

Reflections on the 60th Cork Film Festival.

The Cork film festival reached its 60th year this November with great aplomb and the usual mix of films, events, discussions and workshops. From mainstream features like Danny Boyle's *Steve Jobs* and Todd Haynes's *Carol* to powerful international documentaries like the portrait of a 76-year Korean marriage in *My Love Don't Cross that River* (Jin Mo-young, 2014), the festival was also peppered with a rich shorts programme and the usual celebration of the filmic past with retrospectives of Orson Welles and David Lean. A screening of *Brief Encounter* (1945) was accompanied by the RTÉ concert orchestra, breathing new life into the iconic score and actor and biographer Simon Callow contextualised Orson Welles' magically manipulative dissection of the cinematic form in his introduction to *F For Fake* (1975). *What's Going On* (Murray Lerner, 1971), transported audiences back to the last gig by Rory Gallagher with Taste at the Isle of Wight festival while *The Sound Before the Fury* (Lola Frederich, Martin Sarrazac, 2014) offered a powerful commentary on the political potential of music with its portrayal of the recent recording of Attica Blues, based around letters of inmates connected to the 1972 prison rebellion. Fans of amateur film were treated to one of the most famous examples of the form in the screening of *Raiders of the Lost Ark: the Adaptation* (Eric Zala, 1989) and *Raiders!* (Jeremy Coon, Tim Skousen, 2015), the documentary following the group of teenagers that set out to complete a scene for scene remake of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (Steven Spielberg, 1981) and managed to do so, over 30 years after beginning the project.

Alongside a strand of American independent filmmaking and a range of Irish programming, the festival offered a diverse menu of international cinema including *The Road* (Rana Salem, Lebanon, 2015), a picturesque, pensive, languorous portrait of a relationship with autobiographical elements: writer/director Salem plays the protagonist opposite her real life partner. *Olmo and the Seagull* (Petra Costa, Lea Glob, Denmark, France, Sweden, 2015), offered a thoughtful portrayal of one couple's journey through pregnancy: the film is an honest and challenging account of the fears of parenthood facing two actors. Stylistically it plays with the real and the theatrical, drawing attention to the performance many couples feel compelled to give in the face of society's expectations of parenting. *Our City* (Maria Tarantino, Belgium, Netherlands, 2014) is a well-constructed portrait of Brussels as a modern urban "anywhere": its focus on an eclectic mix of inhabitants gives way to a commentary on the universal human desire to belong. *Umrika* (Preshant Niar, India, 2015) explored the mythical qualities of potential emigration from India to the US. *Peggy Guggenheim: Art Addict* (Lisa Immordino Vreeland, USA, 2015) is an affectionate portrait of a controversial figure in the art world leaving the audience in no doubt as to her unique contribution, while presenting a range of artistic works and archive footage proficiently along the way. A particular highlight was the extraordinary anthropological study of Columbian academic and politician Antanus Mockus in *Life is Sacred* (Andreas Dalsgaard, Ireland, Denmark, 2015). Poignant, philosophical, startling and frustrating, this remarkable portrait offers an overwhelming case for the power of cinema to inform, document and incite change. A well considered range of workshops was also provided, including the particularly striking *LISTEN* strand of programming featuring a masterclass by composer Jed Kurzel, a practical illustration of the use of sound in *Frank* (Lenny Abrahamson, Ireland, 2014) by Niall Brady

and Steve Fanagan of Ardmore studies, an inspiring and evocative account of Alan Splet's work with David Lynch by Dr Liz Greene (DCU) and the music video programme strand *Synchronise*.

The festival also saw the return of the *Illuminate* series, which explores representations of mental health in film. This included screenings and discussion on areas such as ECT treatment (*Good Girl*, Solveig Meikeraaen, Norway, 2014), panic attacks (*Hedi Schneider is Stuck*, Sonja Heiss, Germany, 2015), homelessness and mental health (*Dead When I Got Here*, Mark Aitken, Mexico, 2015). The discussions with directors, healthcare professionals, and the general public were personal, provocative, insightful and a testament to the power of both narrative and documentary to evoke debate. Assisted dying was also discussed after a screening of *In Your Arms* (Samanou Acheche Sahistrom, Denmark, 2015) a moving, unsentimental portrait of Niels, a motorneuron patient who travels to Switzerland from Copenhagen, developing a complex and challenging relationship with his nurse Maria who makes the journey with him.

There were many lively and informative introductions to the films by festival staff and Creative Director James Mulligan took to this task with great gusto, appearing to be in several places at once during the week with great energy and enthusiasm, bolstered no doubt by the sterling work he and his team have invested over the last year into the planning of this stalwart on the festival circuit. In fact we were reminded of the festival's history (it is the longest running in Ireland) by the RTÉ archive clips peppered through the programme before screenings. These offered a snapshot of the cinematic personalities and audience attitudes of years gone by, with clips of the *Father Ted* style protests at screenings of *The Last Temptation of Christ* (Martin Scorsese, 1988) eliciting particular amusement amongst this year's patrons. Overall the festival garnered much deserved success for a rich, entertaining and provocative programme balancing a truly international dimension with a strong celebration of local talent.