



NEW RELEASES

Rose Plays Julie

It's during a term studying animal euthanasia that veterinary student Rose (Ann Skelly) decides to contact Ellen (Orla Brady), the birth mother who gave her up for adoption. But Ellen, who is now a successful London-based actress, doesn't want to know. Undeterred, Rose will not be ignored. And curiosity leads her to discoveries that shake the fragile identity she has built for herself. Directors Christine Molloy and Joe Lawlor have spent years making formally rigorous, atmospheric cinema (*Helen*, *Mister John*, *Further Beyond*) that often deals with the uncanny effects of impersonation and the slippery nature of truth. With *Rose Plays Julie* they have crafted a slow-burn thriller that builds a sense of dread inside an exquisite world of immaculate architecture, rendered through an icy performance style and enveloped by a claustrophobic soundtrack. Skelly and Brady are both exacting and measured in their delivery, as the film takes us through longing and revenge to arrive at the dark places of power and its abuses. This is frank, immersive and decidedly feminist filmmaking.

Kate Taylor, bfi.org.uk

Rose Plays Julie is, on the surface, an expertly drawn thriller, one limned through a slippery relationship between two women working out whether they can trust each other; powerful instances of drone music; shots of eerily empty spaces of modernity like concrete corridors, escalators and golf courses; and a definitionally sleazy performance by Aidan Gillen – in his third feature film with filmmakers Desperate Optimists – as the embodiment of entitlement. There's a gunshot, a vulnerable teenage girl, doublings, risky decisions, a disguise based on a wig and a false name and knowledge of the administration of a poison. Its deployment of generic codes is powerful, with its subtle distribution of knowledge, and restrained use of jump scares, all framed by the compelling ethical question of whether Rose, adopted as a baby, has a right to knowledge of her biological parentage.

Initially, the film suggests the stalker subgenre, as Rose researches her biological mother Ellen online, watching and rewatching a clip of her in a horror film, playing a police officer confronted with a young female car crash victim who turns into a werewolf. Rose follows up her second attempt at a phone conversation by finding Ellen's house in London, following her to work on set, making an appointment to view the house which is up for sale, and getting into an uncomfortable conversation with Ellen's younger daughter Eva, whose bedroom she goes through. Ann Skelly imbues Rose with an impassive, patient expression that makes the directness of her inquiries, when they come, all the more disarming and convincing.

It is here, with Rose's frankness to Ellen, that the film turns narrative tail to confront our expectations about adoption stories. Ellen defies the misogynist stereotypes of both the mendacious actress and the callous mother who gives up her child for adoption, meeting Rose's honesty with her own, at great personal cost. Orla Brady plays beautifully with the ways which both professional performers and mothers are expected to show self-control, and how these are stripped away in her confession to Rose. The act bonds them

deeply and reveals the film as, at heart, the most unusual of narratives: a mother-daughter love story; a narrative of, literally, affiliation, in which a courageous daughter avenges a protective mother. By wrapping this love-as-action story within a thriller, it joins a select feminist anti-canon, comprising Carol Morley's *Out of Blue* and Jane Campion's *In the Cut*. In all three films, the ethics of violence – particularly violent revenge by women against men – becomes the central drama.

In doing so, *Rose Plays Julie*, like the first season of Campion's *Top of the Lake*, also takes on and inverts the tropes that underlie Eurowestern storytelling, the family 'romance' of the Greek tragedies and Biblical narratives. Like Greek tragedy, the film hinges on scenes of recognition and reversal, but the tragic inversion resonates beyond the level of plot: Rose is a veterinary student currently engaged in a unit on euthanasia, and the film looks frankly at what Carol J. Adams called 'the sexual politics of meat', the association of violence against animals and women. A dying, then dead, deer appears towards the end of the film's final act, raising questions about empathy, family and gender. As in Morley's and Campion's work, the realism of the thriller genre is exploded, its underlying fantasy of gendered violence made evident and then ritually (as well as literally) reversed.

