



fish

Alcarràs
(Spain/Italy 2022)

Spoiler alert: You may prefer to read this review after the screening

DIRECTOR : Carla Simon
RUNNING TIME : 120 mins
RATING : [M]

Synopsis:

For the large garrulous Sole clan, who have spent every summer of their lives picking fruit in the familial orchard, this looks to be the last in that tradition, as they face immanent eviction from their patch of land in Catalonia.

Review: Peter Bradshaw

Capitalism never looked more brutal than in this new Catalan-language movie with non-professionals from Carla Simón; it is about an extended family of peach farmers in the town of Alcarràs, people whose unhappiness and dysfunction are created by market forces. It was the winner of the Golden Bear at the Berlin film festival and the 2023 Spanish entry for the best international film Academy Award.

Simón's debut was the wonderfully tender childhood study *Summer 1993* and *Alcarràs* is her very accomplished follow-up. I felt it didn't quite have the same immediately accessible richness and sweetness, but this is a really shrewd, empathic and subtle movie which engulfs you in its dust and sweat and heat.

Quimet, played by Jordi Pujol Dolcet, is a middle-aged farmer who lives with his clan in a rambling rented house with its own swimming pool, surrounded by peach trees, whose delicious fruit he is getting ready to harvest: backbreakingly hard work which he does by hand with family members, together with some African immigrant labour. His wife Dolors (Anna Otín) helps, as does his son Roger (Albert Bosch) – though Dolors has onerous housework and childcare, as well as having to massage Quimet's aching back, with little thanks from her grumpy and depressed husband. Their teen daughter Mariona (Xénia Roset) is busy rehearsing a dance number for the town's summer talent show, and their youngest, Iris (Ainet Jounou), likes playing in an abandoned car in the farmland with her cousins Pau (Isaac Rovira) and Pere (Joel Rovira).

Cont.

FILMS IN THE SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS INC

10.00 am Sunday 11th February 2024

8.15 pm Tuesday 13th February 2024

Review: Cont.

To Iris's awestruck astonishment, strange grownups arrive one day and take away her beloved car: this is an awful omen of the problems to come. The supermarkets are offering Quimet insultingly low prices for his produce, and like other farmers he is getting ready for a mass protest. But his landlord, Pinyol (Jacob Diarte) has in any case curtly informed him that all the peach trees are to be ripped out and replaced with solar panels, and if he wants, he can retrain as a solar panel engineer, which is far more lucrative. Quimet's elderly father Rogelio (Josep Abad) failed to get their land-tenancy in writing: it was merely a gentleman's agreement with Pinyol's late father which the son has ignored.

This agony tears their family apart: Quimet is enraged that his way of life has been cancelled, but his sister and brother-in-law want to take the solar panel deal and his son Roger is in any case hurt at his father's contemptuous indifference to all his new ideas on irrigation. And so Quimet, exploited by the landlord class, is also cruel to his own staff, the labourers that he must mostly lay off.

Movies about rural ways of life are often supposed to be all about the sacred, seasonal rhythm of reaping and sowing. But here there is no rhythm. There is just one continuous throb of anxiety: whether the crop will fail, whether it will be eaten by rabbits, whether it will be under-priced by the supermarket buyers. And now the whole system has been thrown out. There is a new harvest to be gathered: solar power.

Simón's film asks us: is Quimet right to be outraged or not? Is there something sacred about the planting, growing and selling of peaches? Aren't solar panels, with their superiority to fossil fuels, just as important? Might Quimet be, in some inexpressibly painful sense, simply loyal to unhappiness, loyal to a business that has not brought him satisfaction? There is something agonising, almost self-harming in Quimet's protest stunt: he dumps a mountain of his precious peaches outside the supermarket offices: a vast, squelchy pile symbolising his wretchedness and rage. It is a deeply intelligent, humane drama.

Source: www.guardian.com ~ Peter Bradshaw 6/1/2023 : Edited extracts accessed 18/7/2023

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Some Thoughts on: *My Old School*

These recollections are for those of us, (or you, more precisely), with really good memories, as we travel back to early December 2023, when we saw the mind stretching documentary that still has me working out exactly who was who!!

This may not have been a great film, or even a great documentary for that matter, but it was so very, very good at being interesting, intriguing, bizarre, humorous and also quite sad in places and inducing some real concerns for the mental health issues of our film's focus, Brian MacKinnon, or should that be Brandon Lee? This strange, true story fitted in well as our season finale. Not too heavy, completely unique in both subject matter and presentation. A worthy choice FISH committee, thank you.

