

Gareth Jones,
director of *DESIRE* © TC



THE DESIRE FOR CREATIVE FREEDOM

Interview with Gareth Jones, director of *DESIRE* By Christopher Peck

movies offered escapism, a fantasy world in which Britain's establishment remains the world's number one safeguard against all manner of totalitarian lunacy.

Perhaps sensing that many Britons would find this hard to swallow in the rebellious atmosphere of the 1960s, Saltzman and Broccoli went on to make *THE IPCRESS FILE* in 1965. Michael Caine's Palmer is an island of competence in a sea of bureaucratic infighting, and in his competence there is still a glimmer of hope.

When *TINKER, TAILOR, SOLDIER, SPY* premiered on television in 1979, however, that glimmer had almost petered out amidst the Winter of Discontent's social and economic chill; the miniseries itself powerfully capturing the depressed mood of the 1970s.

This capacity to exorcise the demons that went with 20th Century Britain's rapidly diminishing influence in world affairs from a number of different perspectives – cautionary, escapist, cynical and tragic – goes some way towards explaining the pre-eminence of British spy films.

The Spying Game: British Cinema and the Secret State continues with *NEXT OF KIN & THE MAN BETWEEN* at 12.00pm on Saturday 19 September

Writer / director Gareth Jones arrives at the Cambridge Film Festival with his new film *DESIRE* within just a few weeks of the 40th Anniversary of his first trip to Cambridge as an Undergraduate attending St Johns College. Reflecting on his time at Cambridge fondly and his own time performing in University produced plays he shares a poignant moment; "When I think back to all the acting all those years ago, to be back here with a film is really moving."

A prolific writer and director for the past 25 years Jones' latest film *DESIRE* is perhaps his most personal work to date. Discussing the project he recalls; "I was coming back from summer holiday with my wife, when I said I'm fed up. I'm fed up with this project going nowhere, I'm fed up with being messed about by authorities, agencies, financiers, and guarantors. I have an idea and I know the minute you say yes okay it works, that we will make the film and you will know

why we will be able to make the film. I told it to her in five minutes and she said alright we'll do it and from that moment on we as a company, Fiona as producer and I as writer director, were instantly committed to the film and we knew that it was going to happen. Now that is extremely unusual."

Having committed to a project of such ambitious scale Jones found himself in a similarly pressurised situation to his screenwriting protagonist Ralph (Oscar Pearce). "There was terror. There was no editorial input from anywhere else. I knew that I had to get it right from inside my own head. There was no one else that was going to do it for me and I was going to be solely responsible for it." Despite the pressure Jones and his multi-talented producer, composer,

designer, wife Fiona Howe set about creating their film their way.

In order to secure the level of intensity in the performances that would prove so integral to the final film's success Jones was very specific in his casting insisting on theatre trained actors. "There are only four actors in the film for 90 minutes so you have to put them through their paces. I knew that actors without a serious background wouldn't be able to vary their performances and interpret the roles over a 90 minute period." Discussing the final performances from his cast Jones conveys his appreciation for their dedicated work stating; "The actors were lovely because they were on camera for quite a lot of the day so they really felt they were giving a performance and the

performance grew exponentially as they went along. When they weren't on camera they were revising their lines." The only drawback of this dedication, from the perspective of producer Fiona, was a lack of outtakes that she had eagerly been hoping to upload on to YouTube.

The casting of Tella Kpomahou in the role of Néné was also of great significance to the film. The director recollects; "I first met her at the African Cinema Festival in Tarifa Southern Spain and then saw her in a play in Paris where she is based. I admired her energy and commitment to her performances immensely. I thought to myself this actress is never going to get a chance to perform in England because she has no financial independence from West Africa. She wouldn't even get a work permit here unless she was invited so that's what we did. She was certainly a central element from the start as she was about the only person I knew who could play that part." As a predominantly French

speaking actress both she and the production crew had to adapt to their multilingual environment fairly rapidly, however this proved less complicated than imagined as a degree of secondary school French classes began to return to the minds of the crew and pretty soon Jones, fluent in both languages, was directing bilingually.

Having successfully completed the ambitious and personal project what now does Jones desire for the film? "I really want to get inside people's heads because I feel very strongly that British film particularly has ostracised itself into the third person or sometimes even third person plural and has completely abandoned the first person. And I think that weakens and dilutes the identification of the audience. I wanted to keep all my characters very much in the first person."

DESIRE is screened on Saturday 19 September at 3.45pm

THREE'S COMPANY

Aurora (Manuela Martelli) and Ale (Diego Ruiz) are a young couple who escape from their families at Christmas, breaking into an empty house and making themselves at home. The two have grown distant and they fight and bicker over their feelings for one another. Finding a sick girl hidden in the greenhouse they take her under their wing and the three begin an unconventional relationship. Together they help each other through their problems, making attempts to discover where each of their lives will be heading next.

NAVIDAD lingers on precious moments of troubled and inhibited adolescence. Sebastián Campos' exposé of beautiful teens taking those tentative steps into adulthood sparkles with both maturity and sensitivity. The three teens are not only the central characters, they exist in the film almost entirely alone, whilst the camera flirts

NAVIDAD // Sebastián Lelio

with them just as much as they flirt with one another. While *NAVIDAD* may not offer anything new (with such a subject having been previously explored numerous times in cinema), what it does offer are three strong individuals with enough quirky nuances to hold the audience's gaze. Depth quickly unfolds from nothing and as each character's personal narrative is gradually chipped away at, the film brims with empowerment and warmth. Filled with endless musings and shot at a leisurely pace, *NAVIDAD* falls neatly into place with most satisfying results.

Carrie Dean

NAVIDAD is screened on Saturday 19 September at 8.45pm

Following the livelihoods of a diverse group of indigenous Inupiak, Jan Louter's *LAST DAYS OF SHISHMAREF* is a thought-provoking ethnographic portrait of a community on the edge. Shishmaref, the film's subject, is a small village on the frozen island of Sarichef, Alaska which may be lost to the sea as global warming intensifies.

Mixing scenes of daily life-preparing meals, watching TV, doing the laundry - with graphic footage of hunting excursions, the viewer gets a feel for the Inupiak way of life, and how it is transforming. Whilst highly skilled and reverent of traditional artisan trades, villagers are increasingly influenced by American culture; the children listen to heavy metal, and adults go to Bingo. In turn we see a

THE LAST DAYS OF SHISHMAREF // Jan Louter

community that is adapting to change, but fearful of the future. There is a philosophical understanding amongst those followed, that the idyllic society they are living in is being torn away from them by a power beyond their control.

If, as locals and experts believe, Shishmaref is to be swallowed by the ocean, then this wonderfully understated documentary will act as a fitting and touching testament to its final moments of existence.

Will Osborn

THE LAST DAYS OF SHISHMAREF was screened on Friday 18 September