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Michael Haneke is for my money the most accomplished and distinguished filmmaker working in Europe. He is reminiscent of the glory days of European cinema when one met every film by say Bergman or Fellini as a message from the mind of a great artist. Actually, it's a time when film had an intellectual and artistic currency and status which is all but lacking these days.

So it is with Haneke. Each film is a dispatch from the cinematic front line, each film is an intense reflection on humanity's foibles, each film is a reflection of and on us all. His films often cause outrage either because of what they portray or how they portray it. Most memorably it was in **Funny Games**, his devilishly playful take on the thriller genre which drew the audience into uncomfortable complicity with the killers or in **The Piano Teacher**, which portrayed a teacher of classical music to have 'deviant' sexuality. These two films unfortunately allowed detractors to focus on specific scenes. It is however, in his films **Code Unknown** and **Hidden**, that to my mind reveal the depth and reach of Haneke's artistic greatness. Both these films are reflections on multicultural Parisien life and the tension which riddle that society in particular between the comfortable middle classes and the *les bas fonds* as the say on the street of Paris. Haneke unravels these very current and topical tensions without giving answers – which irritates some people – and with great cinematic artistry.

So it is with his latest film **The White Ribbon** which through a story of a rural village in pre world war one Germany explores the insidious rise of evil and reflects on the capacity of people to deal (or not as the case

may be) with the implications. On one level Haneke is, in very personal terms, exploring what it took for his own people/society to have the capacity to embark on two world wars and the atrocities of Nazism. But equally he is casting that net wider to reflect on what it takes for us and society to do something. One need only look at our own society to see the insidious rise of a nationalism which suggests one group of people have more rights than others to see **The White Ribbon's** contemporary resonance.

That Haneke can explore such themes in a compelling engrossing distinctive cinematic style is testament to a true master of the medium.

The White Ribbon opens on **Fri 6 Nov**.

The 15th edition of the **Encounters Short Film Festival** opens this month and if you want to get a sneak preview of the emerging auteurs of the future this is the best place to start. A lot of feature filmmakers learn their craft in the short film form. Names like Jane Campion, Lynne Ramsay, Damien O'Donnell and most recently Andrea Arnold come to mind. It is in the various programmes of the festival that you will see work and names which you should remember for the feature makers of the future.

As part of my job of putting the competitive strands together I watch in the region of 400 short films and every year I am always amazed and thrilled by the range and quality of work submitted. Basically the short film can do everything that the feature film can but more concisely.

This year I was keen to explore the transition from shorts to features. My day job involves watching lots of feature films and of course I am aware of filmmakers who have come up through the shorts route.

Most recently was Romanian director Radu Jude who won the international prize at Encounters two years ago with his delightful film *The Tube with the Hat*. At the Berlin Film festival earlier this year I came across his first feature film **The Happiest Girl in the World** which showed the same wry humour. I was keen that the short film festival not begin and end with the shorts but acknowledge that transition. So this year we will be screening a handful of features including Radu's film and also Tom Harper's **The Scouting Book for Boys** – Tom also won an award at Encounters for his short *Cubs*, **Shifty** which was made through Film London's microwave scheme and of course Andrea's **Fish Tank**.

At the time of going to podcast **Fish Tank** has been nominated for 8 British Independent Film Awards so I am delighted that Andrea will be attending Encounters and giving her hard earned insight into developing feature projects.

The great thing about Encounters is that for four days the film industry comes to Bristol. They come spot the emerging talent, the filmmakers – producers, writers et al – they meet the industry. Most importantly the filmmakers get their films in front of an audience which is really what it is all about – that nerve jangling moment when their precious film goes out into the wide world and is projected onto the big screen in front of a live audience. For audiences there is plenty on offer from trips across the word through short films to showcases of local talent to masterclasses from industry professionals. Get along and enjoy the festival atmosphere.

Encounters runs from **Tue 17 until Sat 21 Nov.**