

Film

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Sorry We Missed You

MA

Set in Newcastle, England, but universally relevant, *Sorry We Missed You* depicts the impact of economic rationalism on the working class. Ken Loach immerses us in the day-to-day life of one such family, intimately portraying the effects that privatisation of public services is having upon the wellbeing of not only the parents but also the children.

Despite the financial setback they suffered with the collapse of their building society in 2008, Ricky (Kris Hitchen) and Abby (Debbie Honeywood) have still been working hard to achieve their dream of owning a home. Hoping for more independence, Ricky has decided to join a parcel delivery business. However, he soon learns that although he and his fellow owner-drivers are nominally franchisees it's for insurance purposes only. They are still essentially employees, bullied by hard-nosed boss Maloney (Ross Brewster) and forced into urinating into a bottle en route by the impossibly tight delivery schedules locked into their hi-tech scanners.



Abby's job as an itinerant carer has become increasingly exhausting because she has had to sell her little car to finance the purchase of Ricky's van. Despite the vagaries of an inadequate public transport system, she still tries to spend extra time with her elderly and disabled clients, treating them as compassionately as she would her own family members.

But cost-cutting bureaucrats do not factor in such dedication. An angry young cerebral palsy client eloquently sums up how private healthcare providers are exploiting carers and clients. Unfortunately, it is Abby upon whom he vents his frustrations. The increasingly long hours the couple must work is clearly affecting their children: creative but rebellious teenager Seb (Rhys Stone) has got in with a crowd of graffiti artists and is in trouble at school; self-sufficient 12-year-old Lisa Jane (Katie Proctor) longs to spend more time with her parents.

Not only are Ricky and Abby home too late to eat with their children but also they are unable to get to meetings with teachers and welfare officers. As the odds continue to stack up against the family, it is clear that something has to give, which it does.

Loach provides no panacea for the situation. He and cinematographer Robbie Ryan simply take us into the catch-22 situation that is this family's daily life. Yet, the mood of this tough film is leavened throughout by the humanity and resilience of the characters. Despite her own exhaustion, Abby tells one of her clients "you've done more for me than you'll ever know". And she means it.

Sorry We Missed You opens on Boxing Day. One wonders what sort of Christmas Lisa Jane and her family would have had.

Mrs Lowry and Son

PG

This curiously engaging film depicts the relationship between L.S. Lowry (Timothy Spall) and his mother Elizabeth (Vanessa Redgrave) towards the end of her life. By 1934, Elizabeth Lowry was a bitter, bed-ridden invalid, totally reliant upon her only child.

Thwarted in achieving her dream of becoming a concert pianist, she remains resolutely unforgiving of her late husband whose desperate attempts to keep her in the manner to which she aspired had incurred such debts that they were forced to move from Victoria Park to Lancashire.

Laurie now works as a rent collector, slowly paying off these debts. Elizabeth tells her devoted son at every opportunity what a disappointment he is, referring to his painting as being merely a hobby. She belittles his skill, his style and his subjects: the factories and the workers. As snobbish as she is selfish, Elizabeth despises the working class.

Yet, this complex woman is as emotionally fragile as she is physically fragile. Her mild-mannered son, who describes himself simply as “a man who paints; no more, no less”, patiently endures her harangues and mood swings. Vicious though her words can be they never stop him painting. Only after her death would his paintings of 20th century industrial life in the north-west of England be acclaimed and the artist venerated. Too late for her son to finally gain approval from the one person he cared about.

Written by Martyn Hesford, directed by Adrian Noble, and designed by Catrin Meredydd and shot by Josep M. Civit, *Mrs Lowry and Son* is a beautifully crafted film which, blessed with consummate performances by Redgrave and Spall, truly holds one enthralled throughout.

Fisherman's Friends

M

Inspired by a true story, *Fisherman's Friends* is a charming, feel-good film that should prove an apt antidote to post-term 4/pre-Christmas stress.

