

The Company of Strangers - London Feminist Film Festival

Saturday 22 August 2015, by [Nisha Ramayya](#), [Ryan Ormonde](#)

The London Feminist Film Festival (20th-23rd August 2015) is a celebration of international feminist films past and present, established 'to support women filmmakers in the male-dominated film industry and to inspire feminist discussion and critique.' The programme includes a documentary about female hip-hop artists in the UK, an event to raise funds for Rape Crisis England and Wales, a series of feminist shorts, and a screening of 'feminist classic' The Company of Strangers, followed by a panel discussion with representatives from the Older Women in Film group : the Short Hot Flush Film Festival.

The Company of Strangers (1990), directed by Cynthia Scott, depicts the aftermath of a bus breakdown in rural Quebec. Eight women (seven elderly women and one younger woman) set up camp in an abandoned lake house, getting to know each other as they work together to survive for three days. Featuring non-professional actors and unscripted dialogue, this docu-fiction realises Scott's ambitions to make a work in which 'every once and a while there would be a scene of such magic that whatever was happening on the screen was more than what was happening on the screen – [...] a combination of the real humanity of the people and something happening because they were participating in a creative act which was the making of a movie.'

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Do you hear the frogs?

No.

Do you hear the white-throated sparrow?

Yes.

The Company of Strangers sounds like singing: women singing while playing poker, singing while fixing the bus; some women singing so that others may dance.

They are singing love songs and songs of praise: Keep the love light glowing / In your eyes so true / Let me call you sweetheart / I'm in love with you

Do you live alone?

When was the time you were most frightened?

Photographs of the women appear – an editorial element reinforcing the use of real people and their true stories.

They come in search of the best summers of her childhood.

Happy dancing

Happy hunting

Happy playing

Happy love – walking on air

There is the fear of being destitute, the fears that come to you when you're alone at home. What am I going to do? What am I going to do? What will happen when they are no longer here, with their feet in the water?

You're alive – you can still love

Living and surviving

Living is communal – all of the women, except Alice, live alone.

Living and desires, dreams – all her desires have left her.

Living and fears

Living with women – living behind the closet door

Cissy: My grandchildren are my life, and my son, of course.

Beth: I've never been happy since my son died.

Mary: Constance is afraid of death, and so am I.

Alice: I'm not going to die, I'm going fishing.

Catherine: You don't let yourself be stopped by things.

Constance as one who is dying rather than living.

Living with or without heaven or god

We're alive!

Shouting out

All of the women, except Constance: Is anybody there? We're alive! We're all alive!

(She imitates the sparrow's song perfectly, but cannot hear its reply.)

What has been left out?

Leave it to the imagination, says Winnie. What is unfinished. The sense of a person, the missing details. Art. What you tell each other.

25 years later...

Alice

Constance

Winifred

Cissy

Mary

Catherine

Michelle

Beth

Dir., Cynthia Scott, 1990