

WNCC

WOKING'S NEW CINEMA CLUB
The Main Feature

Season 42 – Issue 17 – Screening 25 May 2023

Dream Horse

UK 2020

113 mins. Certificate PG

Directed by	Eunos Lyn
Written by	Neil McKay
Cinematography	Erik Wilson
Production Design	Daniel Taylor

Cast

Jan Vokes	Toni Collette
Brian Vokes	Owen Teale
Howard Davies	Damian Lewis
Maureen	Siân Phillips
Bert	Alan David
Elsie	Lynda Baron
Kerby	Karl Johnson
Nerys	Di Botcher
Lord Avery	Peter Davison
Phillip Hobbs	Nicolas Farrell
Angela Davies	Joanna Page
Bo and Russell	Dream Alliance



Our final film of the 42nd Season is a quirky, feelgood tale (based on a true story) of a race horse syndicate in a humdrum small Welsh town. It occasionally overplays the sentimentality, but is held together by an excellent cast, and a strong central performance from Toni Collette.

Jan Vokes is an empty-nester stuck in a rut, holding down two jobs (in a supermarket and as a barmaid) whilst looking after her unemployed, arthritic husband and ageing parents. She exudes disenchantment at her unfulfilled potential, despite past success breeding rabbits, whippets, and racing pigeons. Working at the bar one night, Jan overhears local tax advisor Howard Davies holding forth on his positive experience with horse racing – though it later emerges that in a past syndicate he lost considerable money imperilling his marriage. After some research, Jan pairs a mare with a promising stallion, and raises the resulting foal on her small allotment. She persuades a motley cross-section of locals to chip in £10/week to feed and train the horse, and eventually convinces an English trainer (Phillip Hobbs) to take him on. The horse is christened “Dream Alliance” as it was the town’s dream and the investors are “all in it together.” The group face many hurdles (not least some initial scepticism from the elite racing fraternity as well as some tensions between the members) but Dream Alliance proves to be a winner, bringing the town together. Much communal betting and singing ensues.

The film was inspired by a moving Channel 4 documentary *Dark Horse: The Incredible True Story of Dream Alliance* shown in 2015, freely available on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FygghZZhRZw>).



The original choice for the role of Jan was Welsh actress Catherine Zeta-Jones, although she was eventually ruled out (“too glamorous”) opening the door for the multi-talented (and presumably “less glamorous”) Australian Collette. Welsh actor Ioan Gruffudd was the producers’ original suggestion for the role of Howard Davies but the US distributors wanted an actor better known to audiences there so Damian Lewis (who at least is of Welsh descent) was cast

instead. Both Collette and Lewis nail the accent (to my ears, anyway!).

The film was premiered in early 2020 at the Sundance Film Festival, but the cinematic release was delayed by COVID until June 2021 and (like many films that year) it slipped away quietly at the box-office.

The film was adored by most critics and audiences. The Times commented that it “harks back to Ealing [Studios] staples such *The Titfield Thunderbolt* (rural villagers decide to run their own railway), with its carefully calibrated characters and often unforgiving dissection of class politics. Collette captures exquisitely the yearning of someone for whom middle age offers only penury, despair, and the death of aged relatives.” The Guardian commented “yes, it’s schmaltzy, very schmaltzy, but with strong performances by Toni Collette and Damian Lewis the odds are that you’ll love it. This movie gets a real gallop on, due to the sheer warmth of its performances.” Empire added “the stuff of fairy tale, broadly but winningly told.” The Telegraph pulled a long face, whinnying that “there’s fun to be had here of an undemanding sort – but anything fresh, or memorable, or remotely unexpected? Neigh, neigh and thrice neigh.”

It is indeed a gentle, undemanding film but it doesn’t sugar coat the rougher edges of small-town life. The (Welsh) director Eunus Lyn (whose previous work was mainly in TV - including *Doctor Who* and *His Dark Materials*) was keen to avoid painting a picture postcard image of the valleys and, although there are spectacular racing scenes, the town, ordinary homes, and meeting halls are faithfully shown as shabby and dark. The minor characters (all familiar faces from TV) are broad-brush, at times annoying (the trouser-challenged town lush) and sad (a tea cake devouring widow). The credits reveal that the final payback for the syndicate members (after costs) was relatively meagre – but their motivation was always more communal than financial. Dream Alliance himself was retired to Somerset in 2012.

The real-life Jan Vokes became a local celebrity but still rises at 3.30am four days a week to work at the supermarket, and does another cleaning job in the afternoons on weekdays. Interviewed in the Times she said “People say, ‘What’s it like to be famous?’ and I say, ‘Well, cleaning toilets in Asda at half past four in the morning is reality. Everything else is a fairy-tale.’”

You are recommended to watch the final scene closely. Why, why, why? You’ll find out...

