

# The Main Feature



Season 31 - Issue 13 (screening 24.3.11)

## Fish Tank

UK  
Cert 15

Release date 11.9.09  
123 minutes

Director and writer: Andrea Arnold  
Director of photography: Robbie Ryan  
Editor: Nicolas Chaudeurge

Cast:  
Mia Katie Jarvis  
Connor Michael Fassbinder  
Joanne Kierston Wareing  
Tyler Rebecca Griffiths  
Kyle Harry Treadaway  
Liam Jason Maza  
London Brooke Hobby  
Sophie Charlotte Collins  
Andree Chelsea Chase

Eighteen-year-old Katie Jarvis might sound like the stereotypical Essex girl. She was having a public argument with her boyfriend when a strange woman asked whether she'd like to be in a film. That project was **Fish Tank**, the latest venture by director Andrea Arnold, which has won 18 awards, including the Bafta for Outstanding British Film.

The story centres on a feisty young Essex girl whose life is dramatically altered by the arrival of her mother's new boyfriend (played by **Hunger** star Michael Fassbender). But as it turned out, Jarvis was a shy young girl who took a while to be convinced of her suitability for the role.

As the film's director of photography, Robbie Ryan, explained, "Andrea wanted someone who was the real

thing" and Jarvis, born and bred in Essex like her character, and with a similar background that included leaving home at a young age, was able to bring much of her own experience to the film.

Katie described how, "I'd never done any dancing or anything like that and I didn't think I had a chance." In fact, she was at first so self-conscious about dancing that she refused to do it in front of anyone and had to be left alone in a room with a camera. Despite the lack of experience, she got the part. When she was phoned on her birthday to be told, "I cried my eyes out, I was well chuffed. But I think I was one of a kind, I don't think anyone else will get picked off a train station."



### **Do you feel like this film really captures the Essex vibe?**

The film captures the vibe of the estate, the Mardyke, where it was actually shot, but not where I actually grew up. I grew up in Essex, but not in Rainham. It did capture that area though because you can see it in Mia, in her personality. Even though she's not a bad person, she's growing up in this bad area and there are bad people around her and that affects her behaviour. It's all different though, wherever you go in Essex. We're not all the same!

### **How would you persuade young people, like yourself, to go and see a film like this in which no robots come to life and no buildings get blown up? No pressure!**

I would say that, personally, it's worth seeing because it is about real life. Everyone knows what it's like to have these ups and downs and rows with their family and friends and all these problems going on, so I think if you like to watch real-life and real-life stories, then that's what **Fish Tank** is all about. It's not fictional, it's 'today', you know what I mean?

With pleasing irony, Jarvis is a walking rebuttal of Arnold's cut-adrift women characters in this film: a respectable white working-class girl from a strong, moral, supportive family. Her sisters, aged between 10 and 16, have not been allowed to see the film, only selected clips. "I don't want them seeing it," she says protectively, "because of the sex scenes. They are still young. My dad and I have agreed that we'll watch it with them and skip over those parts."



Arnold won't say where the story of Mia comes from, but she admits there's something of her own background in the film. „That whole world was something I felt I needed to get off my chest," she says. She wrote the story for the area in Kent where she grew up, only later moving it to the other side of the Thames. „But I know the Essex estuary quite well, too, and once I went there I just loved it. It felt very similar to where I'd written for."

She goes beyond the clichés of "broken Britain" and dangerous youth, giving people back the humanity that some parts of the media and the entertainment industry take away. "There are films made with hoodies being the aggressors and beating everybody up, but they're just kids."

According to a recent Unicef report, Britain has the world's unhappiest children, she says. "We're the fifth country in the world and yet there's more kids living in poverty. There are reasons why those kids go out and do what they do. We should be asking questions, not accusing or judging. They're kids. They get very bad press."

Simply blaming people like Mia's feckless mother is not the answer either, she argues. "You can't blame the parents, because what was their life like? I don't know, there are lots of things I can't answer. But there are certainly questions."

