



## BORDERLINES FILM FESTIVAL

ALLELUJAH [15]

Director: Richard Eyre

Starring: Jennifer Saunders, Bally Gill, David Bradley, Judi Dench, Derek Jacobi, Russell Tovey

UK ,2022, 1 hour 39 minutes.

*Allelujah* is a recognisable genre of British films (*Brassed Off*, 1996, *The Full Monty*, 1997) with an equally recognisable cast. It was written as a play by Alan Bennett in 2018 (*Talking Heads* 1988, *The History Boys* 2005, *The Lady in the Van* 2015) and has now been updated for the screen by Heidi Thomas (*Call the Midwife*) including a new ending shaped by Covid but still bearing the witty and charming hallmarks of the original author. It is directed by another theatre and film luminary, Richard Eyre (*The Children Act* 2017, *King Lear* 2018). The strong cast, writing and direction ensures a polished production and as one might expect from such a team, it is gentle and understated, but with some sharp edges introduced by Heidi Thomas's screenplay.

**Peter Bradshaw (The Guardian, 10 September 2022)**, whilst describing *Allelujah* as "A low-key, attractive, if minor Alan Bennett" states that the film adaptation is a "shrewd ensemble comedy" and "enlivened by unmistakably Bennettian gags and drolleries which come along every minute or so" with Covid producing "an unexpected pivot to the drama".

Most of the action takes place in the fictional Bethlehem Hospital ("The Beth") in Yorkshire which is threatened with closure. The plot is about the fight to save The Beth, the lives and deaths of the residents, their relatives, and those who work for the NHS caring for the elderly.

The Press Release by the Production Team describes *Allelujah* as a "warm, humorous, and deeply moving story about surviving old age. When the geriatric ward in a small Yorkshire hospital is threatened with closure, the hospital decides to fight back by galvanising the local community; they invite a news crew to film their preparation for a concert in honour of the hospital's most distinguished nurse. What could possibly go wrong? *Allelujah* celebrates the spirit of the elderly patients whilst paying tribute to the deep humanity of the medical staff".

Jennifer Saunders plays the distinguished but pragmatic nurse Sister Gilpin, Bally Gill the committed Dr Valentine and Russell Tovey the adviser to the Minister who plans to close The Beth. The residents are played by some of the great and the good of stage and screen, but the real star of the drama is the NHS. The film is unequivocally and self-consciously designed to be a tribute to the NHS, 75 years old this year and a call to arms to support those who struggle to keep it going.

*Allelujah* premiered at the Toronto Film Festival on 11 September 2022. **Richard Abele writing for The Wrap (10 September 2022)** endorsed the "wisecracks about ageing and a blistering attack on health-care cuts".

Preview courtesy of Warner Brothers / Pathé

Notes compiled by Adrian Rhead