

La Vie En Rose (12)

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On 10th September, seven members enjoyed the biopic of Edith Piaf. The film, starring Marion Cotillard (who won the best actress Oscar and BAFTA for the role), is largely shown in flashback, from her early childhood post the First World War, to her untimely death from liver cancer at the age of 47 in 1963. It covers her early life when she was left in the care of her paternal grandmother, who was a madam in a brothel, through her life as an itinerant performer with her father, a circus contortionist. She was discovered singing on street corners before progressing to music hall/cabaret before finally succeeding as an international movie star. In later life, Piaf suffered from crippling arthritis, which led to a morphine addiction, before she succumbed to liver cancer which was probably caused by (or at least exacerbated by) her near alcoholism.

Cotillard was brilliant as Piaf. She portrayed her anxiety, vulnerability and ultimately her star quality, capturing Piaf's physical style as well as looking remarkably like her. The rest of the cast was largely supporting, with the stand out cameo of Gerard Depardieu being the only internationally recognised name (before the scandals which effectively ended his career).

We had a few minor gripes. The first flashbacks had a location and date, but when the film returned to them later there was no reminder, leaving the viewer to work out the setting. A few songs over the soundtrack had no subtitles: although they were haunting and beautiful, it would have been nice to know what they were about. It wasn't always clear who the supporting characters were — for example, Charles Aznavour was a passenger in the car accident and it was not made clear at all (nor was the role that Piaf played in launching Aznavour's career). Finally, Piaf's role in the Second World War was completely excised: she was accused of collaboration, but resistance members spoke on her behalf so she was never convicted.

Final thought: a very good film which captured the essence of a tortured performer, with a few minor niggles that prevented it being a brilliant film.

Thanks to Mike Fairbrother for the loan of the DVD.