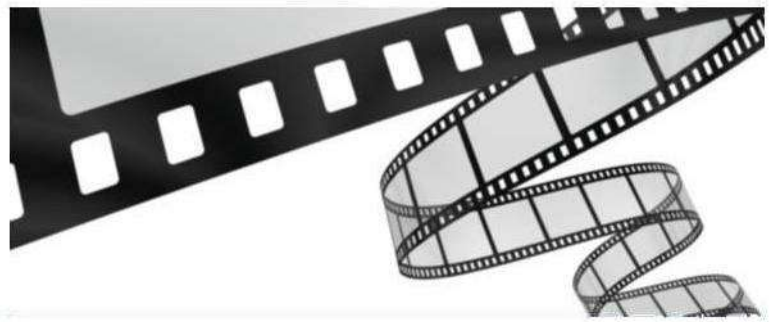


CHELMSFORD FILM CLUB

An Independent film society based in Chelmsford

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Whiplash 2014

USA 106 minutes

Director: Damian Chazelle
Writer: Damien Chazelle
Cast: Johnny Simmons, Nate Lang, J.K. Simmons



Reviews:

Peter Bradshaw, The Guardian

If Facebook's Marc Zuckerberg took jazz drumming lessons from Dr Hannibal Lecter, the result might look like this. That's the Dr Lecter, incidentally, who kills and eats a flautist in the Baltimore Philharmonic Orchestra for being out of tune. Whiplash is a study in the misery and cruelty that's always involved in teaching a musical instrument at the highest level: it's outrageously watchable, very well acted, slightly preposterous, and nowhere near as desperately important as it thinks it is. Watching this film is like listening to a very extended, bravura jazz drum solo. You marvel at the flash, the crash, the technique – and finally wonder where exactly it is all going, and when and how it is going to end. Where does a teacher's inspirational discipline and provocation cross the line into abuse? There is some thrilling classroom brutality and operatic dysfunction, though Whiplash perhaps jazz-drums itself into a bit of a corner. For me, it revived (happy) memories of testy Mr Shorofsky and frizzy-haired Bruno Martelli in Fame

He meets his match, or possibly his ideal pupil, in the form of Andrew, a would-be jazz drummer played with self-possession and flair by Miles Teller. Andrew has a closed, unresponsive expression, as if his whole being has been swallowed inward in concentration and absorption. He has an intense dedication to nurturing his own world-beating talent and status, which makes him emotionally vulnerable to attack. The film's very first scene shows him hammering out a solo and something in it catches the ear of Fletcher, who capriciously interrupts this practice and instantly starts playing mind games with Andrew. His pupil-victim now has to master Hank Levy's complex piece Whiplash, with its freaky 7/4 and 14/8 time signatures: the title acquires an awful additional significance. It is for him what Rachmaninoff's third piano concerto was for David Helfgott. And all the time Fletcher challenges him, needles him, sets him up, knocks him down. Pushed to breaking point, Andrew never knows what to do. Is it a test? Should he defy him? Obey him? Which would win his respect?

K Simmons is brilliant at Fletcher's scariest rehearsal mannerism: demanding that an errant pupil stop playing immediately by raising his hand and clenching his fist, like a Roman emperor signalling for someone to be decapitated. The film's nastiest scene has him doing just this because a student is playing out of tune: a misdemeanour punished in the most appalling and arbitrary way. He looks like he has everyone's balls in his fist, and this is a very alpha-male drama, with just one female musician visible, casually and offensively accused of owing her position in the band to being cute. As for Andrew, he has other people in his life: his dad (Paul Reiser) and Nicole (Melissa Benoist), a girl at a neighbouring college that he asks out on a tentative date. But these relationships are entirely subordinate to his quasi-father and quasi-seducer: Fletcher.

We are entitled to wonder if Fletcher is supposed to be an out-and-out villain, but also if that ambivalence is intentional. Is Whiplash taking us on a narrative journey basically similar to that of Anne Hathaway and Meryl Streep in *The Devil Wears Prada*? Well, *Chazelle* naturally allows you to suspect this, with dark revelations muted in the interests of keeping alive the positive dimension. There is arguably an unintended mismatch between the positive and negative interpretations of Fletcher's behaviour, although also something heroic in the film's final apparent attempt to resolve this tension musically. Concussion merges with percussion. It's a film with impact.

Club notices:

Our last presentation: 'The Green Ray'

35 members and guests returned feedback forms following the showing of this film, the breakdown was as follows:

- 'Excellent': 4 vote
- 'Very good': 5 votes
- 'Good': 12 votes
- 'Satisfactory': 10 votes
- 'Poor': 4 votes

Please visit the current season page at <http://www.chelmsford-filmclub.co.uk> to read all the feedback comments.

Our next presentation:

Monday 1st February at 8pm – Of Horses & Men