

Bord Scannán na hÉireann / The Irish Film Board, The Northern Ireland Film & Television
Commission and Eclipse Pictures present

A Green Park Films production in association with Chapter Four

- M I D D L E T O W N -

Starring

Matthew Macfadyen

Daniel Mays

Eva Birthistle

Gerard McSorley

Written by Daragh Carville

Produced by Michael Casey

Directed by Brian Kirk

Running time: 89 mins

Certificate: 15

- MIDDLETOWN -

The Night of The Hunter meets The Crucible

A modern-day western about God, man and the madness in between. In the context of a single family, in a single place, it tackles the issues of the fundamental versus the secular which so dominate the world we live in today.

Middletown is an explosive tale of the ambition and betrayal threatening to tear one family apart forever. If it was a song, Johnny Cash would have written it.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Set in Ireland, this atmospheric and explosive drama tells the tale of one cleric's chilling determination to rid a rural town of its corruption and sin.

Preacher Gabriel (Matthew Macfadyen) returns home to Middletown and finds the towns inhabitants given over to vice and sin. Determined to save the souls of his flock, he sets about imposing a new order...

However, Gabriel's godly intentions mask a dark and malevolent heart with his damning sermons pitting neighbour against neighbour. Even Gabriel's own family are not free from attack - his younger brother Jim (Daniel Mays) and wife (Eva Birthistle) are first to suffer Gabriel's moral crusade as Gabriel cannot bring the town back to the true path unless he achieves that for his own kin.

Middletown presents a haunting story of good versus evil. Has the preacher come to save them all from eternal damnation or condemn the parishioners to a life of hell?

Directed by BAFTA-nominated Brian Kirk, produced by award-winning Michael Casey and written by hot new talent Daragh Carville, Middletown stars a stunning ensemble of Ireland's acting talent including Gerard McSorley, Mick Lally, David Wilmot, Frankie McCafferty, Bronagh Gallagher and Marie Jones.

LONG SYNOPSIS

Middletown is a village forgotten by time and progress. Jim, the youngest of two sons, has for years tolerated a cantankerous, stubborn Da. A man trying to do the right thing by his family, he also rightly expects to inherit his Da's business which, in a one-horse town, reaches into every pocket. The Da looks scornfully on Jim's ambitions, not least because his wife Caroline along with her mother runs Middletown's drinking den. The scene, as far as he is concerned, of all the ill in the village and with regular scuffles and nightly cock-fights, he might just be right.

Caroline is all too aware of the view Jim's god-fearing father has of her and she doesn't take it too well. She is growing impatient with Jim and insisting that something has to change – they're expecting their first child and need to know what the future holds. Change does indeed come, but not in the form either of them expect.

Middletown's Minister, Reverend Cray, has led the church there as long as anyone can remember but the time has finally come for him to leave. In his place comes Gabriel, Jim's elder brother, chosen from a young age to one day provide leadership and guidance to Middletown. Gabriel returns then, after a long absence, to the place of his birth and childhood memories only to find that things are not as they used to be.

Gabriel believes strongly that the previous minister to his town oversaw a steep decline in morality and determines to bring the people back to God, at any cost. His zeal totally disrupts the balance in Middletown, pitching residents against each other and threatening to tear asunder the familial harmony which has existed until now. Jim looks to his brother for support but Gabriel has thoughts only for the next world and knows that he cannot bring the town back to the true path unless he achieves that for his own kin. The chief recipient of Gabriel's ire is, of course, Caroline, her mother and the temptation to the men of Middletown which they represent.

In a powerful and emotional climax the struggle between Jim and Gabriel threatens both to destroy everything that each stands for and to engulf all of Middletown in a battle with fatal consequences.

Director's Statement

Middletown grew out of a conversation between Daragh Carville (writer), Michael Casey (producer) and myself about the relationship between morality and the doctrine of sin. Our subject broadened to religion generally and ended up inevitably on the subject of fundamentalism. We reminded ourselves that fundamentalism is not just a madness that possesses evil-doers from elsewhere. We gravitated towards a story about a zealot who is a Christian preacher and the impact of his faith on his family. Tensions explode when he is opposed by his brother, a young man of no public authority, but with the courage to define his own ideas of right and wrong.

