



fish

Macadam Stories (Asphalte)
(France 2015)

DIRECTOR : Samuel Benchetrit

RUNNING TIME : 100 mins

RATING :

Synopsis:

A building in a housing project in Paris. One broken-down elevator. Three encounters between six characters. The extraordinary encounters that can be found within ordinary moments, drive this darkly humorous story, as the lonely existences of six solitary people give rise to surprising moments of compassion and intimacy.

Review: Philipa Hawker

French filmmaker Samuel Benchetrit's *Macadam Stories* is a tale of a crumbling block of flats and three unlikely partnerships that it nurtures, in unlikely and offbeat ways.

It's based on Benchetrit's childhood experiences, he says, in a milieu that's often written about in a negative fashion; he wanted to create a more generous, low-key sense of the small details of everyday life in the projects.

Macadam Stories is about people who take a fall, Benchetrit says; each one is also about a new arrival, or the experience of being made welcome. The film interweaves characters from short story collections he has published, as well as incorporating a narrative written specially for the film.

In one story thread, Monsieur Sternkowitz, a grumpy resident of the dilapidated block of flats, takes a tumble from an exercise bike with life-changing consequences. In another, Jeanne, an out-of-work actress (played with comic verve by Isabelle Huppert) moves into the block and forges a surprising relationship with an adolescent boy who lives down the hall. And there's a whimsical story about an American astronaut (Michael Pitt), who crash-lands on the roof and is given shelter by an elderly Arab woman.

Other elements connect the three pairs of characters. The maternal role (whether the mother is absent or present) has an important part in each narrative. And characters use cameras in very particular ways – as shields, Benchetrit says, but also as means of communicating, making connections with others. cont.

FILMS IN THE SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS INC

10.00 am Sunday 28th May 2017

8.15 pm Tuesday 30th May 2017

Review: (Cont.)

He had written one of the roles, the grumpy Sternkowitz, for Jean-Louis Trintignant, the legendary actor with whom he has a close professional and personal relationship: Trintignant's late daughter, Marie, was a former partner of Benchetrit and the mother of his son, Jules, who plays the adolescent boy in *Macadam Stories*.

It had been Trintignant's idea to adapt this story, Benchetrit says. When it came to make the movie, however, the shoot would have been too physically demanding, and he had to find another actor. It took him a long time; it was very difficult to get the image of Trintignant out of his mind. Finally, he says, "I decided it needed someone romantic. And that's not about good looks, it's about something else, some other quality." Gustave Kervern, a Belgian actor who deftly combines solidity and subtlety, was the man he chose.

Confined to a wheelchair after his fall, unable to use the apartment lift, Sternkowitz makes a desperate after-hours journey to a nearby hospital to buy something to eat from a vending machine. While he's there he strikes up a poignant, unpredictable relationship with a nurse (Valeria Bruni Tedeschi) whom he woos by passing himself off as a photographer for *Life* magazine.

The story of the actress and the teenager was the one written specially for the film. The teenage boy, Charly, seems bored and solitary at first, but he soon takes Jeanne under his wing, helping her to negotiate her new life in the flat and encouraging her to revisit her career. It's a relationship in which the child adopts the adult, nurturing role, yet never loses his adolescent spikiness. Benchetrit says he found plenty of reasons not to cast his son, Jules, as Charly. "I wanted someone younger, I didn't want to annoy him, it seemed complicated. But I did some tests with him, and he was great. He worked very hard, he learnt the script very quickly. And he was looking for something more, he wanted to understand the character. For every scene, he came with ideas."

When Charly is keen to see one of Jeanne's films, Benchetrit decided to use a clip of Huppert, although he didn't want one that was too well-known; he chose a scene from *The Lacemaker*, her breakthrough film from 1977, in which she plays a shy young woman driven to despair when a relationship falls apart. "It's not seen as much these days," Benchetrit says, "and I made it black and white to make it seem a little more distant." Huppert took the role of the actress, Benchetrit says, because she likes the opportunity to do comedy, and she found the script funny – she thought the story of the astronaut was hilarious. And she embraced the idea of playing a 'has-been', she liked playing with her own image within the film. "She's a funny person in real life, but people often think of her for tough roles."

Source: www.smh.com Philippa Hawker Edited extracts / accessed 19/4/2017

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COMING UP

Silent Film Festival : Saturday 10th June 2017 @ 2pm - St Jude's Bowral.

In conjunction with St Jude's Musical Society, Australia's Silent Film Festival will present a session of restored classic comedies accompanied by Dr Paul Paviour OAM.

