

Abergavenny Film Society

2021-2022



22 September 2021



After Love

UK 2019 89 minutes

Director: Aleem Khan



This debut feature from director Akeem Khan is an intriguing tale of secrets and lies. Mary Hussain converted to Islam when she married her husband Ahmed and has a close and loving relationship with both him and his family. When Ahmed dies suddenly, Mary finds herself to be a widow in her early sixties. Subsequently, she discovers that ferry captain Ahmed had a secret life just twenty one miles away from their Dover home across the Channel in Calais. This shocking discovery compels Mary to travel to Calais to find out more. As she grapples with her shattered sense of identity, her search for understanding has surprising consequences. Joanna Scanlan, as Mary, offers a masterclass in the dramatic power of understatement in this portrait of people caught between identities and cultures.

Dublin International Film Festival 2021

Dublin Film Critics Award Best Actress (Joanna Scanlan)

06 October 2021



The Whistlers

Romania/France/Germany 2019 97 minutes

Director: Corneliu Porumboiu



Romanian director Corneliu Porumboiu moves into film noir territory with this tough, twisty, elegant and stylish double-dealing thriller. Corrupt cop Cristi (Vlad Ivanov) is a member of a Bucharest crime syndicate. He travels to the Canary Island of La Gomera as part of a plan to free a Bucharest businessman who might be the key to uncovering millions in hidden cash. Cristi is taught the art of Silbo, the secret whistling language used by shepherds that sounds like birdsong. Constantly under surveillance and never sure who he can trust, Cristi is a marked man whichever way he turns.

Cannes Film Festival 2019

Nominee Palme d'Or (Corneliu Porumboiu)

20 October 2021



Rocks

UK 2019 93 minutes

Director: Sarah Gavron



Rocks is Olushola Joy Omotoso (Bukky Bakray), a London teenager whose life is radically altered when she is left on her own with a little brother who needs her. Fearing they will be separated, she decides to step up to the situation. She tells no one and carries on with a little help from her friends, especially Sumaya (Kosar Ali). Based on a script by award-winning playwrights Theresa Ikoko and Claire Wilson, Sarah Gavron's *Rocks* is a raucous celebration of female friendship told with wit, compassion and vibrant performances from a stunning young ensemble. Insightful and deeply empathetic, this drama about teenagers forging their identities in a potentially hostile world is grittily realistic, yet also fiercely optimistic.

British Independent Film Awards 2021

Winner Best British Independent Film (Sarah Gavron)

03 November 2021



The Wonders

Italy/Switzerland/Germany 2014 107 minutes

Director: Alice Rohrwachers



Outstanding performances from the ensemble cast bring warmth and insight to this film about an alternative-lifestyle family eking out a breadline existence as beekeepers in the Tuscan wilds. When a television crew arrives to film the "Countryside Wonders" competition, twelve-year-old Gelsomina (Maria Alexandra Lungu) is transfixed by the spectacle of Monica Bellucci's rural goddess and resolves to get her own family on the show. Sam Louwyck's gruff patriarch, Wolfgang, is opposed to any such selling out despite the family's urgent need for money. Natural light captured on 16mm film adds an earthy texture to this rural drama.

Cannes Film Festival 2017

Winner Grand Prix

17 November 2021



The Reason I Jump

UK/USA 2021 82 minutes

Directors: Jerry Rothwell



Based on the best-selling book by Naoki Higashida, *The Reason I Jump* is an immersive cinematic exploration of neurodiversity through the experiences of non-speaking autistic people from around the world. The film blends Higashida's revelatory descriptions of his autism, written when he was just 13, with intimate portraits of five remarkable young people. It opens a window into an intense and overwhelming, but often joyful, sensory universe.

Acutely observed moments in the lives of each of the characters are connected by passages from Higashida's writing, in which a young Japanese boy journeys through an epic landscape, gradually discovering what his autism means to him, how his perception of the world differs, and why he acts in the way he does: the reason he jumps. Award-winning filmmaker Jerry Rothwell utilises the potential of cinema to evoke these intense sensory worlds, illustrating Higashida's core message: not being able to speak does not mean there is nothing to say.

The film features a captivating soundtrack created by award-winning composer Nainita Desai. National Autistic Society's ambassador Elisabeth Wiklander, who is autistic and a cellist with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, is the featured cellist.