Gabriel, the preacher, the eldest and favourite son, is played by Matthew Macfadyen. He has an amazing integrity that makes a difficult character human. He captures his public authority and private disintegration. He makes Gabriel both aggressor and victim. This is a man who believes that to fulfil his duty to God he must reject his sinful family. But if he loves them, will it break his heart? Will his deity destroy his mind?

In contrast to Matthew's meticulous intensity, Daniel Mays, playing his brother Jim, is open and honest and wears his heart on his sleeve. He brings a freshness and energy to the character that keeps us with him, even as he alienates his father (Gerard Mc Sorley) and tests the love of his wife (Eva Birthistle). By a wonderful co-incidence Daniel, like Jim, became a father for the first time during photography on the film.

Their story obviously draws upon the narrative tradition of biblical parables like 'Cain and Abel' and 'The Prodigal Son.' The mythical quality of these parables also influenced our decision to make Middletown as a period film. Whilst we want the audience to identify with our characters, the film must be timeless and universal.

Cinematically we are chasing the intensity of rural gothic thrillers like *'Night of The Hunter'* and tapping into the classic iconography of the American Western. However the biggest visual influence is probably Caravaggio, particularly his later years. His final works are religious paintings with an incredible sense of earthly drama. People within them have to struggle not to be swallowed by the darkness. Saints look like sinners. Even Christ has cracked feet and dirty fingernails. There is corruption and decay everywhere, but also the most amazing sense of life. Crucially, the divinity is in the humanity.

We hope this is also the case with Middletown. While Gabriel threatens with the prospect of a vengeful God and the certainty of death, Jim puts his faith in his wife, his child and his mind. As long as he can hang on to them, he can have a life worth living.

Writer's Statement

Brian and Michael and I have been working together on Middletown for something like five years. It's been a very collaborative, very organic kind of process, each of us pitching in thoughts and suggestions and the story developing very naturally into its own thing.

I suppose the original idea came partly out of my own experience of growing up in a small town in Northern Ireland that was steeped in religion. But the world of Middletown quickly acquired its own dimensions, so it's certainly not autobiographical or anything like that.

Oddly enough, part of the inspiration came out of listening to a lot of country music - real old blood and thunder country music by Hank Williams and Johnny Cash. I wanted to write a story about a family in a

small border town and I wanted it to have the kind of mythic, Biblical, Western associations you find in those songs.

And so that became Middletown - a life or death struggle between two brothers, with the future of their hometown at stake.

THE CREW

WRITER: - DARAGH CARVILLE

Daragh Carville was born in Armagh in 1969. His first play, *Language Roulette*, was premiered by Tinderbox Theatre Company in Belfast in 1996. The play twice toured Ireland, and has been performed at the Bush Theatre, London, and the Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh. In 1999, it received its American premiere at the New Art Theatre, New Hampshire and in September 2001 it was produced by the Pretty Vacant Theatre Company in Berlin. *Language Roulette* is included in *Far from the Land: Contemporary Irish Plays* (Methuen, 1998.) His second play, *Dumped*, premiered by Tinderbox in September 1997, was subsequently produced by the National Youth Theatre of Great Britain at the Pleasance Theatre, Edinburgh, the Battersea Arts Centre, London, and the Petit Hebertôt, Paris. His third, *Observatory*, was produced at the Peacock Theatre, Dublin in March - May 1999. It was also produced, in a Dutch translation, in Holland in May 2001, as part of the 'Vers Braar' Festival, and has also been published in an Italian translation. *Observatory* is published by Methuen.

In October / November 2000 Daragh Carville was one of seven writers who contributed to *Convictions*, a site-specific theatre event held at the disused Crumlin Road Courthouse, Belfast. *Convictions* was selected as one of the theatrical highlights of the year by both The Observer and BBC 2's Late Review. In February 2001 it won the Irish Times Theatre Award for Best Production. Daragh's contribution, *The Proposal*, has been translated into both Dutch and Hungarian. His fourth play, *The Holyland*, was premiered by the National Youth Theatre at the Pleasance Theatre, Edinburgh in August 2001. It then transferred to the Lyric, Hammersmith. *The Holyland* is published by Methuen. Daragh also contributed to *Vote Vote Vote! An Alternative Assembly of Artists*, a theatre event held by Tinderbox to coincide with the Northern Ireland Assembly Elections in 2003. His most recent play, *Family Plot*, was premiered by Tinderbox as part of the Belfast Festival in October 2005.

