



The Main Feature

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Limbo

UK 2020

104 mins. Certificate PG

Directed & written by Ben Sharrock
Cinematography Nick Cooke
Music Hutch Demouilpied

Cast

Amir El-Masry	Omar
Vikash Bhai	Farhad
Kwabena Ansah	Abedi
Ola Orebiyi	Wasef
Sidse Babett Knudsen	Helga
Kenneth Collard	Boris



Limbo can be defined as “a place or condition of confinement, neglect, or oblivion” or as “a situation caught between two stages where it is unclear what will happen next.” This aptly describes the refugee experience shown in tonight’s film.

Set on an unidentified, remote and sparsely populated Scottish Island (and filmed largely on Uist, in the Outer Hebrides) Limbo tells the story of four single refugee men, living together in a garishly decorated but grottoily functional house. Forbidden to do any paid work, they wait (and wait) for the official word on whether they can stay. There is cheerfully stoic Farhad from Afghanistan, who adores Freddie Mercury, and dreams of going to work in an office. Then there are Abedi and Wasef, passing themselves off as brothers from Nigeria, forever quarrelling, whether about the meaning of an episode of Friends or Wasef’s fanciful dream of playing for Chelsea. Finally, and at the film’s centre, is Omar, a young, sensitive Syrian musician who has carried his grandfather’s precious oud (a short-neck lute-like stringed instrument) from his homeland.

Omar makes increasingly fraught calls to his impoverished parents who have secured refuge in Turkey, seeking the solace of recipes he cannot possibly cook, while worrying about the fate of his brother Nabil who seems to have returned to Syria to fight. He replays fond memories of a solo concert he gave back in Damascus but can no longer play his instrument despite his parents haranguing him that “a musician who doesn’t play is dead.” His abstinence is ostensibly because of a wrist injury, but in reality he has simply lost his motivation.

There is very little to do, except meander over the bleak island to the sole phone box; attend dotty cultural classes run by two bizarre instructors (Helga and Boris) and wander around an

unbelievably drab food store - "please refrain from urinating in the freezer aisle," reads a note on the wall. Waitrose it ain't.

The differing fate of three of the refugees is revealed by the end of the film, with one of them left in limbo.



This was the debut feature film from writer-director Ben Sharrock. In an interview with Entertainment Weekly he was asked what inspired him to make the film

'I was living in Syria, in Damascus, the year before the Civil War started [so in 2010], studying Arabic and politics.

That was my undergraduate degree, before I went into filmmaking.... Then flash forward to when I was in film school, I actually ended up going out to the Sahrawi refugee camps in southern Algeria, working with an NGO there, and staying with a family in the camps. Flash forward again, the global refugee crisis became very prevalent in the media, and I was really struck by the representation of refugees, and felt that there was this process of dehumanisation going on where we had the demonising of refugees on one side, and the pity of refugees on the other, and also we were looking at refugees as just numbers and statistics. I felt like I really wanted to make a film about this subject matter, and set off on a journey to write this screenplay.'

Asked about the filming on Uist he noted:

'We're the first feature film to ever be shot there. I wrote the script, in part, [there]. I wrote the island into the script. It was amazing, but it was extremely challenging. We were in a battle with the island all the time. We were shooting [with] close to gale force winds constantly, and some scenes we had to return to five times just because we couldn't work in those conditions. We'd have six guys holding down lighting stands; otherwise everything would just blow away. It was exhausting, but totally worth it.....When you see Omar out in this landscape, that's real, and he's feeling all of that; he's really far from the camera in these massive wide shots, and also waiting around in between takes. All of these things are feeding into the performances and the creative energy. It wouldn't have been the same film had we not shot there.'

The movie feels wryly poignant and eccentric – sad but funny - with shades of Bill Forsyth in some of the absurdities depicted (a woman with a dolphin's head, a stolen chicken named Freddie, an opera-loving postman...). The pacing is slow, with the camera lingering over the desolate vista maybe a tad too often.

The film was originally slated to be shown at Cannes (but the pandemic intervened). It won several awards from BAFTA Scotland and from the Cairo International Film Festival in 2020. Critical opinion was positive with a 4 star review from the Times ("a winning performance by Amir El-Masry as its Syrian hero") and praise from the Observer for "a gentle, empathic kind of humour that is derived from the men's bleak existences, without mocking them." Just don't expect too much action!

Eugene Smith



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The Highlands and Islands of Scotland have attracted directors for a variety of reasons, but the landscape is often the star. Here are some examples ...

