



NEW RELEASES

The Banshees of Inisherin

The Beauty Queen of Leenane, *The Cripple of Inishmaan*, *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*... In titling his gritty, west coast Irish dramas, Martin McDonagh certainly has a type. All three aforementioned plays debuted (as did two others) between 1996 and 2001, a dazzling period that saw McDonagh anointed as the next great theatrical sensation, his blackly comic, often gruesomely violent tales steeped in authentic locale and caustic yet lyrical language.

The Banshees of Inisherin (the smallest of the three Aran islands, alongside Inishmaan and Inishmore) was initially written during this early creative burst, but never got beyond the page, McDonagh deeming it not good enough. A quarter of a century on, with its author now an established filmmaker, comes *The Banshees of Inisherin*, slightly renamed and presumably reworked, as his fourth feature. The connections to the earlier plays are clear: the same raucously funny and furious banter; a small group of characters placed in an increasingly heated pressure-cooker scenario; and, yes, as in previous McDonagh narratives, body parts bloodily removed.

McDonagh has denounced some of his previous work as 'too plotty', and this feels a much more sober, reflective tale, less punch-drunk on its own dramatic and dialogic showboating, certainly compared to his previous two films *Seven Psychopaths* (2012) and the Oscar-winning *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* (2017), both set in the US. Perhaps a return to his roots – although McDonagh grew up in south London, his family were from and frequently visited County Galway – has re-grounded him. Moreover, the shift from the actual locations of his former plays to a fictional island helps conjure up the more primal, mythical feel that shrouds this disquieting piece – easily McDonagh's best film since his 2008 debut feature *In Bruges* and arguably his most resonant tragicomedy of all.

If Inisherin doesn't actually exist, the setting feeds off a specific reality: 1923, amid the Irish Civil War, which the islanders can hear and occasionally see across the water. Meanwhile, conflict of a smaller, more personal nature breaks out here between two longtime friends, unassuming, good-natured Pádraic Súilleabháin (Colin Farrell) and the older, brooding Colm Doherty (Brendan Gleeson). Arriving at Colm's remote coastal cottage for their daily trip to the pub, Pádraic finds himself shunned. Baffled, he presses his pal for a reason until, eventually, Colm gruffly reveals his hand: 'I just don't like you no more.'

To Pádraic's great confusion and hurt, Colm freely admits that his change of heart is not due to any specific incident or comment that his younger friend has made. It's more a cumulative realisation that he finds Pádraic 'dull' and will no longer waste his remaining years in endless, aimless chat. Instead, Colm, a mean fiddle player, believes he'll spend his time composing music – something meaningful, lasting. Such a seismic upending of the gentle daily routine causes inevitable consternation throughout the small community, Pádraic's sister Siobhán (Kerry Condon) and the assorted villagers veering from bemusement to annoyance to a reluctant acceptance. But egged on by the local loudmouth simpleton Dominic (Barry Keoghan), Pádraic himself can't

leave it, or Colm, be. In desperation, to ram home his point, Colm tells Pádraic that every time he talks to him, Colm will shear off one of his own fingers.

It's a farcical premise: Colm's earnest artistic aspirations would of course be curtailed by his own drastic measures. But the senselessness of the whole squabble is the point. There are clear parallels with the mainland conflict between two factions who just a year prior were united against the British. Early on, Pádraic observes distant cannon fire and mumbles to nobody in particular, 'Good luck to you, whatever it is you're fighting about.' As a metaphor here, it's perhaps a little too easily lined up in McDonagh's firing range.

Still, *Banshees* succeeds because it feels like McDonagh's real target is something more ineffable, unquantifiable. Can Pádraic's tedious 'niceness' compensate for a dawning recognition of one's own dwindling days? Is Colm's loner stance a viable solution ('Another silent man!' rails Siobhán, trapped on an island of taciturn drinkers)? No easy answers are forthcoming. One can empathise with Pádraic's despair at being unceremoniously dumped by his only friend, yet one can't deny the creeping entropy that Colm identifies as embedded within their insular existence. Inisherin may be a tight-knit body politic, but poison drip-feeds into its vital organs, through sadistic policeman Peadar Kearney (Gary Lydon), a serial abuser of his son Dominic; or the local store owner gleefully spreading gossip. The ancient, black-clad Mrs McCormick (Sheila Flitton), part soothsayer, part crone, makes foreboding predictions of imminent island death, but Colm has picked up on a spiritual malaise that's equally lethal. And he just can't shake it.

