

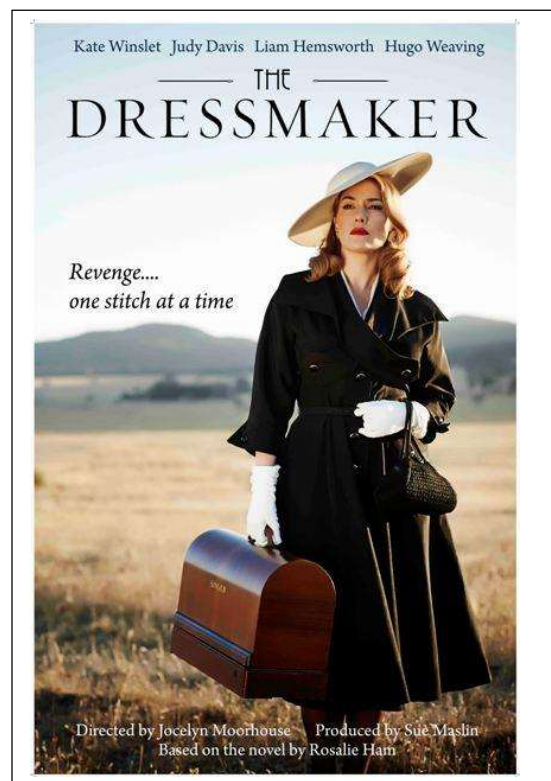


The Main Feature

Season 45 – Issue 4 – Screening 23rd October 2025

The Dressmaker

Australia	2015
118 mins	Certificate 12
Director	Jocelyn Moorhouse
Written by	Jocelyn Moorhouse & P.J. Hogan
Photography	Donald McAlpine
Art Director	Lucinda Thomson
Production Design	Roger Ford
Costume Design	Marion Boyce & Margot Wilson
Kate Winslet	Myrtle (Tilly) Dunnage
Judy Davis	Molly Dunnage
Liam Hemsworth	Teddy McSwiney
Hugo Weaving	Sergeant Farrat
Sarah Snook	Gertrude (Trudy) Pratt
Shane Bourne	Evan Pettyman
Kerry Fox	Beulah Harridiene



Our presentation this evening was described by director Jocelyn Moorhouse as “Clint Eastwood’s ‘Unforgiven’ with a sewing machine...it’s about my favourite subjects: revenge, love and creativity.” The film is a black comedy-drama and a star vehicle for Kate Winslet who is ably supported by several familiar Australian faces. The Dressmaker is a rarity in film history - directed by a woman, produced by a woman, starring a woman, revolving around a mother-daughter relationship, and based upon a book by a woman. Men can appreciate it too.

Winslet is Tilly Dunnage who returns to her ‘one-horse’ home town of Dungatar in 1951, a quarter of a century after she was sent away in disgrace following the death of Stewart, a fellow primary school pupil. After studies in Paris and London, she is now a highly talented dressmaker. Tilly is determined to take care of her ailing, drink-addled and mentally-unstable (single) mother Molly and to find out what exactly happened 25 years before. The colourless town seems little changed since she left, with disparate inhabitants including the flamboyant Police sergeant Farrar, the deceased boy’s father

Pettyman (the town councillor and a horribly oafish lothario) and the sadistic, scheming schoolmistress Harridiene. Tilly tidies her mother's pigsty of a house and makes a seductively colourful splash at a (Aussie rules) football match against the rival town of Winyerp. She uses her dressmaking smarts to transform the local ugly duckling (Trudy Pratt) into a gorgeous swan who finally gets her man at a dance and then sets up shop in her mother's house to deal with a flurry of local women who want "the look." She is successfully wooed by Teddy McSwiney, a kindly handyman/farmhand hunk who helps round out memories of her last day there 25 years before. The town has dark secrets, and seeks to undermine Tilly by importing a new (but less artistic) dressmaker and spreading misogynist, malicious gossip. She feels cursed. The last reel reveals the truth of what happened in 1926 and while the townsfolk are competing at the Eisteddfod (arts festival) in Winyerp, Tilly enacts her blazing revenge.

The source material was a best-selling debut novel by Rosalie Han, published in 2000. There were several false starts for the film version, with Winslet eventually signed up to secure partial funding from the US. Production had to be postponed when Winslet fell pregnant, but filming commenced in Victoria three months after she gave birth.

The film was a smash-hit in Australia (and New Zealand) and received 12 local 'Oscar' nominations from The Australian Academy of Cinema and Television Arts (AACTA), winning five (with nods for Winslet, Davis and Weaving and – of course – for costume design). Tellingly, it also scooped the AACTA award for 2015's Favourite Film (voted for by the public).

The film fared less well outside Oceania, where the novel was relatively unknown and the distinctive quirkiness of small-town Aussie life less appreciated. Critics were impressed by Winslet's bravura performance but less enamoured by the tonal shifts (especially in the last quarter). The New York Post sniffed that "The Titanic is now the second-biggest disaster Kate Winslet has ever been associated with" and Variety equivocated that "the tailoring is more consistent than the storytelling...an appreciably deranged tale of small-town intrigue." British papers were no less caustic, with the Times slating "a hodgepodge of comic melodrama, more panto than pathos" and the Guardian bemoaning "a genre-shifting hurricane of a thing, wildly careering off the rails and smashing into everything in its view." Empire magazine was nearer the mark, commenting that "melodramatic episodes sit oddly with the dark comedy. But it's still a giggle, largely thanks to Tilly's cantankerous mother (Judy Davis) and the camp local cop (Hugo Weaving)." Likewise, the Hollywood Reporter opined "about as far from essential viewing as one could imagine, but, for all its brightly glaring flaws, much of it qualifies as a glossy, goofy, guilty pleasure."