Some of the aspects of the film that I particularly enjoyed included the lip-synced voice of Brian MacKinnon by actor Alan Cumming. A strange task in itself, as our film's central subject was quite willing to be involved and interviewed, but not appear in person. The solution proved very successful and reality returned with actual footage and photos at the conclusion of the film. Cont.

The animation worked well too, bringing an amusing and colourful variation to the more sterile line of talking heads, (interesting as they were), keeping the film flowing.

There were so many intriguing moments. Was his mother in cahoots with him by playing his 'grandmother'? Would he be recognised by his former teachers? But perhaps the most bizarre moment came when he was answering the teacher's roll calling as a 'new' student, when his original, real name was called, but belonging to another lad altogether. Wow.

I'm sure this strange but true story would have prompted many questions and opinions on the way home and for the next little while. Perhaps, would I ever have the audacity to attempt such a scam myself?

Would one ever really desire those years of doubt, anxiety, routine, homework, school bag lunches, detention, excursions, uniforms, canteen tucker, the cane or school discos and schoolies week just to have another crack at achieving a particular final examination result? I don't think so,but then again..... my personal high school may have become co-ed by now for this second time around!!!

Finally, our film provided a beautiful moment for me, (and I'm sure for any members of my vintage or older), in the closing stages. As the credits rolled, the singer Lulu sang an upbeat closing song over them. How wonderfully appropriate this choice of songstress proved to be. Lulu sang the hit song *To Sir With Love* back in the Sixties. She also acted in the film similarly titled, alongside Sidney Poitier and Judy Geeson. What better choice than this to accompany *My Old School*?

Thought provoking, emotionally moving, humorous and BIZARRE.
Thanks FISH, bring on 2024.

Ross Armfield.

More Thoughts on: *My Old School*

Weird. Weird subject, weird situation, weird mix of animation, actual historical footage, older ex-students acting their younger selves, an actor acting a person who was acting. Have to give the actor his due, though – his lip-syncing seemed perfect.

But Brandon Lee – what are we to make of him? I wondered about the doco-maker's intent. Obviously, entertainment and "human interest", the oddity of the whole story. But there seemed to me to be a curious vacuum at the heart of the film, in the lack of any sense of character or personality of the protagonist. He was – perhaps – a master manipulator – or were those stories of "mind control" simply more lies? I couldn't work out whether those shots towards the end of the film of the older Brandon/Brian were in fact the person himself, or the actor.

Why wait so long after failing the first semester of Medicine, to pretend to be a school student again? Why, indeed, go back to his own school? How could he have perpetrated the fraud and not have known that there was a cut-off age to enter Medicine? What happened in the 20 years between the fraud being discovered (2002?) and the making of the documentary? And most of all, what sort of a doctor would he have made? That he was extremely clever seems indisputable, but that sense of manipulation, of being willing to treat people as objects, almost chess pieces, I found chilling. There are doctors, indeed specialists in many different fields, who are brilliant in their diagnoses/surgeries/research but who lack any human empathy. Perhaps he could have become one such.

I'm glad for the pharmacist who remembered his school years with gratitude for Brandon's friendship, but had I been a school friend, I'd have felt used. In the end, I'm with his co-star in *South Pacific* who on seeing for the first time the actual footage of Brandon and her then-16-year-old self in the scene with "the kiss", said with obvious discomfort, it was "icky". **Trish Topp**

Message from the President

We hope that everyone has had a pleasant festive season and that 2024 will bring you good health and happiness. We hope to contribute to the happiness!

You will delight in two different points of view of *My Old School*, our December film. Many thanks to Trish & Ross for their contributions.

We welcome your reviews of anything we screen.

Our perception of a scene/film is influenced by semiotics (how we feel when we enter the cinema), our education and our life experiences. Screenwriters and directors only have (generally) one chance to convey an idea to the viewer... don't you admire them?

A recurring nag: Please arrive before the film begins, and please stay until the credits have rolled. Preaching to the converted, but the latecomers are the early leavers (I am a reformed early leaver).

Roz Garwen

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COMING UP

March	<i>Saint Omer</i> [France]	Sunday 17 th & Tuesday 19 th
April	<i>Nostalgia</i> [Italy]	Sunday 7 th & Tuesday 9 th
May	<i>The Last Film Show</i> [India]	Sunday 19 th & Tuesday 21 st
June	<i>Goliath</i> [France]	Sunday 16 th & Tuesday 18 th

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