Daragh Carville has also written for radio and television. His radio play, *Regenerations*, broadcast in December 2001, formed part of BBC Radio 3's series of new plays for radio, 'The Wire' and was shortlisted for the Richard Imison Memorial Award. His adaptation of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* was broadcast on Radio 4 in December 2003 and Radio 4 has also broadcast two of his short stories, *Still Life* and *The Man from Ancestry*.

Daragh Carville was the winner the 1997 Stewart Parker New Playwright Award and the 1998 Meyer-Whitworth Prize. He was Writer-in-Residence at Queen's University, Belfast from 1999 until 2002, and was one of the team that set up the University's M.A. course in Creative Writing, on which he continues to teach. He is currently working on a number of projects for stage and screen, including *Start of the Summer* and *The House of Frankenstein* for Green Park Films and *Graveyard Sunday* for Tinderbox Theatre Company. He currently divides his time between the North of Ireland and the North of England, where he lives with his wife the novelist Jo Baker, and their son, Daniel.

Middletown is Daragh Carville's first film as screenwriter.

DIRECTOR: - BRIAN KIRK

Born in Armagh, Northern Ireland, Brian Kirk now lives in London. He has directed commercials, television dramas, and short films, including *Baby Doll* and *Do Armed Robbers Have Love Affairs?* which won a Fuji Film Award and a Royal Television Society nomination.

He holds a BAFTA nomination for Best New Television Director, and his British television credits include *Murphy's Law*, which received a Best Drama Nomination at the Irish Film and Television Awards and *Funland*, nominated for a Best Television Drama BAFTA award. For Showtime, he has directed *Brotherhood*. *Middletown* is his first feature.

PRODUCER: - MICHAEL CASEY

Michael Casey established *Green Park Films* at the start of 1998 and in that year produced Brian Kirk's short film *Baby Doll*. He also began work on a substantial development slate based around the work of writer-director John Simpson and the filmmaking partnership of Daragh Carville (writer) and Brian Kirk (director).

In 2000, Michael produced John Simpson's short *Mysterious Ways* and the pair went on to co-found *Parallel World Productions*. The first project from this new vehicle is *Freeze Frame*, a gripping award-winning thriller starring Lee Evans

In 2004, Michael was chosen to be Ireland's *Producer on the Move*, part of an EU initiative in which each European country selects one upcoming producer with undertaking to introduce and help establish them in the international film industry.

Middletown is Michael's second feature film as producer.

THE CAST

MATTHEW MacFADYEN: - GABRIEL HUNTER

Matthew Macfadyen has become best known to audiences on both sides of the Atlantic for his compelling portrayal of Jane Austen's most famous character Mr Darcy in Joe Wright's *Pride and Prejudice*. Starring opposite Keira Knightly, Rosamund Pike, Jena Malone, Donald Sutherland and Brenda Blethyn, the film was a worldwide box-office smash.

Previously, Matthew played government agent Tom Quinn in the hit series *Spooks (MI-5 in US)*. The series (co-starring Keeley Hawes, David Oyelowo and Peter Firth) has enjoyed three successful seasons on the BBC and, subsequently in the US on the A&E Network. The programme takes an authentic and dramatic look inside the operations of Britain's national security services and at the high personal and professional stakes for its agents.

Matthew Macfadyen is now also making a name for himself in films. After small but pivotal roles in Ben Elton's *Maybe Baby* (with Hugh Laurie and Joely Richardson), Michael Apter's *Enigma* (with Dougray Scott and Kate Winslet), and Paul McGuigan's *The Reckoning* (with Paul Bettany and Willem Dafoe), he played the first lead film role (opposite Miranda Otto) in Brad McGann's *In My Father's Den*. The dramatic thriller attracted attention from the worldwide film industry.

Matthew graduated from RADA and performed in numerous Shakespeare productions and in 1999 was nominated for the prestigious RSC Ian Charleson Award for Best Classical Actor under 30. At that time, Matthew began working in UK television, taking a role in David Skynner's telefilm remake of *Wuthering Heights*. He was nominated for Royal Television Society Award for his first television starring role, in Peter Kosminsky's BAFTA award-winning BBC drama *Warriors*. He subsequently starred opposite Sir Michael Gambon in Stephen Poliakoff's miniseries *Perfect Strangers*, again winning acclaim.

