

CHELMSFORD FILM CLUB

An independent film club based in Chelmsford

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Men & Chicken

Dir: Anders Thomas Jensen
Denmark – 2015 – 104 mins.

Cast: Mads Mikkelsen; Nikolaj Kaas, David Dencik

Some changes having to be made to the published programme this season due to one of our distributors going into administration and *THE DAUGHTER* not now being available, we are showing *MEN & CHICKEN*, one of the 'reserve' films voted for at our Selection Meeting back in April. Some Committee members will have seen this film at the ICO viewing sessions and recommended it.

Wendy Ide on The Guardian website wrote about *MEN & CHICKEN* in July:

“There are some films that wear their weirdness slightly desperately, like a novelty tie or a desk sign reading ‘You don’t have to be mad to work here, but...’. These films tend to underline their wackiness with a score written in the musical equivalent of ‘Comic Sans’ font. Other films – and this twisted Danish drama is one such – favour a disconcertingly dead-pan approach. Anders Thomas Jensen is unnervingly matter-of-fact about the birthright of semi-estranged brothers Elias (Mads Mikkelsen), a dim-witted compulsive masturbator, and Gabriel (David Dencik), an intellectual with an over-pronounced gag reflex. And that approach, combined with the high quality of both the performances and facial prosthetics, results in a darkly comic, dysfunctional family drama, rather than the carnival of grotesquery it could have been.

That’s not to say that there isn’t a whole array of unsavouriness on display when Elias and Gabriel track down the father and half-brothers that they only recently discovered they have. The residents of an abandoned asylum, the latter filled with home-made cheese, random livestock and horrifically botched attempts at taxidermy, the half-brothers Josef, Gregor and Franz hold the key to certain mysteries about Gabriel’s and Elias’s background. With an off-kilter waltz motif on the score, the film takes us to some very dark places indeed.”

Jensen is known for his script collaborations with Susanne Bier on movies such as *IN A BETTER WORLD*, *THE BROTHERS* and *LOVE IS ALL YOU NEED*, as well as the western *THE SALVATION*, directed by Kristian Levring. *MEN & CHICKEN* is strong meat, a tangy and strange gothic horror comedy, carried off in a deadpan, macabre style. It is redolent of a number of comedic genres which seek to take the mis-formed, the ugly, the ‘deformed’, and hold the ‘unnatural’ up for entertainment, or to make the audience’s blood run cold, and some viewers may well be offended by some of the black humour and broad knockabout material involving, for instance, people getting hit with stuffed animals. The film explores ‘something rotten in the woodshed’, but here the woodshed is a vast, dilapidated mansion, itself a wonder to behold, on a remote Danish island.

But we hope that you agree with Wendy Ide that a strong case could be made for Jensen allowing us to laugh with his characters, rather than at them.

And for those of you who have followed 'Nordic Noir' detective series on BBC4 over the last few years, you could try to spot just about every Danish, and even Swedish, actor who has ever appeared in them. They definitely seem to be enjoying transforming themselves into characters they have never before played on TV.

Next Film: *RAN*, Kurosawa's great Shakespearian epic on 7 November. After *MUSTANG* on 5 December there is an opportunity to remain behind at the end of the film and join a discussion group, reflecting on the season so far.

Your unwanted books, CDs and DVDs will be gratefully received, for re-sale to members and guests. Every little helps!

