

# The Main Feature



Issue Number 6 – 22nd November 2007

## L'Enfant (The Child)

France/ Belgium - 2005 - 100 minutes

Bruno	Jérémy Renier
Sonia	Déborah François
Steve	Jérémy Segard
Plain clothes policeman	Olivier Gourmet

Written, directed and produced by Jean-Pierre Dardenne and Luc Dardenne



Sonia and her boyfriend Bruno live in the rundown, industrial town of Seraing in Eastern Belgium. At the beginning of the film she has a baby. She gets little support from Bruno who is more interested in getting an income from petty crime. "Only fools work" is his philosophy. When 18-year-old Sonia leaves hospital with baby Jimmy not only does Bruno show minimal paternal interest but he has sublet her flat - no opportunity to obtain money, or just as opportunely to spend it again, will he miss - thus condemning them to spend the night in a segregated hostel not far removed from a Victorian workhouse. Bruno is a rootless 20-year old, a mini-Fagin complete with younger boys to work for him pick pocketing watches, jewellery or any items which he can sell on. He loves Sonia but only in a playful, childlike way. He certainly lacks any sense of responsibility.

When one day the fence to whom he passes on the stolen goods, a well-dressed woman he meets in a bar, asks if he knows that there is big money to be made on the adoption black market, his course of action - knowing as we do his utter lack of any sense of moral responsibility - becomes inevitable. Helpfully offering to take little Jimmy for a walk while his mother is waiting in a queue, he takes the baby to a pre-arranged spot, a shabby room in an anonymous building, to which he later returns to pick up a wad of euros.

This is to be the catalyst for all that is to follow. Bruno now is forced to learn that actions have consequences. His infantile thinking leads him to suppose that Sonia will be pleased that he is bringing back some money and, after all, they can make another baby. He is genuinely surprised at the force of Sonia's reaction and he is soon to discover that there is a price to be paid for what he has done and that it does not just involve money.

This is not an easy film to watch and the grimy locations will do nothing for the Belgian tourist industry. There is absolutely no music on the soundtrack. The main character is a work-shy petty criminal who is guilty of a shockingly irresponsible act. His young girl friend is not that much better. She is prepared to ride on the back of a motor-scooter clutching young Jimmy to her breast and when she discovers that her welfare apartment has been sub-let, she seems concerned most about the recovery of her mobile phone charger. And yet we do come to care about their plight and to be concerned about their fate .

This is partly due to the faultless acting of the two young principals. Jérémie Renier had appeared as a troubled teenager in an earlier film by the Dardenne brothers, *The Promise*, and so we see him here growing into adulthood much as, many years before, Jean-Pierre Léaud did in the films of François Truffaut from *The 400 Blows* onwards. He sustains the central role wonderfully well and Déborah François is equally impressive as Sonia. This was her first film role but she soon was to follow this up by playing one of the leads in *The Page Turner* which we will be seeing later in the season.

But it is also because from the moment when he is confronted by Sonia's violent and very human reaction to his irresponsible act, Bruno, up to this point just as much "the child" as baby Jimmy, is forced to face up to the consequences of what he has done and to try to make some amends for it. This leads him into more trouble than he can handle and to some reckless and dangerous action. The film culminates in a daring and suspenseful chase along the river bank and, as the film reaches its satisfying and ingenious ending, we may ask ourselves has Bruno achieved redemption? Jean-Pierre Dardenne says, "A movie is not a court of justice. We try to make it so that the viewer feels many things about Bruno. When you see him selling the child, you think, 'No, this can't be, this is impossible.' But then the more you see him, the more you realise he's not just a bastard. You are forced to understand the character." And, as one critic put it, "it's as if an irresponsible but much-loved younger brother has finally managed to get back on the rails."

