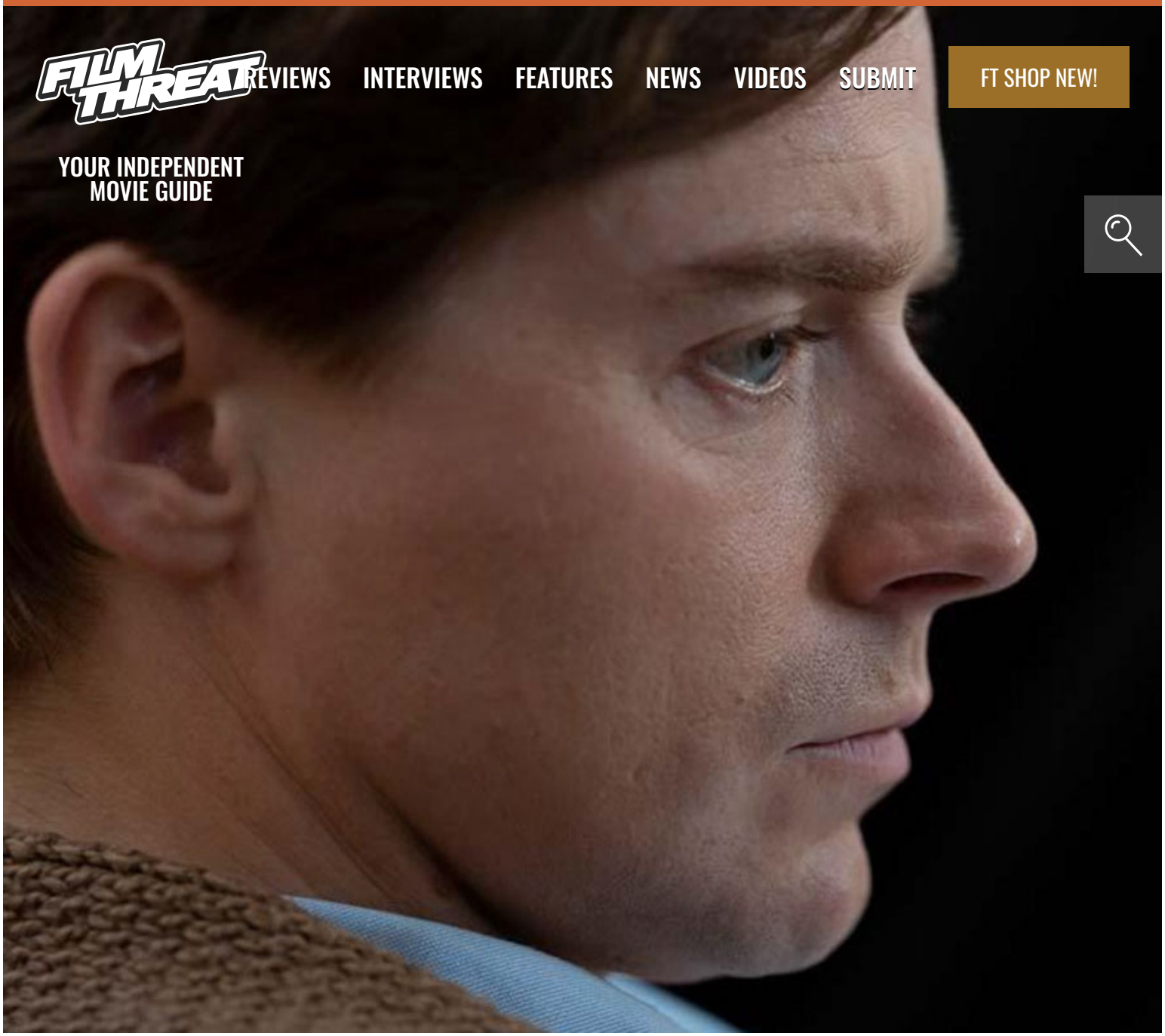
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BENEDICTION

By Alan Ng | May 15, 2022



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SFFILM FESTIVAL 2022 REVIEW! Terence Davies' ***Benediction*** is the tragic story of famed poet Siegfried Sassoon. As World War I raged on, Sassoon (Jack Lowden) enlisted and earned the Military Cross for Gallantry for his efforts and loyalty. However, Sasson's view of the war quickly waned with the death of his brother, Hamo (Thom Ashley), and the belief that the military leaders did not care to see an end to the war.

His opposition to the war was judged as a mental illness, and Sassoon was sent to a military psychiatric facility in lieu of court-martial. While locked away, he wrote poetry inspired by his tour on the Western front and became one of the leading war poets of his time. When WWI ended, he became the darling of the aristocracy and the London stage.

Sassoon's arc in ***Benediction*** is his search for personal salvation. War and the death of his lover, Wilfred Owen (Matthew Tennyson), placed an unforgettable air of loss, depression, and aimlessness on his work and life. He would move on to destructive relationships with the narcissistic songwriter Ivor Novello (Jeremy Irvine) and his long-time friend, Glen Byam Shaw (Tom Blyth). Finding no long-term love in his relationships, Sasson would marry Hester (Kate Phillips) and together raise a son, George (Richard Goulding).







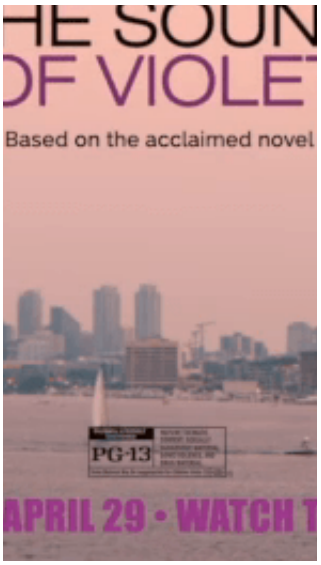


"...wrote poetry inspired by his tour on the Western front and became one of the leading war poets of his time. "

Let me be honest. As much as I liked ***Benediction***, as a straight male who reads comic books versus "real" books (much less poetry), a lot in this just flew right over my head. There is a good amount of poetry jokes. I know they were jokes because the artsy audience I saw it with was laughing it up. I'll also admit that I don't get poetry, and there's a lot of poetry here — the lone Luddite in a sea of Sophisticates.

The drama is also a commentary on being gay in a post-war England. I never understood what it was like living as a gay man in a society with harsh sodomy laws. I think you'll find fascinating the role that class played in protecting their own and the ramifications of the choices Sassoon ultimately makes with Hester.

In telling Sassoon's life, director Davies sometimes morphs the poet of the past into the present. For example,



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in an instant, Jack Lowden transforms into the older version of himself, played by Peter Capaldi. Capaldi's Sassoon struggles to find a life worth living as an upper-class closeted-gay family man and his distant relationship with George and Hester.

The narrative is mournful about a man who lived a long tragic life, a dark and depressing tale of young men having to hide their sexual orientation and its emotional and psychological toll in carrying their secret into their senior years. If you like tragedies, hop on board the ***Benediction*** train. I say this somewhat facetiously, but I was drawn to the aimless character of Siegfried Sassoon. He was a man looking for happiness, but his sour demeanor toward life seemed to attract all the wrong people, leading him to chase the idea of happiness rather than being happy.

Benediction *screened at the 2022 SFFilm Festival.*

BENEDICTION (2022)

Directed and Written: Terence Davies

Starring: Jack Lowden, Peter Capaldi, Jeremy Irvine, Tom Blyth, etc.

MOVIE SCORE: 7.5/10



"...was drawn to the aimless character of Siegfried Sassoon."

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