



Louder than words

The Tribe is a confronting drama about a deaf teenager's brutal initiation into the criminal underworld at a deaf boarding school.

The film follows Sergey as he becomes entangled in robberies and the sex trade and eventually falls in love with one of the girls he pimps out.

Director Myroslav Slaboshpytskiy cast non-professional deaf actors plucked from "poor and disadvantaged families" in Ukraine's deaf community.

Told entirely in Ukrainian sign language, which is different to Australian Auslan, Slaboshpytskiy said he wanted to pay homage to silent film.

He described The Tribe as "a humanistic story of entering adult life in a cruel world."

The Tribe has won more than 25 awards, including last year's grand prize at Cannes Film Festival's Critics' Week.

But it has also been criticised by American deaf author Raymond Luczak, who described it as a lurid "exploitation film made by hearing filmmakers".

Few movies depict deaf people, though one of the most famous was the 1986 film Children of a Lesser God, which earned deaf actress Marlee Matlin an Oscar.

Cinematic choice is also limited for deaf people and many are critical of the Australian cinema captioning service known as CaptiView.

Lateline took five deaf people to a screening of The Tribe at the Sydney Film Festival.

Here are their reactions.

It showed real life. It showed that deaf people aren't hopeless and helpless. I think to say it was exploitative is to not allow deaf people to have their agency. It is being a little bit too protective of deaf people."

Dylan Hill

I didn't think, 'oh that actor's deaf or that actor's deaf'. I saw them as humans. Violence is a human trait. "



It's the first time I've seen a deaf film without a focus on disability or deafness. Children of a Lesser God is a feel good movie about advocacy for language, struggling to communicate and falling in love with hearing people. In The Tribe, deafness isn't even a thing."

Phillip Debs

I was amazed to see so many deaf people. It's so rare to have even a single deaf character in a movie. This was a real illustration of a deaf community as a whole. It was really inspiring."

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I found this movie easy to access. It was told in our way. Hearing people steal our language sometimes. It's our language,"

Marcia Girke-Boyle



The Tribe is an unflinching, gritty and intriguing insight into the deaf world. It was like watching a ballet.

Reporter Jason Om gives a hearing person's view

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CREDITS: Digital producer Brigid Andersen; interpreter Rebecca Cramp; The Deaf Society of NSW; Sydney Film Festival; Photos by Jason Om, Brant Cumming and Bonsai Films; Video: Chris Schembri