



**Patron: Jim Broadbent**  
**Registered Charity No. 1156478**  
**Friday March 9th 2018**  
**Graduation (Cert 15)**

*Dir: Cristian Mungiu*

*Starring: Adrian Titieni, Maria Dragus, Lisa Bugnar*

*Sponsor: Rob and Val Sargent*

*This review contains plot details. It is reproduced with the kind permission of Sight and Sound magazine*



**Synopsis:** Romania, the present. Following vandalism at his house, Dr Romeo Aldea's 18 year old daughter Eliza is assaulted just before taking some important exams. Romeo is concerned that this will jeopardise her chances of a scholarship to Cambridge. He makes a deal with contacts to try and get extra time for his daughter. Eliza meanwhile reveals she'd rather stay with her boyfriend, Marius. Romeo has a row with his mistress. His wife throws him out. Anti-corruption investigators become involved and Romeo begins to suspect that Marius has information about the assault. At her graduation, Eliza reveals that she did the exams without needing extra help at all

Aside from occasional snippets of car-radio opera and a pop song over the end credits, there is of conventional music soundtrack in Cristian Mungiu's fourth solo feature. There is, however, a near-continuous cacophony of rings, chirrups, buzzes and thrums, as almost every scene is interrupted by a phone, sometimes answered, often ignored. Since the majority of the film is made up of conversations between two or three people, usually hushed for fear of being overheard, this constant reminder of modern life's interconnectedness acts as a potent metaphor for its central theme; that of the impossibility of achieving desired outcomes in a complete vacuum. In this environment, actions always have consequences, often decidedly unwanted and even potentially career-, reputation- and even life-threatening.

As played by Adrian Titieni, protagonist Dr Romeo Aldea resembles a younger, plumper Lino Ventura, with a similarly hangdog, perpetually troubled mien. Ostensibly, he has done well for himself: he's a doctor who's obviously popular (his chats with colleagues and cleaners alike have an air of mutual respect), and he has raised a daughter, Eliza, who's both beautiful and brainy, with a real chance of a Cambridge scholarship that will offer her opportunities Romeo and his wife Magda never had. Although Romeo has a mistress (Sandra, one of Eliza's teachers), he has generally stuck to the straight and narrow, despite numerous opportunities for corruption.

All this changes when Eliza is assaulted badly enough to have her writing arm encased in plaster, physically and psychologically jeopardising her performance in a crucial series of exams. Romeo duly pulls every string he can think of to ensure that she gets the results she was confidently predicted, weaving an increasingly tangled web that's all but guaranteed to trip him up at the most awkward moment. The fact that throughout all this he's merely trying to turn the clock back a few days makes his situation more tragic, especially when it starts to involve Sandra (who has been waiting years for him to leave Magda), local officials and even a pair of chillingly affable anti-corruption investigators.

Mungiu's career breakthrough was his Palme d'Or-winning second feature *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* (2007), and this has much of the same clammy tension. Although the Ceausescu era is long past (the regular sight of smartphones establishes *Graduation* firmly in the present), Romanian society is still rife with petty corruption and backhanders - indeed, it's because of this that Romeo is so keen for Eliza to begin a new life in the UK ("All that counts is getting to a normal world"), untainted by what he's had to put up with. He and Magda graduated in the early 1990s, just when Romania was clobbered by post-communist was clobbered by post-communist financial crises, and he's determined not to let external circumstances wreck his daughter's life and career in a similar fashion.

In this respect, Romeo is very different from the monstrously pushy mother in Calin Peter Netzer's *Child's Pose* (2013 - shown by LFS). In that film, the mother Cornelia, wanted to maintain total control over her son's life, whereas Romeo wants Eliza to become more independent. When the investigators utter the phrase "mitigating circumstances", they're echoing Jean Renoir's famous "everybody has their reasons". The film's most notionally corrupt figure, the deputy mayor Bulai, sees himself as a friendly fixer, a municipal Robin Hood, while an overheard conversation about a funeral director who pays ambulance drivers a retainer to tip him off, concludes with "There's a lot of competition, sir". If the system is itself rotten, can we blame people for taking advantage? Especially if they're aiming to improve the lives of their loved ones rather than themselves?

But Mungiu never lets Romeo completely off the hook. Someone clearly has it in for him, for reasons that are never fully explained: his window is broken, his car repeatedly damaged - and was Eliza's assault part of an intentional pattern? The casting of Maria Dragus as Eliza can't help but recall her role in *The White Ribbon* (2009 - also shown by LFS), and although Mungiu is very much his own man (the slightly tremulous hand-held cinematography is now a recognisable signature), there is more than a whiff of Michael Haneke in his basilisk-eyed view of humanity. But as in *4 Months, Graduation* ends on an unexpectedly upbeat note: although narrative threads are left tantalisingly dangling (to underscore the abiding theme that poor decisions can have lifelong repercussions), there's a legitimate reason for Eliza to sport a hesitant but genuine smile in the final shot - a rarity in this grim but riveting film.

