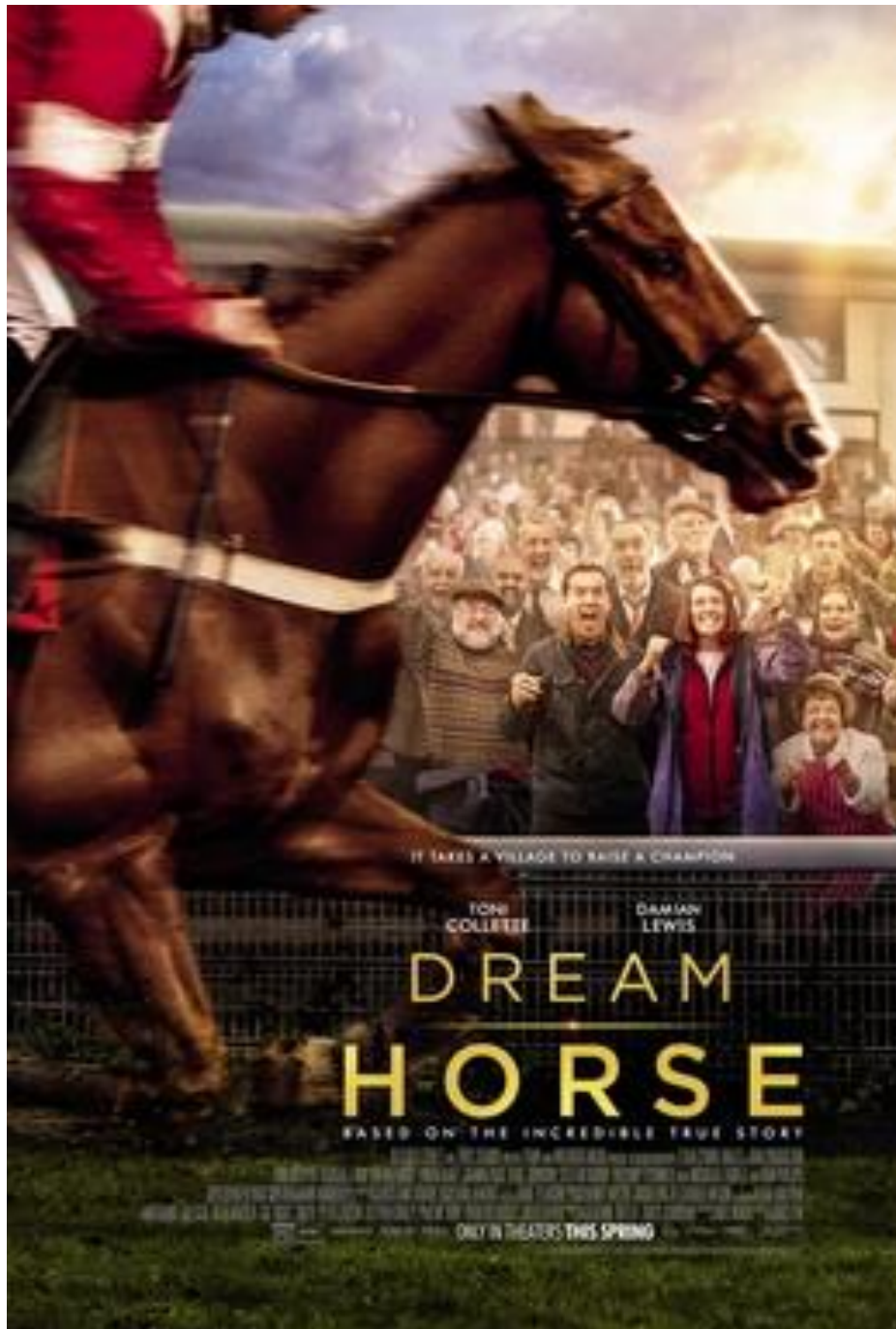


Dream Horse



A Review by Garry Victor Hill

Film Details

Directed by Euros Lyn

Produced by Katherine Butler and Tracy O'Riodan

Associate Producer

Production Design by Dan Taylor

Screenplay by neil McKay

Cinematography by Erik Wilsson

Music by Benjamin Woodgate

Editing by James Pearson

Costumes by Sian Jenkins

Art Direction by Julian Luxton

Filming Locations: England and Wales:

Production Companies: Film4, Raw, Ingenious, Film Cymru Wales

Released On: January 24th 2021 at The Sundance Film Festival.

