

CHELMSFORD FILM CLUB

An Independent film society based in Chelmsford

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I, DANIEL BLAKE

Dir: Ken Loach - 2016 - 100mins - UK. Screenplay: Paul Laverty. Cast: Dave Johns; Hayley Squires; Brianna Shann; Dylan McKiernan; Kate Rutter; Sharon Perry; Kema Sikazwe.

Most members of the Club will be aware of the problems we have had in showing the published programme, while hoping that the two films in question might be eventually shown. This not being the case, we have decided to screen 'I, DANIEL BLAKE', and thanks need to be given to our Secretary, Daden Hunt, for all the effort he has made in tracking the distribution fates of our original choices and getting tonight's replacement. As your organising committee, we would like to dedicate 'I, Daniel Blake' to the memory of our late Chairperson and founder member Jill Dimmock, who is much missed and loved all Ken Loach's work.

And what a sensational, and controversial, movie this 19th feature from Loach has become! It collected the Palme d'Or at Cannes last year, making Loach one of only a handful of film makers to have won it more than once, Michael Hanneke and Francis Ford Coppola amongst them. And collecting his Bafta for the movie Loach thanked the audience for "endorsing the truth that this film says, which is that hundreds of thousands of people - the vulnerable and the poorest people - are treated by this government with a callousness and brutality that is disgraceful." A few days earlier Steve McCall, a manager at Jobcentre Plus in Newcastle that is depicted in the film, spoke out to "dispute [the film's] accuracy" saying that "I hope people don't think the film is a documentary." As though a documentary, as such, depicts some kind of absolute, or ultimate, truth or objective reality. 'I, Daniel Blake' is, first and foremost, a drama, an artistic work, in which an audience is asked to engage with a cast of characters, but also ideas. Does 'Hamlet', say, depict the emotional life of the typical post-adolescent male? Or even a typical prince? Who would dare suggest that all monarchs behave like Macbeth?

And the film has had some negative criticism. However, one commentator has suggested that :“ Accusations that the film is 'inaccurate' are part of the ongoing attempt to dismiss what is being done to vulnerable people in Britain's 'toxic' social security system.”

So, our film is about a woodworker who would work wood, but cannot. He suffers a heart attack and is advised on medical grounds to take a break from manual labour. Thus he represents a whole section of the work force which does manual work but must inevitably face physical incapacity, largely due to advancing age, and has not been able to acquire capital assets throughout a working life with which to enjoy comfortable retirement at...67..79... or whenever the OAP kicks in. There seems to be no Employment and Support Allowance to tide him over and he is shunted on to Jobseekers' Allowance where he is confronted by an alien vocabulary of 'clients' and 'service users', plus box-ticking rituals that have less to do with finding work than unlocking the next monthly payment.

The other main character is Katie, who Daniel befriends. She has been forcibly relocated from London to Newcastle, the kind of on-paper 'saving' that entails the upheaval and anguish that cannot be easily quantified on a government spreadsheet. With housing costs so high in London, it is cheaper for a borough to rehouse its 'poor' to anywhere north of Peterborough (or even to Peterborough itself!) and sell off its social housing to provide homes for those who can afford them, or afford to rent them out. The Northern Powerhouse will surely be eternally grateful....

Too much polemic instead of art? Some of the dialogue given to Katie has appeared to sit unconvincingly on her character. But viewers have seen the scenes where she develops her relationship with Daniel most, and in those in the food bank, as truly moving and convincing. And Newcastle itself is given a warm, humanistic visual texture by Robbie Ryan's cinematography.

Tonight's screening is followed by our second **Discussion** event: meet in the Foyer to take part.

Film Choice List for next season is available: please collect from the foyer.

Next film: **SON OF SAUL** - Thursday 6 April.

