

Dummy

United Kingdom 2008

Director: Matthew Thompson

With Aaron Johnson, Therese Bradley, Emma Catherwood

Certificate: not submitted 89m

Matthew Thompson's first feature *Dummy* displays a visual and narrative assurance that belies its meagre £100,000 budget. Essentially a chamber-piece about two fatherless brothers coping with the death from cancer of their bohemian mother, the film documents the period immediately after this bereavement, as the siblings – 18-year-old budding DJ Danny and the charmingly prim 11-year-old Jack – make sense of a newly desolate life in their Brighton townhouse.

Their mother is gone but her intriguingly sexualised memory is everywhere. A nude portrait of her gazes down from the living-room wall. Jack rifles through her belongings, reacting nonchalantly to the discovery of underwear and a vibrator. He dresses her sewing dummy in a wig and nightgown, and promotes it to the role of confidante. Choice casting here – young Thomas Grant has the wide, attentive eyes of a manga scamp, and a gentlemanly manner – forestalls concerns that Jack may be a Norman Bates in the making.

Danny is notionally the care-giver, but it is Jack who is more responsible and domesticated, given to furious cleaning regimes that hint at OCD. Much of the film's piquancy comes from the boys' adoption of archaic marital stereotypes: Danny the hard-drinking, career-minded 'husband', Jack the house-proud 'wife' who demands emotional reliability ("Look after me! Get up and look after me!") and cries on the doorstep when Danny leaves for a gig. At other times, Jack becomes maternal. He serves hot chocolate on a tray to Danny and his girlfriend, then produces his knitting and says warmly: "Why don't you go out? Go to the cinema." In his traumatised confusion, he steps into the one role he knows for sure is up for grabs.

Emotional distress is largely siphoned off into the occasional flashback to their mother's final hours. Death too is treated with a frankness that precludes the common responses, squeamishness and sentimentality. Reaching towards his deceased parent, Jack dislodges the wig concealing her wispy-haired scalp, but he is soon

SYNOPSIS Brighton, the present. Eleven-year-old Jack lives with his 18-year-old brother Danny, an amateur DJ, after the death of their mother from cancer. Flashbacks to the day of her death run through the film. A social worker examines their mother's will, which has left the boys financially secure while stipulating that they must not be separated. The social worker promises to keep the situation under review. Danny spends his time partying with his girlfriend Zoe, while Jack fantasises that a sewing dummy is his mother. Danny travels to London with Jack for a DJ-ing gig, but the night ends badly when he loses sight of Jack and abandons his decks in pursuit.

Back in Brighton, Danny tells the social worker he can't cope. The prospect of being fostered drives Jack to attempt suicide, but he is rescued by Danny. The brothers throw the dummy off Beachy Head.

Settled with a kindly foster family, Jack is visited by Danny and Zoe, who take him to retrieve the dummy.



Surrogate mother: Thomas Grant, Aaron Johnson

cuddling up to her. When the authorities arrive in antiseptic white suits like the government agents in *E.T.*, the camera gazes on calmly, ruling out hysterical identification even as Jack goes berserk. Thompson's measured approach replicates the coolness with which painful memories can be considered from a safe distance.

The director has said he set out to make "a film about grief that wasn't sad", and in its fleet-footed tone, aided by Phil Hartnoll and Nick Smith's score, the picture recalls David Mackenzie's underappreciated *Hallam Foe*, which also treated heavy themes with a liberating levity. There are echoes too of *The Cement Garden*, and *Cross My Heart*, a forgotten 1990 film (once earmarked for a Spielberg remake) about a child whose friends conspire with him to conceal his mother's death. The financial stability bequeathed to Danny and Jack rules out the urgency present in those movies, where poverty was a real concern, and the prospect of interference by social services more fearsome than it is in *Dummy*.

But Thompson uncovers other hazards, such as the ease with which innocence can fade or curdle. A lovingly handknitted scarf can double as a noose. A young ornithologist's online search for "birds, Brighton" can produce websites in no way concerned with the lesser-spotted sparrowhawk.