**Credits**

<b>Dr Romeo Aldea</b>	Adrian Titieni
<b>Eliza</b>	Maria Dragus
<b>Magda</b>	Lia Bugnar
<b>Sandra</b>	Malina Manovici
<b>Police Chief Ivanov</b>	Vlad Ivanov
<b>Baccalaureat commission chief</b>	Gelu Colceag
<b>Marius</b>	Rares Andrici
<b>Deputy Mayor Bulai</b>	Petre Ciubotaru
<b>Romeo's mother</b>	Alexandra Davidescu
<b>Director</b>	Cristian Mungiu
<b>Screenplay</b>	Cristian Mungiu
<b>Director of Photography</b>	Tudor Vladimир Pandarov
<b>Editing</b>	Mircea Olteanu
<b>Production design</b>	Simona Paduretu
<b>Sound editing</b>	Mircea Olteanu
<b>Costume</b>	Brandusa Ioan

**Romania/France/  
Belgium/Denmark 2016  
127 mins**

### Another View

It's tempting to call Cristian Mungiu's *Graduation* a nightmare vision. The new film from Romanian director Cristian Mungiu (*4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*) begins with a bang. Well, a crash, anyway, as a rock shatters the glass of a living-room window, disrupting the peace of a solid middle-class family. Who has thrown it? What for? The man of the house (an apartment, really) runs out to find the source of the violence, and even goes so far as to run a good deal afield, almost as if he is looking for someone specific, whom he does not find, though he does glimpse a person on the literal other sides of the tracks, as a train passes. His on-foot pursuit is all the stranger because Romeo (as we soon learn he is named) is hardly young, and certainly not slim. A doctor firmly ensconced in middle age, he should be the picture of propriety. Until we see him in bed with a woman not his wife, shortly thereafter. Appearances can be deceiving: I had thought he was no ordinary Romeo; I was wrong.

This is post-[Ceauşescu](#) Romania, approximately in our current day, and as we will learn, corruption still runs rampant in a country forever marked by its long-ruling dictator. As he did in *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*, Mungiu proves himself a master of the gradual reveal of layers of misdeeds, slowly building unease through a mise-en-scène of gathering dread. He reminds me of Austrian filmmaker Michael Haneke – whose 2006 *Caché* this movie resembles in procedural style (though with a different sin at its core) – only with less action, more psychology. In the case of Romeo, who starts out affably enough, Mungiu never fully explains all the reasons behind his comeuppance, though he leaves plenty of evidence out in the open. The specifics are less important than the general, since no one is truly innocent in a world of constant back-scratching.

Except, perhaps, for Eliza, Romeo's college-bound daughter, whose upcoming high-school graduation lends the film its title. She's too young to have committed real crimes, yet finds herself at the center of a byzantine payback scheme. Or maybe not. What happens to her could be a random act. But Mungiu – again with clues strewn out in the open – raises the possibility of cause and effect that keeps us guessing, and engaged, throughout. More importantly, the dramatic question of whether innocent Eliza will escape Romania and move to London, as Romeo desires (his estranged wife is not so sure), becomes the driving narrative force of the story, while also being a bit beside the point, like a Hitchcockian MacGuffin. It's the toll of venality that motivates Mungiu, and in this simultaneously exhausting and engrossing film, he slices his pound of flesh and eats it, too. Ably assisted by a cast that includes Adrian Titieni (as Romeo), Maria-Victoria Dragus (as Eliza), Lia Bugnar (as Magda, Romeo's wife) and Malina Manovici (as Sandra, his mistress) – who all look worn out before the drama even starts – Mungiu delivers yet another profound, cinematic exploration of ordinary iniquity, brilliantly executed and well deserving of the Best Director Award received at Cannes in 2016.

**Christopher Llewellyn-Reed: Film Festival Today**

### Our next screening: Friday March 16th, 7.30 Certain Women (USA 2015. Cert 12a)

Kelly Reichardt's film (Best Film, London Film Festival 2016) brings us the stories of 4 women living in present day Montana, whose lives are all connected in various ways. Their daily lives mirror the challenge of living in a remote part of America, where resilience and determination are needed to ensure survival before anything more personal can be considered. A top-quality cast (Michelle Williams, Laura Dern, Kristen Stewart, Lily Gladstone) and one of America's foremost women directors combine to conjure a world that puts women's experiences front and centre, a film that's "about desire unfulfilled, desire lost and desire eventually regenerated. It's a heartbreaker, pure and simple."

### Programme News

The screening of **The Innocents** on January 12th which was affected by a sound issue, has been re-arranged for Friday March 23rd. While we are still unsure of the reasons behind the problem, we do not anticipate a repeat and hope everyone who came to the film originally will return.

We are working to arrange the showing of **The Other Side of Hope**, which was postponed last week because of bad weather, to take place as soon as possible

The 3 films to complete our season have been selected. They are

**April 6th - Land of Mine (Denmark 2016. Cert 15)**

**April 20th - Hotel Salvation (India 2016. Cert PG)**

**May 4th - Call Me By Your Name (Italy 2016. Cert 15)**

We are now planning for next season's programme. Members are invited to submit suggestions of newly released films for consideration. Please be advised we do not include films that have been available elsewhere in the city for more than a week.

To conclude our 65th anniversary, next season will also include an archive classic, chosen from suggestions made by members. That list is now closed. The programme committee will draw up a short list of titles and members will be invited to vote for the film they'd like to see during April.

**The Indie-Lincs festival** returns to the LPAC from March 15-18. It showcases films by first time directors from all round the world. The Society is pleased to support the festival and we hope members will be able to get to the LPAC and join the audience.