It's a soapy film but there are several admirable set-pieces and flashes of humour. The late changes in tone are indeed grating (and sad). But when all else fails - just admire Winslet's performance – and the frocks!

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, Woking, 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 29th October
Discs of most of our previous shows are available to hire for just £1!

Born in Reading in 1975, **Kate Winslet** has enjoyed a storied career in TV and film, with a penchant for playing strong-willed (“ballsy” in her own words) women. She has flitted successfully between blockbusters and small-scale independent films. Here are 6 movies that showcase her versatility

The Much-Praised Debut

Heavenly Creatures (NZ/1994/99 mins/Dir Peter Jackson/18/IMDb 7.2)

In the 1950s, 2 girls (Winslet and Melanie Lynskey) share a unique and intense bond: their parents separate them, and the teenagers take revenge. A true story. Does the director's name look familiar? Two words – my precious...Shown by the Club in 1996 (no rating available)



The First Oscar Nomination

Sense and Sensibility (US-UK/1995/136 mins/Ang Lee/U/7.7)

“Love, heartbreak, humour and great music” in Emma Thompson’s adaptation. Winslet as Marianne Dashwood secured an Oscar nomination for Best Supporting Actress.

The Big One

Titanic (US/1997/194 mins/James Cameron/12/7.9)

Celine Dion. Rose and Jack. \$2.3bn global box office. No chance of a sequel.

The One that’s on every Christmas

The Holiday (UK-US/2006/136 mins/Nancy Myers/12/7.0)

Rom-com, with lovelorn Winslet swapping homes with an American (Cameron Diaz) over Christmas. After roles in several small films (including Hideous Kinky, Holy Smoke and Finding Neverland) this was Winslet’s biggest hit since Titanic. Sentimental and sweet. Part filmed in Shere.

The Oscar Winner

The Reader (Germany-US/2008/124 mins/Stephen Daldry/15/7.6)

Winslet plays a dowdy ex-concentration camp guard (falsely) accused of war crimes. Her former lover (Ralph Fiennes) knows the truth but cannot save her. Powerful adaption of Bernhard Schlink’s novel by David Hare.



The Latest One

Lee (UK/2023/117 mins/Ellen Kuras/15/6.9)

The life of Lee Miller – model, muse and war photographer. ‘A woman ahead of her time’ and a passion project for Winslet. Miller’s house and galleries (at Chiddingfold in Sussex) are well worth a visit. There is also an exhibition of Miller’s work at the Tate Britain until 15th February 2026.

Honourable mentions for Jude (1996), Iris (2002), Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind (2004), Revolutionary Road (2008) and Steve Jobs (2016).

Comments and reactions to: **Perfect Days** (shown 9th October 2025)

No of reaction slips received = 29

Average score = 7.34

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

Position	Film	Score	Reactions
1	Conclave	8.15	34
2	Perfect Days	7.34	29
3	Maria	6.16	25

I never thought I'd enjoy a film about a toilet cleaner. Enjoyable in an odd sense

Definitely less is more in this case. Excellent. More Japanese films please

Rather slow-moving but absorbing. Superb acting

A typical w/w effort, atmospheric but s.l.o.w!

Very slow. Some good music

Photography great – subtitles too low for me/us to see – not sure it mattered!

Wonderful film. So much to think about!

Perfect film

Fascinating! Kôji Yakusho deserved his award at Cannes

Rather slow-moving but absorbing. Superb acting

Very unusual film and Woking Film Club is a great way to see this type of movie

Unusual story but kept the attention. Good performance from main character

This man knows something is missing from his life – rather sad

Interesting and different

In the end, very emotional. Very well acted Kôji Yakusho

A real slow-burn. Hypnotic, riveting and affecting in stages **Slow but well-paced. I enjoyed this film**

Not quite sure I saw the point. Some rather beautiful filming made it worth watching

Superb acting but I do prefer something with a plot

Beautiful filming. An insight into life and relationships

We saw Japan - interesting

Fabulous, different, thought-provoking, uplifting

And if you'd like to understand Hirayama's backstory....

In a 2024 interview [director and co-writer] Wim Wenders revealed the secret backstory of Hirayama: "He was a businessman and he was rich and he was unhappy and he was drinking a lot and his life was going down the drain. One morning he wakes up in this crummy hotel room, doesn't even know how he got there, doesn't even know if he had sex or whatever happened. He thinks his life is shit, and he doesn't like it. He actually plays with the idea of ending it. Then, miraculously, early in the morning, there's this ray of sunlight appearing on this wall in front of him. And it falls through the little tree in front of the window. There is this play of leaves and sunlight and shadows moving, and he looks at it and stares at it and he starts crying, because he's never seen anything so beautiful. He probably has seen it, but he hasn't noticed. Then he realizes that's the answer to his existential crisis, to become somebody who notices that. He gives up his expensive car, his business job and becomes a gardener and eventually, the guardian of these toilets, because they're all in little parks. Somehow, they found Hirayama as the ideal character to take care of them. That was the backstory."

Forthcoming attraction: 13th November – **Frantz**



Ozon is often at his best when working with women, and he has a fabulous talent in Paula Beer to bring his protagonist, Anna, to vivid life. She's stunning in the role. – The Guardian

A splendid cast work through the complications and stages of grief to provide a scathingly anti-nationalist warning from history – The Irish Times

It's one of his most heartfelt films, beautifully made and very moving in its own quiet, self-effacing way – The Independent

Shot in black and white, the movie occasionally blossoms into color at moments that make perfect sense, when monochromatic mourning is replaced by something like hope – Entertainment Weekly