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Still Mine, reviewed: James Cromwell builds character in a true Canadian little-guy vs. the system tale



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Still Mine is the true story about a man, Craig Morrison (James Cromwell) fighting for his right to build a house on his own land. Here, he's pictured next to his wife, Irene (Geneviève Bujold).

Mongrel

I'd accuse filmmaker Michael McGowan of making up a too-sweet story of a little guy fighting the system. But his screenplay for *Still Mine* is based on a true and very Canadian tale.

Back in 2008, 89-year-old Craig Morrison of St. Martins, N.B., got in a tussle with the Royal District Planning Commission over his plans to build a modest new home on his rural property. He was putting up a sturdy bungalow the way he'd be doing for the better part of a century, but the commission said the structure didn't adhere to the building code.

Among the infractions; no safety stickers on the lumber. That's because Craig cut it himself. The disagreement landed the old man in court.

Still Mine

Rating:

Director: Michael McGowan

Writing Credit: Michael McGowan, ,

Cast: James Cromwell, Campbell Scott, Geneviève Bujold

Rated: PG-13

Genre: Drama

Duration: 102 minutes

Release date: May 03, 2013

Synopsis: An elderly couple fight against local authorities in rural New Brunswick to

In the film, Craig is played by James Cromwell, bright-eyed and stony-faced; the 73-year-old actor pulls off a convincingly hale 89. Geneviève Bujold is Craig's wife, Irene, her signs of dementia forcing her husband to consider a smaller, simpler house for them.

build their final home.

As in Sarah Polley's *Away from Her* and the recent Oscar-winner *Amour*, it can be fascinating to watch a man of a certain generation pushed into the role of caregiver. Craig installs stairway gates, baby monitors and an outhouse on the front porch to accommodate Irene's infirmities. He hides the matches and takes over cooking after she almost burns down the kitchen.

But he won't ask for help from his kids, played by a gaggle of Canadian talent including musician Hawksley Workman. His most useful ally is lawyer Gary Fulton, played by McGowan semi-regular Campbell Scott.

If there's a villain in the story it's building inspector Rick Daigle (Jonathan Potts). Yet McGowan goes out of his way to paint Daigle as a real human being, albeit a bureaucratic and inflexible one. Craig tries to explain that the house he's building is entirely up to code, save for the actual code, but that won't fly with the government's representative. And really, is it unreasonable for the planning commission to want plans?

Still Mine has a few moments that feel a little too structured; perhaps the film itself needed to be less planned. An early scene in which Craig finds he can no longer sell his strawberries because he lacks a refrigerated truck ends with him sighing: "Seems like there's some kind of regulation for everything these days." And a wonderful technique of husband and wife apparently talking to each other even while they're apart loses some of its magic when used twice.

The film's charms more than outweigh any stumbles

Still, the film's charms more than outweigh any stumbles. And kudos to McGowan for his use of Mumford & Sons elegiac *After the Storm* in a pivotal moment, rather than any of the sad-scene standards we've come to expect at the movies. (The director says he was listening to the U.K. indie folk group while writing.)

Cromwell is perfectly cast in the role of the won't-suffer-fools-gladly farmer. He notes in one scene that paying for a building permit feels like paying for others' mistakes. We've all run up against the Man in big and small ways. *Still Mine* will leave viewers with a lump in the throat and a hopeful determination to face administrative adversity with as much stoicism and grace.

—*Still Mine* opens May 3 in Toronto and Vancouver, with wider release on May 10. Michael McGowan will participate in a Q&A after the 8 p.m. screenings at Toronto's Varsity cinema on May 3 and 4.

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