

Every Day is Her Day in Director Bong Joon-ho's 'Mother'

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on March 26, 2010 - 12:32pm

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Rating: **4.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – The concept of family is a fascinating subject for notable South Korean director Bong Joon-ho. His monster movie “The Host” celebrated those familial bonds, and now an even closer relationship emerges in “Mother.”

Mother is portrayed by Kim Hye-ja, in the mode of smothering. She is devoted to her son, Do-joon (Bin Won), who is portrayed as a bit developmentally disabled. He is easily manipulated by friends, and his own over-enthusiasm for the opposite sex. It is during on of these pursuits that he drunkly follows a school girl. When the girl is found dead the next day, he becomes the prime suspect and is arrested.

Mother won't have any of that. She is determined to clear her beloved son's name. Becoming a one woman Sherlock Holmes, she circumvents both the police and her own lawyer to launch an investigation of her own. Using bribes, breaking into a home and an obsessive matriarchal intuition, Mother finds herself in a strange and surreal circumstance, one that leads into revelations that might be best left unresolved.



M is for the Many Things: Won Bin as Do-joon in 'Mother'
Photo Credit: © Magnolia Pictures

This is a bit more serious than Joon-ho's previous film The Host, because of Mother's murder and themes of an all-consuming passion. Although much of it is played for mordant laughs, it is not as slyly symbolic or funny as The Host and doesn't have an outside monster – exception may be given if considering the Mother – that breaks up the narrative.

But what is does have is Kim Hye-ja. Her complete understanding of the role and the role of Mother in the son's life drives this amazing performance. Director Joon-ho opens the film in a wavering field, with Hye-ja doing a bizarre dance. This sets up the portrayal to come, as Mother is as slightly off as her slow-witted son, but in a way that is lost to a focus convinced that he can do no wrong. This mother persona is both strange and electric, and despite all the questionable techniques she uses to break the murder case, her refusal to give up has a dark yet endearing quality.

And who is dear old Mom without the devoted son? Bin Won completely nails the “innocence” of his character, even while secretly he isn’t so innocent. His mother has given him a free pass in this life, and he uses it everywhere, taking his presence to the extreme in virtually every circumstance. It is a fascinating role to observe, because it never seems to be true on its surface. There is a sense that the son is conning everyone he comes across, relying on Mother to make it right.



Mother and Child Reunion: Kim Hye-Ja and Won Bin in 'Mother'
Photo Credit: © Magnolia Pictures

There is also a interesting beauty in the way the film is shot. Director Joon-ho uses the utilitarian buildings of the South Korean setting to stark and provincial advantage. As Mother traipses from schoolyard to police station, there is a sense of bureaucracy that seems impossible to overcome. She also ends up interacting with nature quite a bit, as the elements of water, fire and earth conspire against her in bringing her son to justice. As she protects what she assumes to be a key piece of evidence from a torrential rain, for example, it seems that no atmospheric condition can overcome a mother’s love.

Part of the intrigue in the film is the murder mystery, and through dogged determination by Mother it unfolds like a hard-to-put-down page turner. How the links are made, and how the background characters aid Mother in her search has the fundamentals of Agatha Christie in childbirth. There are shady characters, bumbling officials and scarred schoolgirls aplenty, and even when all seems solved, there is never a solution.

At the heart of Mother is that mystery. Not so much the mystery of the murder and the subsequent investigation, but the enduring mystery of connection between a mother and son, which digs into the extreme and powerful notion that there is someone who will never give up on you, for better or worse. For all her very apparent flaws, the Mother in this film is essentially on that relationship, Sigmund Freud be proud.

"Mother" has a limited release in Chicago and elsewhere on March 26th. Check local listings for screening locations and times. Featuring Kim Hye-ja, Won Bin and Jin Ku, directed by Bong Joon-ho. Rated "R." [Click here for the HollywoodChicago.com interview of director Bong Joon-ho.](#) [12]



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