



Politics with passion



FILM

My Brother Is An Only Child (M) ★★★½
Elio Germano, Riccardo Scamarcio
Directed by Daniele Luchetti
Review: Mark Naglazas

It's normally the director or an actor who whets the appetites of film buffs, that talismanic name above the title that makes the trip to the cinema worthwhile even if the reviews stink.

However, while reading through the PIAF Film Season press handbook I came across a couple of names — Sandro Petraglia and Stefano Rulli — who really got the juices flowing.

No, they're not the caterers at the Somerville Auditorium (although I have no doubt they could whip up a mean carbonara). Rather, My Brother Is An Only Child screenwriters Petraglia and Rulli count among their previous credits Best of Youth, the Italian miniseries that ranks alongside the greatest works of modern movie-making.

Even more enticing, the pair have plunged back into Best of Youth territory with another drama about two brothers who come of age during the 1960s and early 70s and whose relationship is fractured by temperament and ideology.

Such is my profound love and respect for Best of Youth that My Brother Is An Only Child came as a bit of a let-down. It has all the elements — the family torn apart by the ideological battles of the era, the

shaping of souls by art and politics and philosophy, youthful idealism curdling into hatred and self-destruction — but Brother lacks the emotional sweep that makes Best of Youth the most compelling six hours you'll spend in front of a screen of any size.

But Daniele Luchetti's adaptation of Antonio Pennacchi's book *Il Fasciocomunista* is still a fine Festival entry, a touching study of a generation for whom a political belief was not something to be tried on and tossed away, like a cool new outfit, but a matter of life and death.

Unlike *Best of Youth*, which is centred on a middle-class northern Italian family, the clan at the heart of *My Brother Is An Only Child* are working-class and live in Latina, a city south of Rome that was created by Benito Mussolini as a fascist symbol of progress.

Against this odd backdrop of pompous, vaulted buildings and impoverished incompleteness, the natural-born trouble-maker Accio (Elio Germano) rebels against his family's leftist beliefs by falling in with the local fascist party headed by the charismatic Mario (Luca Zingaretti, TV's egg-head hottie Inspector Montalbano).

The young fascist firebrand's extreme beliefs start to shift when he falls for the gorgeous girlfriend of his Marxist brother Manrico (Riccardo Scamarcio). Ah, nothing like a woman to screw with your political beliefs.

Things come to a head during a student performance of Beethoven's *Ode To Joy* whose libretto the young comrades have scurrilously reworked to reflect their anti-fascist ideology. "Art by itself is masturbation," declares host Manrico to the cheering student audience, a cry that

nails the extreme politicisation of the era. In the film's most memorable scene the concert is violently disrupted by fascist thugs furious that the students had appropriated one of their culture heroes, leading to Accio making a definitive break from his Mussolini-worshipping past.

In the second half of the film Accio, after being forced into hiding, drifts around bereft of political belief or professional purpose, pining after the beautiful but unattainable Francesca (a radiant Diane Fleri).

Unfortunately, Luchetti's movie also tends to drift along and become aimlessly episodic as we lose sense of how much time has passed, what each of the characters are up to and where Accio is in his thinking about everything, from politics to love. The film snaps back during the heart-stopping climax when the estranged brothers — played to perfection by the live-wire Germano and the charismatic dreamboat Scamarcio — reunite in Turin moments before a bloody police action that brings the revolutionary era to an end.

My Brother Is An Only Child pales beside *Best of Youth* but its central concern — regarding an ordinary Italian family as a microcosm of Italy during one of the most harrowing, divisive periods in its recent past — is admirable. This collision of the private and the political is also something that's sadly absent in our own instinctually thin, politically vacuous cinema.

My Brother Is An Only Child is screening exclusively for one week at the Joondalup Pines each night at 8.30.



Playing politics: Riccardo Scamarcio makes a stand as Marxist Manrico in My Brother Is An Only Child.