



**Second film  
in our South  
Korean  
Season**

Film essay by  
Mark  
MacLennan  
(InFiFa).

Eden Court  
Cinema  
21<sup>st</sup> Jan 2020  
at 7.15 pm

## The Wailing

(2016, South Korea, Colour, Horror, Mystery, Thriller Running time: 156 mins.  
Written by and directed by Hong-Jin Na

Cast: Kwak Do-won, Hwang Jung-min, Chun Woo-hee, Jun Kunimura

***"The Wailing" is the hard stuff. Handle with care.*** –  
*quote from a review by Glenn Kenny, The New York Times.*

After his stunningly assured debut, *The Chaser* (2008) – one of the most nail biting films I have ever seen – and the subsequent grim, gripping crime / chase thriller *The Yellow Sea* (2011) (again my nails bitten to the quick!) – I naturally had high expectations for South Korean director Hong-Jin Na's third film and first foray into the horror genre, *The Wailing* (released in 2016 to almost universal acclaim and a huge hit in South Korea). Despite plunging us deep into the action from the start, Na keeps us tonally off-balance for the next hour, taking his time setting up the investigative elements (before later stripping away these formulaic layers to reveal a far more complex blend of police procedural, horror and pitch black comedy. (After reading some reviews it is also apparently a 'socio-theological' allegory – perhaps a point for discussion!).

The movie opens with a lazy, underachieving police sergeant, Jong-gu (Kwak Do-won), investigating a double murder in the quiet, rural village where he lives. The crime is grisly, but Jong-gu is an amiable, likable fellow; his endearing personality giving the first quarter of the film a comic underpinning – strongly recalling the bumbling detectives from Joon-ho Bong's fantastic *Memories of Murder*, (a film that InFiFa simply must show one day!),



Jong-Gu struggles to marshal his more hapless colleagues into following the clues to the outbreak of violence in the village, where he lives with his wife, daughter and mother-in-law. When a mysterious sickness appears to be linked to the brutal murders the media blames poisonous mushrooms. Jong-Gu's problems also become personal when it appears that his young daughter has become afflicted with the mystery sickness.



He is thus torn between his rational trained investigative mind and his family's religious beliefs, ultimately agreeing to subject his daughter to a violent, ritualistic exorcism by a respected shaman.



Also coming under increasing suspicion is an elderly stranger (Jun Kunimura, shown below), recently arrived from Japan who lives in woods above the village.



By this time, I was so invested with Jong-gu and his family that as the suspense, violence and more ratcheted up, I was not merely unsettled but had a creeping sense of dread what the outcome would be, with utterly no idea what was going to happen. And then we enter the last act....of which I will say no more!



*The Wailing* is a film that lingers long in the mind and trying to work out what had been developing all along..... There has been some limited criticism about the middle act flagging but my view is it's all essential stuff in setting up the last act that constantly wrong-foots the audience, building to a climax that is both genuinely shocking and perhaps inevitable.....This is undoubtedly one of the best, and most original horror films that I have ever seen.

To date, Hong-jin Na has also written the screenplay for all three of his films and I suspect this will continue. Obviously a major talent, he appears to take his time with all of his films - from conception to execution. I can't wait to see what Hong-jin Na (pic right) will come up for his fourth film, although after checking on the internet nothing appears to be on the horizon so I am assuming I will have to be patient.....



One other thing worth noting is that during the compilation of these notes it transpires that the Chinese characters that comprise the film's Korean title literally translate to '*The sound of weeping*'. I assume that this is shown in the original Korean publicity poster (pardon my ignorance if not!). Upon reflection this is an accurate way of describing the desolation that pervades and haunts this movie like a vengeful, and perhaps demonic, spirit.

Mark MacLennan (InFiFa)

Our next screening..... Pietà

The third film in our..... South Korean Season

In this intense and haunting story, a loan shark living an isolated and lonely existence uses brutality to threaten and collect paybacks from desperate borrowers for his moneylender boss, collecting the debts without regard to the pain he causes his countless victims. One day, a mysterious woman appears in front of him claiming to be his long-lost mother. After coldly rejecting her at first, he gradually accepts her in his life and decides to quit his cruel job and seek a decent, redemptive life. However, he soon discovers a dark secret stemming from his past and realises it may be too late to escape the horrific consequences already set in motion from his previous life.



Eden Court Cinema

Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> Feb 2020 at 7.15pm



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