



fish

Days of the Bagnold Summer
(UK 2021)

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

DIRECTOR : Simon Bird
RUNNING TIME : 86mins
RATING : M

Synopsis:

Susan has been abandoned by her husband who now lives in Florida with his new younger wife. Scruffy and lazy teenage son Daniel, is looking forward to spending the summer with his Dad in the US. When that prospect ends, mother and son have to spend the summer alone.

Review: Mark Kermode

Lockdown has done strange things to families. Some have been stretched to breaking point by lengthy periods of communal incarceration; others have been brought together, reforging bonds that may have been broken. In *Days of the Bagnold Summer*, a bittersweet coming-of-age tale (for both of its central characters), mother and son Sue and Daniel aren't actually in lockdown but they might as well be. Forced to spend several weeks getting under each other's feet, theirs is a tale of isolation and social distancing that has nothing to do with Covid-19 but still strikes a timely chord.

Monica Dolan is terrific as Sue Bagnold, the put-upon yet quietly indomitable fiftysomething librarian whose feckless former husband is now swanning around the States with his pregnant new partner. Lank-haired metal fan Daniel (rising star Earl Cave, seen recently in *True History of the Kelly Gang*) had been preparing to spend the summer in Florida with his dad, to whose many failings he remains wilfully oblivious. So when, inevitably, Dad lets Daniel down at the last moment, Sue is left facing a six-week sulkathon from her surly and perennially pissed-off son. "It's not my fault you're the most boring person in the world!" snaps Daniel, who blames his mother for *everything* – from passing comment on the lyrics of Metallica ("it's *poetry!*") to agreeing to go on a date with his history teacher, Mr Porter (Rob Brydon, oozing smarm).

Cont.

FILMS IN THE SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS INC

10.00 am Sunday 12th February 2023
8.15 pm Tuesday 14th February 2023

Review: Cont.

The Bagnolds were first introduced to *Observer* readers in 2009, when author and illustrator Joff Winterhart was runner-up in the Observer/Cape graphic short story prize. That story blossomed into the 2012 graphic novel on which Simon Bird's funny, acerbic, yet surprisingly tender film is based. Bird (best known for his starring role in *The Inbetweeners*) captures both the levity and the pathos of Winterhart's source, aided by Lisa Owens's excellently empathetic script, which is poignant and affecting.

Despite replacing the sketchy, monochrome squares of the graphic novel with colourful, widescreen images, Bird and cinematographer Simon Tindall are careful to retain a sense of lonely intimacy, with still or slow-moving cameras creating a visual framework that somehow combines the epic within the everyday. Elsewhere, suburban streets and shopping centres are lent an almost western scope, while the vast blue skies of a beach trip provide an ironic backdrop to a scene of chilly confrontation between this odd couple.

There are, of course, other characters in this story, ranging from Sue's more outgoing sister Carol, played with a smidgen of acerbic sass by Alice Lowe; to Tamsin Greig as Astrid, the hippy-dippy mother of Daniel's best friend, who manages to get under Sue's skin. But despite everything that goes on around them – whether its Daniel's hilarious attempts to join a local death-metal band (a subplot with a lovely pay-off) or Sue's misadventures with Mr Porter – it's the mismatched mother and son who hold our attention at all times. Winterhart's novel may open with the declaration that "When someone looks back and writes a history of this summer, two people they will almost certainly leave out are Sue and Daniel Bagnold", yet Bird finds something great in their sidelined lives – whether its yearning and loss, or love and laughter. The frost between these two starts to thaw, but as they both grow into different people, the warmth we share feels neither contrived nor sentimental.

Interlocking vignettes swing from laugh-out-loud comedy to piercing melancholia, but at the centre of it all there is a genuine sense of rebirth and renewal – no mean feat for a small movie with a big heart and a surprisingly wide-ranging vision.

Source: www.guardian.com – Mark Kermode 7/6/2020 Edited extracts accessed 16/11/2022

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COMING UP

February	<i>Days of the Bagnold Summer</i> [UK]	Sunday 12 th & Tuesday 14 th
March	<i>Wheel of Fortune & Fantasy</i> [Japan]	Sunday 12 th & Tuesday 14 th
April	<i>A Son</i> [Tunisia]	Sunday 2 nd & Tuesday 4 th
May	<i>The Rose Maker</i> [France]	Sunday 14 th & Tuesday 16 th
June	<i>Hit the Road</i> [Iran]	Sunday 18 th & Tuesday 20 th

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Some Thoughts on: *Antoinette in the Cevennes*

This cinematic outing to the Cevennes in the south of France, was what I like to label as FISH Lite. As stated in Virginia's introduction to the Tuesday night audience, it was deliberately chosen for our December screening as a perfect lead in to the festive season.

Although it may not have been as deep, meaningful and thought provoking as our more recent screenings, it still had many elements of merit that justified its selection as our Xmas season offering.

These elements included great shots of the ruggedly beautiful Cevennes region, (where would we be in scenic landscape films these days without drone shots?), and lots of amusing moments as our heroine struggled with her dangerous quest for a married man AND an, at times, very wilful donkey.

In addition, there were some fine performances from a strong cast of characters. I think my favourite scenes were of the nightly meetings and meals of companion hikers where the preferred topic of conversation revolved around Antoinette's physical progress with Patrick the donkey and her emotional progress with unrequited love.

The somewhat ditzy Antoinette was portrayed well by actress Laure Calamy, who seems to specialise in these rom-com and light-hearted productions, (some of you may remember her from a popular and very funny Netflix series entitled, *Call My Agent*). However, of course the real star of the film was Patrick the donkey. Lovably endearing one moment and exasperating and frustratingly uncooperative the next.

As implied in the views expressed above, romantic comedy is probably my least favourite film genre, but this really was a quite delightful piece of light-hearted fun and was an ideal way to approach the often hectic and stressful moments at the end of the year.

Having said that, I eagerly await plunging into a brand new set of films in 2023, full of the thought provoking fare that FISH is so great at delivering to us.

Ross Armfield.

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Message from the President

Welcome to the February - June, 2023 FISH season.

By now you should have received your new cards and a synopsis of each of the films we will be screening. Full reviews will also be on our website.

Thanks once again to Ross Armfield for providing a review of our last film of 2022, *Antoinette in the Cevennes*. This light- hearted film seemed to me to be just what we needed at the end of a trying year. I have to confess that for me the star of the film was the wonderful donkey!

We look forward to seeing you all at our first screening.

Sandra Gillespie

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FILMS IN THE SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS INC

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