

CHELMSFORD FILM CLUB

An Independent film society based in Chelmsford

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The Breadwinner

Dir: Nora Twomey

Story: Deborah Ellis

Screenplay: Deborah Ellis; Anita Doron

2017 94 mins

Mark Kermode, *The Observer's* film critic, sang the praises of this animation when he reviewed it in May 2018...

"Further proof that we are living through a golden age of animation is provided by this Oscar-Nominated marvel from Kilkenny's Cartoon Saloon, the studio behind *The Secret of Kells* and *Song of the Sea*. An Irish-Canadian-Luxembourgish co-production, adapted from Deborah Ellis's much-loved YA novel, it's a tale of youthful fortitude in Taliban-era Afghanistan that has something of the defiant feminist spirit of the French-Iranian gem *Persepolis*.

Flitting between a mythical past and a down-to-earth present, the story is full of scary monsters - from fantastical demons to all-too-real landmines and brutal beatings. Yet [the film] looks through the eyes of a resilient young girl whose courage is our guide. Along with the eerie beauty of the animation there is a salving streak of humour that softens this tale's sharper edges, reminding us that - for children- laughter and bravery walk hand in hand.

We meet 11-year-old Parvana (voiced by Saara Chaudry) on the streets of Kabul, where she is helping her father, Nurullah (Ali Badshah), to sell their meagre goods. A teacher by trade, he lost a leg in the Russian war, but is now considered a subversive for encouraging his daughters to be independent - to learn the history of their land and to understand the liberating power of its stories. "Stories remain in our hearts, even when all else is gone," Nurullah tells Parvana, although she's starting to wonder: "What's the use?"

Nurullah is arrested by the Taliban and the family cannot buy food as women must not leave their homes unchaperoned. So Parvana cuts her hair, dons the clothes of her dead brother and ventures into the streets. "When you're a boy you can go anywhere you like!" says fellow traveller Shauzia (Soma Chhaya) as Parvana experiences a whole new world - a magic-carpet ride full of vibrant colour and bustling life. But the storm clouds of war are gathering once more and she must secure her father's release before it's too late.

While researching her novel in the late 1990s, Ellis spent time interviewing girls and women in refugee camps in Pakistan... Twomey and Doron have retained the cultural authenticity of Ellis's book while expanding the narrative in adventurous ways.. including a potted history of Afghanistan ("We were scientists, philosophers and storytellers but we were at the edges of empires at war with each other"). The fabulist subplots and the theatricality of their sequences are in stark contrast to the more realistically rendered world of Parvana's day-to-day life, where the back streets and market places are as vividly realised as anything from the Israeli animated documentary *Waltz With Bashir*, albeit filtered through a visual poetry that captures the misty "honey light" of early morning Kabul. A landscape of abandoned tanks becomes a haunting playground in which our heroines share their dreams of the moon and the ocean, conjuring a *Shawshank Redemption*-style tide of hope that flows like a river through the narrative...

Michael and Jeff Danna's music is lyrical and expressive, blending eastern instruments with western orchestrations as it moves from pieces echoing the street sounds of Kabul to the more expansive evocations of the enchanted story-world, a thrilling climax bringing together all the threads that weave through this terrific movie."

Our next screening: ***The Nun*** on Tuesday 26 March at 8.00 p.m.