His subsequent UK television miniseries appearances include David Yates' BAFTA award-winning *The Way We Live Now* and Peter Kosminsky's *The Project*. Macfadyen's most recent stage appearance is in Nicholas Hytner's National Theatre production of *Henry IV, Parts 1 and 2*, starring as Prince Hal opposite Sir Michael Gambon's Falstaff, through August 2005.

DANIEL MAYS: - JIM HUNTER

Daniel Mays has worked twice with Mike Leigh – the first being when he played Jason, the psychotic boyfriend in *All or Nothing*. A RADA graduate, he has worked extensively at the Royal Court, most recently as the lead in Vassily Sigarev's critically acclaimed *Ladybird*. Television roles include *Funland*, *Classic of '76*, *Beneath The Skin* and *Tipping the Velvet*. Film credits include *Pearl Harbor* and the leading role of Jason in Antonia Bird's *Rehab*, for which he won the Best Actor Award at the Palmare-Reims Television Festival.

EVA BIRTHISTLE: - CAROLINE

Eva Birthistle was born in Dublin after which she moved to Northern Ireland for most of her childhood before returning to Dublin to train at The Gaiety School of Acting. Upon graduating, Eva worked in short films and soon landed a part in one of Ireland's long running TV soaps, *Glenroe*. Moving to London, more TV work soon followed, including Jimmy McGovern's stirring docudrama *Sunday* and John Strickland's *Trust*.

Eva was offered her first feature film, *All Soul's Day* by Alan Gilson in 1997, which was closely followed by work on Peter Sheridan's *Borstal Boy*, *Saltwater* for Conor McPherson, *The American* alongside Matthew Modine and Diana Rigg, and *Timbuktu* again for Alan Gilson. It is her portrayal as Roisin, in Ken Loach's *Ae Fond Kiss*, however that has really caught the industry's attention. When *Ae Fond Kiss* premiered at the Berlin Film Festival, Eva was selected to represent the UK as one of Europe's "Shooting Stars", promoting top European talent, then followed a succession of awards and nominations.

Eva's recent film projects include Ol Parker's feature *Imagine Me and You*, alongside Lena Headey, *Save Angel Hope* with Luke Mably and Billy Boyd and the mysterious 'Eily' in Neil Jordan's *Breakfast on Pluto* with Liam Neeson and Cillian Murphy. Eva has just completed filming opposite Leo Gregory in the London based thriller *Reverb* for Eitan Arrusi and departs to Canada for the summer to shoot *State Within* for the BBC alongside a stellar cast including Jason Isaacs.

Joint winner with Kate Winslet for British Actress of the Year Award at the London Film Critic's Awards

Eva was awarded the Best Actress title at the Irish Film and Television Awards for her performance in "Ae Fond Kiss" (October 30th 2004).

She was also nominated in the same category at the Scottish BAFTAs (Nov 14th 2004) and at the British Independent Film Awards (Nov 30th 2004).

GERARD McSORLEY: - THE DA

Irish directors rarely make a movie without McSorley – he has featured in Neil Jordan's debut, *Angel*, *Michael Collins* and *The Butcher Boy*. For Jim Sheridan he made *In The Name of the Father* and *The Boxer*.

Other film roles include his chilling portrayal of John Gilligan in Joel Schumacher's *Veronica Guerin* which he was nominated for an IFTA in 2003. McSorley also worked with Thaddeus O'Sullivan in *Nothing Personal* and *Ordinary Decent Criminal*, with Damien O'Donnell in *Inside I'm Dancing*, Lance Daly's *The*

Halo Effect and is currently working on David Gleeson's *The Front Line*. Other film roles include *Angela's Ashes*, *Agnes Browne*, *An Awfully Big Adventure*, Mel Gibson's *Braveheart* and Atom Egoyan's *Felicia's Journey*.