Such tonal multiplicities are a defining feature of Desperate Optimists' work, with their early short films, collected as *Civic Life*, each differently generating the unusual and welcome effect of hallowing civic architecture and its communities with not just dignity but a rich inner life. In their first feature *Helen* (2009), a young woman who has been raised in the care system finds a way to survive leaving it through playing a missing classmate in a police reconstruction, through which the film allusively places her as Helen of Troy, who could create a magical double.

Again like *Top of the Lake*, *Rose Plays Julie* offers a resistant re-interpretation of the poetic trope of the colonised nation as a raped woman, called the *aisling* in Irish tradition. Rose's biological father Peter is a television archaeologist, and the author of a popular book on Irish prehistory.

Meanwhile Ellen is playing an English-accented aristocrat in a film shot in Dublin, and when Rose first meets her, is on the set of a historical drama suggestive of *Call the Midwife*. Her face framed by an old-fashioned nurse's veil, Ellen looks hauntingly reminiscent of Elle, the female protagonist of *Hiroshima mon amour*, who is in Japan to play a nurse. It's one of a number of subtle details that build to a powerful choral reminder that sexual violence is not just a private issue between individuals, but underlies the nation-state. Playing Julie to get closer to her birth mother, Rose also teaches Ellen a new role, one that extends beyond lover, nurse or even officer of the law: together they enact not vengeance but reparation. No more potent new myth for our times could exist.

So Mayer, *Sight and Sound*, October 2021

ROSE PLAYS JULIE

Directed by: Christine Molloy, Joe Lawlor
©: Samson Films, Desperate Optimists
A Samson Films/Desperate Optimists production Presented by:
Fis Éireann/Screen Ireland
With the participation of: Broadcasting Authority of Ireland, RTÉ
Executive Producer for Fis Éireann/Screen Ireland: Celine Haddad
Produced by: David Collins, Joe Lawlor
Co-producer: Eoin O’Faolain
Line Producer: Cathleen Dore
Supervising Accountant: Ashifa Lalini
Production Accountant: Orla Collins
Location Manager: Karl Daly
1st Assistant Director: Jules Benoiton
Script Supervisor: Christine Dilworth
Casting Director: Emma Gunnery
Written by: Christine Molloy, Joe Lawlor
Director of Photography: Tom Comerford
Editor: Christine Molloy
Production Designer: Emma Lowney
Art Director: Mark Kelly
Graphic Designer: Melanie Downes
Costume Designer: Joan O’Cleary
Make-up Designer: Caroline McCurdy
Hair Designer: Lyndsey Herron
Colourist: Adam Dolniak
Composer: Stephen McKeon
Sound Recordist: Niall O’Sullivan
Stunt Co-ordinator: Joe Condren
Animal Wrangler: Eddie Drew

Cast

Orla Brady (Ellen)
Ann Skelly (Rose)
Aidan Gillen (Peter)
Annabell Rickerby (Molly)
Catherine Walker (Teresa)
Joanne Crawford (Valerie)
Alan Howley (Dr Langan)
Sadie Soverall (Eva)
Jack McEvoy (young man)
Hannah Behan (young woman)
Esosa Ighodaro (archaeologist)
Sarah-Jane Scott (hotel receptionist)
Molly Rose Lawlor (oldest child)
Lochlann O’Mearain (farm hand)
Jules Benoiton (director)
Lily Brand (vampire)
Derry Lawlor (Derry)
Louis Skelding (child 1)
Brenda Skelding (child 2)
Georgina Skelding (child 3)
Chloe Vos (young Rose)

Ireland/UK 2019©
100 mins

A New Wave Films release

NEW RELEASES & RE-RELEASES

Souad
Continues from Fri 27 Aug
Annette
From Fri 10 Sep
The Maltese Falcon
From Fri 17 Sep
Rose Plays Julie
From Fri 17 Sep
Never Gonna Snow Again
(S’niegu juz’ nigdy nie beǳie)
From Fri 22 Oct
Seven Samurai (Shichinin no Samurai)
From Fri 29 Oct
Naked
From Fri 12 Nov
Petite Maman
From Fri 26 Nov
Rebel Dykes
From Fri 26 Nov

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