

Oscar Shorts 2018: The Silent Child

[Maddie Scarlett](#) tackles the story of a young deaf girl in this quiet but impressive short

Tuesday 9 January 2018

*With cinema's most-hyped awards show creeping up on us, **Nouse** turns its attention to an oft-ignored Academy Award: Best Live-Action Short Film. With access to several of the 10 films that have made the Oscars shortlist, our team will be tackling them in a series of interviews and reviews. From thrillers with timely racial commentary to dance dramas, there is plenty of wonderful work to see on the shortlist. The final five nominees will be announced on 23rd January.*



Image: Slick Films/Slick Showreels

Director: Chris Overton

Starring: Rachel Shenton, Maisie Sly, Rachel Fielding

The Silent Child is an unassuming film with an important message. The story follows young and deaf Libby as she learns how to communicate through sign language with her social worker Joanne. In a beautiful country house in the English countryside, the nuclear family gets on with their daily lives, unaware and oblivious to the struggles Libby faces. Joanne is hired to prepare Libby for starting school and recommends teaching a mix of sign language and lip reading. Libby's mother (Suzanne), who is confident Libby can do fine with just lip reading, begins to realise that her daughter is learning and using a language that she and the rest of the family cannot understand. Conflict arises as the mother panics and pulls Libby away from the progress she is making.



Image: Slick Films/Slick Showreels

This short film is gripping, with each scene important and dramatic, moving the story at a nice pace. Ominous music and an abundance of fog creates an unsettling tone and throughout the film new, different things are uncovered. Unfortunately, the build-up of tension doesn't really have the pay-off it deserves. The plot is not revealed instantly and the audience must work to understand what is happening, this is aided by the family talking to Libby as if she had normal hearing abilities and downplaying her disability in all aspects of life. When Joanne first arrives, we are not told about the issues she has been hired to tackle, instead we're told "we have quite low expectations, we just want her to be a little but more confident in time for school". As she has a non-visual disability, this is an apt way to begin Libby's story as not everything is as clear as it first seems. Generally flowing well, one issue is the scene in which Joanne goes out to the car to speak to Suzanne's mother-in-law. Joanne has no motive to leave the house and speak to her one and one and this made the information-gathering stand out among the otherwise smooth beats of the story.

The obvious theme of *The Silent Child* is that of motherhood. From the beginning, we learn about Suzanne's worries of being a good parent and this is continued with her battle to do what she thinks best for her child. Clearly a successful mother to her two older children, her son achieving A*s in his GCSEs, Suzanne is confused and anxious when she is faced with the idea that Joanne might know better. Rachel Fielding (*Holby City*, *New Tricks*) does a decent job as Suzanne. She delivers her lines in a rushed manner but, in character, this suits perfectly - they're a busy family with things to do and people to see.

Writer-star Rachel Shenton (*Waterloo Road*, *Hollyoaks*) provides a brilliant performance as Joanne with buckets of emotion and a real sparkle for her character. Joanne becomes Libby's only friend and the importance of that friendship is highlighted in Libby's dramatic change of demeanour - going from quiet and sad, to lively, active and full of laughter. The nature of this relationship really makes you think about the importance of connecting with someone and is quite emotional to watch as a viewer. Maisie Sly's performance as Libby is outstanding. At only 6, and profoundly deaf in real life, Sly has really mastered the art of on screen performing, her expressions are small but full of emotion and not once does she seem awkward or stale. Libby's character arc is beautiful and heart-warming, if there is one thing that should make you watch this film, it is her.



Image: Slick Films/Slick Showreels

Cinematographer Ali Farahani, and sound designer Greg Claridge both have unassuming filmographies but come together beautifully here and bring to life the story which director Chris Overton (*Pride*, *Drifters*) sets out to deliver. Fluid camera movement and a colour-palette of muted tones are easy on the eye and add to the melancholy mood of the piece. More vibrant outdoor scenes in the montage of Joanne and Libby becoming friends is contrasted by the dark, shadowy frame of Suzanne looking out at their relationship with jealousy. The only shot that felt out of place was the silhouettes of Joanne and Libby under the tree, although it makes a great promo poster, it didn't seem to fit in with the rest of the cinematography.

The sound design was excellent, as it should be in a film about hearing. The mixing stood out due to its attention to detail; from the silent and impactful dinner table scene, to the soft and barely audible voice of Joanne as she talks and signs, it was a real highlight. The music is not overused and delicately accompanies image throughout the film. Without watching *The Silent Child* to review it, you likely wouldn't notice such detail in its sounds. This is the sign of a job well done as sound design should be like wallpaper: always there and providing an important background, but not in the forefront of the viewers mind.

Having already won 15 awards at various festivals, it seems likely that *The Silent Child* will receive an Oscar nomination. If not, it surely deserves to be watched by as many people as possible, after all, it's main aim is to raise awareness, and it's a beautiful way to do so.



One comment

Heather

3 Mar '18 at 8:58 am

Megga congratulations for the nomination and good luck for Sunday X

[Report](#)

Most Read Discussed

1. [Short Film Sunday: All These Creatures](#)
2. [TV Review: Endeavour – Series 3 Episode 2: ‘Arcadia’](#)
3. [TV Review: Vera Series 5 Episode 2: ‘Old Wounds’](#)
4. [Film meets fact – why is historical accuracy important?](#)
5. [TV Review: Endeavour – Series 3 Episode 4: ‘Coda’](#)
6. [TV Review: Endeavour Series 2 Episode 2](#)

Write for Nouse Film & TV

[Get in touch with the editors](#)

[Join the Facebook group](#)

More in Film & TV

[Short Film Sunday: All These Creatures](#)

[Interview: Get Ready With Me director Jonatan Etzler](#)

[Short Film Sunday: Fauve](#)

[Netflix sued by Satanic Temple](#)

[Vintage Sundays Review: The Wizard of Oz](#)

[Review: Manbiki Kazoku \(Shoplifters\)](#)

[About Nouse](#)
[Who's Nouse](#)
[Website Credits](#)

[Contact Us](#)
[Advertising](#)
[Archives](#)
[Student Discounts](#)
[Print Editions](#)
[Mini-Sites](#)
[Nouse on Twitter](#)
[Nouse on Facebook](#)
[Nouse on Google+](#)

© 1964–2018 Nouse

[Policies](#) |

