



The Main Feature

Season 44 – Issue 10 – Screening 13 February 2025

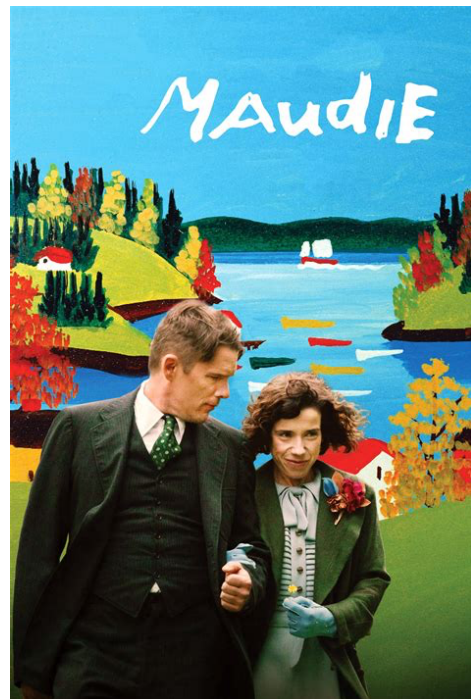
Maudie

Canada/Ireland, 2016, 115 mins, Cert 12

Director	Aisling Walsh
Writer	Sherry White
Cinematography	Guy Godfree
Production Design	John Hand
Music	Michael Timmins

Cast

Sally Hawkins	Maud Lewis
Ethan Hawke	Elliott Lewis
Zachary Bennett	Charles Dowling
Gabrielle Rose	Aunt Ida
Lawrence Barry	Mr Davis, the shopkeeper
Greg Malone	Mr Hill
Billy MacLellan	Frank
Kari Matchett	Sandra
Marte Bernard	Kay



The club has shown a run of "based on a true story" films recently¹, and this is another. It is drawn from the life of the folk artist Maud Lewis, maybe little known in this country but hugely popular in her native Canada. She was born Maud Dowling in 1901 (some authorities say 1903 but she was known to lie about her age), in poverty-stricken Nova Scotia, which she never moved away from. The Dowling family was never well-off, but as a blacksmith and harness maker by trade, her father was able to give them a relatively comfortable life. However, his daughter Maud was born with a crippling and degenerative condition which as she grew older led to decreasing mobility and constant pain. The modern medical consensus is that she was suffering from juvenile rheumatoid arthritis, a rare condition little understood at the time. She was able to go to school until she was fourteen, and was always interested in painting, going round to local shops with her mother, and selling Christmas cards for pin money as she was unable to go out to work.

¹ *The Great Escaper* (12 September), *Wicked Little Letters* (9 January), *One Life* (23 January) – Ed.



Maud's life changed in 1938 with the death of her mother, so, with few other options, she went to live with an aunt. This did not work out, so she answered an advertisement for a job as housekeeper to a fish-peddler called Elliot Lewis. Lewis had a totally different background to hers. He was brought up in a charitable organisation, virtually a work-house, had little education, and never learnt to read or write. They married, and lived in his one-roomed house for the rest of their lives. To bring in a little money, Maud started painting again, selling her work locally, often by the side of the road

outside the house. By the end of the war, increased affluence meant more motor cars and tourists, and her work gradually became widely known, and was taken up by a local gallery, then by TV and the art world. In spite of her increased fame, though, she never took the opportunity to increase her prices.

Maud continued painting, despite increasing disability, until her death in 1970, following a fall in which she broke her hip and from which she never recovered. Her husband continued to live alone in their one-roomed home, until he was 86, killed by a burglar who thought he must have a fortune hidden away. In fact, there was quite a bit of cash in and around the property: they never spent it to make their lives more comfortable.

Her art is described as "Primitive" or "Folk" art. She never had a professional art lesson in her life. Its popularity is due to her cheerful bright colours and the scenes she had grown up with, documenting a way of life that was disappearing: a blacksmith's forge; farms; boats on the river. Pictures for which she charged \$5 now change hands for tens of thousands.



Some critics have found this film superficial, more interested in the cruelty Maud went through, failing to do justice to a complex and remarkable woman. Others salute it as a tribute to what was undoubtedly an indomitable spirit. All agree, however, that the performances of Sally Hawkins and Ethan Hawke are outstanding. I confess I only know Sally Hawkins as the slightly batty Mrs Brown in *Paddington* and *Paddington 2*, and as Phillipa Langley in *The Lost King*, who she played with great sensitivity. This film has been a revelation. It makes me want to catch up with her other roles.

A great deal more information about Maud Lewis, and illustrations of her paintings, can be found on the Art Canada Institute website (<https://www.aci-iac.ca/search/?search=Maud+Lewis>)

Diana James

Club website: www.wncc.org.uk. Prefer to leave your comments on the film and your score online rather than on paper? Email to reactions@wncc.org.uk by Wednesday 19 February 2025
Discs of previous shows are available to hire for a modest fee.



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French film director Bertrand Blier dies aged 85

The French film director Bertrand Blier, the creator of cult and provocative films such as *Les Valseuses*, *Buffet Froid*, and *Tenue de Soirée*, has died. The veteran filmmaker, celebrated for his daring and unconventional storytelling, was behind some of France's most iconic arthouse successes of the 1970s and 1980s. He was also instrumental in launching the international career of French actor Gérard Depardieu.

Several French personalities praised his career, noting that his works were firmly rooted in a bygone era. 'In films that captured the spirit of their time, he gave iconic roles to some of the greatest actors. Bertrand Blier was a remarkable and unconventional filmmaker, passionately devoted to the freedom of creation' wrote French Culture Minister Rachida Dati. 'Both a writer and a filmmaker – cynical yet provocative, moralistic yet jaded – Bertrand Blier loved women, but he made them suffer at the hands of his male characters' Gilles Jacob, a former president of the Cannes Film Festival, added.

