



A SERIOUS MAN

USA | 2009 | 110m | 15

Director: Joel & Ethan Coen

Screenplay: Joel & Ethan Coen

Cinematography: Roger Deakins

Editing: Roderick Jaynes

Original Music: Carter Burwell

Leading Players: Michael Stuhlbarg (Larry Gopnik), Richard Kind (Uncle Arthur), Fred Melamed (Sy Ableman), Sari Lennick (Judith Gopnik), Aaron Wolff (Danny Gopnik).

filmnote

A Serious Man is the fourteenth feature by the Coen Brothers and it is layered like dark comedy cake that only they know how to bake.

The movie takes us straight into the heart of a Jewish burrough in the suburbs of Minnesota in 1967. We are procured to the plot of the film by a small and of-that-period Yiddish ersatz folk tale of tzadik. Tzadik in traditional Yiddish, is a name given to the one believed to be righteous and a spiritual leader. This overstating story reflects upon the biblical sourcing of the themes of the movie and one can see the clear relation between Job, of the first testament, and the cherry of this soon to be ongepotchket (mess) of a situation, Larry Gropnik (Michael Stuhlbarg).

Larry Gropnik, who like Job, endeavours to live a linear life, albeit in constant fear of God. He is, by profession, a university Physics professor with a pending tenure and by private life a husband, father and brother. Larry soon finds himself dealing with grounding events that forcefully make him realise that the cosmos or some higher power does work in mysterious ways, and sometimes against you.

Mysterious and anonymous letters jeopardizing Larry's tenure constantly keep arriving at the university, which make his superiors question him and his application. His wife, (played by Sari Lennick) is cheating on him with Sy Albelmann (Fred Mclamed). Ironically everyone approves of the situation as Sy proves to be the prevailing "serious man". Larry's unemployed brother (Richard Kind) whose status does not appear to change anytime in the near future, moves in with him. Both Larry's children keep an alienating distance from their father. His son (Aaron Wolff) only speaks to his father when the television antenna needs repairing and his daughter (Jessica McManus) keeps occupied with experimental drama stage. As these events pile on Larry, their weight begins to take their toll and his life begins to spin uncontrollably. At this climatic point Larry begins to question religion and tries to understand what kind of god

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would allow this to happen to a humble and serious person such as himself? Questions on existence and religion have been touched or hinted before in previous Coen Bros movies, but this movie creates a genre of its own, one that focus's on man's relationship in coming to terms with God. These existentialist themes, done in a dark yet humorous way, of questioning the human condition and godly existence echo the European influence of art house films such as the films of Ingmar Bergman. These matters are subtly infused into the lifestyle of Larry, in his politics, family responsibilities, faith and sexual and/or platonic relationships.

"I've tried to be a serious man, tried to do right, to be a member of the community" protests the helpless Larry, but the more Larry shows his efforts of loyalty to his faith when asking for help from his 3 orthodox Rabbis, the more the Coen Brothers show that organized religion and its leaders can be useless, non-sensical cons.

The entire composition of the movie is so similar to the environment that the Coen brothers grew up in (Minneapolis in the 60s), that one could deduce that this movie is coming from personal angle. Perhaps we can understand that the Coen Bros carry a certain divine knowledge and are trying to tell us through the character of Larry. Are the Coen Bros trying to tell us something about God and the way the universe works or are they completely satirizing the idea of a controlled faith?

Reaching his own conclusions, Larry knows that no matter what, he must prevail as the "serious man", as the mensch. But how will he cope?

fershtay? (understand?)

BFF Film Note by Ana Maria Sapountzis

Tomorrow at Bath Film Festival 2009

Tuesday 17 November, 7.00pm | Little Theatre | £7 / £5

King Of India

Arvand Sinha | India | 2008 | 107m | 12A | subtitles

This lyrical and mesmerizing documentary follows a family of 'Nat' carnival and street entertainers in Kolkata, India. The film focuses on young Raja and his siblings who are sent out to perform as soon as they can walk. Beautifully observed with strong attention to detail, this colourful family saga reveals the complexities of Indian society.

Tuesday 17 November, 9.15pm | Little Theatre | £8 / £6

Cracks

Jordan Scott | UK/Ireland | 2009 | 104m | 15

Jordan Scott, Ridley's daughter, establishes her own identity with a complex and intriguing study of an enclosed society whose dynamics are disrupted by the arrival of a beautiful teacher (Eva Green) and a pupil with an exotic background.

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