

## '45 Years' is Emotional Art From a Long Relationship

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on January 22, 2016 - 10:01am

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Rating: **5.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – There is something incredibly special when two old pros – in this case actors Charlotte Rampling and Tom Courtenay – interpret an amazing exploration of a long relationship with a preciseness that creates life affirmation, despite the sorrows. There is truth in this film.

This one sneaks up on us, providing an almost innocuous secret as a plot engine, and then revving that engine to the breaking point – yet in a quiet and desperate way that most people live. A long marriage is ripe for land mines of raw feelings and repressed anger, and “45 Years” confronts it all, with two performers as the husband Geoff and wife Kate that absolutely understand what the story is projecting. Rampling and Courtenay take the smallest gestures, or turn of character, and make the most of those collection of moments. By the end of this film, we know Geoff and Kate, because who they are insiders to how all of us are. That type of exposure is rare in a piece of art, and the technique combines the intimacy of stage acting with the wide angle of film presentation.

Geoff (Courtenay) and Kate (Rampling) are planning a black tie celebration for their 45th wedding anniversary. A wrench is thrown in during the planning that involves an incident and secret from Geoff’s past. The details begin to unfold as the secret is revealed, and Geoff begins to act strangely. Kate, in the meantime, is feeling a sense of betrayal.



Geoff (Tom Courtenay) and Kate (Charlotte Rampling) in '45 Years'



Photo credit: Sundance Selects

The couple continue to keep their appointments and plan their event, while the past keeps bubbling up with new revelations. Geoff becomes distant, and may be suffering from melancholy having to do with the secret. Kate occupies herself with a bit of detective work regarding the incident, and it all becomes too clear for the tenuous marriage, but the band plays on at the 45 year celebration.

This is tough sledding, but in that sledding there is a harmony with the life events that provide clarity. It is also proof that even the smallest secret has the potential to emotionally cripple a situation, depending on how and why it's revealed. The couple, in their maneuverings around the situation, reveal a truth about human nature that cuts like a stun gun. This is a vital emotional reminder that we're born alone and die alone, and along the way those people we choose to walk with along the path may contribute to that sense of loneliness.

Charlotte Rampling, who made her first film in 1965, is getting deserved praise for her performance, including an Academy Award nomination for Best Actress. She is revelatory here, giving a seemingly ordinary woman a sense about herself that never is too late to realize. Her character is all about the buried hurt, until suddenly it isn't – completed with a monumental gesture – and her representation of Kate's being is played perfectly, note by difficult note.

And what about the husband Geoff, portrayed by Tom Courtenay (first film, 1962!)? Yes, he is the “villain” of the story, but is he? Does he need to take a fall for a nugget of his life unrevealed, one that happened before he met his eventual wife? Courtenay makes decisions about his character that are spot on, a combination of dismissal of his wife's dread and a deep regret for a life that he lost. He wears his suit of self-flagellation that is an old man's experience. He becomes too self-reliant on the circumstance that it easily will all go away, just like everything else in the long marriage.



Living La Vida Loco in '45 Years'

Photo credit: Sundance Selects

Director Andrew Haigh also wrote the adaptation of the script (from a story story) and unerringly reveals all the key points that make the emotional reactions of the screenplay really work. He also hired the right people. The couple is childless, but the community that they have built around them is a warm and embracing system, one that continues without knowledge of the couple's unraveling. It's those type of small touches that manufacture the truth of the film, and generates the power of that truth.

This is a smaller and quieter film than the usual fare of the American cinema...no wonder it's a British film. No overt emotions please, we're British. Let's bury them and bury them until the inevitable explosion detonates. That just ain't British, man, that's all of us.

[CLICK HERE](#) [18] for the 10 Best Films of 2015 by Patrick McDonald of HollywoodChicago.com, featuring “45 Years.”

*“45 Years” continues its limited release in Chicago on January 22nd. See local listings for theaters and showtimes. Featuring Charlotte Rampling, Tom Courtenay, Geraldine James, David Sibley and Dolly Wells. Screenplay adapted and directed by Andrew Haigh. Rated “R”*



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