



FACT SHEET

Week beginning 28 July 2007

**Media, Film and Technology
Breach and Driving Lessons**

The two movies I want to talk about in this program are linked by the presence of the talented actress Laura Linney. She's not the star of either of these movies but she infuses a special quality into any movie in which she has a role. If you are trying to conjure up an image of Laura Linney just think back to that delightful British movie *Love Actually* which was released a few years ago.

She's the un-attached American woman – no longer in the first blush of her youth – who yearns to make her feelings known to a handsome chap who works in the same office. Eventually, she does let him know and, for a short time, all seems to be going well, but then we find there is a substantial impediment to Laura's ability to form a free-spirited relationship with her beau.

There is another man in her life already. This other man is her brother, a hospitalised manic depressive who relies on Laura's consoling phone chats and frequent visits to prevent him from sliding into an even more perilous state of health. Laura finds that she must choose between her new-found lover and her devotion to her brother. Stoically, and sadly, she chooses her brother.

A movie role such as this clearly places great demands on a performer. In years past it's the kind of role that might have been played by Deborah Kerr or Ingrid Bergman. Laura Linney picks up the torch from these illustrious forerunners. She too knows exactly how to work to the camera to effectively convey a range of emotions by a subtle lifting of the eyebrows or a slight tilt of the head.

In the recently-released movie *Driving Lessons* – another British-made movie – Laura Linney plays the role of a dominating wife and mother who, despite her outward appearance, conceals a very different life. She is just perfect in the role of the church-going, holier-than-thou Minister's wife who flits off to secretly commit her own little peccadillos.

The other major female role in *Driving Lessons* – it's actually the major role in the movie - is played with delight by Julie Walters. She was the wonderful Rita in *Educating Rita* all those years ago. Walters plays an eccentric, ageing actress who engages Laura's seventeen-year-old son as an odd-jobs person.

And that brings us to the third of the three significant roles in the movie. The seventeen year old is played by the red-haired Rupert Grint whose face has been seen around quite a bit lately on posters for the latest Harry Potter movie. Grint's blank-faced character is even more innocent of the world's ways than his age would normally allow. Probably, we are led to think, because of the tight leash on which he is kept by his domineering mother.

However, he inexorably falls under the influence of the outrageously eccentric character, played by Julie Walters – a process which strains his relationship with his mother, but which leads him to a liberating, coming of age. *Driving Lessons* is the kind of movie which the British do to perfection. There are not many characters but they are sharply-drawn and all played with distinction. The

screenplay provides us with a well-woven mixture of chuckles, laughs and dramatic tension. I found that it was a little slow in getting under way but once the Julie Walters character is introduced it picks up pace and interest and this carries through to the conclusion. I gave it three stars.

Laura Linney has a smaller role in another recent release called, simply, *Breach*. Clearly, once again, she's not the star of this movie but she manages to grip our attention whenever she's on screen. In *Breach* she plays an FBI agent who is in charge of a unit which is engaged in the process of nabbing another FBI agent who has been selling classified information to the Russians. In this movie she's a kind of ice-cold avenging angel who circles her prey with patience and efficiency.

Breach is an unusual movie in that we are told the ending right at the beginning. It's based on a true story from quite recent times so I guess a lot of people – particularly American audiences – would have recalled the prosecution of this double-agent who was, apparently, the most successful anti-American spy in the history of the United States.

However, despite the fact that we know, in broad terms, how it will end, the movie generates gripping tension throughout as the FBI carefully manoeuvres its suspected traitor-agent into a situation where he will be able to be caught red-handed. The rogue agent is played by Chris Cooper in what I think is probably his first leading role. And it's a great performance. Even this far out from next year's Academy Awards there have already been suggestions that he will score a nomination for this role.

He perfectly embodies the complex, puzzling, highly-intelligent nature of his character. In fact, much of the tension of the movie derives from the skilful way in which Cooper rivets us to his eyes – forcing us to speculate about his thoughts and making us wonder what his next move will be in the life and death game of chess he chooses to play.

There are no James Bond-style action sequences in *Breach* – it's that other kind of spy movie – the cat and mouse kind. But what it lacks in action it makes up for in tension. It's a cleverly made, engaging drama. I gave it four stars.

Now, in closing, a brief acknowledgement of the recent deaths of two of the movie industry's outstanding contributors. Firstly, cinematographer Laszlo Kovacs, who passed away aged 74. Laszlo Kovacs was born in Hungary but fled to the United States in 1956 and began working in the American film and television industry in the early 1960s. His most significant early movie was *Easy Rider* in 1969, but his stand-outs in the seventies included *Five Easy Pieces*, *What's Up, Doc?*, *Paper Moon* and *Shampoo*. In more recent times he was Director of Photography on *My Best Friend's Wedding* and *Miss Congeniality*. At the time of his death, Kovacs was working on a documentary with fellow Hungarian cinematographer, Vilmos Zsigmond, entitled: *Laszlo and Vilmos: The Story of Two Refugees Who Changed the Look of American Cinema*.

And, finally, the passing of the Swedish writer-director Ingmar Bergman at the age of 89. In a way that few others have ever done, Bergman extended the boundaries of movie-making while establishing his own indelible style. In the fifties, sixties and seventies we went to see Bergman movies with a sense of awe – almost with reverence. He was one of the truly great innovators of the motion picture industry whose influence continues to pervade movies and television to this day.

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July 29, 2007