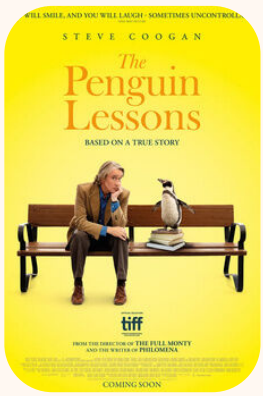
See You at Jackson's Cinema House!

MAEBASHI CITY COORDINATOR FOR INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS (CIR)
JACKSON BANNISTER'S ACTIVITY REPORT

FEBRUARY 2026

Maebashi Cinema House, a mini-theater in Maebashi City. Jackson, a film-loving CIR, watches one hand-picked recommendation from the theater manager and brings you a review.
Movies transcend borders! *See you at the cinema*!



DECEMBER'S MOVIE

The Penguin Lessons

Jackson Bannister

I work as a Coordinator for International Relations (CIR) in Maebashi City, Gunma Prefecture, engaging in activities to deepen mutual cultural understanding between Japanese and non-Japanese residents.

前橋シネマハウス
MAEBASHI CINEMA HOUSE

Films are another family

～Discover new cinema in Maebashi—connecting films, people, and the community.～

In order to foster bonds within the local community through film, we decided to open Maebashi Cinema House.
Although small, our theater shares a wide variety of films from the heart of Maebashi. Our program spans a wide range of genres, including high-quality independent and mini-theater films that rarely receive screenings, hit titles that have completed their runs at multiplex cinemas, family-friendly films that parents and children can enjoy together, and classic masterpieces from the past. Through this selection, we hope audiences will discover new films.
This is the kind of "Cinema House" we aspire to build.

MISSION

3F, Maebashi Plaza Genki 21 Annex,1-16 Chiyoda-machi 5-chome, Maebashi City

MAEBASHI CITY HALL
CULTURAL AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS DIVISION
JACKSON BANNISTER
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The Penguin Lessons

A quiet anti-fascist story wrapped in irony and humor.

Going into *The Penguin Lessons*, I wasn't expecting much. Based on the poster alone, I assumed it would be a light, family-friendly animal companion film. Instead, I was pleasantly surprised to find something far more adult-oriented, thoughtful, and emotionally resonant than I had anticipated. I tend to associate films featuring animal companions with children's movies, but this one quickly establishes itself as something deeper and more politically aware.

At the center of the film is **Steve Coogan**, who delivers a characteristically strong performance. This is a very English film, steeped in that distinctly dreary, dry, and sarcastic humor that British cinema does so well, for which Coogan is perfectly suited. What impressed me most was how subtly he portrays his character's growth. Over the course of the film, we can see meaningful development, but Coogan never betrays the character's base personality to achieve it. The growth feels earned, understated, and authentic.

The supporting cast is solid, though intentionally restrained. No one goes so far as to steal the spotlight —and honestly, that's for the best. This is very much a protagonist-centered work. A more flamboyant side performance might have distracted from Coogan's arc.

That said, Björn Gustafsson's portrayal of the slightly eccentric Finnish "Tapio" is particularly memorable—an oddball presence that feels uniquely European in the best way.

I was also impressed by the Argentine actors. Many of them have relatively few credits in Argentine cinema, yet they more than hold their own performing in English alongside Coogan, an actor with extensive experience in both British and Hollywood productions. Their performances feel natural and grounded, adding emotional weight to the story.

Thematically, the film delivers its anti-fascist message effectively without being overly heavy-handed. The script is arguably its strongest asset; it is witty, thoughtful, and sharp in its critique while maintaining subtlety. However, I did find myself wishing that some of the story arcs had been further developed. The students' storyline, in particular, felt slightly underbaked.

At 111 minutes, the film is already a respectable length, but an additional 15-20 minutes—or tighter editing in the early scenes—might have allowed the individual arcs more room to breathe.

Technically, the film is quite impressive. The camerawork stands out, especially in the middle portion, where several shots feel carefully composed and visually striking. Combined with the strong script and performances, the direction helps elevate the material beyond what the premise might initially suggest.

And then, of course, there's the penguin. The animal is undeniably cute and used effectively as a comedic tool. Importantly, the film doesn't over-rely on the wackiness of human-animal interactions for laughs—a trap many similar films fall into. The balance is just right. Despite the title, The Penguin Lessons isn't really about penguins (who would've guessed?). The penguin serves more as a catalyst than the core subject, which works to the film's advantage.

Overall, while it may not reach the heights of similar films such as *Good Will Hunting* or *Dead Poets Society*, it accomplishes exactly what it sets out to do. It's heartfelt, politically relevant, and emotionally engaging. I left the theater far more impressed than I expected to be.

In a time when discussions about authoritarianism and fascism feel especially urgent, films like this matter. If you enjoy British humor, historical dramas, thoughtful political commentary, or simply a well-crafted story, *The Penguin Lessons* is well worth your time.