What makes McDonagh such a potent writer is his leavening of existential woe with mordant, absurdist humour. The call-and-response rhythms and repetitions of his heightened native dialect are expertly delivered by a cast familiar with his writing. Reuniting Farrell and Gleeson for the first time since their glorious *In Bruges* double-act is a real coup, rewarded with arguably the former's most complex work to date, fretful and needy one moment, then bolstered, often by drink, with an ill-considered resolve the next. A glowering, towering Gleeson equals his own screen peaks, *In Bruges* and, for Martin's older brother John Michael, *Calvary* (2014). Keoghan, as ever, pilfers every scene he's in. And Condon, a veteran of McDonagh's stage work, brings a shrewdness and stoic melancholy to Siobhán, the one character who might just be able to extricate herself from Inisherin's stagnant sorrows.

There's a coherent, holistic feel to *Banshees* that simply isn't evident in McDonagh's two flashier 'American' films, and an understated confidence maybe even lacking in his debut. Ben Davis's camerawork finds pastoral beauty in the island's sheer coastal cliffs and verdant patchwork fields, but also plays upon its almost tangible claustrophobia, often shooting through restricted viewpoints (Colm first appears within Pádraic's reflection outside his window, a neat foreshadowing of how stifling he finds his company). Alongside Gleeson's own impressive fiddle-playing, Carter Burwell's plaintive harp- and glockenspiel-led score evokes an aching sense of loss, against which even personal kinships feel an inadequate buffer. A sort of homecoming, then, for McDonagh, and a return to form and theme, but also an advance; a more compassionate, contemplative howl for his island of lost souls.

Leigh Singer, *Sight and Sound*, November 2022

THE BANSHEES OF INISHERIN

Directed by: Martin McDonagh
©: 20th Century Studios, TSG Entertainment Finance LLC
a Blueprint Pictures *production*
Production Company: Metropolitan Films
Produced with the support of incentives for the Irish Film Industry provided by the: Government of Ireland
Produced with the support of the: British Film Commission, UK Government's Film Tax Relief
Presented by: Searchlight Pictures
In association with: Film4, TSG Entertainment
Executive Producers: Diarmuid McKeown, Ben Knight, Daniel Battsek, Ollie Madden
Produced by: Graham Broadbent, Pete Czernin, Martin McDonagh
Financial Controller: Clare Cunningham
Location Manager: Eoin Holohan
Post-production Supervisor: Alistair Hopkins
Script Supervisor: Jeanette McGrath
Casting by: Louise Kiely
Written by: Martin McDonagh
Director of Photography: Ben Davis
Camera Operator: Des Whelan
Stills Photography: Jonathan Hession
Special Effects Supervisor: Paul Byrne
Editor: Mikkel E.G. Nielsen
Production Designer: Mark Tildesley
Supervising Art Director: Paul Ghirardani
Set Decorator: Michael Standish
Costume Designer: Eimer Ní Mhaoldomhnaigh
Make-up Designer: Lynn Johnston
Hair Designer: Orla Carroll
Music by: Carter Burwell
Production Sound Mixer: Simon Willis
Re-recording Mixers: Chris Burdon, Johnathan Rush
Supervising Sound Editor: Joakim Sundström
Stunt Co-ordinator: Eimear O'Grady

Cast

Colin Farrell (*Pádraic Súilleabháin*)
Brendan Gleeson (*Colm Doherty*)
Kerry Condon (*Siobhán Súilleabháin*)
Barry Keoghan (*Dominic Kearney*)
Gary Lydon (*Peadar Kearney*)
Pat Shortt (*Jonjo Devine*)
Sheila Flitton (*Mrs McCormick*)
Brid Ní Neachtain (*Mrs O'Riordan*)
Jon Kenny (*Gerry*)
Aaron Monaghan (*Declan*)
David Pearse (*priest*)
John Carty (*older musician 1*)
Oliver Farrelly (*older musician 2*)
Lasairfhíona Ní Chonaola (*female singer*)
James Carty (*student musician 1*)
Conor Connolly (*student musician 2*)
Ryan Owens (*student musician 3*)
Jenny (*Jenny*)
Sammy (*Morse*)
Minnie (*Minnie the pony*)

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114 mins

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The Banshees of Inisherin

From Fri 16 Dec

She Said

From Sat 17 Dec

Living

From Mon 19 Dec

Corsage

From Tue 27 Dec

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