered with gags such as the outlaw who is very disappointed at not getting his own wanted poster. There is also an air of elegy/pre-knowledge of the passing of an episode in American history. "In a short time, this will seem like a long time ago," says one character.

There is of course a shoot-out at the end – there has to be one.

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Our next screening is on Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> October – The Duke of Burgundy.