British Independent Film Awards 2021

Winner Best Documentary (Jerry Rothwell)



01 December 2021

Veins of the World



Mongolia/Germany 2020 97 minutes

Director: Bayambasuren Davaa



The director of much-loved World Cinema classic *The Story of the Weeping Camel* transports us to the spectacular beauty of the Mongolian steppe. This time she looks at the encroachment of modernity and its effect on nomadic lifestyles that have changed little in hundreds of years. Following the sudden death of the leader of a campaign against mining companies who are destroying the habitat on which they depend, his eleven-year-old son steps up to carry on his David versus Goliath fight.

Director Byambasuren Davaa was diverted from her original scenario for her fourth feature when she witnessed first-hand the impact that mining operations were having on long-established Mongolian communities. She immediately switched her attention to exposing this existential threat. While *Veins of the World* shows us the majestic grandeur of the Mongolian landscape, the cinematography also reminds us that the way of life dependent upon the preservation of this same land is in a very precarious position.

Berlin International Film Festival 2020

Nominee Best Film (Bayambasuren Davaa)

15 December 2021



One Way to Denmark

UK 2019 91 minutes

Director: Adrian Shergold



In this heart-warming comedy, Herb, a down on his luck Welshman played by Rafe Spall, hatches a far-fetched plan to better his life. Herb's life is a mess. He's lost his social benefits, can't hold a job, can't talk to his son, has a neighbour who won't shut up and a diet that consists mainly of cheap beer and mushy peas. It's no way to live and he knows it. After discovering Danish convicts live a luxurious life he could only dream of, Herb decides to travel across Europe with one crazy goal; to get himself arrested and sent to a Danish prison where the beds are warm and the water is hot. After meeting a local barmaid and a lovable stray dog who won't leave his side, Herb begins to realise that prison may not be his only chance to get the life he hoped for.

05 January 2022



Mr Jones

Poland/UK/Ukraine 2019 118 minutes

Director: Agnieszka Holland



Oscar nominee Agnieszka Holland tells the extraordinary story of the real-life Welsh journalist who uncovered Stalin's genocidal famine in Ukraine. Almost 10 million were killed during what became known as The Holodomor of 1932 and 1933.

Gareth Jones gained fame, in 1933, from being the first foreign journalist to interview Adolf Hitler. On leaving a government role, Jones decided to travel to Moscow, intent on securing an interview with Stalin himself. Hearing murmurs of government-induced famine, Jones travelled clandestinely to Ukraine where he witnessed the atrocities of man-made starvation. After deportation to London, Jones was accused of being a liar by those with an interest in silencing him and, as the death count grew, he had to fight for the truth to be heard.

In this powerful drama, James Norton gives a bold, sympathetic performance as Gareth Jones, the idealist intellectual and man of action from Barry.

Berlin International Film Festival 2019

Nominee Golden Berlin Bear Best Film

19 January 2022



I Never Cry

Poland/Ireland 2020 97 Minutes

Director: Piotr Domalewski



Writer-director Piotr Domalewski's touching drama tackles the subject of mass economic emigration within Europe when Poland joined the European Union. Thousands, then millions of Poles moved abroad for work, often separating them from their children who came to be referred to as 'Euro-orphans'.

I Never Cry follows Ola (Zofia Stafiej), a 17-year-old force of nature from Poland whose top priority in life is passing her driving test and getting a car. After her father dies while working in Ireland and her mother is forced to stay behind with her disabled brother, it is Ola who must travel there to bring his body home. Armed with only a backpack and a dwindling pack of cigarettes, she bounces around Dublin chasing down information about her largely unknown father and battling the various layers of bureaucracy that stand in her way. Eschewing clichés for naturalism in an engaging drama of teenage rationale and angst, Domalewski depicts Ola with humour, curiosity and empathy as he explores the emptiness left behind by a missing parent.

