



Case Number 13893



BEFORE THE RAIN: CRITERION COLLECTION

Criterion // 1994 // 113 Minutes // Not Rated
Reviewed by Judge Clark Douglas // June 24th, 2008

The Charge

It's going to rain.

Opening Statement

"Time never dies. And the circle is not round."

Facts of the Case

Director Milcho Manchevski's directorial debut connects the stories of several different individuals in order to create a sweeping portrait of humanity. He begins with the tale of a Christian monk (Grégoire Colin) in Macedonia who aids and protects a young girl who comes to him for help. Next up is a trip to London, where a photographer (Katrin Cartlidge) has just learned that she is pregnant, and must decide whether to stay with her husband or her secret lover. Finally, we follow a war journalist (Rade Šerbezija) attempting to re-discover his roots

back to Macedonia, where he meets up with old friends and family. These stories are connecting in sad and complex ways that will all be revealed in **Before the Rain**.

The Evidence

When **Before the Rain** was released in 1994, many critics compared the film to Quentin Tarantino's **Pulp Fiction**. That may seem a little bizarre, as the tone of Milcho Manchevski's masterful film couldn't be further from the pop-energy of Tarantino's effort. However, the non-linear story structure does indeed mirror Tarantino's in an unusual way. Each segment takes adds a new layer to the previous segment, offering new revelations and truths as the story progresses. However, the impact of **Before the Rain** can be most noticeably felt in more recent films such as **Crash** and **Babel**. Like those films, **Before the Rain** offers intimate portraits of numerous lives. The primary characters in the film may or may not know each other, but they are connected in small ways. These connecting threads form the fabric of the plot. We move backwards and forwards, tracing the steps of these characters until we reach the painful and revealing crossroads.

Before the Rain has a lot to say, but it is far more interesting in provoking thoughts than simply preaching at the viewer. You get the sense that everything is connected for very specific reasons, but there's something missing that would somehow explain everything. There are so many deep feelings here about life, death, and war, all placed together in a powerful manner that leads us into reflective thoughts which pick up where the film leaves off. One of the most remarkable things about the film is that it manages to offer a simultaneous compassion for/cynicism towards humanity in general. This is such a sad movie, angry and heartbroken over the cycle of violence and hatred that runs rampant in the world.

I mentioned **Crash** and **Babel** as descendants of **Before the Rain**. I have vastly differing feelings about both of the films (I love the former and dislike the latter), but **Before the Rain** is cinematically superior to both films. Rather than offering heavy-handed moments of contrivance that work towards wringing tears out of the viewer, this film connects each segment with small and considerably more believable to both films. Perhaps the emotional impact is smaller here, but it is much harder to reject or dismiss what **Before the Rain** is attempting to say.

The cinematography by Manuel Teran is a remarkable asset to the film, beautifully capturing each segment of the film in a powerful way. The first segment, "Words", is particularly astonishing, offering such a memorable view of Macedonia. "Faces" is intentionally visually drab, highlighting the gray and white shades of London, while "Pictures" offers a less breathtaking look at Macedonia once again. These images are accentuated in an unusual but effective way by the Macedonian band Anastasia. They provide a diverse selection of musical cues that capture just the right mood for each scene.

All of the primary performances here are low-key and introspective, and Manchevski casts some very fine actors in each role. Grégoire Colin is quite touching, bringing a deep level of compassion to his role as the silent monk. Katrin Cartlidge is very well-suited to her role, supplying precisely the weary sadness that the part requires. The best performance comes from Rade Šerbedžija, who seems so resigned and broken beneath his rugged exterior. We don't learn

a lot about the past of these characters, but the performances supply a vague back story for each character that we instinctively recognize and identify. This is not a film in which characters are merely pawns in the service of a plot, but unique and relatable human beings.

Criterion supplies the usual top-drawer features for the film. The highlight is a commentary with Manchevski and film scholar Annette Insdorf, which is very revealing and engaging. Occasionally Insdorf starts praising and worshiping Manchevski to the point of silliness, but her enthusiasm for the film is certainly infectious. There is also a sixteen-minute interview with Rade Šerbedžija, who shares his thoughts on the film and on the war in the Balkan states at the time. "Behind the Scenes in Macedonia" is a decent 15-minute featurette from the time the film was released. We also get five minutes of on-the-set footage, fifteen minutes of soundtrack selections, Manchevski's 1992 hip-hop music video "Tennessee", along with some photographs, a stills gallery, and trailers. As usual, this is a very strong batch of supplements from Criterion.

Let me tell you, this transfer is just beautiful. This one of the strongest DVD transfers I've seen recently; it beautifully accentuates this visually complex film. Colors are rich and well-balanced; blacks are very deep. There is very little evidence of grain or scratches. The sound is excellent as well, with score attaining surprisingly powerful levels without ever drowning out the sound design or dialogue.

The Rebuttal Witnesses

It's not quite Tarkovsky-slow, but the film moves at an extraordinarily deliberate pace, requiring a lot of patience (and alertness) on the part of the viewer.

Closing Statement

Manchevski's **Before the Rain** is a thought-provoking gem. Yet another fine film that receives the Criterion treatment. This DVD comes highly recommended.

The Verdict

Not guilty

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Scales of Justice

Video: 96

Audio: 95

Extras: 94

Acting: 90

Story: 98

Judgment: 95

Perp Profile

Studio: Criterion

Video Formats:

- * 1.78:1 Anamorphic

Audio Formats:

- * Dolby Digital 2.0 Surround (English)

Subtitles:

- * English

Running Time: 113 Minutes

Release Year: 1994

MPAA Rating: Not Rated

Distinguishing Marks

- * Audio commentary w/Annette Insdorf and Milcho Manchevski
- * Interview with Rade Šerbedzija
- * "Behind the Scenes in Macedonia"
- * Soundtrack selections
- * On-set footage
- * Trailers
- * Photos
- * Storyboards
- * "Tennessee" Music Video
- * Essay by Ian Christie

Accomplices

- * IMDb

<http://us.imdb.com/title/tt0110882/combined>