

THE IRISH NEWS

Family ties: Irish indie *You're Ugly Too* reviewed

Irish writer/director Mark Noonan's debut feature is a bittersweet yet defiantly unsentimental drama starring *Game of Thrones* man Aidan Gillen and newcomer Lauren Kinsella. David Roy savoured its gentle humour, atmospheric visuals and compelling characters

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You're Ugly Too is set in a caravan park in the Irish midlands
You're Ugly Too (no cert, 78mins)

Starring: Aidan Gillen, Lauren Kinsella, Erika Sainte, George Pistereanu

Director: Mark Noonan

RATING: FOUR STARS

YOU'RE Ugly Too is textbook indie cinema, from its understated minor-key tone and leisurely pacing to its unobtrusive acoustic guitar-based score and stubborn refusal to offer up neat resolutions within its tragicomic storyline.

The fact that this gentle, slow-burning drama is also highly affecting and features a superb double-act by leads Aidan Gillen and Lauren Kinsella makes it an ideal end-of-summer elixir for cinema fans feeling dazed and used by the recent crop of CGI-singed popcorn fodder.

Just five minutes of *You're Ugly Too*, should be enough to finally expunge *Fury Road*'s foul tang from anyone's mind for good.

Admittedly, Irish writer and director Mark Noonan's impressively assured debut feature shares some common ground with George Miller's mystifyingly acclaimed, memories of *Mad Max* part one desecrating mega-budget destruction derby in that it employs a fair few cinematic tropes.

You're Ugly Too is a buddy movie at heart, featuring an ex-con struggling to get a foothold in the Real World and young damaged girl dealing with a family tragedy.

The big difference between the two films – apart from a complete lack of car crashes, albino crazies in bondage gear and motorised, flame-throwing guitarists – is that the smartly written indie actually offers audiences a few surprises too.

The performance by newcomer Lauren Kinsella is chief among them: playful, confident but never cocky in that oh-so-irritating 'child star' manner, her deft turn as 11-year-old recently orphaned Stacey is guaranteed to send casting directors far and wide fumbling for their phones.

Kinsella's streetwise, narcoleptic skate brat enjoys an amusingly antagonistic adolescent rapport with Will (Gillen), her chokey-fresh legal guardian, as the pair head off into the wilderness of the Irish midlands (director Noonan's stomping ground) for some quality bickering time at Stacey's mother's old caravan.

The film doesn't disclose everything about this odd couple and the nature of their relationship all at once. The audience is given a general sense of the situation at hand and then allowed to discover the details as the story progresses, often at the same rate as the characters themselves.

Happily, Gillen has enough skill to ensure we get the sense early on that his character isn't some sort of monster, so there's never any question that *You're Ugly Too* is going to veer off into extremely dark and disturbing territory.

That said, he's clearly troubled and keeping a secret from Stacey and everyone else – like Emilie (Erika Sainte), the attractive Belgian schoolteacher living a few 'vans down with her moody husband Tibor (George Pistereanu) and their young son (played by Kinsella's younger brother).

Both Sainte and Pistereanu succeed in making an impact on us despite their limited screen-time, adding further dramatic richness to the film's low-budget charm.

Cinematographer Tom Comerford is clearly another talented newcomer to watch: he captures the stillness of the rust-flecked 'middle of nowhere' rural environment in vivid widescreen when not giving us fly-on-the-wall access to dialogue-sparse interactions within cramped, careworn interiors.

Cleverly, Noonan quickly establishes a pointedly non-specific modern day setting for the story – we see computers, yet Will drives an ancient Renault and neither he, Stacey, nor anyone else they meet seems to own a mobile phone – giving proceedings an enjoyably timeless quality that should help his film endure for years to come.

Most importantly, we become invested in these characters enough to actually care what happens to them – yet this charming, oddly uplifting film earns our respect by never taking the easy, 'Hollywood' option with their relationships.

In short, *You're Ugly Too's* stylish, understated beauty is well worth beholding.