



Dear Wendy

Thomas Vinterberg

DENMARK/GERMANY/UNITED
KINGDOM/France, 2005
English

101 minutes ■ Colour/35mm

Production Company: **Lucky Punch I/S/
Nimbus Zentropa Production**

Executive Producer:

**Peter Garde, Peter Aalbæk Jensen,
Bo Ehrhardt, Birgitte Hald,**

Producer: **Sisse Graum Jørgensen**

Screenplay: **Lars von Trier**

Cinematographer: **Anthony Dod Mantle**

Editor: **Mikkel E.G. Nielsen**

Production Designer: **Karl Juliusson**

Sound: **Kristian Eidnes Andersen**

Music: **Benjamin Wallfisch**

Principal Cast: **Jamie Bell, Bill Pullman,
Michael Angarano, Danso Gordon,
Novella Nelson**

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Dear Wendy showcases writer Lars von Trier and director Thomas Vinterberg's tremendous talents to great effect. Von Trier reduces the snarling fury of *Dogville*, his wide-ranging critique of American frontier values, into a single-minded autopsy of gun adoration. His virtuosic script winks accusingly at pop culture's obsession with weaponry and pokes fun at its phallic roots. The firearms culture south of the border is perhaps America's most baffling and self-damning inheritance; its internal illogic offers fertile ground for von Trier's hatred of bourgeois mythmaking.

Vinterberg's direction brings warmth to von Trier's relentless intellectual attack. He loves the form and construction of cinema and skilfully finesses the film's slides in and out of cinematic reference. He is also an exceptional director of actors, giving his performers much more space (both literal and emotional) than von Trier has done in his recent work, allowing us to invest ourselves in these rich characters.

Jamie Bell seizes this opportunity with both hands. Following his haunting performance in David Gordon Green's *Undertow*, *Dear Wendy* confirms Bell's ability to enter the ambiguous world of a boy on the crest of adulthood. His mesmerizing, courageous performance adds volumes of pathos to the film's argument.

Set in a whimsically stylized archetypal mining town, the film observes Bell's character, Dick, a loner coddled by his family's African-American maid, Clarabelle (Novella Nelson), as he falls in love with a gun he

names Wendy. Dick draws a motley crew into a secret society called The Dandies, who dress up in funny hats, shoot at targets and watch films about the damage bullets do to flesh. When Dick is charged by the town's sheriff (Bill Pullman) with serving as a kind of probation officer for Clarabelle's grandson, a teenaged murderer named Sebastian (Danso Gordon), the gang is disrupted in unexpected ways.

The film has been attacked by American critics as didactic and narratively incomplete. These charges, also levelled at von Trier's *Dogville*, are particularly absurd here as layers of historical argument envelop the viewer in the nightmarish love affair with guns that endlessly proclaims itself on the nightly news. This is satire at its most powerful.

■ Noah Cowan

Thomas Vinterberg was born in Copenhagen and studied at the National Film School of Denmark. His short film *The Boy Who Walked Backwards* (94) won several awards internationally. His feature films include *The Greatest Heroes* (96), *The Celebration* (98), *It's All About Love* (03) and *Dear Wendy* (05).

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