

DVD Select: 'The Wind that Shakes the Barley' tugs at the heart

by Robert_J_Hawkins

Freeing your country from an unwanted occupier is a grim, violent and bloody business. I could be writing about Iraq - where we are perceived by much of the country as alien occupation forces.

'THE WIND THAT SHAKES THE BARLEY' - Cillian Murphy, left, and Padraic Delaney star in 'The Wind That Shakes the Barley.' CNS Photo courtesy of Joss Barratt. DVD RATINGS

4 stars: Don't miss: rent it/buy it

3 stars: Worth the risk: rent it

2 stars: On the tipping point: if nothing else is available

1 star: Don't bother: wait until it's in the \$1 bin But I'm not.

It is the 1920's and the occupiers are the British and the country - perhaps its status as a country is in dispute - is Ireland. The citizens have peacefully assembled, elected a representative body and declared their freedom from England, as the United States once did. In response, England sends in thousands of troops to put down the revolution.

Somehow, in the midst of all this Damien (the immensely captivating actor Cillian Murphy) has been able to study medicine and is about to depart for a residency in London when the infamous Black and Tans hit too

close to home. Twice he watches helpless as British troops beat, brutalize, and even murder his countrymen. It is more than he can ignore.

Cut to Damien forsaking his promising medical career to take the oath of the resistance, a vow to fight until Ireland is a free country ruled by free people.

And so begins the epic story of the Irish resistance, "The Wind That Shakes the Barley" (Genius, 3.5 stars) by the iconoclastic filmmaker Ken Loach and screenwriter Paul Laverty. Well, in truth, the movie begins with a lively game of field hockey by the local townsmen, set against a breathtakingly beautiful mountain range. The camaraderie is abruptly ended when the British soldiers pummel the men for congregating against the orders of the Empire.

Damien already is a firm believer in the revolution and whatever it takes to win Ireland's freedom. So is his older brother Teddy (Padraic Delaney). While Damien and Teddy carry on the grim business of guerrilla warfare, a truce is negotiated with England. The momentary jubilation is dashed when it is discovered the subsequent treaty doesn't create a free Ireland. It creates an Ireland free to exist under British rule.

Some, like Teddy, are OK with that. Others, like Damien, want the all-or-nothing for which they first vowed to fight. And this is where life gets hard. The British withdraw. And brothers take up arms against brothers. Fathers against sons. A civil war. (Sound familiar in a contemporary setting?)

Loach's and Laverty's sympathies are clearly with the Irish against the British (who come out mostly as low-paid thugs) but when it comes to civil war, loyalties aren't so clearly drawn. Loach, ever the socialist observer, seems to be saying "My, god, look what we are capable of doing to each other." And it is heartbreaking.

ALSO THIS WEEK

"Georgia Rule" (Universal, 1.5 stars) The great tragedy in this film is that Lindsay Lohan was tapped to play an out-of-control young woman. Clearly anything she does on screen begs comparison to her personal life. And I'd have to say she was holding back in the movie. Lohan is Rachel, a young woman who's non-stop flirtation with drugs, alcohol and promiscuity have exhausted her mother, Lilly (Felicity Huffman). Even though she's estranged from her own mother, the Georgia (Jane Fonda) of the movie's title, Lilly thinks sending Rachel to Georgia's Idaho home for the summer before college is a good idea. I still can't imagine why. Unless it was the pure Caucasian Nation atmosphere of this small town that suddenly appeals to San Franciscan Lilly. Because Georgia is no prize. She is rigid, remote, arbitrary and yet professes great empathy - very Southern Californian. Rachel blows through cow town disrupting lives, spreading lies and fomenting scandal to the point where you're not sure you can care whether or not she was molested by her stepfather. Lilly is no sympathetic creature either - heavily dependent on her husband (the stepfather Cary Elwes) and alcohol for emotional stability. This is the rare Garry Marshall movie in which the word "heartwarming" doesn't come to mind, even once. To compound the endless series of misfires much of the dialogue sounds as if it were pasted together from voice-over sessions conducted days and miles apart. And we know Huffman and Fonda can pull off rapid-fire banter onscreen. Hmmm.

MORE TITLES

A "gut busting" comedy about real estate "Closing Escrow" (and in today's market, you know, we could all use a laugh); Laurence Fishburne and Paul Walker shoot it up in the direct-to-DVD action-thriller "Bobby Z"; documentary "Rush to War" looks at the last 50 years of U.S. foreign policy; a ride home for the holidays and a haunted road mark the terror-thriller "Wind Chill" for death. One that will surprise you: In "Steel Toes" (Monterey Video), the wonderful actor David Strathairn is a liberal Jewish lawyer appointed to represent a Neo-Nazi skinhead (Andrew Walker) on trial for the murder of an East Indian. Provocative? You bet.

IT CAME FROM TV

Steve Carell, John Krasinski, Jenna Fischer are all there in Season 3 of "The Office"; the early days of Tom Hanks and Peter Scolari are embodied in season 2 of the sitcom "Bosom Buddies"; beauty is skin deep and a knife flick away in the fourth season of "Nip/Tuck." Pick up season 1 of "30 Rock" and watch how it really grew into its skin over the 21 episodes; catch seasons 1 and 2 of a smart, edgy comedy with fresh faces "It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia" that had the ill fortune of airing on the FX channel; William Fichtner joins the cast for season 2 of "Prison Break"; David Spade does what he knows best in season 1 of "Rules of Engagement" - he's annoying. Remember how you really got tired of trying to track those wacky wives of

Wisteria Lane. Here's your chance to catch up on season 3, "Desperate Housewives: The Dirty Laundry Edition" before season 4 begins Sept. 30. Lots of extras on the six-discs, in addition to the 23 one-hour episodes.

FROM THE VAULTS

Sony has packaged together "Resident Evil" and "Resident Evil: Apocalypse" for your shopping convenience and to capitalize on the upcoming sequel "Resident Evil: Extinction." Sure they're based on a popular video game, but the connecting thread here is Milla Jovovich who always looks stunning saving the world and kicking butt. Stoner alert: Paramount has released the 1978 Cheech and Chong classic cannabis comedy "Up in Smoke: High-larious Edition." Includes fresh interviews with the boys, Cheech Marin and Tommy Chong, deleted scenes and commentary track by Marin and director Lou Adler.

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