



the promise

Colour, Germany 1994, 119 minutes

Sophie Sellman
Young Sophie
Konrad Richtev
Young Konrad

Corinna Harfouch
Meret Becker
August Zirner
Anian Zollner

Director
Producer
Script

Margarethe von Trotta
Eberhard Junkersdorf
Peter Schneider
Margarethe von Trotta
Felice Laudadio
Franz Rath
Juergen Knieper

Photography
Music



There have been many films which dealt with the lives of ordinary people in extraordinary times. From *Gone With The Wind* and *Shenandoah*, set against the backdrop of the American Civil War, to the Chinese epics of the 1980s and 90s – among them *Farewell My Concubine* and *To Live* – set during the years of the Communist regime and the Cultural Revolution, the majority have been set far away from us in history and geography. Here, for a change, is a story set in recent times – some of it well within the memory of the youngest members of the Club! – and on our own continent.

The Promise tells how the Berlin Wall separates one particular pair of young lovers in 1961 and keeps them apart through most of their adult lives. As they struggle to make careers and settle down to life in their new settings – she in the West with her aunt and he in the East – Sophie and Konrad experience the changes that the 1960s and 70s bring. The 'permissive' society in the West contrasts with the abortive attempts to bring democracy to the East, in particular the violence of the Prague Spring of 1968.

Von Trotta has tackled the thorny subject of the complications that political extremism causes in personal lives in earlier films, *Marianne und Juliane* (shown by the Club under its English title *The German Sisters*) and *Rosa Luxemburg*, a dramatisation of the political activist's life. However, here it is not the protagonists who espouse political views; they are merely the pawns in other peoples' games. Konrad's successful career in astrophysics makes him in demand at conferences and symposia around the world but his loyalty to the Party is always the first consideration when he seeks permission to travel. Sophie, on the other hand, has more freedom and is defiant when confronted by authoritarianism, much to Konrad's dismay and potentially to his detriment.





It is hard to believe that the events depicted here are set in such recent times, as the world in which they took place seems so alien now. The changes that take place in the UK are relatively low key compared to the events and policies which we see here and it's a lot easier just to get on with your life. *The Promise* makes us see once again that it can be hard to plough one's own furrow when faced with a society which makes demands and sets rules which many people do not wish to accede to.

As a personal aside, I have a friend who travelled to Berlin in December 1989. He wanted to visit a friend of his who lived in West Berlin and found that the demand was so high that all direct flights were fully booked for the next two weeks. He had to fly via Frankfurt instead. His Christmas card in 1989 contained a photo of him, hammer in hand, doing his bit to knock the Wall down. Sellotaped below it was a souvenir. I've still got it.

Gill Rollings

Hopefully not !

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The Waterman's Arts Centre at the High Street, Brentford (Box Office 0181 568 1176) starts the new year by screening the new film *"The Wings of the Dove"*, on the same day, 2 January, that it opens in the West End. The film, which stars Linus Roache and Helena Bonham Carter, is from the novel by Henry James and was a hit at the London Film Festival

The Centre is also offering a special offer to Students and those under 25 years of age - buy 2 cinema tickets and bring a friend free! The offer is valid on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday during December and January, and all tickets should be for the same screening. Proof of status is required.

An eleven week course on Contemporary Film will be run at the Waterman's Art Centre, Brentford (Box Office - 0181 568 1176) from 22 January. The course is run in association with Birbeck College, University of London. Students will be introduced to a wide variety of cinema from different cultures. The viewing of films and extracts form an integral part of the course. The course fees of £50 (concessions £30) include admission to all 5 screenings in the cinema.

The sudden death of David Gill at the age of 69 (a surprise in itself - his modesty and energy made him seem much younger) represents a tremendous loss to the film archiving movement, even though he never worked for an archive himself. That is to say, he never worked in an archive - he certainly worked with and for film archivists with a respectful willingness, a professionalism, and an unprecedented tolerance for institutional constraints which completely disarmed all those who were confronted with his quiet charm and special brand of gentle persuasion.

David was the first 'outsider' to bridge the traditional gap of suspicion which existed between film preservationists and the often-enclosed world of collectors and buffish film historians. He saw the need for both, and after forming his inspirational partnership with Kevin Brownlow (later to turn into Photoplay Productions) brought a timely sense of ambassadorship and entrepreneurialism to the seemingly arcane and esoteric business of film restoration. He not only helped to restore and keep alive cinema's past, but put it back on the screen in the most public way possible - and with absolute integrity and artistry. In short, he put the reticent work of film preservation on the map.

Abel Gance's *Napoléon* began it all in November 1980, when David was the driving force in bringing together all the elements necessary for that epic revival screening at the Empire, Leicester Square: Kevin Brownlow's impassioned restoration work of 25 years; Carl Davis' finest score; the technical support of the National Film Archive; and underwriting from Thames Television. From that moment on, film preservation and its presentation became a vital public issue and gave film archives a new prominence and importance at national and international level.

The NFTVA will remember David most warmly and admiringly for his negotiation of the transfer of the Chaplin out-takes (previously used in Photoplay's *The Unknown Chaplin*) into the permanent care of the Archive - an eleventh-hour rescue if ever there was one, since many of the nitrate reels were already sticky, though thankfully mostly salvageable.