He followed in his father's footsteps, starting in cinema as an assistant director. In 1963, he directed his father Bernard Blier in his first feature *If I Were a Spy*. In 1974, Blier shocked France and launched Gérard Depardieu's career with *Les Valseuses*, a subversive tale about a pair of joyriding young thugs on a sex and crime spree across the country. Based on Blier's own novel, it became a cult classic and was the first of his nine movies with Depardieu, whom Blier later described as 'my pet actor, my cinema brother, my alter-ego'. A parable of male unease at women's liberation, many at the time found *Les Valseuses* morally ambiguous and its sex scenes brutal and vulgar, but its theme would dominate almost all of his later work.

His work is currently facing criticism for its misogyny and the way it portrays male dominance. In recent years, some of his actresses, such as Miou-Miou and Brigitte Fossey, have shared that they sometimes experienced his crude humour as an humiliation or an assault.

The same 'wounded machismo' ran through his biggest international hit, *Trop belle pour toi* in 1989, with Depardieu playing a man who grows bored by his beautiful wife and falls for his much plainer secretary. Regarded as something of a modern classic, the New York Times called it an 'exceptionally rich romantic comedy'. It also won Blier the jury prize at the Cannes film festival and five Cesars including best actress for Depardieu's then real-life partner, Carole Bouquet, who played the wife. 'What intrigues me again and again is how male friendships are relatively unproblematic, and yet when men approach what they passionately desire, then their problems begin' he said.

Blier burst onto the scene at a time when France's New Wave directors were running out of steam, with his black comedies peopled with marginal figures, villains, rogue policemen and prostitutes, seen as unique and unclassifiable. He said he found modern cinema 'irritating', though many found echoes in his work of that of Spanish surrealist director Luis Bunuel.

In 1979, he won the best foreign film Oscar with the menage-a-trois comedy *Get Out Your Handkerchiefs*, featuring Depardieu and Patrick Dewaere. In 1980, he won a Cesar for *Buffet Froid*, a mixture of absurd and realism, in which he directed his father for the last time, inevitably alongside Depardieu.

A born iconoclast, he was never happier than when poking fun at social mores, and had another hit with the provocative *Tenue de Soirée (Evening Wear)* in 1986, which took on homosexuality and sex triangles. By the 1990s and 2000s after a string of commercial flops, Blier was having trouble securing funding for his films. In 2010 he returned to surrealism with *The Clink of Ice* which broached cancer, with an alcoholic writer played by Jean Dujardin talking about his illness, taking the form of a man played by Albert Dupontel.

Source - <https://www.rfi.fr/en/culture/20250121-french-film-director-bertrand-blier-dies-aged-85>

Comments and reactions to: **One Life**

No of reaction slips received = 35

Average score = 8.80

Score	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	~	~	~	~	~	~	2	2	7	14	10

A reminder that there is good in people even in the vilest of times. A lesson for today

Moving with exceptional acting. A fine choice for the club

Excellent in every way

Very thought provoking. Very well done

Very moving, excellent script and superbly acted

Amazing film. So thought provoking yet uplifting at the end

Great film. Very moving

Second time for watching this film, and very worthwhile Excellent – a story to be heard

Excellent in every area

Excellent. Well-acted

Heartbreaking story that needs to be told

Excellent acting and film. Very moving

Wonderful story and excellent acting from everyone. Such a sad story still relevant today

Never seen so many people attending! A remarkably well-made and acted film – it recreated the situation in 1939 Europe

Enjoyed seeing for the second time, it's a very emotional film to watch

I was not looking forward to this but it was excellent. Well-presented and acted

A good choice by the film club's committee. A second viewing by me but well worth a second watch

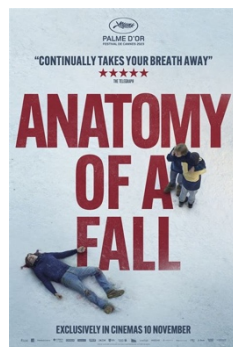
Lovely restrained performance by Anthony Hopkins. Straightforward telling of an important story – didn't need any embellishment

An emotional film covering a true story of humanity and courage

Position	Film	Average score
1	One Life	8.80
2	The Great Escaper	7.96
3	Wicked Little Letters	7.66
4	The Holdovers	7.62
5	The Taste of Things	7.16
6	The Color Purple	6.77
7	Past Lives	6.46
8	Winners	5.88
9	Barbie	5.59

Editor's note: There has been an error in forwarding comments and scores submitted via reactions@wncc.org.uk. This has been corrected and the scores above include those sent by email. The differences are fairly small. The scores which have changed are: *The Great Escaper* (-0.04 to 7.96); *The Holdovers* (-0.18 to 7.62); *Winners* (-0.12 to 5.88); *The Taste of Things* (+0.12 to 7.16) and *Past Lives* (+0.13 to 6.46). The only change to the ranking is *The Holdovers* now falls below *Wicked Little Letters*. Apologies to members who sent comments and scores by email – all is now working as it should.

Forthcoming attraction: 27 February 2025 – **Anatomy of a Fall**



It's hard not to be drawn in. That's the trick of Anatomy of a Fall. Sandra is a fascinating, one-woman puzzle box, thanks largely to the strength of Hüller's performance. Independent

The film that remains, for most of the final reel, is inevitably one about the brutality of intimacy. Sober, mature film-making. The Times

A death can be pinned down, as here, by details of blood spatter and snow melt. The forensics of life are harder to know. Financial Times