



The Main Feature

Season 37 - Issue 3

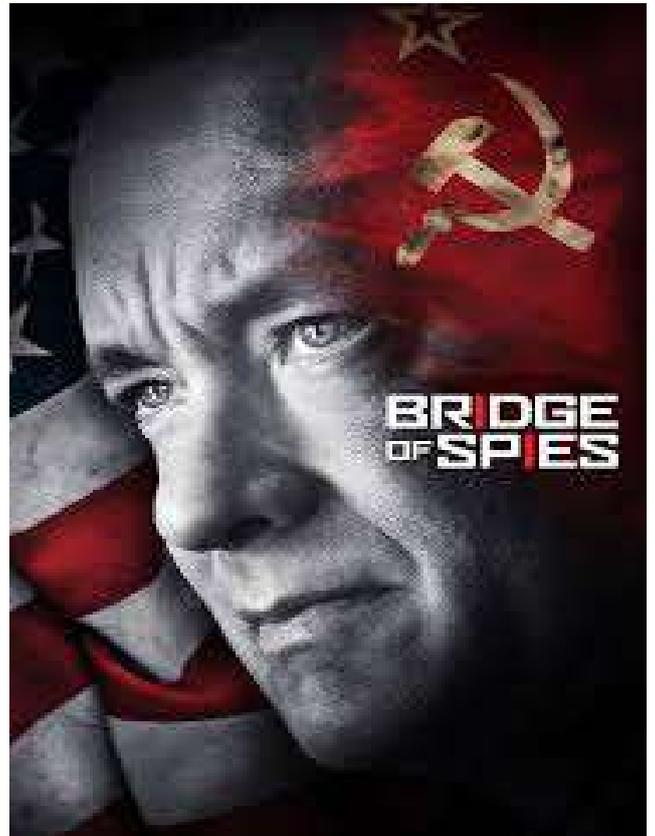
screening 22.9.16

USA 2015 135 minutes cert PG-13

Director Steven Spielberg
Writers Matt Charman, Joel Coen and Ethan Coen
Music Thomas Newman
Cinematography Janusz Kamiński
Editor Michael Kahn

Cast

Tom Hanks as James B. Donovan
Mark Rylance as Rudolf Abel
Amy Ryan as Mary McKenna Donovan
Sebastian Koch as Wolfgang Vogel
Alan Alda as Thomas Watters
Austin Stowell as Francis Gary Powers
Scott Shepherd as CIA Agent Hoffman



Driving through Check Point Charlie into East Berlin during the Cold War, one really did seem to transit from Technicolor to Black and White . Coloured by films like "The Spy who came in from the Cold" and "Funeral in Berlin" the city lived up to its grim reputation in the Russian sector. The shattered Prussian palaces, museums and churches were still awaiting restoration by teams of Polish craftsman who had honed their skills on remaking the centre of Warsaw, but the rest of the German Democratic Republic, while sequestered within the wall, wire, watch towers and death strips was full of surprises.

Who knew of the Sorbs, a protected Slavic minority, in a watery wonderland south east of Berlin where the street signs were in both German and Sorbish? Their walled capital of Bautzen was a medieval delight with the cathedral still divided between the Catholics in the Apse and Protestants in the Nave following a judgement of Solomon by their Reformation prince. The World Council of Churches was able hold a remarkable reception on the banks of the Elbe and the fabled castle of Colditz was an old peoples home. Colourful wooden nutcracker men and Angel wind mills powered by candles were still made in the mining villages near the Czech border south of Dresden and an annual Shakespeare festival held in Weimar.

There was even a travelling British Council exhibition of World War Two posters . Matchbox toys were imported from UK, although not the military models, of course. More surprising, one could be a conscientious objector to the 28 months of compulsory military service. You could join a reconstruction battalion for somewhat longer instead.

But venture down a country road festooned with signs demanding Allied military missions keep out and the forest of aials and lighting conductors around the bunkers harbouring Russian nuclear ordnance, were a unnerving reminder of a fragile balance of power that floated on a sea of spies seeking to provide their masters reassurance that neither side was really about to initiate Armageddon while mercilessly undermining each other. And all the while the Stasi kept an unremitting watch over their population with over 91,000 staff and in excess of 173,000 informants, according to some experts the most complete surveillance of a country's people in history.

No wonder there was no unemployment in East Germany. If anyone could make Communism work, it was the Germans.

Unlike some of her contemporaries who today wish to celebrate the construction of the Wall, Angela Merkel, standing on the Glienicke bridge, which connects Potsdam and West Berlin, watching the replaying of one its best known spy exchanges that took place during her childhood in the East must have been pleased with the success of Spielberg's film. No one in her youth would have bet on the peaceful reunification of her country.



