



BROKEN CIRCLE BREAKDOWN

Spring
Season
2014

Director: Felix Van Groeningen, Belgium, 2012 111 minutes. In Flemish with English subtitles. With Veerie Baetens, John Heldenbergh, Nell Cattrysse

The Broken Circle Breakdown is a 2012 Belgian drama based on the play written by Johan Heldenbergh. It features its writer in the main character of Didier and actress/singer Veerle Baetens as his wife Elise. Young newcomer Nell Cattrysse plays their ill daughter Maybelle. The film has been selected as the Belgian entry for the Best Foreign Language Film at the 2014 Academy Awards.

Elise and Didier fall in love at first sight. She has her own tattoo shop and he plays the banjo in a bluegrass band. They bond over their shared enthusiasm for American music and culture, and dive headfirst into a sweeping romance that plays out on and off stage - but when an unexpected tragedy hits their new family, everything they know and love is tested. An intensely moving portrait of a relationship from beginning to end, propelled by a soundtrack of foot-stomping bluegrass, *The Broken Circle Breakdown* is a romantic melodrama of the highest order.

The two leads throw themselves into the emotional mix and the music that they make - both of them sing, in English, with the band that supplies the movie's title - feels less like a backdrop and more like the essential binding of the tale. For any viewer who, for one reason or another, has been shamefully ignorant of Belgian bluegrass, here is your opportunity to make amends.

Review by Mark Kermode (The Observer)

A powerful and haunting tale of love, death and bluegrass – a mournful song played on a broken instrument, with striking visual accompaniment.

Presenting its central relationship in a *Blue Valentine* style broken-backed montage of past and present, this shimmering adaptation of Johan Heldenbergh and Mieke Dobbels's play slips between the couple's first passionate encounters and their later battles against the illness that threatens to rob them of their most treasured possession.

He is hairy and obsessed with Americana; she is tattooed and wears a cross; they meet in the unexpected harmony of their voices, singing arcane songs about this world and the next to the accompaniment of bull fiddle, banjo and slide guitar. As the cruelties of life bite deep and their child is endangered, their worldviews diverge, a meditation upon mortality and transcendence emerging naturally from the landscape of folk songs and spirituals. Committed performances add to the appeal, provoking tears that are more than sentimental as the interweaving themes rise and fall like competing melodies – poignant, affecting and precise