The Edge of the World (1937) Michael Powell



Powell based his script on the true story of the evacuation of thirty-six people from St. Kilda, an island ten miles

off the west coast of Scotland, on 29 August 1930. The film was made over four months during the summer of 1936 on the island of Foula, in the Shetland Isles. Permission was denied to film on St. Kilda, which is in the Hebrides, and where they actually speak Gaelic, while on Foula they speak Norse. The mixture of documentary and drama, location footage and studio filming is occasionally awkward, as is the mixture of professional and non-professional actors. However, despite its simple and rather melodramatic story, *The Edge of the World* still stands up today, particularly for its stunning location cinematography, as well as the film's opening scenes in which we see various ghostly apparitions on the now deserted island. (BFI)

I Know Where I'm Going! (1945) Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger



Of all the classics produced by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, this may be the most unsung but it's undoubtedly the most entrancing. As the headstrong young woman and the laird who distracts her from

her stuffy fiancé, Wendy Hiller and Roger Livesey are superb, and there's knowing support from Pamela Brown, John Lawrie and Finlay Currie. Erwin Hillier's photography is as beautiful as it is atmospheric, but it's the expert mix of romance and comedy, arresting use of the landscape and respectful fascination with the local culture that makes this so compelling (Radio Times)

Whisky Galore! (1949) Alexander Mackendrick

Set on the fictional Hebridean island of Todday during the Second World War (actually filmed on Barra), the film is based on the true story of a freighter run aground on the island with a cargo of whisky some of which the islanders 'salvage'. There is entertaining tension between the Englishman (Basil Radford) commanding the Home Guard and the Scots of Todday. It was issued the same year as *Passport to Pimlico* and *Kind Hearts and Coronets* – quite a trio for Ealing.

Local Hero (1983) Bill Forsyth

Living in Glasgow in the late Seventies and early Eighties, I felt we owned Bill Forsyth as the quintessential contemporary Scottish director. His first film *That Sinking Feeling* was set in Glasgow, and his best-known early work *Gregory's Girl* was set in the nearby new town of Cumbernauld. *Local Hero* is on a bigger scale, with a proper Hollywood star (Burt Lancaster), and set in the Highlands. It is about an American oil company which wants to buy up a Scottish village to install an oil refinery. Filming took place in Aberdeenshire and on the west coast near Mallaig

Shell (2012) Scott Graham



The film examines the relationship between a father and his 17 year-old daughter who together run a

remote petrol station in the Highlands. It is an austere story, centred on the daughter's future, but writer-director Scott Graham has a distinctive sense of place and landscape. When the weather is inhospitable in the film, you feel cold in the cinema. Filming took place in Badcaul near the charmingly named Little Loch Broom in Ross and Cromarty, north-west Scotland.

Michael Hipkins

Comments and reactions to: **JoJo Rabbit**

No of reaction slips received = 25

Average score = 6.04

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

Great choice for Film Club. Refreshingly different

Sick humour – non-woke!

Funny and thought-provoking

Odd but with a certain bizarre charm

Not my type of film. Didn't find it funny. Difficult to watch at present. Couldn't stop thinking of Ukraine

Wunderschön

Second time I've seen it. Most enjoyable.

A strange and unusual film, but it grew on me!

I think I get the point, but some parts bordered on 'Allo 'Allo!

The Tin Drum did it better

Weird, wacky and poignant!

A curate's egg of a film

Impressive performances – certainly different – but tonally all over the place! Hard work, and a hard watch.

Raucous, funny and in very bad taste - but the best way to counter a monster is with mockery.

Position	Film	Average score
1	Breakfast at Tiffany's	7.20
2	Nomadland	7.13
3	Parasite	7.07
4	The Farewell	6.85
5	The Personal History of David Copperfield	6.67
6	Permission	6.60
7	Pain and Glory	6.59
8	The Crimson Pirate	6.42
9	Baby Driver	6.19
10	JoJo Rabbit	6.04
11	Bait	5.35

Forthcoming attraction: 24 March 2022 – **Portrait of a Lady on Fire**



In 18th-century France young painter Marianne, is commissioned to do the wedding portrait of Héloïse without her knowing. Therefore, Marianne must observe her model by day to paint her portrait at night. Day by day, the two women become closer as they share Héloïse's last moments of freedom before the impending wedding.

Imdb

Portrait of a Lady on Fire is a sensual romance fueled with beauty and artistry. An emotional whirlwind, it is a rare film that is as tender as it is powerful, making it one of the most memorable and authentic romances of our time.

Heathershottakes.com