The film, which was part funded by the Germans, includes Gary Power's son in a small supporting role. A less accurate sub plot depicts the simultaneous release of the American academic, Frederick Pryor by the East Germans. Now an economics Professor, he had the opportunity of reading his Stasi file after the Wall came down and learnt the identity of the American woman who told the East Germans he was connected to the CIA, an allegation he has always strenuously denied but which earned him a six months grilling . Unlike the portrayal in the film, his interrogator was a model of political correctness throughout.

During the Cold War the Glienicke Bridge was conveniently placed for the exchange of captured spies between East and West, which took place in tense conditions with snipers in attendance in case of a last minute double-cross. The story of the film is based on real events in the 1960s with the film showing how the stories of the two men came to intertwine thanks to the efforts of an American insurance lawyer.



The film is light on physical action but strong on legal argument and confrontation out of court and on both sides of the Iron Curtain, pursued with determination and bravery by the Tom Hanks insurance lawyer character. His is a role that a generation back would have gone to James Stewart. A decent man having no wish to step outside his settled family life and conscious of the likely cost, he is nevertheless persuaded of his duty uphold the American system by providing even a Russian spy with proper representation. So he takes it on.

What present day actor could better convey the straightforward sincerity mixed with warmth and sharp intelligence that he brings to the role? Having heard him recently on Desert Island Discs I am, as an unrepentant film fan, prepared to believe that he does possess these qualities off-screen as well as on.

Here he has a wonderful foil in our own Mark (Cromwell in Wolf Hall) Rylance, who won the Oscar for Best Supporting Actor for his part as Abel (who is shown in real life here▶).



The film is leavened with occasional touches of humour which are thought to come from the involvement of the Coen Brothers, best known as directors (Fargo; Hail Caesar!), in polishing the script.

The whole storytelling package, comprising an intelligent script, atmospheric cinematography and stand out performances by both Rylance (who worked with Spielberg on this summer's The BFG) and Hanks, a long time collaborator of the director, plus the easy, expert directing style of Steven Spielberg.

Spielberg somehow hints at an optimism which sets this film apart from the grey grittiness of so many spy dramas. The film confirms his place in the modern pantheon of great directors.

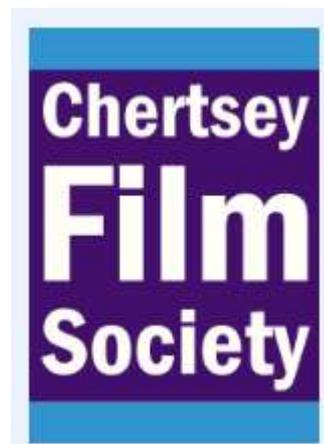
Notes by John Dance and Dominic Bruce independently of each other, and they have been edited together.

The printing of the notes by Reppoint is undertaken free of charge



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Our neighbour's new season started with “Youth” on 9 September.



La French	30 September
The Big Short	14 October
Tangerines	4 November
Taxi Tehran	25 November
Hail, Caesar!	16 December
Carol	6 January
Anomalisa	20 January
Mustang	17 February
Bridge of Spies	10 March
Julieta	31 March
Sing Street	21 April

WNCC members can attend any film in their season for £3.

All you have to do when you go to Chertsey Hall, Heriot Road, Chertsey, KT16 9DR (free parking) is to show your WNCC membership card and then pay the £3 fee

A reciprocal arrangement is in place for their members.

Comments and reactions to: **Carol**

Good period feel

Very stylish but lengthy and at times boring

Very atmospheric – really got the 50s to a T

Excellent – caught love perfectly

No feeling of romantic joy with this film – only sadness

Commendable understanding of the complexity of human desire

Well played by the two principals but how did it end?

Beautifully filmed and acted. 50 years ago it would have been quite shocking – now it is rather trite

Had to mark it “8” as I was watching it for the second time. Enjoyed the film even more – excellent casting.

A very pleasant experience as a guest – I was very impressed with the film and the whole set up!

Great style

A bit slow

Excellent acting – long boring film

A great start to the season!

Great attention to period details

Score	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	~	~	~	~	~	3	8	6	11	1	~

No of reaction slips received = 27

Average Score = 6.97

Our next film on 13 October:



“Flawlessly acted and meticulously observed.”

“This audience-pleaser is smart and acerbic”

“It just goes to show what you can get with a talented cast, intelligent writing and solid direction.”

“This is the kind of fluid, balanced comedy-drama that Woody Allen wishes he could still make.”

“The thing about a movie like this is, the characters may be French, but they’re more like people I know than they could ever be in the Hollywood remake.”