Eugene Smith



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Programme for the 43rd season

(subject to confirmation)

2023 14 September	<i>The Banshees of Inisherin</i> (2022, Ireland, 100 min, cert 15). Two lifelong friends find themselves at an impasse when one abruptly ends their relationship, with alarming consequences for both of them. Won four BAFTAs
28 September	<i>Mrs Harris Goes to Paris</i> (2022, UK, 115 min, cert PG). A widowed cleaning lady in 1950s London falls madly in love with a couture Dior dress, and decides that she must have one of her own. Based on the novel by Paul Gallico
12 October	<i>Classe Tous Risques</i> (1960, France, 110 mins, cert 12). A ruthless criminal flees from the pursuit, involving more and more casualties. 'The greatest of all French gangster movies ... it singlehandedly puts muscle, sinew, soul and brains back into the French gangster movie ... don't miss it' <i>Guardian</i>
26 October	<i>Rams</i> (2020, Australia, 119 min, cert 12). A decades-long feud between two sheep farming brothers comes to a head when disaster strikes their flocks. An Australian remake of the 2015 Icelandic film.
9 November	<i>The Lost King</i> (2022, UK, 109 min, cert 12). In 2012, after having been lost for over 500 years, the remains of King Richard III were discovered beneath a carpark in Leicester. The search had been orchestrated by an amateur historian whose unrelenting research had been met with incomprehension by her friends and family and with scepticism by experts and academics.
23 November	<i>Decision to Leave</i> (2022, South Korea, 139 min, cert 15). Hae-Joon, a seasoned detective, investigates the suspicious death of a man on a mountaintop. Soon, he begins to suspect Seo-rae, the deceased's wife, while being unsettled by his attraction to her.
14 December	<i>Downton Abbey – a New Era</i> (2022, UK, 125 min, cert PG). The Crawley family goes on a grand journey to the South of France to uncover the mystery of the dowager countess's newly inherited villa.
2024 11 January	<i>Living</i> (2022, UK, 102 min, cert 12A). In 1950s London, a humourless bureaucrat decides to take time off work to experience life after receiving a grim diagnosis. Inspired by the Japanese classic <i>Ikiru</i> (1952).
25 January	<i>Dog Day Afternoon</i> (1975, USA, 125 min, cert 18). Three amateur bank robbers plan to hold up a bank. A nice simple robbery: walk in, take the money, and run. Unfortunately, the supposedly uncomplicated heist suddenly becomes a bizarre nightmare as everything that could go wrong does.
8 February	<i>Where the Crawdads Sing</i> (2022, USA, 125 min, cert 15). A woman who raised herself in the marshes of the Deep South becomes a suspect in the murder of a man with whom she was once involved.
22 February	<i>Vagabond (Sans toit ni loi)</i> (1985, France, 105 min, cert 15). A young woman's body is found frozen in a ditch. Through flashbacks and interviews, we see the events that led to her inevitable death.
14 March	<i>Empire of Light</i> (2023, UK, 119 min, cert 15). Sam Mendes' drama about the power of human connection during turbulent times, set in an English coastal town in the early 1980s.
28 March	<i>Parallel Mothers (Madres paralelas)</i> (2022, Spain, 123 min, cert 15). The story of two mothers who bond in unexpected ways after giving birth the same day.
11 April	<i>Top Gun Maverick</i> (2022, USA, 131 min, cert PG-13). After thirty years, Maverick is still pushing the envelope as a top naval aviator, but must confront ghosts of his past when he leads TOP GUN's elite graduates on a mission that demands the ultimate sacrifice from those chosen to fly it.
25 April	<i>Till</i> (2023, USA, 130 min, cert 12). In 1955, after Emmett Till is murdered in a brutal lynching, his mother vows to expose the racism behind the attack while working to have those involved brought to justice.
9 May	<i>The Guilty</i> (2018, Denmark, 85 min, cert 15). A police officer assigned alarm dispatch duty enters a race against time when he answers an emergency call from a kidnapped woman.
23 May (and AGM)	<i>Good Luck to You, Leo Grande</i> (2022, UK, 97 min, cert 15). Nancy Stokes, a retired school teacher, is yearning for some adventure, and some sex. And she has a plan, which involves hiring a young sex worker named Leo Grande.

Comments and reactions to: **A Private War**

No of reaction slips received = 20

Average score = 6.95

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

It's mind-boggling the danger reporters put themselves in

A hard watch

Emotional ego trip hiding behind the 'Press' label

Powerful film – the futility of war

Stunning central performance by Rosamund Pike

Very good club. Uninspiring film, too fragmented

A powerful depiction of the grimness of war. A brilliantly made and acted film. This is the sort of film WNCC is for

The message was correct but she acted [...] killing her own team

Remarkable people telling the stories and experiences of others. Harrowing and courageous and madness

Compelling central performance but overall too bitty and not enough back story

A bit disjointed at times – but superb photography of war scenes and excellent acting

Rather upsetting but we need reminding how terrible modern wars are

Position	Film	Average score
1	Belfast	7.96
2	The Duke	7.75
3	Seven Chances	7.61
4	Elvis	7.59
5	Mandela and de Klerk	7.47
6	After Love	7.36
7	The Perfect Candidate	7.16
8	A Private War	6.95
9	The Band Wagon	6.91
10	Flee	6.79
11	Day for Night	6.57
12	Midnight Cowboy	6.22
13=	The Mole Agent	6.00
13=	Son of Saul	6.00
15	Guardians of the Galaxy	5.53
16	Shadows in Paradise	5.00
17	Pickpocket	4.20
18	L'Eclisse	3.00



The opening film of the 43rd season - 14 September 2023 –

The Banshees of Inisherin (subject to confirmation)

Two lifelong friends find themselves at an impasse when one abruptly ends their relationship, with alarming consequences for both of them. A 'flawless tragicomedy of male friendship gone sour.' The Guardian