Rather unusually, it was filmed in chronological order. At the end of each week the actors were given the scripts for the scenes that they would perform the following week so that when they performed each scene they were largely unaware of what would happen to their characters later in the film.

With *Fish Tank*, we have a British product that is realistic, harsh and brutal, without ever succumbing to the overwrought notions expected of this generic form. Perhaps this is because Arnold is more interested in human characters and desires, as opposed to making an overarching social statement. Of course, the stark circumstances of these characters plays a pivotal part in their motivations, but these circumstances are never elevated or shoved into the viewer's face, existing instead in the subtext and production design. In turn, Arnold has crafted a picture that should please critics and arthouse aficionados, as well as audiences, interested in discovering a universal, human narrative.

Iain McGlashan

# Filmclub: moved by the movies

The ability of cinema to open up a world of possibility for young minds is the force behind Filmclub, founded by writer Lindsay Mackie and director Beeban Kidron. **A charity, set up in 2006, it runs programmes in 6,500 UK schools, offering children films beyond the blockbuster fare at their local multiplex.**

The films, which cover everything from *101 Dalmatians* to *12 Angry Men*, comedies, dramas and documentaries, must fulfil four criteria: they have to engage, inspire, challenge and entertain. More than 180,000 children have benefited from the scheme, which is part-funded by the Department of Education and counts Steven Spielberg among its supporters.

“Film is an accessible way for children to discover themselves and the world beyond them,” says Kidron. “Children watch *To Sir With Love* and marvelling at the way social attitudes have changed. They see *Hotel Rwanda*, which provoked outrage, and *Schindler’s List*, which provoked tears and hope.”

On Wednesday 2 March Filmclub launches its Power of Film campaign. It includes *Afghan Star*, about Afghanistan’s version of *Pop Idol*, to spark discussion about life in other countries, and Al Gore’s *An Inconvenient Truth* to provoke debate about climate change.

**Colin Firth** "I am going for this year’s fine crop: the kitchen scene in *Blue Valentine* between Michelle Williams and Ryan Gosling; Robert Duvall’s confessional speech at the end of *Get Low*; all of Jeff Bridges in *True Grit*."

**Helen Mirren** I would say Antonioni’s *L’Avventura* was the film I first got really excited about. I had seen fifth-run American movies, but this was the first time I had seen a European film. I just found it very uplifting.

**Kristin Scott Thomas** In *The Bridges of Madison County*, Meryl Streep puts her hand on Clint Eastwood’s shoulder: she is trying to hang on to a moment that is very fragile.

**Andrea Riseborough** In *Key Largo*, when Humphrey Bogart, without moving a muscle in his face, feels total tranquillity – and then anger. I was almost sick when I saw that for the first time.

**David Suchet** *Kind Hearts and Coronets* starred Alec Guinness in eight roles. He was stunning in all of them, especially as Lady Agatha D’Ascoyne. I was bowled over by it.

**Jim Broadbent** It must be Michael J Pollard in *Bonnie and Clyde*. I thought, there is a character actor having fun. It opened up a world of possibilities for me. I somehow identified with him – and he had a funny face, hadn’t he?

**Steve Buscemi** It would be *Angels With Dirty Faces* and the look on James Cagney’s face before going to the electric chair, when he has to decide if he will die a coward or not for the good of the Dead End kids. He was brilliant. I love him.

**Mike Leigh** *Les Quatre Cents Coups (The 400 Blows)* is a great film about growing up. Truffaut is a great film-maker and there is a wonderful season of his films at the moment at the BFI.

**Terry Gilliam** Kubrick’s *The Paths of Glory* for his tracking shots through the trenches. I became aware that the camera can be a character in the piece. The opening sequence in *Brazil* is basically a homage, or a rip-off.

