

The Tree at <http://www.cornerhouse.org/> Reviewed by [Anne Ryan](writers.html#anne-ryan) August 2011

During the long summer holidays Manchester's Cornerhouse is vital for the cinema goer who is not in thrall to the continuing adventures of the boy wizard or the Smurfs.

So on a damp summer Saturday I braved the clear up from the riots to spend an afternoon in the welcoming environment of the Oxford Road venue. As well as access to some of the most exciting and challenging independent films, fascinating exhibitions and a great restaurant, one can also pass a couple of hours enjoying a cup of coffee (and a very tempting looking cake) and browsing through a great collection of magazines and newspapers on the first floor or just watching Manchester go by.

'The Tree' is the kind of film that would never be seen in the multiplexes and might otherwise escape one's notice. An Australian independent production from a female director gathers little publicity, but the casting of the French star Charlotte Gainsbourg earns this small poetic family drama a higher profile.

Gainsbourg brings her customary fragility and intensity to the role of a grieving mother of four facing life following the sudden death of her husband. Her attempts to rebuild her life and find love, with the 'Lord of the Rings' actor Marton Csokas, are tested by her children. The film focuses on eight-year-old Simone who firmly believes that her late father's spirit lives on in the imposing fig tree that overshadows their weatherbeaten house.

She also faces a more paranormal obstacle. In an attempt to understand her father's death, her daughter Simone becomes convinced that her father's soul has transmigrated to the branches of the tree which dominates this homestead. This spiritual presence becomes a very physical threat in the course of the drama.

Writer-director Julie Bertuccelli uses this metaphor to explore the effects of grief on a family and produces a moving and poetic work. The film is beautiful to look at and the Australian landscape has a mesmerising quality, also handling the child actors very skilfully and they are very impressive without the annoying cutsiness that can spoil bigger (Hollywood) productions.

A small film, but an intriguing and moving work and with a thought provoking emotional depth.

Cast: Aden Young, Charlotte Gainsbourg, Marton Csokas, Morgana Davies
Country: Australia, France
Year: 2010