

Fido

2006

CANADA

91 min., colour, 35mm

Director Andrew Currie

Producer Blake Corbet, Mary Anne Waterhouse

Writer Robert Chomiak, Andrew Currie, Dennis Heaton

Cinematographer Jan Kiesser

Editor Roger Mattiussi

Sound Chris Duesterdiek, Paul Sharpe

Music Don Macdonald

Principal Cast Carrie-Anne Moss, Billy Connolly, Dylan Baker, Henry Czerny, Tim Blake Nelson, K'Sun Ray

Production Company Anagram Pictures

Andrew Currie's *Fido* marks Canada's entry into the increasingly popular "zom-com" or zombie comedy subgenre. Currie's film is set in a retro future and modelled after the technicolor melodramas of Douglas Sirk and the B-grade space invasion films of the 1950s and 1960s, with a little George A. Romero zombie gore to top off the genre blend.

In *Fido*, radioactive space dust has fallen to earth and reanimated the dead, turning them into violent zombies who prey upon the living. The idyllic town of Willard has nothing to fear, however, thanks to ZomCon industries, a national organization that has managed to control the zombies with electric shock collars and ruthless security measures. Now every wholesome nuclear family has a zombie of their own to put to work around the home. Except for the Robinsons. Bill Robinson (Dylan Baker) does not trust zombies, collared or not, and, despite his wife's pleas, refuses to allow one into his home. However, when the head of security for ZomCon industries (Henry Czerny) moves in across the street, Helen Robinson (Carrie-Ann Moss) decides she cannot possibly live without a zombie of her own. Enter Fido (Billy Connolly), a zombie with a good heart who becomes both a best friend and a substitute father figure to little Timmy Robinson (K'Sun Ray).

Fido is part horror, part black comedy, part melodrama, and part "boy and his dog" story. The blending of genres allows for wacky comedy that mocks generic conventions and acts as an allegory for the issues of national security and government control that are affecting North American life today. Despite its darker political undertones, however, *Fido* manages to be a very sweet and funny comedy that has pleased audiences since its first festival release. Billy Connolly's performance as Fido is a surprising turn for a comedian usually associated with his distinctive facial hair and heavy Scottish accent, both of which are absent in this film as zombies can only communicate through grunts and sounds. Vancouver native Moss, best known for her role as Trinity in the *Matrix* trilogy, also plays outside her comfort zone in a comedic role. In addition to Baker, the talented character actors featured in *Fido* include Tim Blake Nelson in the role of the helpful neighbour Mr. Theopolis, whose teenaged girl zombie is more of a girlfriend than a slave.

Fido has inevitably been compared with other zom-coms including New Zealand's *Black Sheep* (2006) and especially the British *Shaun of the Dead* (2004). While there are similarities between *Fido* and *Shaun's* depiction and treatment of the zombies, *Fido* remains at heart a story about family, fear and "containment," an apt word repeatedly emphasized in the film. Still, association with *Shaun of the Dead* may have actually benefited the film in terms of publicity. *Fido* was distributed internationally and received a very favourable response from critics. Reviewers picked up on the particularly quirky details Currie inserted into *Fido*, including the brilliant technicolor-style cinematography (which led to allusions to Tim Burton and even Wes Anderson), the Lassie parodies ("What's that Fido? Timmy's in trouble?") and, above all, the heart of the film, as Fido, through his friendship with Timmy, becomes more human than most of the sheltered people within the town.

Fido marks director Andrew Currie's second feature film, following his debut *Mile Zero* (2001), and is a return to familiar territory for Currie, who first started using zombie-human relationships to comment on the state of humanity in his 1997 short *Night of the Living*. *Fido* was produced in conjunction with Telefilm Canada by Anagram Pictures, a production company co-owned by Currie that also released the comedy *The Delicate Art of Parking* (2003).

Fido premiered at the 2006 Toronto International Film Festival to rave reviews and went on to show at the 2007 Sundance Film Festival, having already secured an American distribution deal with Lionsgate Films. Loved by the critics and predicted to be the next independent Canadian film capable of achieving international success, the feature's box office results were thus somewhat surprisingly low. *Fido* has all the makings of a cult film, however, and while it may not have been a sleeper hit in the theatres, it continues to be a much-discussed recent work among Canadian cinephiles. Heartwarming, funny and even unexpectedly beautiful, this zombie comedy moves beyond the limitations of any one genre to become what is fundamentally a fable about what it means to be human.

By Andrea Whyte