

# '71

It's not often that a French friend emails me about a film which, 'I must absolutely see'. She had just watched it at the 2015 Cannes Film Festival and wondered if I had already seen it; I hadn't. The film was the superb directorial debut by Yann Demange: *'71*. When presented at the Berlin Film Festival in 2014, it had five nominations and won him the award for Best Director.

Set in West Belfast in 1971, during early years of the Troubles in Northern Ireland, the film is a behind-the-lines look at the impact of the conflict on both the civilians population and the British army. The plot is not new; during action a young and inexperienced soldier, Gary Hook, becomes separated from his unit led by an equally inexperienced Lieutenant. Severely beaten, and after witnessing the killing of a comrade, he finds himself abandoned in enemy territory – the Falls Road – a British soldier in blood stained army fatigues.

There are echoes here of the 1948 James Mason thriller *Odd Man Out* in which an IRA gunman passes a night hiding from the British army in the same city. Hook navigates the nightscape of battle torn, rubble-strewn streets lit by the flames of burning cars. It could be any city at war.

His ordeal will lead him through loyalist strongholds and see him become a ploy in a nationalist plot. There is a heart-stopping chase sequence through alleys and demolished houses in war-torn Belfast in which he is hunted down by the IRA.

Where *'71* excels is in its avoidance of the tone of tragic correctness which most dramas about the Troubles assume. It faces squarely the complexity of the 'enemy within' in a world where the UK authorities are running high-level informers, and the Provisionals are plotting against their own chiefs; bad blood and bad faith making it impossible to know who to trust. There are no heroes here, no redemption moment; only the tragic reality of human beings caught up in violent conflict. The re-creation of West Belfast in the early 1970's is the most realistic I have seen on film. Added to a sense of detachment with which the subject is presented, this makes *'71* one of the most real and immediate films on the 30-year conflict.

With Black Taxi Tours of the area now making the world of *'71* seem very far away, if not unreal, such films serve to remind us of what was 'lest we forget.'

**Chris Campbell** retired to her native Enniskillen after working and living in Belfast and Belgium for many years. The Brussels Cinema Museum stoked her love of the art form and she is a member of the Fermanagh Film Club.