

Four Mothers [15]

2024 Ireland

89 mins

UK released **4 April 2025**

Director **Darren Thornton**

Screenplay **Colin Thornton; Darren Thornton**

Cinematography **Tom Comerford; Burschi Wojnar**

Music **Hugh Drumm; Stephen Rennicks**

Cast **James McArdle** (Edward); **Fionnula Flanagan** (Alma); **Dearbhla Molloy** (Jean); **Stella McCusker** (Maude); **Paddy Glynn** (Rosey); **Gaetan Garcia** (Raf); **Niamh Cusack** (Maura)

YA novelist Edward (James McArdle) is a full-time carer for his mutely-defiant mother Alma (Fionnula Flanagan), who bosses him around from an iPad. Chronically unassertive, he's become such a pushover that his three friends can't resist the temptation to ditch their own needy mothers with Edward in order to attend a Pride weekend in Spain. Now Edward has four demanding elderly women to take care of as his publisher becomes ever-more insistent and the object of his lust, physical therapist Raf (Gaetan Garcia), prepares to move overseas.

Darren Thornton – together with his writing partner and brother Colin – makes a warm return to the big screen after 2016's *A Date For Mad Mary* with *Four Mothers*, a clearly personal tribute to middle-aged Irish gay men, their working-class matriarchs and what it means to – finally – grow up.

A loose remake of the small Italian film *Mid-August Lunch* (2008), the film showcases once again the genial, salty-sweet disposition of the Thornton brothers alongside their ability to draw empathetic performances from their leads — in this case, veteran Irish actress Flanagan and Glasgow's McArdle, playing a perfect Irishman in his first outright film lead.

The writing in *Four Mothers* is key to its modest successes: it follows a nicely-paced dramatic trajectory, but the dialogue and performances are key.

Edward's debut novel is suddenly finding success in America and his publisher wants him to go on a book tour there to capitalise on it. Lacking self-confidence, Edward struggles with phone-in radio promotional

interviews at the same time as he avoids telling Alma that he needs to go away for two weeks, which will involve her moving to a home for respite care. Clearly, Edward is going to have to grow up or grow a pair over the course of the 89-minute film, and it's testament to McArdle's sensitive understanding of his character that he keeps the viewer's sympathy even as patsy Edward agrees to ever-more outrageous demands. All four women have distinct personalities and problems, which adds to the enjoyment of their slow-forming sorority, and the addition of a mini-bus and a road trip to Galway to visit a medium played hilariously by Niamh Cusack keeps the laughs coming. Flanagan is striking in a mute role, conveying the panic, love and selfishness of a wholly- and perhaps happily-dependant woman.

The real achievement of *Four Mothers*, though, is to take this high, arch concept and turn it into something more subtly loving. How do we best care for ourselves and each other as we get older? It's not a popular subject in cinema, but this gently-exaggerated scenario has truth at its core and is at least part-based on the Thorntons' own mother, as well as the Italian source material. Broad though his film might be, Darren Thornton makes it a closely-shot affair across well-rendered interiors, the better to capture the intimacy of the subject matter. Music underscores the humanity at the film's core. Of course there are laughs here but, like life – and even at Maspalomas Winter Pride – there's so much more to take into consideration.

Fionnuala Halligan, *Screen Daily*, 13 October 2024 (abridged)

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