

Friday, February 6th 7.30pm

## A Thousand Times Good Night (15)

dir: Erik Poppe

starring: Juliette Binoche, Nikolaj Coster-Waldau

sponsor: Dr Roderick Ørner Ltd and Michelle Allen,  
Psychological Therapies and Consultancy Services

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*A Thousand Times Good Night* is less a screen drama than two hours of guilty liberal hand-wringing, a highlight reel of Juliette Binoche practising her vacant wistful stare. She plays Rebecca, a photojournalist who leaves behind a peaceful family life in Ireland to cover the conflict in Afghanistan.

The opening credits announce the film as an EU co-production whose investors include the Norwegian Film Institute, the Irish Film Board and Eurimages. The Scandinavians are spoken for by Nikolaj Coster-Waldau, one of the strapping *Game of Thrones* cast, here in gentle-giant mode, modelling several handsome woollen sweaters in the role of Rebecca's long-suffering husband Marcus. As for Ireland, we get the couple's improbable colleen daughters (Lauryn Canny is in the meatier role as Steph), several nice tourist board views – verdant hillsides and coastal scenery as Binoche jogs on the beach – a supporting role for U2 drummer Larry Mullen Jr and nary a mention of the Troubles, for, of course, sectarian violence is something that occurs far away in the land of the Brown People.

This the fourth feature for Norwegian director Erik Poppe, who has previously worked as a cinematographer and, in the 1980s, as a war photographer. It's an old saw that flipping the expected gender of a character can add new and unexpected elements to otherwise familiar material, but this is nullified as Poppe lards every minute of *A Thousand Times Good Night's* run-time with at least a thousand oral and visual clichés. We've got hands waving out of the window of a moving car and caressing white linens flapping in slow motion on the laundry line, all to the tune of spare, quavering piano plunking, the sound-track of sober soul-searching and final stiff-upper-lip determination. Uninspired



compositions are lent a semblance of vitality by hand-held tremor, while Poppe relies heavily on the elegance of Binoche's close-up to carry his story – over-much, in fact. There are acres of footage showing the actress with eyes set towards an uncertain future, the new furrows on her face undisguised in plain daylight, as in last year's *Camille Claudel 1915*.

What's meant to register here is Binoche's lack of vanity, her bravery – though this becomes confused in *A Thousand Times Good Night's* all-consuming welter of smug self-congratulation. Rebecca is brought to the brink of confronting questions about the ethics of her work, the reduction of subjects to objects, but she's invariably absolved once the film retreats to its standard mode of chiding didacticism. “The world was more interested in Paris Hilton climbing out of a car with no knickers on than what was happening in the world,” Rebecca tells her daughter, explaining why she shoots – and it says something that the film repeatedly places its audience in the position of a child being lectured about societal ills. (Marcus also gets his chance to hold forth; he's a marine biologist working to raise awareness of radioactive pollution in the Irish Sea.)

Adding to the air of pedantry is the fact that the script, by Poppe and Harald Rosenløw-Eeg, pops every single theme squarely on the nose: the identifiable nadir has younger daughter Lisa, who has begged for a pet cat, being told to choose between two, one named Happy and the other Lucky – you can't have it all, you see! This wisdom is attested to by *A Thousand Times Good Night* which tries for both moral ambivalence and courageous affirmation and ends up with nothing much at all.

**Synopsis:** Afghanistan, present day. While documenting a female suicide bomber's final hours, photojournalist Rebecca is seriously injured in a marketplace blast. Rebecca's husband Marcus joins her in the hospital and together they return home to their two daughters, teenager Steph and younger Lisa, in peaceful rural Ireland. Marcus says that he can no longer live with Rebecca if she continues to cover dangerous global conflict, so she vows to quit her job. When Steph begins work on an African project for school, however, Rebecca takes the opportunity to photograph an allegedly safe refugee camp in Kenya, taking Steph along with her with Marcus's blessing.

Shortly after Rebecca and Steph arrive at the camp, soldiers from another tribe attack. Reverting to old habits, Rebecca leaves Steph in the safekeeping of others and heads towards the action with her camera. Marcus learns of this and throws Rebecca out of the house. Rebecca prepares to travel to Kabul to shoot a follow-up to her earlier assignment. Rather than board the plane, however, she goes to watch Steph present her African project to her class.

Still unreconciled with Marcus, Rebecca returns to Kabul to photograph the preparation of another suicide bomber, this one a girl no older than Steph. The girl goes towards her death and Rebecca sinks to her knees in exhausted despair.

### Credits

**Rebecca:** Juliette Binoche

**Marcus:** Nikolaj Coster-Waldau

**Theresa:** Maria Doyle Kennedy

**Tom:** Larry Mullen Jr

**Stig:** Mads Ousdal

**Steph:** Lauryn Canny

**Lisa:** Adrienne Cramer Curtis

**Jessica:** Chloe Annett

**Brian:** Bush Moukarzel

**Director:** Erik Poppe

**Story:** Erik Poppe, Harald Rosenløw-Eeg

**Screenplay:** Harald Rosenløw-Eeg

**DoP:** John Christian Rosenlund

**Editor:** Sofia Lindgren

**Music:** Armand Amar (dir.)

**Norway/Ireland/Sweden/Germany 2013**

**117 mins**



# Lincoln Film Society

Patron: Jim Broadbent



## A Trick Missed?

*Modern motherhood is the hot topic in this thoughtful, if underpowered photojournalist drama starring Juliette Binoche.*

