

The Main Feature

Season 40 – Issue 14 - Screening 22 October 2020

The Lunchbox

India/France/Germany/USA, 2013
105 min, Certificate PG

Director	Ritesh Batra
Screenplay	Ritesh Batra; Hindi language adviser: Vasan Bala
Producers	Gureet Manga, Anurag Kashyap, Arun Rangachari
Cinematography	Michael Simmonds
Music	Max Richter

Cast

Irrfan Khan:	Sajaan Fernandes
Nimrat Kaur:	Ila
Nakul Vaid:	Rajeev
Bharati	Mrs Deshpande ('auntie'),
Achrekar:	Ila's neighbour (voice only)
Denzil Smith:	Mr Shroff, Sajaan's office boss
Nawazuddin	Shaikh
Siddiqui :	
Shruti Bapna:	Mehrunissa
Lillette Dubey:	Ila's mother



While holidaying in Brazil in 2007, fellow travellers informed my wife and I that there were two 'must-see' countries we should visit: South Africa (for flora and fauna), and India. "Why India?" I enquired. "You'll never visit another country like it." I was assured.

Tonight's film is set in modern-day Mumbai, a far cry from the Bombay of 1890 when 'dabbawalas' (meaning one who carries a box) were instigated by Mahadeo Havaji Bachche. 'Dabbawalas' are particular to Mumbai, a system in India where lunches are collected from restaurants or domestic homes and delivered to workplaces by bicycles and trains. The system achieved commercial registration in Mumbai in 1968.

Director Ritesh Batra spent a week witnessing the 'dabbawala' system in 2007, gleaning countless interesting personal stories. 'The Lunchbox' is a collaboration with Arte France Cinema, shot largely in documentary style. "A well-told old-fashioned romance", Taran Adarsh of 'Bollywood Hungama' calls the film. Trisha Gupta of the 'Sunday Guardian' describes 'The Lunchbox' as "a lovely little film". These descriptions suggest we can look forward to a film in keeping with great British film traditions like David Lean's 'Brief Encounter', 1945, (romance), or indeed the wonderful 'small' films of Ken Loach or the early 1960s 'Kitchen Sink' dramas. The international appeal of tonight's offering is best summed up by co-producer Anurag Kashyap's observation that "The Lunchbox" "travels across borders", a fact borne out by the film's multicultural production teams.



The use of office work as one of the main themes this evening is something most of us can relate to, either in person, or through having wives or relatives who have worked all of their lives in this environment. Other more personal themes Batra incorporates are those of sexual and emotional repression, isolation, and the unknown factor of retirement and how to fill our third age- not forgetting Batra's conveyance of the tantalising essence of enjoying good food. Even if Batra does

not convey the cacophony of noise, the riot of colour, chaos, and cattle in the streets that my fellow travellers alluded to in 2007, it is likely that we will enjoy a culinary and emotional feast this evening if we appreciate home cooking and romance. A mouth-watering prospect if, like me, you come from a family of food aficionados.

'The Lunchbox' received several awards at the 2013 Star Guild Awards (Excellence in Indian Film and TV Awards): the Yash Chopra Award for Most Promising Directorial Debut for Ritesh Batra; Star Verdict Performer of the Year for Irrfan Khan; and Best Supporting Actor for Nawazuddin Siddiqui. Irrfan Khan has also appeared in 2008's 'Slumdog Millionaire', dir. Danny Boyle, Loveleen Tandan, and 2012's 'Life of Pi', dir. Ang Lee. 'The Lunchbox' also garnered the Critics Week Viewer's Choice Award at the 2013 Cannes International Film Festival. The film's standing internationally was recognised by its third-highest grossing Indian film position overseas in 2013.



Paul Avenell



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

We will gather your reactions to tonight's film electronically: send an email to reactions@wncc.org.uk. See page 4 for details.

Irrfan Khan died on 29 April 2020, aged 53. Peter Bradshaw says he was a vital bridge between Bollywood and Hollywood, and possessed a strong romantic appeal

Irrfan Khan was a distinguished and charismatic star in Hindi- and English-language movies whose hardworking career was an enormously valuable bridge between South Asian and Hollywood cinema. He was armed with a sensitive and seductive gaze: his good looks matured in middle age in such a way that he could play dramatic or villainous roles but also romantic leads of a certain age and of a certain emotional wistfulness. You could almost call him Mumbai's Clooney — although it would be condescending to explain this colossal Indian star in Hollywood terms.



I first became aware of Khan and his marvellous screen presence in Asif Kapadia's terrific 2001 film *The Warrior* in which he has a powerful lead role as the warrior Lafcadio, the erstwhile servant and hitman to a murderous warlord who renounces the way of violence, retreats to the hills and must then confront another warrior who has been sent to kill him. It is an amazingly atmospheric movie (which Kapadia brought off with enormous skill before his own shift into documentaries) and Khan's cool samurai hauteur was vital in making it work.