◆ Ryan Gilbey

CREDITS

Directed by Matthew Thompson
Produced by David Langan, Matthew Thompson, Miranda Robinson
Screenplay Michael Mueller
Story Paula Barnes, Matthew Thompson
Director of Photography David Langan
Editor Kant Pan
Production Designer Philip Barber
Music Nick Smith, Phil Hartnoll

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Production Companies A Format Films production in association with HighWire Films

A film by Matthew Thompson
 Supported by Screen South

Executive Producers Fiona Gillies, Nicola Fenn, Sean Cascone, Chris Carey, Kant Pan

Co-producer Paula Barnes

Line Producer Charle Bowden

Production Co-ordinators Lysander Ashton, Kate Chadderton, Mafi Alves Luis

Location Manager Nick Hale

Night Club Co-ordinator Alex Tipping

Picture Post Supervisor Portia Napier

Assistant Directors 1st: Oily Robinson, 2nd: Annie Mosebach

Script Supervisor Natalie Sloan

Casting Nicola Fenn, Fiona Gillies

Gaffer Dave de Haan
Additional Editing Nick Follows
Art Director Lorna Gay Copp
Portraits by Tess Martin
Costume Designer Julia Patkos
Make-up Designer Kirsty Bailey
Special Effects Make-up/Hair Supervisor Caitlin Tanner
Titles Designed by Santamaria Design
Original Strings Played by The London Telefilmnic Orchestra

Musical Director Levine Andrade
Musical Direction/Additional Composition for Nick Smith & Phil Hartnoll Timothy Cole

Soundtrack "Pushin' On" – The Quantic Soul Orchestra featuring Alice Russell; "Slow Moves" – José González; "It's Over" – The Beta Band; "Dispel the Clouds" – Longrange, backing vocals by Kelly Malone; "Riverman" – Nick Drake; "Over and Out"; "Not a Lot of Nice Days" – Team LG; "Hustler" – Simian Mobile Disco; "Control Me"; "Just One More" – Longrange; "Seconds" – Alloy Mental

Sound Recordist Henry Milner
Dubbing Mixer Andy Hagon
Sound Editor Gemma Nicholson

Stunt Co-ordinator Steve Truglia

CAST
 Aaron Johnson
 Danny
 Therese Bradley
 Eisa, mother
 Emma Catherwood
 C. Jaeger
 Florence Rawlings
 Naoki Kishimoto-Eley
 Alice Slade
 Chris Raes
 Thomas Grant

Jack
 Leo Winger
 form tutor
 Jack Pierce
 club promoter
 Andrew Havill
 doctor
 Morgan Symes
 Michael Palmer
 undertakers
 Anna Jaskolka
 teacher in corridor
 Jerome Blake
 bouncer
 Michelle Munden
 Zoe's friend
 Jo Thorne
 shop assistant
 Sandra Grant
 woman in shop
 Benn Carr
 James Patterson
 grave diggers
 Charles Kirchin
 priest
 Phil Willet
 Aidan Stephenson
 funeral directors
 Natalie Sloan
 Matthew Thompson
 train passengers
 Annie Mosebach
 waitress
 Daniel Leatherdale
 foster dad
 Nicola Fenn
 foster mum
 Eve Thompson
 Arthur Thompson
 Audrey Thompson
 Sam Foster
 Oscar Aitcherson
 Isabel Foster
 Sian Atkins
 Matilda Fenn
 Louis Mueller
 Gabriel Mueller
 Imogen Davies
 Toni Bednary
 Jody Barrett
 Edson Dos Santos
 Osvaldo Feliet
 Bruno Silva
 Mauro E Sa
 Lamine
 Isaac Houli
 Joanna
 Behzad Fallahi
 Dennis Arthur Evans
 Mark Herod
 Lucie Mara
 Lauren Halsey
 C. Jaeger
 Florence Rawlings
 Naoki Kishimoto-Eley
 Alice Slade
 Chris Raes
 Anna Masouras

Alec McDonald
 Josh Bethell
 Kai Midane
 Sam Widdons
 Javen Holcombe
 Augie Taylor
 Simon Fenn
 Richard Coffey
 Innes De Clercq
 Rebecca Grierson
 Lara Solomons
 Jessica Shore
 James Muzia
 Joseph Marsh
 James Prendergast
 Dominic Kavanagh
 Tim Morris
 Verity Kavanagh
 Clarke
 Nigel Downey
 Eve Odweay
 Sarah McKie
 Leonora Metzger
 Leah Brakes
 Ruby Wild
 Army Trigwell
 Emily Chart
 Lee Smith
 Reid Heath
 Hannah Salter
 Charm Barrett
 Alan Barrett
 Tania Ziekie
 Laura Frederick
 Kye Otridge
 Maria Low
 Santigle Kamara
 Sadie Cook
 Paul
 Louise Hartfield
 Kim Lavin
 Oliver Rolle
 Edson Pairs
 Musci Valeria
 Jo McKenna
 Michael Henry Smith
 Eliza Grant
 Abby Sumrie
 Lily Sumrie
 Ella Sumrie
 background artists
 pupils from
 Blatchington Mill
 School
 Longhill School
 Dharma School
 Brighton
 school children

Dolby Digital In Colour [1.85:1]

Distributor Shoreline Entertainment (CA Cinema)