Distributors: Warner Brothers Pictures and Bleeker Street

Running Time 113 minutes

Rating: PG

Cast

Toni Collette as Jan Vokes
Damian Lewis as Howard Davies
Owen Teale as Brian Vokes
Nicholas Farrell as Philip Hobbs
Siân Phillips as Maureen
Karl Johnson as Kerby
Peter Davison as Lord Avery
Joanna Page as Angela Davies
Steffan Rhodri as Gerwyn
Anthony O'Donnell as Maldwyn
Alex Jordan as Johnson White
Max Hutchinson as James Lingsford
Lynda Baron as Elsie
Katherine Jenkins as the race course singer

Review

In her Welsh village Jan Vokes wakes up to her alarm while it is still dark, oblivious to her husband Brian (Owen Teale) who snores on, sounding as loud and as tedious as a jackhammer. She has to wake up that early to polish the floors in the co-operative where after opening hours start she works the check out until her daily break, such as it is. This consists of looking after her aged, nearly infirm parents. At night she works a bar. Walled pennants and photographs show that she once helped her father race winning pigeons. In a cruel irony, wall graffiti tells us that things cannot be too bad in town as the pigeons are still returning. Several "to let" signs and abandoned, boarded up shops in the main street show us things are indeed bad and worsening. If anyone on the planet

fits that famous description of most of us “living a life of quiet desperation”, she does.

When she is told that a new face at the bar, Howard Davies (Damien Lewis) was once a success in the horse racing world, but has since lost everything, and is now slowly regaining security, she begins to develop ideas about horse racing and does research, but the many large financial costs that several warn her of are a barrier. They have a point: stud fees, stabling, training, insurance and wages for jockeys, vets and hostlers all make this “the sport of kings” indeed. Few outside royalty (or at least the aristocracy) can afford the costs - or the likelihood of losing their investment. On sagacious advisor puts her chance of winning at a thousand to one.

Despite this, Jan has tremendous determination and optimism and goes ahead. Why? She says she has to have something to look forward to in the mornings when she wakes up. Others feel the same way and with Howard Davies, they join her to initiate a syndicate from amongst the villagers and the nearby locals.

Howard’s motivations seem slightly different. Judging by his home, the clothes worn by himself and his wife and his work environment, he is reasonably well off, at least financially. Job satisfaction however must be somewhere near nil. Sitting in front of his computer all day he has a boss who regularly does the literal stand over tactic as she contemptuously dumps more work on his desk, telling him that she wants it done by a set time. As is usual with the type, they then haughtily walk off without explanation, probably to cover her own error somewhere. When she tries this once too often and she catches him off task watching on screen horses, he flares up, telling her he is sick to death of finding tax breaks for the rich made from taking money from the taxes of ordinary people. He walks out and back into the horsing world.

Clearly the film makers are backing the ordinary people: fortunately they are unsentimental about it and depict the many tribulations that occur on the syndicate’s way to success. These start with the death of the mare they have bought; all they are left with is a foal, Dream Alliance. This foal will incur massive costs before it can race and then face many more on its track to glory.

The film, closely based on true events, works as another in what has become a new genre in English cinema: the determined

battlers standing by their original idea to win against the odds. Like the others, it is done well and is popular with audiences and critics; deservedly so.



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Toni Collette

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Damien Lewis

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