## Reactions to ....The Oyster Farmer – 10<sup>th</sup> March 2011

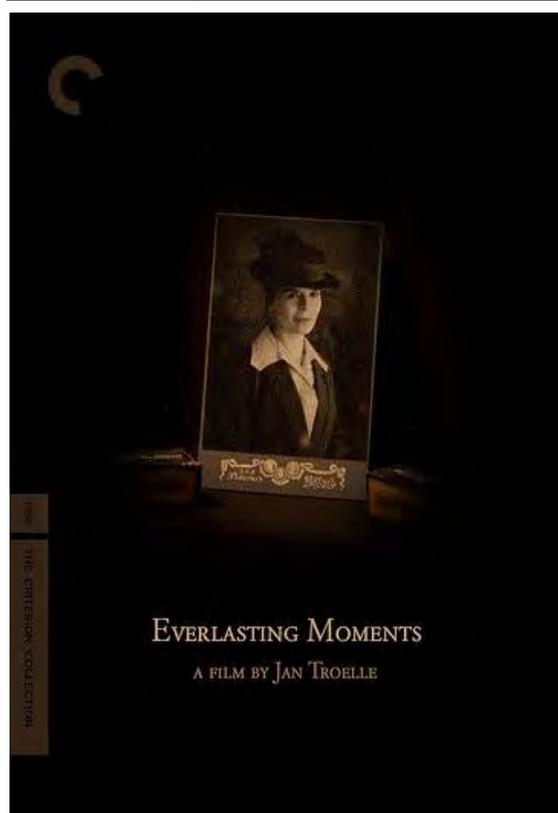
|                            |                             |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |           |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|
| <b>Score</b>               | <b>0</b>                    | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>5</b> | <b>6</b> | <b>7</b> | <b>8</b> | <b>9</b> | <b>10</b> |
| <b>Votes</b>               | ~                           | ~        | ~        | 2        | 2        | 14       | 9        | 11       | 4        | 2        | ~         |
| <b>Total received – 44</b> | <b>Average Score – 6.02</b> |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |          |           |

### Your Comments

A way of life – some lovely characters: Jim Norton (Mumbles) stole the show  
 Lovely photography but the accents were difficult  
 A lively experience, but a bit muddled to follow  
 Slight but interesting about the oyster farming  
 More like this please + can I have a bath like that  
 Thin story, good characters  
 First half rather slow: second no better!  
 Story too slight, too disjointed  
 Beautiful scenery, well filmed but story a bit thin  
 Excellent and interesting to see a different way of life  
 Beautiful scenery, I'd like to know a bit more about oyster farming – not enough plot and didn't like the sex scene.

Superficial and so obvious  
 This won prizes?!  
 No story  
 I liked it!  
 Fantastic scenery: shame about the people  
 A very strong sense of place  
 Enjoyable – subtitles would have helped

| Position         | Film                               | Average Score |
|------------------|------------------------------------|---------------|
| 1 <sup>st</sup>  | Invictus                           | 8.02          |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup>  | An Education                       | 7.83          |
| 3 <sup>rd</sup>  | Le premier jour de reste de ta vie | 7.54          |
| 4 <sup>th</sup>  | Kongekabale ( <i>King's Game</i> ) | 7.36          |
| 5 <sup>th</sup>  | The Hurt Locker                    | 7.09          |
| 6 <sup>th</sup>  | A Touch of Class                   | 6.97          |
| 7 <sup>th</sup>  | Cherry Blossom                     | 6.88          |
| 8 <sup>th</sup>  | Appaloosa                          | 6.8           |
| 9 <sup>th</sup>  | Europa, Europa                     | 6.59          |
| 10 <sup>th</sup> | Oyster Farmer                      | 6.02          |
| 11 <sup>th</sup> | Ushpizin                           | 5.94          |
| 17 <sup>th</sup> | Paranormal Activity                | 2.75          |



Our next presentation at 8pm on Thursday 14 April:

## Maria Larssons eviga ögonblick (*Everlasting Moments*)

Sweden, early 1900s - an era of social change and unrest, war and poverty. A young working class woman, Maria, wins a camera in a lottery. The camera grants her the eyes to view the world, and empowers her over several decades to raise and nurture her family.



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