

THE COMMITMENTS

'Ireland.. has the youngest population in Europe and the high unemployment amongst young people is an important factor in why so many struggle to buy their guitars and form their garage bands as a way of gaining some dignity for the present and hope for the future.'" (Alan Parker)

"It was our intention at all times to.. .show a contemporary world a little different from the romantic notions normally associated with films about Ireland" (Alan Parker)

Think back to the opening few minutes of the film. In that five minutes we are introduced to the main character, Jimmy Rabbitte, but we are also introduced to the city of Dublin. It is not a typical picture postcard view that we are given but something quite different.

From what you see on the screen what city did you think you were seeing at the start of the film?

What impression did you gain of the city from what you were shown? And the types of people in it?

Why do you think the director of the film decided to open the film in this way?

Having placed the film in a particular social milieu, the director then guides us through the audition process as Rabbitte attempts to form his soul band called The Commitments.

We meet many characters, some of whom we will never see again (they fail the audition) and others who will form part of the band.

What generalised image of the youth of this particular part of Dublin are you given?
Pick three of the audition failures and try to produce a short paragraph explaining the way that they look, the way that they behave, and the sort of life style that they represent.

Why do you think that they failed the audition?

Eventually the band is formed. There are eleven characters in The Commitments, all of whom are portrayed as very different individuals. Fill in the following chart, giving as much detail as you can about each character:

APPEARANCE**DRESS****NORMAL
OCCUPATION****POSITIVE/NEGATIVE
CHARACTERISTICS**

JIMMY

NATALIE

DEAN

OUTS PAN

BERNIE

IMELDA

STEVEN

DEREK

JOEY
'THE LIPS'

DECO

BILLY

MICKAH

- Which characters struck you as the most sympathetic and why?
- Which characters did you not warm to and why?
- Which characters, if any, were the most important in the band and how were they shown to be so?
- Why did the director of the film make some of the members of the band peripheral to the main action?
- Why do you think the director of the film decided to make each character so very different?

Is it a matter of maintaining an interest in the film by creating various personality clashes or was he trying to make a point:

a) about the cross section of youth in Dublin?

b) the music business in Ireland?

If so, what point was made about the youth in Ireland?

And what point, if any, was the director making about the music business in Ireland and the people who are part of it?

Now pick three of the characters who make up The Commitments. From what you have seen of them in the film is it possible to construct a more detailed portrait of them? What sort of life do they lead away from the band? What impression did you get of their home life? Their hobbies and interests?

What sort of childhood do you think they might have had and what do you think they might have to look forward to?

You should write a brief portrait of each of the three characters you have picked and, most importantly, it should be based on the evidence you have gleaned from what you have seen and heard on the screen.

Equally, why do you think it is that the band becomes so important for them? Do they all really want to be pop stars? Do they really think that they might make it big in the music industry?

Or does their involvement in a fledgling band have a more symbolic importance for them? In other words, how important is the title of the band?

When you have first seen the film you should ask yourself the following questions:

- What picture of life for the youth of Dublin does the film represent?
- Is it important whether the band succeeds or fails?
- Is the film ultimately inspiring or depressing?
- What, if anything, is the message of “The Commitments”?

SELLING A FILM

You have now seen the new film directed by Alan Parker called “The Commitments”. A public relations company has given you the task of devising a marketing/advertising campaign for the film. At this stage you should divide into two small groups, preferably no larger than three or four. All of the groups will work on the project and a decision will be made at the end of the day as to which campaign will be used.

AUDIENCE

Your first task is to attempt to establish the likely audience for the film. Some of the questions you will need to ask yourself are:

- Is this a film that is likely to appeal to a younger sort of audience or an older one? Why?
- Is it a film that will appeal to people who like the blues?
- Or comedy?
- Is it like any other film you have seen or is it completely original?
- Is the fact that it is set in Ireland likely to have put people off? (and indeed did it have to be sold differently in Ireland compared with the rest of the UK?)

You might also like to compose a market research questionnaire which you can then get other members of the class to complete for you. Among the questions you should ask are:

- What was your favourite part of the film?
- Was there any part of the film which you did not like?
- What age group would you recommend the film to?

Continue with questions that will help you build up an idea of the type of audience you should aim for.

THE POSTER

You were asked above how you were made aware of “The Commitments”. Now that you have seen the film, how would you have created an awareness in your potential audience? You will have seen the poster for the film. What information does it give you and what expectations of the film does it create? When you saw the film were your expectations correct? Did the poster make you want to see the film in the first place?

Design your own poster for the film. Remember that your job is to make people want to go and see the film. It is also meant to suggest a little about the narrative and genre of the film. This means that you should think carefully about aspects of the film that are most likely to appeal to an audience. What are the selling points? Is it the humour? Is it the music? Is it the suspense involved in seeing whether the group succeeds? Is it the Irish connection?

You could design two posters for the film, one selling the film as a comedy and one selling the film as a film about soul music. How will the images be different?

It is also a good idea to invent some kind of catchy slogan. What will yours be? To what aspects of the film will it refer? The actual narrative? Or perhaps Alan Parker, the director? Will it remind you of his other successful films or not?

THE TRAILER

Shotsheet a trailer. This will involve isolating what you consider to be the key scenes in the film that will whet the appetite of the audience, give them a taste of the flavour of the film but obviously not give too much away, otherwise they will feel that they don't have to see it after all. At the same time, similar considerations of audience will have to be made - it will not be enough just to show the band playing since people might get the wrong impression. Equally, what will the captions be? There are no stars. Will you use any names? If so, whose? And will there be a voice-over? If so, what will it say?

PUBLICITY

What about the media? How will you get them interested enough to feature your film on their TV/Radio programmes, their chat shows? What have you got to offer the newspapers and magazines? How do you set about creating an interest and then maintaining it? Do you create some scandalous gossip? Or would this actually have a detrimental effect? Do you emphasise the lack of a star name and play on the fact that the actors and actresses are all relatively unknown? Who is likely to be the best spokesperson for the film? Can you perhaps predict a star, or at least a major talent in the making?

SELLING POINTS

What aspects of the film are original? How do you get this across? Why should Terry Wogari interview someone from a film about a band in Ireland? Again, here you are talking about selling points. What, in your opinion, are the selling points of the film that will primarily stimulate interest enough to get the audience into the cinema, and secondly, influence them to tell their friends what a good time they had?

THE TITLE

What do you think about the title of the film? Does it simply give the name of the band or does it also give some ideas about the themes of the film? Does it give the correct impression or does it just confuse people? Why do you think the title was chosen in the first place? If you want to change it with what would you replace it?

MARKETING

What other marketing ploys can you think of would have increased public awareness of the film? For instance, since it is about music, would it have made sense to issue a single from the film? Or maybe an album? Which song(s) were most likely to be successful? Is a blues number likely to put people off if taken in isolation? Should there simply have been a soundtrack album or should The Commitments have been resurrected for the release of the film?

All the above points have, of course, already been considered by the marketing and advertising departments whose brief it was to sell the film. To what extent did they get it right? To what extent do you, as a member of the cinema-going public, agree or disagree with them?