

Warts and All

There is a treat in store for lovers of British Cinema this month when the British Film Institute holds a major retrospective of films by the much admired - but not quite as well known as he should be – British director, Ken Loach. Loach has been creating brilliantly crafted, hard-hitting, slice of life dramas and documentaries for almost 50 years now, since he arrived in the mid 60s with the controversial, but influential, *Cathy Come Home* (1965), which focused on the problems of poverty, unemployment and homelessness.

Cathy Come Home has been described as a docu-drama and was an early indication of Loach's determination to reject the usual compromises required from film makers and portray his subject in an honest and realistic way. If you want to know what Britain is really like today, you will find it pretty accurately depicted in his films. And it's not a pretty picture. His approach could be described as 'warts and all', which is an expression we use for a representation which shows us everything, making no attempt to play down or hide its worst aspects.

In terms of British cinema as a whole Loach's work is at the warty end of a spectrum at the other end of which are glossy, uplifting, and immaculately complexioned feel good films like *Bridget Jones*, *Notting Hill* and *Love Actually*. These offer a view of Britain that is far easier on the eye, and the conscience, than Loach's. Set in that 1% of London that looks fantastic and featuring a decidedly unrepresentatively attractive selection of young British actors, these films are Atlanticist in tone, and, with an eye on the international market, nearly always feature at least one glamorous American among the cast.

Somewhere in between these two groups are the spate of dramas depicting very recent history, *The Queen*, *The Damned United*, *The King's Speech* and the very soon to be released *The Iron Lady*, featuring Meryl Streep as the former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.

This last group try to have it both ways, they deal with serious topics concerning events within living memory but have star name performers, big budgets and a certain glamorous Hollywood sheen (and I'm not referring to Michael Sheen here).

Entertaining as these films are, if you fancy something a bit rawer and have a genuine interest in finding out what contemporary Britain is really like *warts and all*, the Loach season runs until the 12 of October and will be followed by screenings around the UK. If it all sounds a bit heavy going, it should be stressed that aside from the gloom Loach's films are great entertainment, contain some genuinely hilarious moments (such as the attack on a gangster's house by a squadron of Eric Cantona's in *Waiting for Eric*), and, surprisingly often, end on a hopeful note. Their broad canvas contains ugliness, misery, anger and abuse, but also beauty, dignity, decency and humour.

Just like real life.

<http://www.bfi.org.uk/>

<http://www.theironladymovie.co.uk/blog/>

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