

**TRANSCRIPT****Cinema Review****Number 1 (2009) - I've Loved You So Long****John J McGowan****Broadcast Monday 2 February 2009**

Welcome back, dear listener, to sharing my world of the movies for 2009.

The summer heatwaves have finally begun to crash over us and I have always believed that there is no better place to go to escape the heat than a picture theatre. Picture theatres led the way in air-conditioning – at least in Adelaide. I believe that Adelaide's most glorious picture palace, The Regent, was the first public building in this city to be air-conditioned – somewhere around 1929. I treasure my childhood memories of settling down in a sensuously cool theatre for a three-hour escape from Adelaide's blistering 1950's heatwaves. At the intermission, a Dandy ice cream supplied with its little wooden spoon, made the experience complete.

Well there have been plenty of interesting movies on offer this summer to entice you into the cool darkness of the theatres, but today I'm going to concentrate on just one of these.

It is nothing short of awe-inspiring to witness an actor or actress taking up the challenge of completely inhabiting the persona of a difficult character. Such is the case with Kristin Scott Thomas in the French production *I've Loved You So Long*.

Scott Thomas plays the role of a woman who silently carries the burden of a terrible secret. In Scott Thomas's gripping embodiment of this person, the burden is present in the sad emptiness of her eyes; the half-smiles that die before they are born; and in her robotic movements. She is withdrawn and inward-turned, finding it difficult to communicate with anyone – even her younger sister who tries hard to reach out to help her. In a voice that is dull and hollow, she fends-off questions with single-word responses. As the movie unfolds we wonder what terrible tragedy has left her so grievously afflicted. And therein lies another intriguing aspect of this movie.

The plot is constructed in the manner of a thriller, with clues seeded enticingly along the way but with the major revelation skilfully concealed until near the end of the film. Although the movie is not *actually* a thriller it establishes gripping dramatic tension from the opening sequence and this never lets up. At the base of the plot is a terribly sad story which has the power to move members of the audience to tears.

But it's far from melodramatic. The screenplay is pared-back so that there is not a wasted word and the direction, by writer-director Phillipe Claudel, complements his own economical writing. The camera is allowed to dwell on the haunted face of Scott Thomas's character and even a slight movement of her lip is able to convey so much about her hidden pain.

And, I must advise you that all of the dialogue is in French with English sub-titles.

This poses no problem for Kristin Scott Thomas who, although English born and raised, has chosen to live in France since she was nineteen years old. The supporting cast comprises an

ensemble of very capable performers whom most of us have probably never seen before. The French seem to have an endless reserve of such people who have an uncanny capacity for portraying engaging, believable characters with no apparent effort. They relax into their roles with such ease that often they appear to be simply going about their everyday lives – even though we know that they are surrounded by cameras, lights and technicians. It's earthy performances such as these that contribute to the consistent appeal of so many French movies.

As an aside - on an occasion in which life seemed to imitate art - I was once a guest at a house party in Paris organised by some up-and-coming young filmmakers. The big suburban house was filled with movie industry people: writers, directors, actors, actresses and so on. All of the talk was about movies and making movies. They were obsessed with movies. I was swept along by this enthusiasm and, before long, I began to feel that I had just walked into a sequence from one of the movies they were talking about. In fact, some years later, when I was watching a French movie back in Adelaide, I chuckled when I noticed that some sequences from that movie were filmed in the same house where the party had been held.

But, getting back to *I've Loved You So Long*. This movie belongs to Kristin Scott Thomas. However, she's nothing like the Scott Thomas that we are used to seeing: the witty socialite from *Four Weddings and a Funeral* or the glamorous and alluring sophisticate from *The English Patient*. Scott Thomas says that when she undertook the role of the deeply-troubled Juliette Fontaine, director Phillipe Claudel said that he would set out to "destroy her beauty".

Well, beauty, as they say, is in the eye of the beholder, and I'm not sure that Claudel actually succeeded in destroying it on this occasion. However, he certainly managed to remove Kristin Scott Thomas's glamour. Nevertheless, despite being stripped of her customary radiance, this is the finest screen performance I have seen her deliver.

That she has not been nominated for this year's Academy Awards just reflects on the fallibility of the Oscars. She would certainly have got my vote for the year's best actress in a drama. So I would urge you to go along and see Kristin Scott Thomas in *I've Loved You So Long*. You'll see a four-star movie and a winning performance.

Good bye for now. I'll see you in the back stalls.

John McGowan
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