*Based on Norwegian director Erik Poppe's first-hand experience as a photojournalist covering war zones for a national newspaper, A Thousand Times Good Night is a slowburning drama that eschews its thorny political subtext in search of domestic catharsis.*

*Juliette Binoche plays Rebecca, a passionate and talented war photographer who clashes with stay-at-home husband Marcus (Game of Thrones' Nikolaj Coster-Waldau) over her attitude towards work versus maternal responsibilities. Were it Marcus choosing to put his profession first, there wouldn't be much of a film here. As it is, Rebecca's obsessive and endless pursuit of excellence in her field raises a pertinent social conundrum. In recasting his own semi-autobiographical story with the gender roles reversed, Poppe gives his film broader significance. But it's not enough to save it from mediocrity.*

*Aside from a handful of nail-biting action sequences — the most pivotal involving Rebecca escorting a group of female suicide bombers through a bustling market square in Kabul, for which she winds up hospitalised — Poppe stages the majority of the drama on the homefront in the family's idyllic Irish farmhouse. Rebecca's willingness to endanger herself is a great source of anguish for Marcus and eldest daughter Steph, who idolises her mother yet visibly resents her decision to leave at a moment's notice. She's a bright and inquisitive teenager who's just starting to find her place in the world, and the thought of losing her mother is understandably distressing.*

*Rebecca and Marcus' increasingly strained relationship reaches breaking point when she convinces him to allow Steph to tag along on a supposedly safe assignment to a Kenyan refugee camp. Predictably, the trip turns to violence, and in the film's most symbolic and shocking moment Rebecca abandons Steph and resets her shutter amid the approaching rat-a-tat of rebel gunfire. She gets her shot, and is promptly labelled an unfit mother upon returning home. But is this fair? Why is it that a man can be career-driven with little repercussion, but a woman doing the same is likely to be branded neglectful?*

*It's a provocative and complex issue, but Poppe never really gets to grips with it, and he lets his film slip into melodrama far too easily. Despite Binoche's committed central performance, the vociferous bickering of an ineffective husband and wife team does not make for compelling viewing. The juxtaposition between a fractured western family and miscellaneous war-torn countries is crude and trivial, but far less palatable is the A-grade snot acting on show in the film's closing scenes.*

**Adam Woodward, Little White Lies**

## Film Society Programme updates

The 3 films chosen to fill the empty new release slots in the programme are as follows:

**April 10<sup>th</sup>: Ida** (Poland, 2014) – A drama about a novice living in 1960s Poland who discovers a secret about her past. The film is distinguished by both the acting and cinematography and is Oscar nominated this year for Best Film in a Foreign Language.

**April 24<sup>th</sup>: In Order of Disappearance** (Norway 2014): pitch black comedy revenge thriller in the style of *Fargo* that has some terrific set piece moments and gorgeous winter photography.

**May 22<sup>nd</sup>: Bicycling with Molière** (France 2014): a literate and quintessentially French comedy of manners, starring Lambert Wilson and Fabrice Luchini, about a battle of egos between 2 actors.

We are also beginning to gather ideas for next season. Members are invited to submit suggestions (email or in writing) to be added to the long list, between now and the end of next month. We consider any genre, contemporary releases and classic restorations but do not include films that have had a wide general release and appeared at the Odeon.

## Magna Carta 2014

With the support of Lincoln Records Society and the BFI Film Audience Network (Film Hub Central East) we have put together a season of films designed to add to the Magna Carta celebrations in the city this year. The programme is about to be released and will be available at a range of locations, including The Venue, the Drill Hall, The Collection and LPAC, whose support we also gratefully acknowledge.

## Documentary Day

In collaboration with the University of Lincoln and the BFI Film Audience Network (Film Hub Central East), we have organised 'Secret Stories', a documentary day on March 21<sup>st</sup>, at the EMMTEC building, University of Lincoln.

3 films will be shown:

**1.30 – 3.30: Plot for Peace (UK 2013. Cert 12a):** the hidden story of the French businessman who was instrumental in initiating the process which ended with Nelson Mandela's release from jail. (Part of the Magna Carta season)

**4.00 – 6.00: Finding Vivian Maier (UK 2013. Cert 12a):** Now considered one of the 20th century's greatest street photographers, Vivian Maier secretly took over 100,000 photographs that went unseen during her lifetime. Since discovering her archive, amateur historian John Maloof has crusaded to put this prolific photographer in the history books. Oscar nominated this year for Best Documentary.

**6.45 – 8.30: This is not a film (Iran 2011. Cert U):** Iranian director Jafar Panahi, under house arrest after appealing against a 20 year sentence for alleged propaganda against the Iranian Government, depicts a day in his life and provides a telling commentary on the nature of repressive government. (Part of the Magna Carta season)

Entry to all these films is free. Light refreshments will be served.

**Our next film: Friday February 13<sup>th</sup>, 7.30pm**

## **Exhibition (15)**

Joanna Hogg established herself as one of contemporary Britain's most original film directors with her first two features *Unrelated* (2007) and *Archipelago* (2010). In these films, she scrutinised the dynamics of the relationships that existed between the characters, in a way that captured the attention and admiration of critics.

She continues this exploration with *Exhibition*. Set in a very contemporary house, which is as much of a character as D & H the two artist protagonists, the film allows us to observe their interactions with each other and the building as they prepare their latest pieces of work. Hogg uses her trademark style of long takes and minimal camera movement to create an utterly distinctive and different cinema, making *Exhibition* undoubtedly a film to be thought about and discussed long after it finishes.