



The Main Feature

Season 45 – Issue 1 – Screening 11th September 2025

Conclave

UK/US
120 mins

2024
12A

Director	Edward Berger
Screenplay	Peter Straughan
Photography	Stéphane Fontaine
Design	Suzie Davies
Costumes	Lisy Christl
Music	Volker Bertelmann

Cardinals

Ralph Fiennes	Thomas Lawrence
Lucian Msamati	Joshua Adeyemi
Stanley Tucci	Aldo Bellini
John Lithgow	Joseph Tremblay
Sergio Castellitto	Goffredo Tedesco
Carlos Diehz	Vincent Benitez
Isabella Rossellini	Sister Agnes
Brian F. O'Byrne	Mgr. Raymond O'Malley
Jacek Koman	Archbishop Woźniak



Welcome to the first film of our 45th Season!

Conclave is a political thriller set in the Vatican, adapted from the 2016 Robert Harris best-seller. It's a film blessed with a magnetic central performance from Ralph Fiennes, a strong ensemble cast and a twisty plot. It achieved extra prominence after the death of Pope Francis this April and the subsequent election of Cardinal Robert Prevost as Pope Leo XIV. Indeed, The Telegraph reported that - per the new Pontiff's brother (John) - Robert watched the film so that he would "know how to behave" in the real Conclave.

The film opens with the death of the ageing Pope from a heart attack. As Dean of the College of Cardinals, Lawrence has responsibility for organising the election of a new Bishop of Rome. All 108 Cardinals are summoned to the Vatican, including the unknown Mexican-born Benitez (Bishop of Kabul, Afghanistan) recently appointed "in pectore" (in secret), presumably for his safety. Lawrence identifies 4 "papabili" (possible Popes). His own preference is Bellini, a moderate American eager to challenge traditional positions, but there is also Tedesco (Italian, a staunch and bombastic conservative who yearns for the Tridentine [Latin] Mass rite discarded over 50 years before); Tremblay (Canadian, quietly moderate but archly political)

and Adeyemi (Nigerian, personable but homophobic). The Cardinals are to be securely sequestered in the Sistine Chapel, served by a small staff of Nuns and a few Priests.

Lawrence has to deal with a series of revelations about the candidates, including allegations of fornication and of simony (the prohibited sale of Church offices). Adeyemi takes an early lead but falls away, and some Cardinals turn to Lawrence himself as a compromise candidate. A new Pope does emerge after several ballots (or “scrutinies”), signalled to the waiting world by the famous white smoke as the final voting slips are burned. There is a very surprising revelation at the end of the film (no spoiler!).

Ralph Fiennes is on screen for almost all the run-time. He is world-weary, burdened by doubts and ill-at-ease with his role as an investigator and judge but invests Lawrence with a knowing dignity and organisational nous. Fiennes was the 3rd choice for the part (after Robert De Niro and then Javier Bardem dropped out). I can’t believe either actor would have improved on his performance. Isabella Rossellini, as Sister Agnes, has little to say – but makes one very telling intervention. Whilst the characterisation of some of the Cardinals is rather clichéd (*of course* the Italian is voluble and the Nigerian is uncomfortable with gays!) the film is expertly paced and continually intriguing, if rather lacking in humour. The visuals are richly detailed, filmed at a palace north of Naples with the Sistine Chapel carefully recreated at Cinecittà studios in Rome. The costumier took the liberty of using an old (17th Century) design with more vibrant colours to emphasise the red vestments.

Robert Harris was a reporter for the BBC (Newsnight, Panorama) and Political Editor of the Observer. He turned to fiction writing in 1992, with the publication of *Fatherland*, which set the template for his subsequent fifteen novels – finely detailed, re-imagined historical events with an unexpected end-twist. Some of his books have been filmed for TV (*Fatherland*, *Archangel*, *The Fear Index*, *Munich – The Edge of War*) but *Conclave* is easily the most successful big-screen adaptation, with the global box office of \$127m more than double the combined receipts from *Enigma* (2001), *The Ghost* (2005) and *An Officer and a Spy* (2019). The film won the BAFTA for Best Picture for 2024, and was nominated for 8 Oscars. The adaptor Peter Straughan won the Academy Award for Best Screenplay, and similar prizes from BAFTA and at the Golden Globes.

