

# SANCTUARY

Ireland (2016) 87 minutes

**Director:** Len Collin

**Writer:** Christian O'Reilly (based upon his play)

**Cast:** Kieran Coppinger (Larry), Charlene Kelly (Sophie) and Robert Doherty (Tom)



**Screening 12 December 2018 at Swindon Arts Centre**

## Synopsis

Larry has Down's syndrome and Sophie has epilepsy. Larry is at home with his mum and Sophie is cared for in a community facility, but they have met and fallen in love. Care worker Tom has arranged to let them have an afternoon together, sneaking them away from a group trip to the cinema. This is against his better judgement, and indeed against the law.

## Reviews



There is something gently radical about this. Films about intellectual disability tend to focus on gifted individuals, presenting talent and handicap as two sides of a coin. Or disabled characters serve to redeem others by imparting lessons in simplicity and emotional honesty. At best, such films feature disabled actors (*The Eighth Day*). At worst, they call in showboating Hollywood stars to do the job (*Rain Man*). But *Sanctuary* conforms to no stereotype; it is about people wanting to lead ordinary lives on their own terms. *Sanctuary* poignantly sketches the cloistered confines of the characters' lives: everyday objects are new to them, and their reference point for many things is television. It also evokes the contradictory views of disability found across society – and even in some individuals.

*Alex Dudok de Wit, BFI Film Forever*

*Sanctuary* is one of the most ambitious, innovative and deeply moving Irish films of recent times. Featuring a cast composed mostly of intellectually disabled actors, it explores with compassion, understanding and at times considerable humour, challenges faced by intellectually disabled individuals in Ireland today, particularly when they fall in love.

The film cleverly and unobtrusively brings the viewer through the complexities faced by intellectually disabled people wishing to start a relationship – the relevant law is mentioned once in the narrative but its introduction is neither forced nor disruptive but rather a necessary part of understanding the rationale for the actions of the film's lead characters.

Furthermore, the film does not treat its subjects as objects of either pity or deserving of our sympathy; these are independent and remarkable individuals who offer fascinating perspectives on the world around them. The scenes in which the group members escape from the cinema to explore the city, its shops, markets, and pubs are particularly impressive in this respect. Each character engages with his or her surroundings in what may be considered unusual ways but they simultaneously alert us to aspects of the world we inhabit but may have become blind to through over-familiarity.

*Sean Crosson, Film Ireland*

## Film Facts

- The characters are played by actors who also appeared in the play performed by the Blue Teapot Theatre Company, Galway.
- The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act, 1993 referred to in the film was repealed in May, 2017.
- *Sanctuary* was filmed in Galway City, Ireland.