

## April 07 – Watershed Podcast Transcript

Welcome to Watershed Media Centre's podcast bringing you news, reviews and views on our forthcoming programme.

British director Shane Meadows is without doubt one of the most significant of this country's younger generation of directors. When the era of Loach and Leigh has passed (not that I'm rushing it) the baton will be passed onto Meadows. I agree we have to get another feature at least out of Terence Davies – but putting that to one side – it is clearly Shane Meadows who re-energises that unique British thread of social realism with a unique vision all his own. For some, social realism is a bit too clinical and worthy a term but in the hands of talent e.g. Loach, Meadows it is an invigorating genre, filled with humour, social insight and compassion. Not that either director should be pigeon holed with this term – just look at Loach's **Wind that Shakes the Barley** and Meadows extraordinary chilling **Dead Man's Shoes** – the latter may well go onto to be an absolute British classic. Only time will tell.

Meadows new film **This is England** is a deeply personal film – charting as it does a young teenager boys journey through adolescence peer pressure in the early 80s – which is semi autobiographical. This was a time – which Meadows concisely and brilliantly conveys in the opening montage – when Britain was at war with the Falklands, when ska and the specials were providing the soundtrack for a generation, but also the National Front were peddling their wares.

The main character Shaun is bullied at school and finds refuge with a group of skinheads whom Meadows beautifully undermines our expectations of, by portraying them un-stereotypically as a mixture of alternate aggressive, playful and warm hearted. As mentioned this was a time when white skinheads and Black ska culture mixed and their gang includes a Black guy. However into this groups midst comes an altogether more sinister character whose appeal to patriotism, and the flag of St George's masks a racist sentiment. Meadows subtly introduces tensions and maps out the moral positions.

Although refracted through the early 80s, **This is England** is a profoundly cautionary tale for a contemporary teenage audience. It speaks their language. At the recent Berlin Film festival the film played in a strand aimed at 14+. Imagine my surprise when I discover that the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) gave it an 18 certificate. Well that was crazy, if only because it excluded the majority of the cast from watching the film in their own country. I remembered that a similar fate befell Loach's *Sweet Sixteen* a four letter peppered account of teenage life in Greenock near Glasgow. But the target audience was those kids who use that language. However whilst the BBFC certificate nationally, they do it on behalf of the local authority and as a last resort one can appeal to them.

I decided that **This is England** deserved the opportunity to be seen by the target audience of 15+, and so went to Bristol City Council with a request that they review the certificate and give it a 15. And so I went in front of the licensing committee and put my case for *This is England* – all the time thinking this just aint going to happen, they've got a lawyer for heavens sake. But, and

this I frankly find reassuring, they watched the film, we had a lively discussion about young people and racism, and the committee passionately felt that **This is England** should be seen by teenagers and promptly agreed to a 15 certificate for the film for Bristol. Well I just about fell off my seat. Who says local government bureaucracy never delivers? So it is that at the time of going to podcast Shane Meadows new film carries an 18 certificate except in the enlightened Bristol area where 15s and over can watch it.

**This is England** opens at Watershed on Fri 27 April

If you ever wanted a cinematic definition of deadpan you would look in two places. First, and most naturally, you would go to comic star of the silent era Buster Keaton, whose emotionless face whilst comic chaos collapses all around him, probably is the dictionary definition of deadpan. Secondly you would reach for the films of Finnish director Aki Kaurismaki. Kaurismaki is possibly best known in the UK for his **Leningrad Cowboys go America** film, a troupe of bequipped, Cuban heeled, pointy toed musicians playing somewhere between a Yorkshire brass band and Chuck Berry.

Over the years Kaurismaki has distilled what could have been seen as “too quirky for its own good” style into precise, melancholic deadpan studies of ordinary everyday heroes, which have to be savoured like the aftertaste of a koskinkorva finnish vodka neat from an ice cold glass. You give yourself over to Kaurismaki’s pace and you are rewarded with poignancy, humanity and some serious deadpan Finnish humour. Just to give you a marker of that legendary humour – a Swedish guy and a finnish guy are drinking in a bar. The Swede says to the Fin – ‘do you want another?’ Are we talking or are we drinking? replies the fin!

Kaurismaki’s new film **Lights in the Dusk** opens at Watershed on Fri 6 April and then moves over to the Arnolfini. To mark this new release we are screening a double bill of his earlier films **The Man without a Past** and **The Match Factory Girl** on Sun 8 April. We have also put together a programme of short films from Finland. If you don’t know already Tampere – the second city of Finland – every March is host to one of the finest short film festivals in Europe. The programme is a selection of great short films from Finland that were screened in Tempere. We also have a programme of artists’ film and video work put together by Bristol Artist in Residence Hannu Karjalainen. If you want to see what Hannu has been up to in Bristol got to [www.dshed.net/studio/projects/hannu/index.html](http://www.dshed.net/studio/projects/hannu/index.html)

China is clearly becoming a major player in the West but what of its film culture? We may know something of what became known as the third generation of filmmakers – the likes of Zhang Yimou, Chen Kiage and stars like Gong Lee. Over April we have a season covering eight decades of Chinese filmmaking, which has been curated by film critic Mark Cousins. This is a rare opportunity to get an insight into the depths of Chinese film culture. As well as the classics such as Yimou’s stunning **Ju Dou** and Kaige’s **Yellow Earth** (whose cinematography was courtesy of Yimou) there are films from the 30s like **The Goddess** – the epitome of Chinese realist filmmaking. By coincidence Zhang Yimou’s latest film **The Curse of the Golden Flower** opens on Fri 13 April. It is interesting to see the tightrope walked by the more celebrated Chinese filmmakers between Hollywood and their own cultural style.

Also profiled this month is Spanish and Latin American film courtesy of Manchester’s Cornerhouse touring **Viva** festival. This is highlight from the recent 13th festival and includes

Spanish director Alex de LA Iglesia's typically political incorrect **Crimen Perfecto**. I always think of Iglesia as the dark twin of Almodovar. He deserves to be more celebrated in this country. Also screening is **El Aura** the new film by **Nine Queens** director Fabien Bielensky who tragically died last June leaving behind a small but potent body of work. Indeed esteemed film critic Nigel Floyd said that **El Aura** was the best film in last year's Edinburgh Film Festival. Praise indeed and catch these films whilst you can. They are on between Fri 20 – Sun 29 April.

If that wasn't Latino enough there is the glorious reissue of Alejandro Jodorowsky's infamous cult classic **El Topo**. This played in many reputable cinemas all over the world, before disappearing out of sight. If you want to know what cult means in the cinematic dictionary – go see **El Topo**, which opens at Watershed on Fri 20 April.

That's all folks – As they say in the trade – 'til next time, see you at the cinema.