

# MY FERAL HEART

UK

JANE GULL

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Movies featuring characters with an intellectual disability have one thing in common: The disabled characters are almost never played by an actor with a disability. For British director Jane Gull, when she was looking for someone to play Luke, the character at the centre of her film *My Feral Heart*, her mind was made up.

"The script had a character who had Downs syndrome so, for me, there was no question about the part being played by someone without Downs syndrome. That was important," she tells *The Straits Times* on the telephone from London, where she is based.

She met Steven Brandon, who has Downs syndrome, while out casting for actors to fill the roles of occupants in a care home. Brandon is an actor in the Essex-based Mushroom Theatre Company, a group that integrates able-bodied with disabled and special-needs children.

While she was set on casting an actor with Downs to play Luke, Brandon showed that he was right in many more dimensions than just that one criterion. "When I looked at Steven, it wasn't about the fact that he had Downs. To me, he was a brilliant actor. I did some workshops with him and he's got the personality. He can show emotion, vulnerability, he can be funny and he has comic timing. He is perfect for the part."

John Lui, [straitstimes.com](http://straitstimes.com)

A terrific central performance from Steven Brandon, a young man with Down's syndrome, is the driving force of this heartfelt British independent picture. In a neat reversal of expected roles, Luke (Brandon) has become the care-giver for his prickly but loving mother. However, when she dies, the authorities ignore the fact that he can and does live independently and shunt him into a residential care home. A sequence in a car, in which the camera rests on Luke's face as he mourns both his lost mother and lost independence, is achingly poignant and beautifully acted. The addition of the abrasive, discordant score is superfluous – everything the scene needs is in Brandon's face.

Luke gradually opens up to Eve (Shana Swash), a pretty, perky care worker, and to troubled, privileged Pete (Will Rastall), who is doing community service in the grounds. Less convincing is another plot element – Luke finds a mute, semi-feral woman (Pixie Le Knot) in the nearby fields and nurses her back to health. It plays better if you read it as symbolic rather than literal – she is, perhaps, a wounded animal whose human form is a manifestation of Luke's empathy and kindness.

Wendy Ide, *The Observer*

**WRITER:** Duncan Paveling **CINEMATOGRAPHY:** Susanne Salavati **Music:** Barrington Pheloung

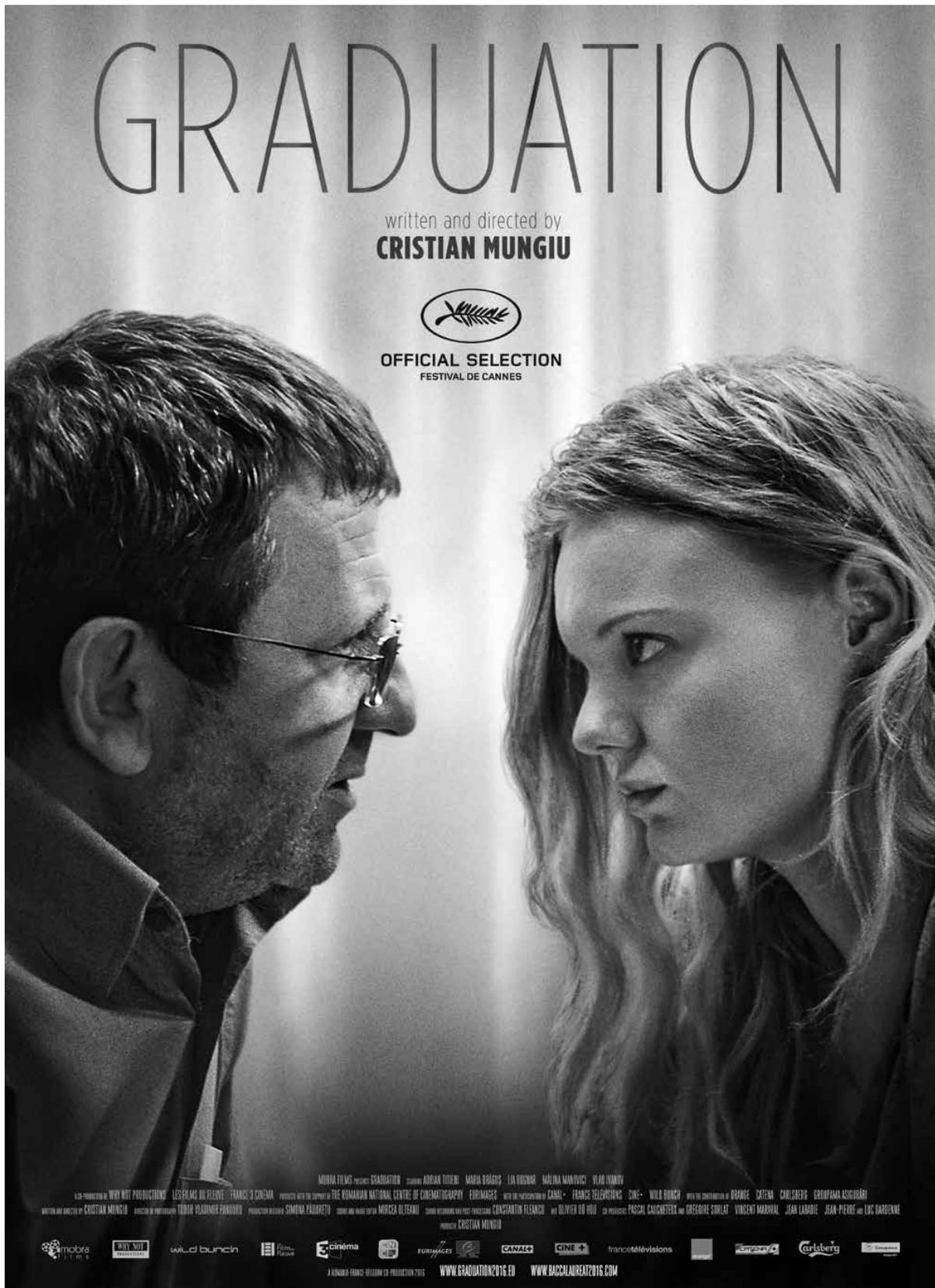
**CAST:** Luke Steven Brandon | *The Girl* Pixie Le Knot | *Pete* Will Rastall | *Margaret* Susanna Hamilton

VOTING FOR *THE GREAT BEAUTY* A39 | B28 | C16 | D9 | E5 | Rating 72.4% | Attendance 117

Next screening | **Graduation** | Tuesday 3 April 2018 8.00pm

'...a fastidiously complex study of one man's moral choices at a crucial junction in his life...'

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**Tuesday 3 April 2018 8.00pm**

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