

The Outrun [15]

2024 UK/Germany 118 mins

UK released **27 September 2024**

Director **Nora Fingscheidt**

Screenplay **Nora Fingscheidt; Amy Liptrot**

Cinematography **Yunus Roy Imer**

Music **John Gürtler; Jan Miserre**

Cast **Saoirse Ronan** (Rona); **Saskia Reeves** (Annie);
Stephen Dillane (Andrew); **Lauren Lyle** (Julie);
Paapa Essiedu (Daynin); **Izuka Hoyle; Nabil
Elouahabi** (Samir)

The title means an outlying coastal piece of farmland on Orkney; it is not suitable for cultivation, but so continually windswept with Atlantic spray that its grass stays short as if naturally tended, and so functions metaphorically in various ways. It could be a healing place for troubled city dwellers; or a place whose restorative quality is an illusion, a place as violent and mysteriously destructive as the city; or it could even stand for the actual person who has come there, the low-functioning addict, shaped and flattened by forces all but impossible to outrun.

Saoirse Ronan is outstanding in this painful, involving addiction-recovery drama, directed by Nora Fingscheidt and adapted by Fingscheidt and Amy Liptrot from Liptrot's own 2017 memoir of the same title. Ronan plays Rona, a young woman born in Orkney who has been living in London as a postgrad student, where her joy in her freedom has been succeeded by alcohol abuse and depression. Her relationship with the tender, caring Daynin (Paapa Essiedu) is poisoned by her toxic addiction and she gets into a terrifyingly vulnerable and violent situation.

But after rehab, and at the very tail end of her troubled 20s, she agrees to go home to Orkney and corncrake habitats. Ronan's unassuming scenes with the RSPB, apparently using non-professional actors, are the very best thing in this very good film – better, for me, than the slightly self-consciously dreamy voiceover passages about Orkney mythology.

Orkney is not sentimentalised as a rural place of innocence. The feeling of being all alone in a wind-lashed cottage is fervently conveyed: the islands are shown to be beautiful but intimidating, with a challenging unanswered question in the peace and quiet. And Rona has to come to terms with her troubled family background. Her dad and mum, Andrew and Annie – the excellent Stephen Dillane and Saskia Reeves – have separated due to Andrew’s bipolar episodes, exacerbated by drinking; Annie for her part has found Christianity. Rona is uneasy with both, and with the unprocessed realisation that her own passion and capacity for euphoria, as well as her addictive personality, is something that she has taken from her dad, either by nature or nurture; and the awful truth is that to survive she might have to cut him loose, just as her mother has done. In every shot and every scene, mostly in closeup, Ronan carries the film with her unselfconsciously fierce and focused presence. Out-of-control-drunk acting in montage is a difficult thing to bring off – as is the representation of precarious sobriety – but she does it with intelligence and plausibility. There is a powerful moment when Rona confesses in her 12-step group that what she mostly feels is a passionate longing for the happiness of being drunk. Later, in an Orkney shop, Fingscheidt allows us to register a visually unemphasised row of bottles behind the shopkeeper while Rona is buying food and her blank, composed remark to him that, no, she doesn’t want anything else. It is a considerable performance.

Peter Bradshaw, *The Guardian*, 27 September 2024 (abridged).

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