Critical reaction from the Catholic press itself was generally warm. The Catholic Herald noted that the film “lacks the subtlety to explore [Church politics] inventively” despite some “exquisite moments.” The Diocese of Westminster’s reviewer praised a “slick film” but quibbled with several details. The secular critics were more effusive, with a 93% favourable rating on the Rotten Tomatoes website (computed from over 300 global reviews). The only recurring criticism was about the surprise ending but Fiennes (and indeed the whole cast) received universal acclaim. The Sunday Times called the film “brisk, smart and propulsively plotted;” Variety effused that “it’s one of those rare films that respects the audience’s attention even as it sneaks a few tricks behind their backs” and Empire deemed it “deftly balanced...pulp and pensive in equal measure.”

I must confess that I fell asleep watching it on a (night) flight over the Atlantic. I was kept wide awake by my second viewing and can only repeat The Spectator’s summary review – “well-written, smart, taut and visually stunning.”

Eugene Smith



We thank Red Eye for subsidising the cost of printing these notes. Red Eye Print, Unit 2D, Lansbury Estate, 102 Lower Guildford Road, Knaphill, GU21 2EP Tel: 01483 772111

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 17th September
Discs of most of our previous shows are available to hire for a modest fee.

Woking Film Club – Programme for 45th season – subject to confirmation

25 Sept	<i>Maria</i> (USA, 2024, 124 min, cert 12A) Maria Callas, the world's greatest opera singer, lives the last days of her life in 1970s Paris, as she confronts her identity.
9 Oct	<i>Perfect Days</i> (Japan, 2025, 125 min, cert PG) Hirayama cleans public toilets in Tokyo, lives his life in simplicity and daily tranquility. Some encounters also lead him to reflect on himself.
23 Oct	<i>The Dressmaker</i> (Australia, 2015, 118 min, cert 12) A glamorous woman returns to her small town in rural Australia. With her sewing machine and haute couture style, she transforms the women and exacts sweet revenge on those who did her wrong.
13 Nov	<i>Frantz</i> (France, Germany, 2016, 114 min, cert 12) In the aftermath of WWI, a young German who grieves the death of her fiancé in France meets a mysterious Frenchman who visits the fiancé's grave to lay flowers.
27 Nov	<i>Jimi: All is by My Side</i> (UK, USA, 2013, 118 min, cert 15) A drama based on Jimi Hendrix's life as he left New York City for London, where his career took off.
11 Dec	<i>A Christmas Tale (Un conte de Noël)</i> (France, 2008, 150 min, cert 15) The troubled Vuillard family is no stranger to illness, grief, and banishment, but when their matriarch requires a bone-marrow transplant, the estranged clan reunites just in time for Christmas.
2026 8 Jan	<i>Mr Burton</i> (UK, 2025, 124 min, 12A) The story of the wild school boy Rich Jenkins, son of a boozy miner and an English teacher who recognised his talent, Philip Burton. A moving, untold story of how Rich Jenkins became Richard Burton the biggest star Wales has ever produced.
22 Jan	<i>Chevalier</i> (USA, 2022, 108 min, cert 12A) Son of an African slave and a French farmer, Joseph Bologne, Chevalier de Saint-Georges, achieves an unthinkable position in society as a famous violinist, composer and fencer, in addition to experiencing an ill-fated love affair.
12 Feb	<i>Touch (Snerting)</i> (Iceland, 2024, 121 min, cert 15) A romantic and thrilling story that spans several decades and continents; Touch follows one man's emotional journey to find his first love who disappeared 50 years ago, before his time runs out.
26 Feb	<i>Thelma</i> (USA, 2024, 97 min, cert 12A) When 93-year-old Thelma Post gets duped by a phone scammer pretending to be her grandson, she sets out on a treacherous quest across the city to reclaim what was taken from her.
12 March	<i>Girls Will Be Girls</i> (India, 2024, 118 min, cert 15) At a strict boarding school nestled in the Himalayan foothills, 18-year-old Mira first discovers desire and romance. However, her curious, rebellious, coming-of-age is disrupted by her young mother, who never got to come of age herself.
26 March	<i>How To Make Millions Before Grandma Dies (Lahn Mah)</i> (Thailand, 2024, 125 min, cert 12A) A man, driven by his desire for a multi-million-dollar inheritance, begins to care for his terminally ill grandmother. However, winning her favour will not be an easy task and he is not the only one with an eye on the money.
9 April	<i>The Penguin Lessons</i> (UK, 2025, 111 min, cert 12A) A disillusioned Englishman who goes to work in a school in a divided Argentina in 1976 finds his life transformed when he rescues an orphaned penguin from the beach.
23 April	<i>I'm Still Here (Ainda Estou Aqui)</i> (Brazil, 2024, 137 min, cert 15) A woman married to a former politician during the military dictatorship in Brazil is forced to reinvent herself and chart a new course for her family after a violent and arbitrary act.
14 May	<i>Still Life</i> (Italy, UK, 2013, 92 min, cert 12) A council case worker looks for the relatives of those found dead and alone.
28 May	<i>AGM and Mid-August Lunch (Pranzo di ferragosto)</i> (Italy, 2008, 76 min, cert U) Broke, and armed with only a wry sense of humour, middle-aged Gianni lives with his mother in their old apartment. The debts are mounting, but if Gianni looks after the building manager's mother during the Ferragosto, all will be forgiven.

