

BFFS SOUTH WEST GROUP

Mother

Cert 15 Republic of Korea 2009
129 mins

Crew

Director	Bong Joon-ho
Screenplay	Park Eun-kyo Bong Joon-ho
Cinematography	Hong Kyung-pyo
Editor	Moon Sae-kyoung
Production Designer	Ryu Seong-hoo
Music	Lee Byeong-woo

Cast

Kim Hye-ja	mother
Won Bin	Yoon Do-yoon
Jin Goo	Jin-tae
Yoon Jae-moon	Je-mun
Jun Mi-Sun	Mi-Sun
Song Sae-beauk	detective
Kim Byoung-soon	chief
Chun Woo-hee	Mina
Lee Young-Suck	ragman

Synopsis

Small-town South Korea, present day. The dotting single mother of slow-witted Do-joon pays up after her son and his friend Jin-tae attack a group of golfers who'd previously knocked down Do-joon. A golf ball incriminates Do-joon in the murder of schoolgirl Ah-jung, and he signs a police confession without understanding its significance.

Do-joon's mother is convinced of his innocence. Although her accusation against Jin-tae proves ill-founded, the latter's help is important in furthering her investigation. Tracking down the victim's mobile phone proves crucial, since the dead girl kept photographs of her many lovers on it, allowing Do-joon to identify a local ragman. Mother visits the old man's shack.....

Abridged from Sight & Sound, Sept. 2010



Review

In 2006, director Bong Joon-ho brought *The Host* to the world stage. A clever, startling reawakening of the monster movie genre, the film brought the director tremendous, well-deserved success, making him something of a master of the genre after only a single picture. *Mother* returns Bong to familiar cinematic ground, taking on a slightly comic, utterly transfixing murder mystery that pins violence and messy displays of injustice on the most saintly of screen images: dear old mom.

Desperate to keep her moderately mentally-challenged son Do-jun (Won Bin) out of trouble, Mother (Kim Hye-ja) observes his daily life from her area of work, shooing him away from problematic characters, hoping his better judgment will one day reveal itself. When a local girl winds up gruesomely murdered and displayed for everyone to see, the local police arrest Do-jun in connection to the crime, goading him into a confession. With Do-jun in prison, Mother sets out to find clues that will set her one and only child free, with the help of her son's friend, Jin-tae (Jin Ku). Hoping for easy answers, Mother instead finds a town of vast dysfunction, with multiple suspects in her pint-sized crosshairs.

Mother is a sumptuously Hitchcockian thriller that walks a fine line between wry comedy and broad suspense. It's a high-wire act from Bong that spotlights his gifts with genre-bending material, unafraid of subtle tonal shifts and stark flashes of horror. While *The Host* was a superb examination of Korean society and environmental damage, *Mother* reduces the cinematic scope to more frenzied domestic concerns, stuffed inside of a spellbinding murder mystery the filmmaker sustains delightfully for the two hour running time.

While assembled with expertly designed cinematography that extracts a delightfully macabre tone out of every available moment, the real power of the film emerges from Kim's sensitive, trembling performance as Mother. A woman dealing with her own crippling issues of guilt, Mother yearns to protect her son from bullies and scams, watching as her child bluntly bolts through life safe in the knowledge that his mom will be there to catch him when he falls. However, Mother is perhaps Do-jun's greatest threat, developing a sense of dread that the director coils around the script faultlessly, building the character not expressly on notes of flat-footed sainthood, but of possible sin. Kim plays the role to wonderful lengths of worry and desperation; it's a skin-tearing performance that helps the director find those hostile dark spaces and sublime smacks of revelation.

The twists and turns of *Mother* take on a traditional sense of the unexpected, as Mother inches toward a final revelation that turns a simple declaration of innocence into a winding road of betrayal and deception that threatens to turn the spotlight of guilt on the woman who demanded all the answers in the first place. *Mother* is a true nail-biter, with a generous sense of humour and appreciation for the deranged that maintains an inviting, colourful atmosphere of murder, parental protection, and maternal extremity.

Review by brianordorf

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Programme Notes