



fish

*My Old School*  
(UK 2022)

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

DIRECTOR : Jono McLeod  
RUNNING TIME : 105 mins  
RATING : M

**Synopsis:**

In 1995, a 32-year-old medical student called Brian MacKinnon became a global news story when it emerged he had, two years earlier, posed as a teenager called Brandon Lee to reattend his old school. A documentary for anyone who has fantasised about going back in time to their school days.

**Review: Peter Bradshaw**

Here is a documentary for anyone who's ever suffered from impostor syndrome or ever fantasised about going back in time to their school days, to reverse all those heartbreaks and humiliations. In other words: all of us.

In 1995, a 32-year-old failed medical student called Brian MacKinnon, posed as a teenager to re attend his old school, Glasgow's Bearsden Academy, taught by his old teachers who did not recognise him, just so that he could retake his Higher exams and reapply to medical schools, which would not admit people over 30.

One of his classmates was Jono McLeod, and it is McLeod who has directed this film about MacKinnon's extraordinary true-life tragicomedy, interviewing his school contemporaries and using animated sequences with Lulu and Clare Grogan voicing incidental characters. He also interviews MacKinnon himself who did not want to appear on camera, lip-synched instead by the actor Alan Cumming. It's a verbatim-cinema effect which is intriguing if misleading. Cumming has a naturally approachable, sympathetic face whereas MacKinnon's is blanker and more mask-like.

Cont.

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FILMS IN THE SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS INC

10.00 am Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> December 2023

8.15 pm Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> December 2023

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## Review: Cont.

With staggering chutzpah, this grown man, not so very far from middle age, put on a school uniform and bluffed his way through class, befuddled pupils who didn't want to mention how weirdly old he looked, delighted teachers with his intelligence and maturity and even took the starring role in the school play, *South Pacific*, to universal acclaim, singing the line: "Younger than springtime am I ...!" He had to kiss his 16-year-old leading lady, a disputed moment which is the subject of this film's great revelation. MacKinnon avoided having to present a birth certificate to the teacher in charge of admissions – who declined to be interviewed – bamboozling her with a preposterous tale about having been privately tutored as he travelled around Canada with his now dead opera-singer mother who was estranged from his university professor dad.

He might have got away with it entirely. In fact, he did get away with it entirely, in that he was admitted to Dundee University's medical school, but thrown out in his first year when the scandal emerged, either because a classmate had seen his passport while on a Spanish holiday with him or because MacKinnon couldn't help confessing – it's not entirely clear.

Which brings us to the semi-acknowledged elephant in the room. Wasn't there something revoltingly inappropriate in this thirtysomething male consorting with teenage girls? Fascinatingly, everyone in the *South Pacific* cast (including MacKinnon and his leading lady) and everyone who saw it, remembers the climactic onstage kiss being embarrassing, sure, because it was such an awkward platonic peck. But then McLeod shows the video taken of the performance, which reveals something very different: a pretty definite kiss. Groupthink memory is trumped by the facts. Then there is the sad issue of MacKinnon's elderly mother and how much she knew about his fraud.

This is a film which could be put alongside other "faker" films, like Louis Myles's *Kaiser: The Greatest Footballer Never to Play Football* or Bart Layton's *The Imposter*, in that it shows us not just a rational trickster who is coolly carrying off a dangerous pretence to get what he wants, but as someone in the grip of something beyond his conscious control. And you could compare it to many high school movies: after all, the whole high school movie genre is driven by thirtysomething screenwriters who are obsessed with their school days.

My own theory is that MacKinnon's spectacular dysfunctional meltdown helped create the market for the explosively popular, but toxically nostalgic website *Friends Reunited*, launched five years later in 2000. He was the guy crazy enough to live the dream: not the dream of being a medical student (which is entirely incidental to the story) but the dream (or nightmare) of being a teenager for a second time.

Source: [www.guardian.com](http://www.guardian.com) ~ Peter Bradshaw 19/8/2022 : Edited extracts accessed 18/7/2023

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## COMING UP

February 2024      *Alcarras* [Spain]

Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> & Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup>

## **Some Thoughts on: *Decision to Leave***

Disclaimer: My observations that follow are almost entirely based upon the visual experience of *Decision to Leave*. The heads atop FISH members of just average height, sitting in the row immediately in front of me, plus, (and much more impactful), my continually drooping head, combined to prevent me reading at least fifty percent of the subtitles!!!

Thank goodness for the detailed review in our newsletter which I had just read the day before. At least I had the gist of the screenplay and the direction this unique, creative and visually stunning film was taking us on.

Despite these subtitle compromisers, there was so much to appreciate about this little beauty from South Korea.

This very stylish murder mystery was perhaps a trifle long at two hours and eighteen minutes, but succeeded well in pleasing both the eye and the mind.

For the mind, Director Park Chan-Wook gave us complex characters such as the emotionally challenged hard working detective, who happened to suffer from insomnia. We also had the challenge of seemingly erratic editing and jump cuts to different times and locations. This took some time to get used to, and was undoubtedly difficult for some people to grasp, but all made sense as the film progressed. The way texting and mobile phones in general were used was both innovative and interesting. The fabulous cast delivered in spades. Totally believable and engaging, they evoked real empathy as the plot twisted, turned and progressed.

For the eye, we had treat after treat. Beautifully shot in vibrant colour, who could forget the crisp, clear images of lunch food trays, the spectacular mountain murder site and its wonderfully dramatic surrounding rock formations. There were creative and extraordinary drone shots, such as the two cars that pull up and park at the beach site in the final desperate scenes, providing an amazing image. The most unforgettable and emotionally engaging images of all though, must surely have been when Seo-rae made her 'decision to leave' at the conclusion of the film. The sand, the digging of the hole, the incoming tide and the surrounding surf and rocks. This was seriously powerful cinema.

Once again, FISH has provided not only another thought provoking film, but another great opportunity to experience a taste of alternative cultures and lifestyles, so different from our own.

**Ross Armfield.**

## Message from the President

What a joy it is to hear such divergent views about a film! It is refreshing to see different people from other countries, to help us work out our own better-informed opinions and to widen our perspectives, albeit from a cinema seat.

Please be aware that this newsletter will be the last hard copy we are sending, indeed if that is how you are reading it. Next year all of our correspondence will be by email except for the tiny number of people with no email address for whom we will post hard copies. In that way we are able to spend less money from your annual subscriptions.

So we are asking you to please verify that we have your correct email address to save confusion early next year.

We hope that you have a wonderful festive season and that you are looking forward to the films we have chosen for you for 2024. The first film is *Alcarras* (Spain) on 11th and 13th February.

Roz Garwen

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A stylized, handwritten-style logo for 'fish' in a bold, black font.

### FILMS IN THE SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS INC

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