This film won the *Palme d'Or* at the Cannes Film Festival in 2005, though its setting is as far removed from the opulence of Cannes as it is possible to imagine. The Dardenne brothers had previously won the *Palme d'Or* for *Rosetta* in 1999 and in 2002 the Best Actor award went to Olivier Gourmet - the policeman in *L'Enfant* - for his role in another of the brothers' films, *The Son*. Before their movie successes of the last decade they had made documentaries and this shows in the documentary style of the filming with its close-up, hand-held camerawork.

And finally a *Babywatch* note. It is claimed that no actual babies were mislaid during the making of this film although a surprisingly large number of babies - 21 - are credited with playing the role of Jimmy.

Malcolm Walrond



## War documentaries top Oscar list

Films about war dominate the shortlist of movies competing for the title of 2007's best documentary at the Academy Awards next February.

Eight of the 15 films on the list look at past or current wars. The others include Michael Moore's *Sicko*, which is about the American health care system.

Five final nominees will be picked in January before the Oscars are handed out at the 80th awards ceremony.

Last year winner was Al Gore's global warming film *An Inconvenient Truth*.

Among the war films on the list are Charles Ferguson's *No End in Sight*, *Body of War* and *Operation Homecoming: Writing the Wartime Experience*.

*Taxi to the Darkside*, deals with the Afghan war and tells of the death of a taxi driver at a US military base, and *Nanking* looks at the killing of 300,000 civilians in China by Japanese troops in 1937.

*Lake of Fire*, which looks at the abortion debate, is also featured on the shortlist along with *Please Vote for Me* which is about children in China holding an election.

The ceremony takes place on 24 February at Hollywood's Kodak Theatre.

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## Hitman comedy to launch Sundance

A comedy about hitmen set in Bruges will launch the 2008 Sundance Film Festival, organisers have announced.

*In Bruges* stars Brendan Gleeson and Colin Farrell as two Irish assassins sent to the Belgian city by employer Ralph Fiennes after bungling a job.

The film is the first feature from the playwright Martin McDonagh, who won an Academy Award in 2006 for short film *Six Shooter*, also starring Gleeson.

Next year's Sundance festival runs from 17 to 27 January in Park City, Utah.

Run by Robert Redford's Sundance Institute, the annual event is America's leading showcase for low-budget, independent and speciality movies.

### 'Totally original'

"In many ways *In Bruges* is a quintessential Sundance film," said festival director Geoffrey Gilmore.

"It's brutal, philosophical, funny, and totally original, he continued, describing 37-year-old McDonagh as "a masterful storyteller."

The offbeat comedy is one of around 120 features screening at this year's event, one of the highlights on the film festival calendar.

The full programme will announced at the end of the month.

Fiennes is currently in Bath filming period drama *The Duchess* with Keira Knightley.

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# Reactions to ....

*Prestige*

~~The Day I became a Woman~~ - 25<sup>th</sup> October 2007

Score 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
Votes ~ ~ ~ 1 1 5 3 12 13 1 ~

Total Votes - 36 Average Score - 6.86 Position in Season - 4th

Film	Score	Position
The Lives of Others	8.23	1 <sup>st</sup>
Notes on a Scandal	7.73	2 <sup>nd</sup>
Pans Labyrinth	6.88	3 <sup>rd</sup>
The Prestige	6.86	4 <sup>th</sup>
Offside	6.56	5 <sup>th</sup>
The Day I became a Woman	5.72	6 <sup>th</sup> (Amendment due to wobbly maths)

## Your views

A bit obscure

Intriguing illusion, competently acted, well directed.

Fascinating film and the ending certainly was a surprise but talk about obsession.

A difficult story to follow

The illusion was a mystery to me – transporting

Dazzling Transmogrification

Intriguing but did I miss something?

## Next Time

13<sup>th</sup> December 2007 – Belle et La Bête

Jean Cocteau's classic tale of the young girl who is downtrodden by her siblings but shows tremendous character when faced with her father's captor. A Christmas treat!

 France/1946/93 mins



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