



HELEN

UK/Ireland | 2008 | 79m | PG

Director: Christine Molloy, Joe Lawlor

Screenplay: Christine Molloy, Joe Lawlor

Cinematography: Ole Bratt Birkeland

Editing: Christine Molloy

Original Music: Dennis McNulty

Leading Players: Annie Townsend, Sandie Malia, Dennis Jobling, Danny Groenland

filmnote

Joint directors/writers Lawlor and Molloy started out in Dublin in the 1980s, collaborating on community theatre projects before branching out into work for radio and the screen under the title "Desperate Optimists". Their other films include *Civic Life Project*, a series of nine shorts created using a cast from the local community and *Who Killed Brown Owl?*, a one-take short showing the chaos that ensues upon the interruption of an idyllic English afternoon. However, *Helen* is considered their major debut into British cinema.

This year at the European First Festival, Lawlor and Molloy received the Grand Jury Prize for *Helen* and Annie Townsend won Best Actress for her performance as Helen. Ole Bratt Birkeland, who was responsible for the long takes and stunning photography used in the film, won Best Cinematography Award at the Dublin International Film Festival.

This beautifully shot film follows the character of orphan Helen as she is asked to take the lead role in a police reconstruction of missing girl Joy's last movements. It begins by following the journey of a girl in a bright yellow jacket as she makes her way with friends through a park, then alone through woodland. It cuts to scenes of a line of police combing the area for clues to the whereabouts of missing Joy. After a poignant scene involving her parents and a policewoman as they are shown their daughters possessions discovered in the woods, the plot takes on a new direction and instead follows the movements of Helen in the police reconstruction.

Even though the focus is now directed to her, Joy's presence in the film is undeniable; it fills every room, is behind every feeling, behind every motive and action. During the course of making the video reconstruction, Helen reaches the age where she can have access to information regarding her parents and reluctantly she decides to hear details of their whereabouts. These revelations and her reactions to them further add depth behind her unknown and unfixed identity and character.



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excellent A

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B

fair C

D

poor E

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As we are taken deeper into the story through the use of slow and carefully constructed shots, the film, and Helen herself, take on a much darker tone.

This film explores the powerful themes of home and belonging through Helen's lack of a complete identity and the ever present gap created in Joy's parents' lives. The haunting music provided by artist Dennis McNulty is used sparingly throughout but matches well to the tone of the scene it accompanies. Dialogue is also limited, making this a very visual film, but when it occurs it is sudden, stark and intrusive. Evidence of chaos is left behind by the absence of Joy, reflected in the obscure camera angles as they draw you away from the main focus in many of the scenes.

This well shot and directed film is brilliantly placed together. The strong themes held within the plot are woven into every expression, action and word. Annie Townsend's portrayal of Helen is as astonishingly thought-provoking as the film itself. The support cast frequently show signs of amateur performance, however this also adds to the simplicity and overall feel contained in the film. All this combined with the darker tones present in the second half means that *Helen* will stay with you for a long time after the end credits have finished rolling.

BFF Film Note by Zoe Chapman

Also tonight at Bath Film Festival 2009...

8.45pm | Rondo Theatre | £6 / £4

Afterschool

Antonio Campos | USA | 120m | 18

Ezra is a solitary boy at boarding school who locks himself in his room, finding online comfort from images of sex and violence. When he emerges from his lair, he comes across the last moments of twin girls, which he devotedly records, rather than coming to their assistance. The film is determinedly non-judgemental and does not offer the easy satisfaction of sympathetic characters, but you will find yourself remembering it for a lot longer than some dumb comedy.

and tomorrow...

Thursday 19 November | Chapel Arts | £6 / £4

The Sky Crawlers

Mamoru Oshii | Japan | 2008 | 122m | 15 tbc

In this nightmarish world, war is a media contrivance played out between gigantic corporations to reassure the populace that things are being taken care of. The meditative, dystopian worldview of Mamoru "Ghost In The Shell" Oshii's latest anime is balanced by stunning aerial action sequences and a muted but striking beauty.

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