David set an example among film restorers which others - even the major film studios - have subsequently followed, and for that he will be remembered with honour and gratitude.

Clyde Jeavons, Consultant Curator, and Anne Fleming, Curator, NFTVA

● A much loved comic actor, Red Skelton - who died on September 17 aged 84 - proved himself a master of physical comedy in a succession of popular films, including *Whistling in the Dark* (1941), *Dubarry Was a Lady* (1943), *I Dood It* (1943), *Thousands Cheer* (1943) and *Merton of the Movies* (1947).



● Perhaps best known for his role as Terry the chef in *Fawlty Towers*, Brian Hall - who died on September 16 aged 59 - made several big screen appearances, most notably as cockney gangsters. These included *The Long Good Friday* (1979) and *McVicar* (1980).

● Leonard Maguire - who died on September 12 aged 73 - regularly cropped up on stage, TV and cinema, in particular with roles in *The Honorary Consul* (1982), *A Dry White Season* (1988) and *Prospero's Books* (1991).



● A dependable actor over many years, Andrew Keir - who died October 5 aged 71 - will be best remembered for his role as Professor Quatermass in *Quatermass and the Pit* (1967), but recently appeared as the Duke of Argyll in *Rob Roy* (1995). Other film appearances came in *The Brave Don't Cry* (1952), *The Maggie* (1953), *Cleopatra* (1962), *Dracula - Prince of Darkness* (1966) and *Zeppelin* (1971).

● For 45 years the voice of Nelson Gabriel in *The Archers*, Jack May - who died on September 19 aged 75 - appeared in films such as *The Man Who Would Be King* (1975), *The Shooting Party* (1984) and *The Bounty* (1984).

35 reactions, average score 6.71

Comments

It's just too slow.

Mellow and atmospheric.

Look forward to "Blue in the Face."

Characters well played out.

So very life like.

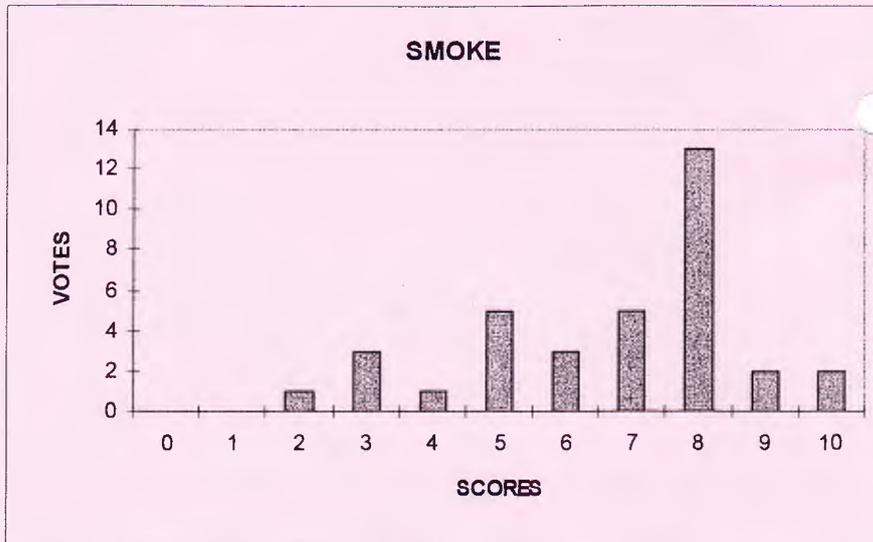
Second half far better than the first.

Was Forest Whittaker's left arm always longer than his right?

A most unusual and touching film.

There's no smoke without fire - but this film failed to set the house on fire.

Helen Sayers



Reactions - the story so far:

BRASSED OFF.....	8.14%
STAGECOACH.....	7.44%
CARRINGTON.....	6.73%
SMOKE.....	6.71%
SCENT OF GREEN PAPAYA....	6.34%

5 ACADEMY AWARD® NOMINATIONS!

BEST FILM

- BEST DIRECTOR - Mike Leigh
- BEST ACTRESS - Brenda Blethyn
- BEST SUPPORTING ACTRESS - Marianne Jean-Baptiste
- BEST ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY - Mike Leigh

6 BAFTA® NOMINATIONS!

BEST FILM

- BEST DIRECTOR - Mike Leigh
- BEST ACTRESS IN A LEADING ROLE - Brenda Blethyn
- BEST ACTOR IN A LEADING ROLE - Timothy Spall
- BEST ACTRESS IN A SUPPORTING ROLE - Marianne Jean-Baptiste
- BEST ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY - Mike Leigh

COMING NEXT MONTH

December 11

Secrets & Lies (GB; 1996) [15] Director: Mike Leigh.
 Mike Leigh's bittersweet tale of family tensions was showered with honours, collecting nominations for 5 Oscars and 6 BAFTAs, following Brenda Blethyn's Best Actress award at the Cannes Film Festival. The all too accurate depiction of the final over-spilling of frustration and resentment during a birthday barbecue should set everyone up for the Christmas holidays!



a MIKE LEIGH film

SECRETS & LIES®

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REACTIONS