Port Isaac is a tight-knit fishing community on the coast of Cornwall. The local grand house has been bought by London financier, Charles Montegue (Christopher Villiers), whose music executive son and friends descend upon the village for a bucks' weekend, displaying the boorish arrogance of cashed-up city “tossers” and alienating the Port Isaac community.

As a practical joke, one of them, Danny (Daniel Mays), is commissioned to sign up the Port Isaac fishermen's choir to a recording contract.

However, when he falls for Alwyn (Tuppence Middleton) who runs the local B&B, Danny not only takes his mates' challenge seriously, but must convince Alwyn and her family that his intentions are honourable. Neither task proves easy.

The romantic narrative is laced with snippets of local lore. Director Chris Foggin has assembled a strong cast led by James Purefoy, David Hayman and Maggie Steed as Alwyn's father and grandparents respectively. *Fisherman's Friends* was shot in Port Isaac; cinematographer Simon Tindall, production designer Hannah Purdy Foggin and composer Rupert Christie were clearly inspired by the picture-perfect location and its rich history.

Judy and Punch

MA

Writer-director Mirrah Foulkes has adapted the traditional slapstick domestic violence of the Punch and Judy puppet show as the spine of her first feature film. *Judy and Punch* can be construed as an analogy for present day society, where no matter how spurious a mendacious accusation is it can spread like wildfire via social media. In 17th century Seaside, one needs only to be accused of witchcraft to be sentenced to death. Even gentle Judy (Mia Wasikowska) is warned that her basic sleight of hand magic tricks for children may be

construed as sorcery.

Observing the relish with which men, women and children flock to hangings and stonings, wily puppeteer Punch (Damon Herriman) cranks up the level of violence in his shows, telling his much better half Judy that it's what the people want. When his inability to "stay straight and sober" results in tragedy, Punch quickly blames it on "unnatural acts" by others, incredible though the accusations are.

Before retribution arrives in the form of a band of outlaw heretics, Punch's despicable treatment of women, children and the elderly verges on psychopathic. While such appalling behaviour by puppets might still make audiences laugh, it takes on a much more sinister, ugly tone when the perpetrators and victims are flesh and blood.

Filmed in and around Montsalvat in Victoria, the film looks lovely. While all design aspects are most impressive, Foulkes' apparent reluctance to cut scenes showcasing the design unfortunately highlights often two-dimensional characterisations. More judicious editing could possibly have salvaged this rambling tale.

Knives Out

M

From writer-director Rian Johnson comes this highly entertaining riff on the murder mystery genre. Successful murder mystery writer Harlan Thrombey (Christopher Plummer) has just celebrated his 85th birthday at a family party in his gloriously gothic revival home. The next morning he is found dead.

As Detective Elliott (Lakeith Stanfield) and Trooper Wagner (Noah Segan) sift through the various family members' versions of the previous evening's events, it seems everyone had a motive to do the old man in.

A gentlemanly southern private detective Benoit Blanc (Daniel Craig) has been mysteriously hired to join in the investigation by a person or persons unknown. Blanc enlists the reluctant assistance of Harlan's young South American nurse, Marta (Ana de Armas).

From the opening sequence, Johnson smoothly steers his stellar cast through a maze of red herrings, and assorted whodunnit clichés and references. Design and production values are outstanding and there's even a crazy car chase. Thoroughly escapist holiday fun!

The recent Winda Festival of Indigenous Films from around the globe featured Not Just Numbers, an inspiring documentary about the Tangentyere Women's Family Safety Group and the leadership role they have assumed in developing programs to combat family and domestic violence and sexual assault in their Alice Springs communities. Writer- director and co-convenor of the TWFSG Shirleen Campbell is truly inspirational. The film culminates in a delegation of these formidable women travelling to Canberra where they spoke with various politicians.

Not Just Numbers is well worth chasing up. It also screened on NITV on 25 November after the festival. The festival also featured children's TV series Robbie Hood, which is available on SBS On Demand.

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