

TER's Picks For EIFF 2013 – Frances Ha and Svengali



Greta Gerwig throws some shapes in Noah Baumbach's
Frances Ha

When I ask my friends if they'd like to come along to a film festival with me, a lot of them reply "no thanks, I'd prefer to go see Fast and Furious 6 instead". Now, Fast and Furious 6 is a lot of fun and I enjoyed it immensely, but the point is that many audiences have certain preconceived notions about the movies that appear at festivals. Today I'm going to do my best to dispel those notions by highlighting a couple of the most fun and accessible films playing at this year's EIFF, either one of which would make a great Friday night at the cinema.

Frances Ha

In his career as a writer and director, Noah Baumbach has often come back to the same central theme of people either refusing or unwilling to grow up and lead "proper" adult lives. These movies tend to be mostly serious with occasional flashes of humour. While his latest film treads similar thematic ground, this time he has a secret weapon: co-writer and leading lady Greta Gerwig. Literally throwing herself into the role of Frances, Gerwig brings a lightness of touch and a winning vulnerability to just about every shot in the film.

Frances is a 27-year-old struggling dancer living in New York with Sophie, her best friend from college. When Sophie, a successful publisher, moves on to a more upmarket neighbourhood, Frances is left to find her own place in the city and in life. Moving from friend to friend, apartment to

apartment and setback to setback, she has to decide if she's going to keep living on impulse or take advantage of her talent and become a real grown-up.

Making full use of the city landscape and shot in crisp black and white, the movie comes across as Baumbach's ode to the 60's French New Wave (even going so far as to give Frances a brief sojourn to Paris), and there are plenty of little homages to find if you are a fan of that genre. The characters of Lev and Benji might as well have been called Jules and Jim, for example. But even if you don't know your Godard from your Truffaut, you'll be hard pushed to not be caught up in this film's infectious optimism and good humour.

Svengali

Expanded from a partly improvised web series, Svengali is the story of Dixie, a guy from small-town Wales who goes to London determined to find a band that he can turn into superstars. His relentlessly upbeat nature and naivete leave him wide open to be taken advantage of, but through a combination of his luck and likability, he manages to come within touching distance of his dream. Can he make it all the way? Well, I don't want to spoil it for you. Suffice it to say that it's the journey that matters, not the destination.

With Dixie, writer and star Jonny Owen has created a character that you just can't help but root for and surrounded him with a fun supporting cast including Martin Freeman as a mod record store owner and Michael Smiley as an urbane debt collector. Vicky McClure is excellent too as Shell, Dixie's ever-supportive girlfriend.

The comedy in Svengali is broad and constant, and never afraid of a good stereotype. Everyone in London calls Dix "Sheepshagger", and when our hero takes a trip back home, the taxi rank at the train station comprises a guy with an unsaddled horse. Anyone who wanders into Svengali expecting something deep and meaningful will soon get themselves set

straight. This has the potential to be a good crowd-pleaser and bodes well for Owen's future career.

Both of these films are playing tomorrow night. Frances Ha starts at 8:30 at the Filmhouse, while Svengali kicks off ten minutes later at Cineworld. Each has an encore screening on Saturday as well. You can get tickets for these and all the other films via the EIFF website at www.edfilmfest.org.uk