**Breaking the Waves**

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**Breaking the Waves** is a 1996 film directed by Lars von Trier and starring Emily Watson. Set in the Scottish Highlands in the early 1970s, it is about an unusual young woman, Bess McNeill, and of the love she has for Jan, her husband. The film is an international co-production led by von Trier's Danish company Zentropa. It is the first film in Trier's 'Golden Heart Trilogy' which also includes *The Idiots* (1998) and *Dancer in the Dark* (2000).

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### Plot

*Breaking the Waves* tells the story of Bess McNeill, a pretty young Scottish woman with a history of psychological problems. She marries Norwegian oil rig worker Jan, despite the apprehensions of her community and Calvinist church.

Bess is somewhat simple and childlike in her beliefs. During her regular visits to the church, she prays to God and believes God answers through her using her voice.

Bess has difficulty living without Jan when he is away on the oil platform. Jan makes occasional phone calls to Bess in which they express their love and sexual desires. Bess grows impatient and prays for his immediate return. The
next day, Jan is paralysed from an industrial accident and is flown back to the mainland. Bess believes her prayer was the reason the accident occurred.

No longer able to perform sexually and mentally affected by the paralysis, Jan asks Bess to find a lover. Bess is devastated and storms out. Jan then attempts to commit suicide and fails. He falls unconscious and is readmitted to hospital.

Jan's condition deteriorates and he urges Bess to find and have sex with other men and tell him the details as it will be as if they are together and will keep him alive. Bess begins to believe these actions are the will of God and in accordance with loving Jan.

Despite her unwillingness and inner turmoil to be with other men, she perseveres as she believes it is keeping Jan alive.

**Cast**

- Emily Watson as Bess McNeill
- Stellan Skarsgård as Jan Nyman
- Katrin Cartlidge as Dodo McNeill
- Jean-Marc Barr as Terry
- Adrian Rawlins as Dr. Richardson
- Jonathan Hackett as Priest
- Sandra Voe as Mother
- Udo Kier as Sadistic Sailor
- Mikkel Gaup as Pits
- Roef Ragas as Pim
- Phil McCall as Grandfather
- Robert Robertson as Chairman

**Style**

The film is influenced by the realist Dogme 95 movement, of which von Trier was a founding member, and its grainy images and hand-held photography give it the superficial look of a Dogme film. However, the Dogme rules demand the use of real locations, whereas many of the locations in *Breaking the Waves* were constructed in a studio.[citation needed] In addition, the film is set in the past and contains dubbed music, as well as a brief scene featuring CGI, none of which is permitted by the Dogme rules.

**Production**

Helena Bonham Carter was von Trier's first choice to play the role of Bess, but she dropped out just before shooting was to start, reportedly due to the large amount of nudity and sexuality required by the role.[4] Melanie Griffith was also considered.
The exterior scenes were shot in Scotland: the graveyard was built for the film on Isle of Skye; the church is in Lochailort, the harbour in Mallaig, and the beach in Morar.[5] The interiors were shot at Det Danske Filmstudie, Lyngby, Denmark.

The helicopter used in the movie, G-BBHM, a Sikorsky S-61-N, was later involved in an emergency landing and fire that destroyed the aircraft but none of the four crew were injured. This occurred at Poole, Dorset on 15th July, 2002.[6]

Reception

Critical response

*Breaking the Waves* was named one of the ten best films of the decade by both Roger Ebert and Martin Scorsese during a show where the famous film personalities listed their top movies of the 1990s. [7]

Box office

Released on November 13, 1996, the film has grossed just over $4 million in the US.[8]

Awards

*Breaking the Waves* won the Grand Prix at the 1996 Cannes Film Festival,[9] and three awards at the 1996 European Film Awards including: Film of the Year, International Film Journalists Award, and European Actress of the Year (Watson). Emily Watson was nominated for the 1996 Academy Award for Best Actress, the 1997 British Academy of Film and Television Arts award, the National Society of Film Critics prize, and the European Film Award for Best Actress.

References

Bibliography

- Ebbe Villadsen: *Danish Erotic Film Classics* (2005)

External links

- *Breaking the Waves* (http://www.allmovie.com/movie/v136347) at allmovie
- *Breaking the Waves* (http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=breakingthewaves.htm) at Box Office Mojo
- *Breaking the Waves* (http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0115751/) at the Internet Movie Database
- *Breaking the Waves* (http://tcmdb.com/title/title.jsp?tid=442820) at the TCM Movie Database
- *Breaking the Waves* (http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/breaking_the_waves/) at Rotten Tomatoes
- *Breaking the Waves* (http://www.metacritic.com/movie/breakingthewaves) at Metacritic

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