Comments and reactions to: **Three Day Millionaire** (shown 22nd May 2025)

Average score = 5.58

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

Silly but fun. Could have done with the subtitles!!

Enjoyable film – great plot and acting. Good script and plenty of comedy thrown in!

Didn't really work

Lazy script and poor acting

Light hearted and very enjoyable Grimsby characters

Heard very little of the dialogue. Just about realised what was going on

Definitely need subtitles on all films

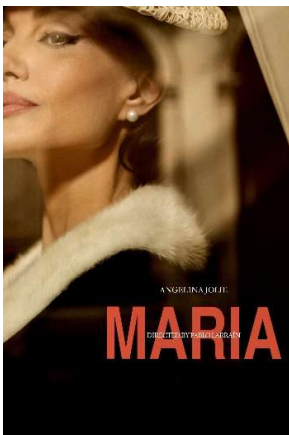
Subtitles would have really helped – understood one word in fifty

I could not follow the film because of the poor diction

A backdrop of the dying fishing industry in a consequently dying town, but little made of that in terms of social commentary, albeit some decent photography. The characters were rather stereotypical, but the saving grace was a sort of tragi-comic story with a happy (if unlikely) ending. It's possible that the film might have been a lot funnier than we realised, but so many of the clipped comments or asides and scenes covered by loud music (and indeed a great deal of what the main character had to say) were so hard to hear that much of the script (which was surely intended to have its comic moments) was lost on us (and we suspect much of our audience). Perhaps subtitles would have raised its scoring. I fear subtitles are a general MUST if the Club is to retain its audience in future.

Position	Film	Avg Score	Reactions
1	One Life	8.80	35
2	Maudie	7.97	30
3	The Great Escaper	7.96	26
4	Wicked Little Letters	7.66	35
5	The Holdovers	7.62	26
6	Anatomy of a Fall	7.22	36
7	The Taste of Things	7.16	29
8	Chocolat	6.96	24
9	The Color Purple	6.77	26
10	Past Lives	6.46	29
11	The Blue Caftan	6.05	21
12	Winners	5.88	24
13	Barbie	5.59	22
14	Three Day Millionaire	5.58	24
15	Slow	5.54	26
16	Poor Things	5.10	20
17	All of Us Strangers	4.75	24

Forthcoming attraction: 25th September 2025 - **Maria**



Angelina Jolie's Callas commands the screen as a great diva in decline – The Guardian

Music is born of misery. Of suffering. Happiness never produced a beautiful melody – Maria Callas

A study of performance and fame, of how addictive and intoxicating it can be, a rich blessing and a terrible curse - Empire