After a stretch of playing Bollywood bad guys, Khan found some further success in the Wilder-esque ensemble romantic comedy *Life in a ... Metro* in 2007, in which he was the gauche and leering guy with which one female character finds herself uncomfortably fixed up on a date. But perhaps the actual star-making breakthrough came with his lead role in the real-life drama *Paan Singh Tomar* in 2010, an extraordinary story that is a mix of *Chariots of Fire* and *Ned Kelly*. Khan played an Indian soldier whose talent for running made him a medallist at the Asian Games in the late 1950s – and then in the late 70s became a *daaku*, or

rebel bandit, when he was involved in a murderous land feud in the Chambal valley with family members – he refused to surrender to armed police despatched to arrest him, resulting in a spectacular siege during which he was shot dead. The role – similar to *The Warrior* in some ways – was perfect for Khan's ability to suggest mainstream heroism, but also a kind of *capo di tutti i capi* bad-guy aura, all encompassed in a still watchfulness in the eyes.

In the English-language world, Khan's international prestige had been cemented two years before that as the police detective in Danny Boyle's feelgood hit *Slumdog Millionaire*, a Mumbai-set film based around the TV contest *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* with Dev Patel as Jamal, the teenager from the ghetto who somehow found himself within an ace of winning the top prize on the legendary gameshow. He has to explain himself to the cop, and Khan's mixture of tough, careworn authority with a hint of gentleness makes him just right for the role, as he almost certainly would not have been good casting for the brasher part of the Tarrant-esque host, played by Anil Kapoor. He was well received in Mira Nair's immigrant drama *The Namesake* in 2006, and was also a potent presence in Ang Lee's *Life of Pi*.

In the last decade, Khan took what were arguably pay cheque roles in Hollywood as the stereotypical enigmatic Indian plutocrat in *The Amazing Spider-Man* (2012) as Rajit Ratha, the corporate executive overseeing the fateful experimentation laboratory; and in *Jurassic World* (2015), playing the park's super-rich owner. Cipher roles, perhaps, but ones to which he brought a deadpan yet debonair good humour.

These were only part of a string of credits, but the movie that allowed him to steal everyone's hearts was the romantic drama *The Lunchbox*. He played the middle-aged office worker who finds that the wrong lunchbox has been delivered to his desk, with a note inside. This leads him into a heartrendingly chaste, romantic exchange of letters with an unhappy married woman, stuck at home in her housewife job, as he is stuck in his salaryman role. Khan found his finest hour in this story, with an exquisitely gentle, subtle performance. Rewatching *The Lunchbox* and *The Warrior* would be great ways to remember him

Comments and reactions to: **Swimming with Men**

No of reaction slips received = 16

Average score = 7.00

Score 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
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Great swimming pools!

A very 'smiley' experience, much appreciated in these days of gloom and doom- excellent character performances given by the actors

Enjoyable but not directed tightly enough to make it really good

Odd and unlikely subject, but fun!

Good fun, but a weak denouement

Splashing (!) return. Today it seems strange to see people sharing lifts (let alone a swimming pool) without facemasks. Glad the evening went swimmingly

Nice film with a good cast and a happy ending what more do you need. Great to be back!!

Enjoyed this film immensely a perfect choice for the return of WNCC

A passable film with my less-than-favourite lead actor. The build up at the end didn't hit the spot for me, not a touch on the emotional ending in 'Sunshine on Leith'

Entertaining but ultimately rather insubstantial. Ending over the top and less humour than might be expected given the cast. It was eerily nostalgic to see a bustling train station and office, plus a full pub and sports stadium...

Light hearted entertainment showing the benefits of group bonding. Nicely acted by well known people.

Entertaining and a real feel good film with a very unusual story line. Good mixture of differing characters that worked extremely well.

Position	Film	Average score
1	Green Book	8.43
2	Bohemian Rhapsody	8.35
3	The Magnificent Seven	8.05
4	The White Crow	7.29
5	Il Capitale umano (Human Capital)	7.22
6	Before the Flood	7.17
7	Pillow Talk	7.11
8	Swimming with Men	7.00
9	Stan and Ollie	6.92
10	Ballon (Balloon)	6.91
11	Todos lo saben (Everybody Knows)	6.71
12=	Sherlock Jr	6.52
12=	La Tortue Rouge (The Red Turtle)	6.52
13	Manbiki kazoku (Shoplifters)	6.45

Forthcoming attraction: 12 November 2020 - **Can You Ever Forgive Me?**

A best-selling celebrity biographer takes desperate steps when her books no longer sell. Melissa McCarthy recruits Richard E Grant to help in her deceptions. Based on a true story. *McCarthy manages something very special: she makes a character who is odd, obnoxious, difficult and alcoholic seem lovable and even heroic.* The Independent

Your reactions – email to reactions@wncc.org.uk. Send marks out of ten and any comments you have. Use the scale below to help you:

1. One of the worst films you have ever seen
2. A poor or distasteful film
3. Just bearable though you wouldn't want to watch it again
4. Not really worth watching - it might be an OK film but not your sort of film
5. Just worth watching – you did not feel you had wasted your time

6. You quite enjoyed the film – above average acting or direction
7. You enjoyed the film – your sort of film; you recognised the quality of the acting and direction
8. You would watch this film again – a highly enjoyable film
9. In your top 100 films – excellent in most departments (acting, direction, script, cinematography)
10. In your top 10 films of all time – a classic