

Fish Tank

UK

Cert 15 2009 112 mins

Credits

Director	Andrea Arnold
Screenplay	Andrea Arnold
Cinematography	Robbie Ryan
Editor	Nicolas Chaudeurge
Art Director	Christopher Wyatt
Production Designer	Helen Scott

Cast

Katie Jarvis	Mia
Michael Fassbender	Connor
Kierston Wareing	Joanne
Rebecca Griffiths	Tyler
Harry Treadaway	Billy Sydney
Mary Nash	Keira

Synopsis

Barking, Essex, present day.

Fifteen-year-old Mia lives in a council high-rise with her mother Joanne and her younger sister Tyler. Disaffected and friendless, Mia loves to dance, but only by herself in a disused flat. On a patch of waste ground near travellers' caravans she tries to free a tethered horse and is chased away by the lads who own it. Returning to try again she's caught but manages to fight free. Later she goes back yet again; the youngest of the lads, Bill, tells her the horse is old and sick.

Joanne brings home a new boyfriend, Connor, who's friendly and treats Mia and Tyler kindly. He takes them all for a drive to a lake where Mia helps him catch a fish. Hearing that a local club is looking for dancers, she confides in Connor, who lends her his camcorder to film an audition disc. Mia meets Billy again and goes with him to a scrap yard to look for car



Review

Like her startling debut *Red Road* (2006) Andrea Arnold's *Fish Tank* is set in high-rise, low-income Britain around the emotional travails of a young woman. Fifteen-year-old Mia (Katie Jarvis) lives on a housing estate close to rural Essex with her mum (Kierston Wareing) and sister Tyler (Rebecca Griffiths). She's a spitfire with a bad reputation and an aggressive instinct – Vicky Pollard would probably keep out of her way. "What's wrong with you?" asks her mum. "You're what's wrong with me," she snaps. Only dancing to hip-hop in an abandoned flat gives her release and enjoyment.

When her mum's new boyfriend Connor (Michael Fassbender) moves into their flat Mia is surprised, and affected, by the idea of someone being nice to her. She begins to respond to his charm, but as the weeks pass it gradually becomes apparent that Connor might not be the carefree gadabout he seems. Arnold controls this simmering tension as adroitly as she did in her first film: it's a real skill to present quite unpleasant characters and then reveal them as vulnerable, even loveable. She is also blessed with a remarkable eye for place. *Fish Tank* balances the urban against the bucolic, first in virtuoso shots of a tethered white horse by a motorway overpass, later in a long, heart-stopping, sequence that changes from suburban Tilbury to the ominous marshlands of coastal Essex.

In her first film Katie Jarvis gives a fabulously sullen performance. Her Mia is angry and hostile and knows it – yet the single time she smiles it changes her whole face. Arnold has told how she first spotted Jarvis, arguing with her boyfriend on Tilbury station. It took a brave person to approach her. Michael Fassbender, still reed-thin from his Bobby Sands ordeal in *Hunger*, gives good value as the charismatic interloper; he seems so at ease with character you can imagine him taking on just about anything. These two, and Rebecca Griffiths as a pint-sized, potty-mouthed sister, lend a human vitality to a film of bleak impersonal spaces.

Anthony Quinn, The Independent on Sunday, September 2009