Dublin International Film Festival 2021

Winner Michael Dwyer Discovery (Zofia Stafiej)

02 February 2022



The Truffle Hunters

Italy/Greece/USA 2020

84 minutes

Directors: Michael Dweck, Gregory Kershaw



Deep in the forests of Piedmont, Italy, a handful of men hunt for the rare and expensive white Alba truffle which, to date, has resisted all of modern science's efforts at cultivation. They are guided by a secret culture and training passed down through generations as well as by the noses of their cherished and expertly trained dogs. They live a simple, slow way of life in harmony with their loyal animals and their picture-perfect land, seemingly straight out of a fairy tale. Unbothered by mobile phones or the Internet, their priorities lie with their families and the community. The demand for white truffles increases year after year even as the supply decreases. As a result of climate change, deforestation, and the lack of young people taking up the mantle, the truffle hunters' secrets are more coveted than ever. However, as it soon becomes clear, these ageing men may just hold something much more valuable than even this prized delicacy: the secret to a rich and meaningful life.

Sundance Film Festival 2020

Nominee Grand Jury Prize World Cinema

16 February 2022



La Cha Cha

UK 2020 91 Minutes

Director: Kevin Allen



La Cha Cha is an outrageous comedy set at a campsite on the Gower Peninsula. The story follows the mild-mannered Solti Battering's (Liam Hourican) quest to scatter his grandfather's ashes. Failing to find any campsites open during lockdown, Solti seeks refuge in the La Cha Cha where he discovers an alternative community, for those of a certain age, run by young siblings Libby & Damien. The future of La Cha Cha, however, hangs in the balance.

Young leads Ruby & Sonny Serkis along with Rhys Ifans, Dougray Scott, Alfie Allen and Melanie Walters form a cast which includes the best of Welsh talent.

02 March 2022



You Will Die at Twenty

Sudan/ France/Egypt/Germany
Norway/Qatar 2019 103 minutes

Director: Amjad Abu Alala



The debut film of Amjad Abu Alalah expands from a fable-like premise to create a culturally-specific, morally compelling story. Muzamil (Moatasem Rashid) is raised by his mother Sakina (Islam Mubarek) with a heavy weight over him. A sheikh has predicted that Muzamil will die at the age of twenty. Viewing Muzamil as an outcast, his father flees to work abroad whilst his wife protects and mourns the “son of death.” Set during Omar al-Bashir’s dictatorship, Muzamil’s outsider status brings him into contact with others whom society would sooner forget as he walks a line between religious absolution and shaking himself free from the curse.

Full of immediately striking images and a visual intelligence in smaller moments, the film’s interiors are shot with an uncanny warmth and exteriors highlight the breadth of Sudan’s vistas. An assured debut, visually bold and morally nuanced, *You Will Die at Twenty* brings a humane reality to living under a religious dictatorship.

Venice Film Festival 2019

Winner Lion of the Future Award

16 March 2022



Limbo

UK 2020 104 minutes

Director: Ben Sharrock



Ben Sharrock’s deadpan comedy-drama brings a completely fresh perspective to the life of a migrant. On Scotland’s remote Uist Islands, surrounded by gale-force winds and stormy seas, gifted musician Omar (Amir El-Masry) and his fellow Syrian asylum seekers endure puzzling cultural-awareness lessons from an oddball pair of locals. Awaiting news of their refugee status claims, they spend much of their time queuing to call loved ones on the island’s only payphone. Carrying his grandfather’s oud with him and wandering the desolate, thistly landscape, Omar fears for his brother who is still fighting in Syria and questions his own decision to leave.

Drawing on stories from Sharrock’s friends in Damascus, *Limbo* imbues its characters, a group of lost souls awaiting both visas and different, more inner types of release, with dignity and individuality. Recalling the quiet, occasionally surreal comedic absurdism of the films of Palestinian actor-director Elia Suleiman and Finnish director Aki Kaurismäki, it’s a sincere and immensely intelligent film about the internal and external reckonings forced upon refugees.

BAFTA Awards 2021

Nominee Outstanding British Film of the Year

30 March 202



Men Who Sing

UK 2021 77 minutes

Director: Dylan Williams



This humorous and melancholic portrait of a male voice choir in North East Wales begins with filmmaker Merf's father, Ed, a 90-year-old widower, selling the family home and making early arrangements for his own funeral. Weekly practice is his last remaining solace but, with an average age of 74, his beloved choir is facing a crisis of its own. They must act quickly or face extinction and the hunt begins to find "brown haired men" in their forties and fifties to keep the choir going. As their search intensifies, the group grows closer. Ed finds new meaning in his life while Merf deals with his own bad news by focusing on the choir's revival. Eventually, they travel to Northern Ireland to perform for the first time in two decades.

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