Now You Tell One (1926) with Charley Bowers & *College* (1927) with Buster Keaton

Tickets \$20/\$15 concession ~ Cash sales only at the door

Bookings: 0419 267318 & www.ozsilentfilmfestival.com.au

Some Thoughts On: *Truman*

I just loved this gentle outing depicting the relationship of two old mates and dealing with the complexities and complications of a terminal medical condition. From the beautifully evocative and appropriate soundtrack, through the humour to the 'medical' scenes and then dealing with the practical day to day issues that arise in such circumstances, all were presented without cliché and overblown sentimentality.

The big questions that many of us may face down the track were all posed in a natural and understated way. Do I accept further treatment or not? Do I disclose everything to family and friends or try to protect them and reduce their concerns and worries? How do you deal with others' reactions, both positive and negative? Am I able to fully prepare both physically and emotionally for the inevitable? Should I have tried earlier and harder to visit and be with my old friend?

Outstandingly strong performances by the whole cast carried this funny and moving film to its delightful and unexpected conclusion. On second thoughts, Tomas getting Truman was always likely, given Julian's love for both of them and his habit of getting the best from his generous, old companion. My favourite scenes were the parting of father and son in Amsterdam and the night Tomas and Paula spent in the hotel room....not a romantic event as such, but one of emotional support, relief, release and a shared acceptance of losing someone they both cared so much for. Even Julian understood the 'rightness' of it the next morning in the hotel lobby. Just lovely.

Ross Armfield.

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I felt warmed by the gentleness of this movie, as it addressed the approaching death of the main character, and I was moved as I observed the men's friendship amidst the pain. All the men struggled to find their way in the face of Julian's terminal illness. While Julian expressed some of his feelings, Tomas and Nico had trouble showing theirs; and all three found it very difficult to put into words their affection for one another. They were, however, very good at hugging!

It was a poignant pleasure to accompany friends and family members, with humour, apology and respectful care, finding their different ways in such difficult emotional territory. There were lessons – including acknowledging past wrongs and taking care of one's dog – in what is it to be a true man (suggested by the dog's name?). **Neill Ustick**

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COMING UP:

May	<i>Macadam Stories</i> (France)	Sunday 28 th & Tuesday 30 th
June	<i>Labyrinth of Lies</i> (Germany)	Sunday 25 th & Tuesday 27 th
July	<i>Things to Come</i> (France/Germany)	Sunday 23 rd & Tuesday 25 th
August	<i>Toni Erdmann</i> (Germany)	Sunday 20 th & Tuesday 22 nd
September	<i>The Second Mother</i> (Brazil)	Sunday 17 th & Tuesday 19 th
October	<i>The Fencer</i> (Finland/Estonia)	Sunday 15 th & Tuesday 17 th
November	<i>The Last Hammer Blow</i> (France)	Sunday 19 th & Tuesday 21 st
December	<i>Kumiko the Treasure Hunter</i> (USA)	Sunday 10 th & Tuesday 12 th
February '18	<i>Jimmy's Hall</i> (UK)	Sunday 11 th & Tuesday 13 th

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Message from the President

The contrast between our last two films is why FISH is such an interesting, and at times, challenging film society. From *A Pigeon Sat....* to *Truman* ~ what journeys! We are very lucky indeed.

Thank you so much for your speedy replies and return of forms and funds for the renewal of your membership to FISH for our new season ahead, commencing in July. The rapid response was so overwhelming that our hard working membership secretary, David Cowie, had to take a short break on Hamilton Island! Your new membership cards will be sent to you AFTER the conclusion of our current season, so please don't worry if you were expecting them back by return mail. Your current cards will be collected at our June screenings, so in the meantime, hang on to them dearly.

The first seven films in the next season are listed elsewhere in the newsletter. It is a collection of films that we feel is at a level of interest and diversity to match the high standards and quality of our recent seasons. A synopsis of each one will be sent out with your new cards in a couple of months, but if you can't wait ~ Google them. They're terrific. One of the new films is the German comedy, (now they're two words you don't see together very often), *Toni Erdmann*. Just to give you a heads up, this very funny and highly reviewed film is quite long by our usual standards at two hours and forty two minutes duration. It's not as long as popular three hours plus movies like *Schindler's List*, *Titanic* or *The Wolf Of Wall Street* but long enough for it to probably be wise not to consume multiple cups of tea or coffee just prior to sitting down to watch it!!! I would like to send a special thank you to Gerard Aiken at The Empire who will schedule his Sunday afternoon program around our later-than-normal-finishing screening of, *Toni Erdmann*. Once more we are indebted to them. Thank you.

I look forward to seeing you again at our next cinematic outing, *Macadam Stories*.
Yours in film,

Ross Armfield



FILMS IN THE SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS INC

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