



fish

Rams
(Iceland 2015)

DIRECTOR : Grímur Hákonarson
RUNNING TIME : 92mins
RATING : M

Synopsis:

A small story about two old estranged brothers and their animals gently morphs from gentle near-absurdist comedy to something close to tragedy. A simply but skilfully told tale of the hardships of isolated rural life in Iceland, even today.

Review: Leslie Felperin

Director Grímur Hákonarson's droll and tragic tale of Icelandic sheep farmers encapsulates all the best things about Nordic film-making: polished storytelling, radiant humanism, great acting and immaculate cinematography that shows off the stunning landscapes (in this case, Iceland's bleak, treeless moors) to their best advantage.

Unfurling a delicate, perfectly pitched tale of curmudgeonly bachelor brothers who haven't spoken in 40 years (a scene-stealing sheepdog passes notes between them), it modulates effortlessly between absurdity and tragedy, as an outbreak of scrapie threatens to wipe out the livestock they love. Sigurður Sigurjónsson has the more prominent part as the wily sibling who appears to comply with the authorities, while Theódór Júlíusson rages against the enforced slaughter of their herds.

A documentary-maker originally, Hákonarson neither sneers at nor sentimentalises this agrarian way of life, which tries to preserve ancient bloodlines and knitwear patterns in a modern world where disease outbreaks have dire economic consequences that can reach far beyond a single valley or community.

Source : <http://www.theguardian.com/film> ; Leslie Felperin 5/2/16 Edited extracts / accessed 9/3/16

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FILMS IN THE SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS INC

10.00 am Sunday 24th July 2016
8.15 pm Tuesday 26th July 2016

Review: Alissa Siomon

Rams is a touching humanist drama set in a remote farming valley where two estranged brothers must come together to save what's dearest to them: their sheep. Director/writer Grimur Hakonarson, an experienced documentarian, capitalizes on his extensive knowledge of Icelandic bachelor farmers and the unique landscapes of his homeland, while spicing the proceedings with some wonderfully wry, charmingly understated comic moments. Like his compatriot Benedikt Erlingsson in *Of Horses and Men*, Hakonarson lovingly captures a deeply rooted rural culture that is closely connected to the Icelandic national spirit.

Although they have not spoken to one another for 40 years, Gummi (Sigurdur Sigurjonsson) and older brother Kiddi (Theodor Juliusson) live on neighbouring farms against a harsh and majestic northern landscape that becomes a fateful character in the action as autumn gives way to winter. Both men breed sheep from the same ancient pedigree, and each year they are rivals in a valley-wide competition for best ram.

When Kiddi's flock shows signs of scrapie (BSE), an incurable and highly contagious virus that attacks the brain and spinal cord, the veterinary authorities decree that all the sheep in the valley must be destroyed. It's a devastating blow for the local farmers, but the order hits hard-drinking, unruly Kiddi and quiet, thoughtful Gummi particularly hard, and they rebel against the rules in their own distinct ways.

With a keen eye for detail, Hakonarson naturalistically presents the rigors of farm work, the plainness of his solitary protagonists' lives and their deep affection for their sheep. Spot-on production design by Bjarni Massi Sigurbjornsson supplies interiors that look as if they haven't changed since the 1940s, but which also provide reams of character information. The worn-looking Icelandic sweaters and ripped flannels that the brothers wear also speak volumes about men living without women.

As Hakonarson's beautifully modulated film progresses, recurring images contrast and poignantly resonate with meaning. A sheep pen bustling with baaing livestock is later filled with dead animals; Gummi's scooping up of Kiddi's frozen body after a drunken binge finds a tragic rhyme in the film's finale. Although some of the action is heart-rending, Hakonarson maintains a respectful tone of admirable restraint throughout.

Of course, the main reason the film registers so affectingly is the casting of two of Iceland's best actors. As the older, angrier brother, Juliusson (so good in the 2011 Directors' Fortnight title *Volcano*) shows a range that makes one long to see him as King Lear. But the audience sympathies are carried by Sigurjonsson, through whose kindly eyes the story unfolds.

