

Film Notes

by Chloe Harcombe

UK | 2021 | 93m | 15

Director: Harry Macqueen

Starring: Colin Firth, Stanley Tucci

Supernova

Actor turned writer-director Harry Macqueen's sophomore film follows Colin Firth and Stanley Tucci as Sam and Tusker, partners of 20 years, as novelist Tusker is diagnosed with early-onset dementia and Sam puts his music career on hold to take care of him. The narrative follows the pair as they prepare for the difficult path ahead, where one has to deal with losing himself, while the other deals with the loss of someone who is still very much alive. The couple travel across the northern English countryside in their ageing camper van, visiting friends, family, and locations from their shared past. The majority of their journey is set against the vast landscape of the Lake District, captured in all its beauty by director of photography Dick Pope. *Supernova* explores love and death — the all-encompassing themes of the film mean it has the ability to find a universal appeal.

Macqueen approaches the difficult subject matter with delicacy. His writing has already garnered praise and attention from critics after premiering at San Sebastián Film Festival in September and at BFI London Film Festival in October. In *Variety*, Guy Lodge noted that the film overturns the

'relative scarcity of male protagonists put in the more vulnerable position' of battling dementia, and that it is also special in its 'thoughtful, unassuming depiction' of two men in a loving relationship. Macqueen's directorial choices abstain from dialogue-heavy scenes, instead favouring quieter moments of painful, melancholic reflection that result in deep emotional catharsis.

The authenticity of the film is also helped by the talents of the two leads. Firth and Tucci share a friendship of 20 years — similar to their characters — which was established back in 2001 when they both starred as senior Nazi officials plotting the Final Solution in Frank Pierson's *Conspiracy*. Their chemistry as a couple translates on camera effortlessly, conveying an undeniably truthful portrayal.

In an interview with *Deadline*, Macqueen stated that he doesn't 'tend to write for people necessarily' and, instead, the casting of Firth happened through Tucci: when he was approached by the director, Tucci



Excellent

Fair

Poor

What did you think of the film? Please mark or tear the number.

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immediately suggested Firth. When Macqueen welcomed the idea, Tucci confessed that he had already sent the script to his friend. Tucci explained that Firth's 'sensitivity was right', and that the friends have 'a history that maybe two actors who didn't know each other couldn't bring.' Sam and Tusker joke and tease one another with a light-hearted ease, suggesting that Tucci's instinct may have been correct.

Although the characters' future may seem predictable in its final destination, Macqueen's screenplay takes several diversions from the inevitable path. Tusker appears infatuated with the solar system, noting that he believes stars form an

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essential part of human beings. Stunning shots of the English starlit skies are accompanied by Keaton Henson's score, which provides light and beauty to an atmosphere that is otherwise plagued by the fear of loss hanging heavily over the couple.

Critics have concluded that both Firth and Tucci deliver career-best performances in a film that expertly examines two people coming to terms with their own mortality. It is a beautiful, touching effort from Macqueen, and it is almost certain to tug some heartstrings.

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