



Stockbridge Community Cinema

Programme Notes 15 June 2018

Loveless

Director: Andrey Zvyagintsev

Screenplay: Oleg Negin, Andrey Zvyagintsev

Starring: Yanina Hope, Maryana Spivak, Alexei Rozin, Varvara Shmykova, Matvey Novikov, Daria Pisareva

An estranged couple going through a brutal divorce both have new partners and want to start over until their 12 year old son Alyosha disappears after witnessing one of their fights.

The article below was written by Ryan Gilbey for Curzon Cinemas



A World Without Love

Loveless is the fifth and latest film from the 53-year-old Russian writer-director Andrey Zvyagintsev – his finest, in fact, from a list hardly lacking in other contenders for that title. It has been plentifully rewarded during its nine months on the international festival circuit, picking up the Jury Prize when it premiered at Cannes last year and being named Best Film at the London Film Festival.

Nothing new there. This director has had to deal with having statuettes and silverware thrust into his arms ever since his debut feature, *The Return* (2003), won the Golden Lion at Venice. That was the story of two brothers whose lives are disrupted and jeopardised by the arrival back home of their estranged father. One learns very quickly with most Zvyagintsev films to fear for the safety of any children on screen. Nowhere is this more pertinent than in *Loveless*, which begins with the sullen, unhappy 12-year-old Alyosha (Matvey Novikov) going missing while his parents (Maryana Spivak and Aleksey Rozin) are busy trading insults in a particularly acrimonious divorce.

Any Russian director should expect comparisons with Tarkovsky, not least one who works, as Zvyagintsev does, with abundant natural imagery (trees and water dominate his work). But *The Return* and *Loveless* really do approach the grandeur, the urgency both dramatic and spiritual, that we associate with that master — and he was no slouch, as *The Sacrifice* (1985) should remind us, when it came to pinning weighty metaphysical

matters on the slender shoulders of a child. Zvyagintsev, though, tends to harness his philosophical points to recognisable commentary about modern Russia, and to the world in general. It should not be interpreted as a slight on either filmmaker that the description of him as “Tarkovsky with a plot” has entered circulation.

He is diplomatic in interviews but unafraid of controversy in his art. His last picture, *Leviathan* (2014), which won the Golden Globe for Best Foreign Language Film, was a scathing portrait of governmental corruption and moral dereliction which features a scene in which men use portraits of Russian leaders for target practice. Vladimir Putin is conspicuous by his absence. “It’s too early for the current ones,” says the police officer leading the shoot. “Let them ripen on the walls.” One Kremlin loyalist said publicly that the director should atone for the film by kneeling in Red Square and apologising to his compatriots.

Zvyagintsev works unashamedly in the realm of metaphor and symbolism; it would be pointless, for instance, to insist that only a literal reading were intended of the shot in *Loveless* which shows Alyosha’s mother wearing a tracksuit bearing the word “RUSSIA” as she jogs on a treadmill, getting nowhere slowly. But his work engages emotion and intellect at once. This intense, concentrated film is concerned not only with the search for a missing child but with the hunt for our common humanity.