Source: www.variety.com Alissa Siomon 15/5/15 Edited extracts/accessed 10/3/16

Some Thoughts On: *Far From Men*

What a wonderful piece of cinema. The power of the image truly came to the fore in this tightly constructed film. We were drawn in from the opening with a panning long shot of rock strewn deserts and valleys, finally arriving at the isolated school house; 'far from men', but not for long.

The film could have become dominated by its existential vision of a retreating world filled with endless cycles of 'eye for an eye' revenge and savagery. We were constantly reminded of our diminutive stature in space and time through long shots in which the characters crawled like ants across the landscape. Numerous shots dwelt on the backs of characters - their faces and thoughts hidden from us and each other.

However, ultimately, we were left with the possibility, the chance, of new pathways. The wonderful visual metaphor of Mohamed's choice to take the path to the desert and Daru's heart-wrenching decision to leave his beloved children, each in their own way represented the decision to go on, to choose life over the possibility of simply becoming another victim of inhumanity or being forced to choose a 'side'. After all, we are all just 'guests'.

Thanks once again to the committee for presenting such a great piece of cinema.

Paul Williams

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VALE : *Chris Topp*

On Wednesday 22nd June, our FISH family lost a very special member. After a year and a half of struggling against his illness and enduring countless treatments and unrelenting invasive procedures, Chris Topp finally succumbed, peacefully, to his insidious condition. Many of you knew Chris well, many would have heard of him and many of you would have been unaware of this gentle, funny, caring and intelligent man.

Chris was one of a small group of people who gathered 22 years ago to form FISH. He became our very first president and was responsible for steering FISH through its formative years. Chris, and his wife Trish, have been heavily involved within FISH since the beginning in a variety of roles and were made Life members in recognition of their hard work and commitment to our film group. Chris spoke at our 20th birthday celebrations at the end of 2014, along with the other ex-presidents of FISH, and expressed to me at that time his desire to return to the committee at some stage. It was not long after this that Chris was suddenly and heavily impacted by his illness.

All of us at FISH are so grateful for everything Chris did on our behalf. We extend our deepest and most heartfelt sympathies to Trish and her wonderful family and share their grief and sense of loss but at the same time rejoice at the fact that it was our great fortune and privilege to have had this wonderful man as part of our lives and film society. **Ross Armfield & the Committee**

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COMING UP:

August	<i>A Family Affair</i> (Greece)	Sunday 21 st & Tuesday 23 rd
September	<i>The Crow's Egg</i> (India)	Sunday 18 th & Tuesday 20 th
October	<i>Tanna</i> (Australia)	Sunday 23 rd & Tuesday 25 th
November	<i>Tehran Taxi</i> (Iran)	Sunday 20 th & Tuesday 22 nd
December	<i>Alex & Eve</i> (Australia)	Sunday 11 th & Tuesday 13 th
February '17	<i>The Nightingale</i> (China)	Sunday 12 th & Tuesday 14 th

Message from the President

The new season is upon us and the membership cards for it have been posted to all joining and re-joining members. There have been a few minor issues with Australia Post and the delivery of the cards to a couple of members. Please don't hesitate to get in touch with us if you haven't received your card/s yet or if you have any queries whatsoever about the new season or FISH procedures in general. After all the work of the renewal process ~ please store and secure your cards well!

We know all members try their best to be punctual for all screenings, however, obviously circumstances can arise causing arrival at the cinema after the screening has commenced. If this happens, we ask that members take the closest, most available seats when navigating in the dim light. Struggling to get to more central or preferred seats, past already seated members, can be very disruptive and indeed annoying. Thank you in anticipation of your cooperation in this regard.

A special welcome to people joining FISH for the very first time. We hope you will enjoy the quality and diversity of the films we have on offer in our brand new 16/17 season. We KNOW you'll enjoy the value!! The pressure is on to maintain the standards set with the last few seasons ~ we've had some outstanding cinema in that time. We are so lucky to be kicking off with *RAMS*, a much celebrated film and one that seemingly ticks all the boxes for another quality, quirky FISH outing. In fact the first seven films all look pretty good. I'm confident this season will hold its own, it should be wonderful, and it's for Chris!

Yours in film

Ross Armfield



FILMS IN THE SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS INC

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