



## BORDERLINES FILM FESTIVAL

THE WHALE (15)

Director: Darren Aronofsky

Starring: Brendan Fraser, Hong Chau, Sadie Sink, Ty Simpkins, Samantha Morton

US, 2022, 1 hour 57 minutes

From Darren Aronofsky, director of *Requiem For a Dream* (2000), and *Black Swan* (2010), comes a hugely moving film in which Oscar-nominee Brendan Fraser gives "the performance of a lifetime" (**TIMEOUT**).

An adaptation of Samuel D Hunter's play, *The Whale*, follows morbidly obese, social recluse English teacher, Charlie, as he attempts to reconnect with his estranged daughter, Ellie. Much like Aronofsky's, *The Wrestler* (2008), *The Whale* explores familial tension as an ageing father, grappling with his own mortality, attempts to reconcile with his daughter. The film is part of our 'Ties That Bind' strand, scrutinizing relationships between parents and children.

Too often a derided figure amongst audiences, Brendan Fraser, *The Mummy* (1999), *George of the Jungle* (1997), delivers an astounding transformation into Oscar and BAFTA nominee that is nothing short of astonishing - "A performance for the ages" (**VARIETY**). Fraser's incredible physical transformation was engineered by prosthetics artist, Adrien Morot, who's remarkable fat suit earned *The Whale* an Oscar nomination for Makeup & Hairstyling. Oscar attention has also been lavished on Hong Chau, who plays Charlie's prickly friend, Liz. Across the board, the film is stuffed with complex characters and admirable performances, with *Stranger Things*' Sadie Sink contributing enormously as Charlie's daughter, Ellie, in addition to stalwart, Samantha Morton's turn as Charlie's ex-wife, Mary.

As with Brendan Fraser and Hong Chau in *The Whale*, Aronofsky has the enviable habit of garnering Oscar attention for his stars. Ella Burstyn was nominated for Best Actress in a Leading Role in 2001 for *Requiem For a Dream*, Micky Rourke and Marisa Tomei were nominated for Best Leading Actor and Best Supporting Actress respectively for *The Wrestler*, while Natalie Portman won Best Actress in a leading role for *Black Swan*.

Aronofsky's first film shot on digital, *The Whale* also experiments with aspect ratio, presented entirely in 4:3. The effect is one of almost unbearable claustrophobia, giving Charlie's apartment an air of stuffiness and clamminess. Physically altered beyond recognition by his emotional trauma, Charlie finds his social circle vastly reduced, whilst ironically his physical size has ballooned, turning him to a broken man, left feeling abandoned in an insignificant apartment.

Notes compiled by Sam Briggs