



MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Those of you who were not tempted to attend our AGM on 22nd September will not know that our/your committee for FISH was re-elected and we are delighted that Simon Woffenden has joined our ranks.

Several friends have told us that our films have been thought-provoking and interesting but they request a comedy or two. We will do our best, but good comedy films are few and far between.

Our wonderful local art gallery Ngununggala is having a fund-raiser at the Empire on **12th November**. They will be showing *The Pool* about the Bondi Icebergs Swim Club and the director will be present for a Q&A.

We are happy to publicise films for our local friends as long as they are not overtly political.

Please continue to send us your views/reviews of our film choices. We rely on professional reviews, film festivals and opinions from critic friends but we are open to suggestions, provided that the films are with distributors.

We are always grateful to the Empire management for their help. With best wishes to all,
Roz Garwen



FILMS IN THE SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS INC

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FILMS IN THE SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS INC

10.00 am Sunday 20th October 2024

8.15 pm Tuesday 22nd October 2024

The Last Night of Amore
[Italy 2023]

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

DIRECTOR : Andrea Di Stefano

RUNNING TIME : 124mins

RATING : M

Synopsis:

This stylish thriller was a big hit at the Italian box office in 2023. An honourable Milanese police lieutenant's spotless record comes under threat over the course of one fateful night.

Review: Vittoria Scarpa

A spectacular gliding flight over Milan, at night, ends near the city's central station, inside a small flat crammed with buzzing people. There is an air of surprise party, there is music, trays of freshly baked lasagne and children playing. Friends, relatives and his young wife, who is coordinating everything, are all waiting for him, Franco Amore, to celebrate his last day of work before retiring after 35 years of honourable service in the state police. When he arrives, Franco can hardly hold back tears, he even looks upset. Such a surprise, such emotions – his grown-up daughter is even here, connected by video call from abroad! But when he gets a call from his boss, and not to wish him a happy birthday, Franco has to leave the party. What happens? Before returning home, had Franco really gone for a run as everyone thought?

This is how Andrea Di Stefano's *The Last Night of Amore* begins, before jumping back ten days. Ten days earlier, Franco (Pierfrancesco Favino), one step away from retirement, is offered a seemingly simple and highly remunerative 'little job' commissioned by a Chinese clan. An honest policeman who has never shot a living soul, he is reluctant to accept, but his wife's cousin, a Calabrian whose activities remain dubious and for whom Franco already works as a personal security guard, manages to convince him. We then discover that the upright Franco, is in fact related to people who gravitate around the 'ndrangheta. Over the years this seeming conflict of interest has impinged upon his police career. Yet low pay, rewards that never arrive, and difficulty in making ends meet are the breeding ground for the unedifying drift of even the most unsuspecting of agents.

Di Stefano directs this thriller/drama with a steady pulse, which succeeds in conveying the right amount of suspense and subterranean tension. A good narrative rhythm is maintained and the device of re-enacting the same scenes from different points of view is effectively used.

Favino's acting talents are well known, while other performances to note are Linda Caridi as Franco's wife Viviana and Francesco Di Leva, in the role of Dino, Franco's friend and colleague, another agent – a good man – for whom corruption is almost a necessary double job.

Some Thoughts on: *Farewell, Mr Haffmann*

What a sense of doom permeated this movie.

The deal done between Haffmann and the (at that stage) decent Mercier has moral ambiguities from the start and these multiplied thick and fast through the changing circumstances. The desire for a child overrides everything for Mercier – what, he asks, is a man who cannot father a child? Inevitably his plan sets up a relationship between his wife Blanche and Haffmann, but not the one he intended. Neither of them wants it either but, despite being asexual, this relationship grows into something real.

Mercier develops a growing horror at what he's become – compromised as a father, as a jeweller and as a collaborator – and takes it out in violence against Blanche. He comes home drunk and rabid from Nazi parties to which Blanche refuses to go. Of course, Haffmann will seem like a refuge to Blanche who grows in stature throughout the film. The decency which her husband showed at the start becomes something real in her.

I found myself wondering at the ease with which we all tell lies to ourselves to try to ease our moral burdens. How would I have reacted in similar circumstances? I was slightly horrified to find myself responding to the colour of the few scenes in which the glamorous mistresses of the Nazis visit Mercier's shop, wearing lipstick and beautiful clothes. How easy it is to become seduced by this, in contrast to the drabness and darkness of the rest of the film.

This film must be uncomfortable viewing for French audiences, but it could equally apply to all of us. Given that we hear so few escape stories from the time of the Shoah, there seemed a very tidy "neatness" in Mercier's undoing, all caused by himself, and in Haffmann's escape – and even in what seems to have been the survival of his family in such an uncertain time and place. The sheer chance and timing which permitted these outcomes is certainly not impossible, but it does seem improbable. Perhaps this neatness lies in the origins of the film because it was originally a play and you could imagine the script working really well in the confined space of a stage with a small cast.

It's a film which will resonate with me for a long time. Thank you as always to Fish and the Empire.

Trish Topp.

Many thanks again, for your insightful comments Trish. [Ed.]

More Thoughts on: *Farewell, Mr Haffmann*

FISH certainly 'delivered the goods' when it offered the superlative piece of French moviemaking *Farewell Mr Haffmann*. With a cast composed of a stalwart of French cinema, Daniel Auteuil ably accompanied by Giles Lellouche (very recently seen in *Suddenly*) and Sara Giraudeau (remembered from the utterly magnificent *Le Bureau*) this movie was beguiling from the start.

Set in the early days of the WW2 German occupation of Paris we meet M. Joseph Haffmann, an established and respected jeweller who, being of Jewish faith, suddenly finds himself having to urgently relocate his family to unoccupied France to avoid deportation while he remains to 'sell' the business to his partially disabled assistant, François, on the condition that he buys it back at the end of the war - needless to say, this fanciful plan, heavily based on trust, is doomed from the start and, instead of following his family to safety as intended, Joseph is forced to move in with François and his wife, Blanche, in the apartment above the shop; this arrangement does not last and he is forced to move into the cellar where he is confined for some time, unable to leave.

We see François' character develop in a less than favourable light as he forms a friendship with German officers on whom he depends for his business; he sees his new situation offering financial success and has no intention of honouring the agreement with Joseph. François (who is supposedly infertile) also forms a rather bizarre plot for his (very unwilling) wife to be impregnated by M. Haffmann to give them a much-wanted child! This plot (unfulfilled) leads to a widening schism between François and Blanche while she becomes closer and more sympathetic to Joseph.

François' greed is finally his undoing when, assuming the (Jewish) identity of Joseph in order to sell a valuable painting, he is arrested by the gendarmes and, having been betrayed by Blanche, is imprisoned to await, we assume, deportation. Joseph, in turn, assumes the non-Jewish identity of François and escapes to re-join his family. Blanche remains in the shop.

I'm sure this movie is not without its faults but this viewer thoroughly enjoyed it in all aspects as I think most of the audience did.

Thank you, FISH.

Roger Thompson

Thank you also Roger, for taking the time to email your comments. [Ed.]

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COMING UP

November	<i>Goodbye Julia</i> [Sudan]	Sunday 17 th & Tuesday 19 th
December	<i>Mad About the Boy</i> [UK]	Sunday 8 th & Tuesday 10 th
February '25	<i>The Road to Patagonia</i> [Aust.]	Sunday 16 th & Tuesday 18 th
March	<i>Citizen Kane</i> [USA]	Sunday 16 th & Tuesday 18 th