Gerry McSorley was educated at Queen's University Belfast and lives in Dublin where he is a regular player at The Abbey and The Gate Theatre and has appeared in, among many others, *Equus*, *Three Shouts from a Hill*, *A Doll's House*, *The Crucible* and *The Collector*. He played Michael in the Abbey Theatre's *Dancing at Lughnasa* in Dublin, London and on Broadway. He is also the narrator of Pat O'Connor's recent film version starring Meryl Streep.

His television credits include his award-winning performance in *Omagh*, for which he won Best Actor at 2004 IFTAs and also The Golden Nymph at Monte Carlo TV Festival. Other performances include *Vicious Circle*, *Making the Cut*, *Kidnapped*, *Act of Betrayal* and *Lapsed Catholics*.

MICK LALLY: - REVEREND CRAY

Mick Lally began his acting career with Taibhearc na Gaillimhe in Galway. Later he became involved with the founding of the Druid Theatre Co. in 1975. With Druid Theatre Co. he played in *Playboy of the Western World*, *The Glass Menagerie*, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* and many besides. In 1985 Mick again portrayed Old Mahon in *Playboy of the Western World*. The company were invited to the Donmar Warehouse, London, where they were nominated for the "Olivier Awards" (the play was recorded for Channel 4 TV). After London the company took the play on two record breaking tours to Sydney and also New York with Mick in the same role. Mick has also worked with Druid in *Waiting for Godot*, *Whistle in the Dark* (which was also taken to the Abbey Theatre, Dublin), *Touch of the Poet* and as Larry Taggart in the highly acclaimed production of *Wild Harvest*.

Mick has worked extensively in theatre in Dublin including Passion Machine's *Studs* at the S.F.X; the record breaking *The Year of the Hiker* and hugely successful *Moll* and *The Man From Clare* all at the Gaiety; *The Power of Darkness*, directed by Garry Hynes, *Drama at Inish*, *A Crucial Week in the Life of a Grocer's Assistant* and *The Honey Spike* at the Abbey Theatre; *Winter Thief* in the Peacock Theatre, which he also co-directed; he rejoined the Passion Machine for their *Songs of the Reaper Festival* in the Project Arts Centre in a play directed by Michael Scott, *Dectire*; Druid Theatre Company's 21st anniversary production of Brian Friel's *The Loves of Cass Maguire* directed by Garry Hynes and *A Skull in Connemara* as part of the *Leenane Trilogy* also directed by Gary Hynes *The Dead School* by Patrick McCabe which played in the Galway Arts Festival for Macnas Theatre Co. He was nominated for Best Actor in the 1998 ESB/Irish Times Theatre Awards for this role. Other work includes *Site* as part of the Galway Theatre Festival; a national tour of Samuel Beckett's *Happy Days* a national tour of JB Keane's *The Chastitute*, directed by Terry Byrne and a national tour of JB Keane's *The Field*. Mick also worked on *The Castlecomer Juke Box* for Red Kettle Theatre Company, toured with *The Matchmaker* directed by Michael Scott and also worked on *The Well of the Saints* directed by Garry Hynes. Mick toured with 'The DruidSynge Cycle', in conjunction with Druid Theatre, in Ireland last year and is due to be tour with the show to the USA this summer. He has also been touring with *The Matchmaker* in conjunction with the SFX Theatre this year.

Mick is probably best known for his role of Miley Byrne in RTE's *Glenroe*. Other television work includes *Bracken* and *Roma*, for which he received a Jacob's award, *Tales of Kinvarna*, and *Year of the French*. Mick recently worked with RTE and TG4 on *Tales From the Poorhouse/Scealta O Theach na mBocht* with director Louis Lentin and last year he joined the cast of *Ballykissangel* for the BBC in their final year.

Film work includes *Poitin*, *Our Boys*, *The Outcasts*, *Nights in Tunisia*, *Ballroom of Romance*, *Painful Case*, *The Fantasist*, *Fools of Fortune* and *The Secret of Roan Inish* directed by John Sayles; Barry Devlin's *A Man of no Importance*, directed by Suri Krishnamma; *Circle of Friends*, which is based on Maeve Binchey's book and directed by Pat O'Connor, *I Could Read the Sky* with director Nichola Bruce and *Alexander* directed by Oliver Stone in 2003. Mick most recently worked on *Middletown* directed by Brian Kirk.

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At no time during rehearsals or filming were any animals harmed or put under any duress or at any risk of accident or injury.

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