



NEW RELEASES

Supernova

A lovely, semi-abstract sequence opens Harry Macqueen's *Supernova*. A dark sky lights up, star by star, in time with a single repeated piano note. With every key strike, more points of light appear; one shines brighter than the rest, briefly, then winks out. A hand resting on a naked torso twitches absently, also in time with the music – it's as though, in sleep, the fingers are picking out a tune that plays whole galaxies into and out of existence a billion miles away. The film will not always be this subtly allusive – sometimes it will fill out a melody that might have been better left as a half-remembered motif – but mostly this is the perfect induction into *Supernova*'s delicate connection-making, between the very close and the unreachably distant, the seismic and the minute.

The pianist is Sam, played by a beautifully modulated Colin Firth using his natural diffidence to devastating effect in a career-best performance. And the man he is cradling under tangled bedsheets is Tusker – an unlikely yet obscurely appropriate name for an American novelist – also perfectly played with that softly sarcastic sophistication that maybe only Stanley Tucci can deploy. But if the two performances are individually excellent, it is the relationship between them that is the real star of *Supernova*, a portrait of the dazzling starburst of intense feeling that floods a deeply loving couple's universe right before heat death.

They are on a camper-van road trip through the Northern English countryside – shot with DP Dick Pope's eye for the humble amid the grand: the inherently jaunty little van wending its way through hillsides so vast there are shadows of entire cloud formations on their slopes. But Tusker is gravely ill, and his disease brings with it periods of forgetfulness and disorientation. He loses words, and sometimes his bearings, but the cruellest aspect of dementia is that it doesn't happen all at once, and Tusker is more often lucid than not, and heartbreakingly aware of all he is going to lose. He masks his terror well, for the sake of his beloved Sam – as the more gregarious of the two, naturally it is Tusker who harbours the biggest secrets.

Journey's end is a concert Sam is giving – his first in a long time – but en route, after some relatable bickering about the satnav, the pair stops off with Sam's sister Lil (Pippa Haywood), for a party she and Tusker have secretly arranged. It's a merry occasion, but then Sam makes a shocking discovery when he opens the box in which Tusker keeps his writing paraphernalia, which is marked with his initials but might as well be engraved 'Pandora'.

Occasionally, an overly literal music cue or a slightly contrived screenwriting device (there's an Elgar piano concerto that is Tusker's favourite and yet Sam has never played it for him) threatens sentimentality. But the palpable chemistry between the two graceful stars always brings the film back to the real, with Firth and Tucci exchanging the warm, witty dialogue with lived-in ease. Even so, it's the unspoken language of this extended farewell that is most convincing – how death reverses itself into life, how every new moment instantly becomes a memory, browning at the edges like an autumn leaf.

Supernova is not an edgy film, scarcely alluding to the struggles this older gay couple undoubtedly faced along the way – one casual jab about Margaret Thatcher is as much political commentary as it contains. And due to Tusker's illness and the long-worn familiarity of their closeness, but also to filmmaking restraint, the sole lovemaking scene is tender to the point of timid. But this gentleness and quietness is also the point, magnifying and universalising Macqueen's eloquent, compassionate, moving drama: a supernova is the most traumatic and majestic of galactic events, but it happens in silence.

Jessica Kiang, *Sight & Sound*, December 2020

Anyone who has lived through the dementia of a loved one knows that it's a long goodbye, a cumulative loss. As the afflicted person endures its ravages – gradually shedding memories of the world around them in frustrating piecemeal fashion – the process presents few opportunities for cathartic emotional release. Even death often brings a dull kind of relief for the grieving.

That makes it a difficult condition to dramatise on film. It doesn't progress in neat, escalating acts, yet there's a surreal undertow to this everyday condition – the sense of living in a separate reality even from those nearest you – that keeps attracting filmmakers all the same. The results tend to be tasteful and streamlined, often working principally as showcases for fine actors playing out wrenching mental anguish to impressive effect. Julianne Moore, Henry Fonda, Meryl Streep, Julie Christie, Emmanuelle Riva and Judi Dench are among the stars who have earned themselves Oscar attention for doing so, sometimes in quite anodyne films, creating the unfortunate impression that dementia is an easy go-to for prestige drama.

In the last year, however, a rush of dementia-centred films has offered a bracing variety of formal approaches to a subject too often treated with beige kid gloves. Sure enough, one of them won a couple of Oscars, including one for a great actor gruellingly enacting the cruel effects of Alzheimer's disease. Yet little else about Florian Zeller's remarkable debut *The Father* follows form. A rare attempt to convey the psychological disorientation of dementia from the inside out, it adopts the point of view of Anthony Hopkins's affected protagonist Anthony as he grapples with memory loss.

You'd almost call *The Father* a horror film, if not for the more visceral genre stylings of Natalie Erika James's *Relic*, another first feature that premiered alongside *The Father* at Sundance last year, and has since gathered a less mainstream audience for its unnerving depiction of a household unravelled by mental unravelling. Probing how an elderly Australian matriarch's dementia preys on her daughter and granddaughter as well as herself, James's film is not unlike Zeller's in its articulation of the condition through unreliable perspective and changeable physical space.

Other recent films have taken a less brutal view, without feeling less honest for it. In her exquisitely intimate documentary *Dick Johnson Is Dead* (2020), director Kirsten Johnson doesn't just find wry gallows humour in her own father's evolving dementia, but invites him in on the bittersweet joke. Together, they envisage and rehearse an assortment of scenarios for his death and afterlife, making a virtue of dementia's agonisingly indefinite timeline, while also acting as an urgent, in-the-moment diary of his changing consciousness.

The anxious uncertainty of things to come also hovers over the sporadic tender joys of British director Harry Macqueen's lovely *Supernova*, which

narrows its focus to early-onset dementia. American writer Tusker (Stanley Tucci) is just beginning to experience mental decline, prompting a rambling Lake District road trip with his partner Sam (Colin Firth) as they gently but tensely debate how to live with his impending deterioration. Some critics have accused Macqueen’s lyrical, conversation-driven film of being too sanitised, sidestepping the uglier realities of Tusker’s future, though that rather misses its point – to zero in on a fragile, potentially brief precipice stage, where someone with dementia can still determine his future, and converse candidly with others about it.

Still, the cosy-knitwear-and-country-house comforts of *Supernova* do highlight a commonality even among this new, more diversely told spate of dementia dramas: a consistent focus on the white middle class, where the trauma of the condition is at least supported by plush, roomy interiors, the fretful presence of caring family, and the money to take care of worse eventualities. We’ve seen comparatively few films about how dementia affects the poor, oppressed and alone, as if the mental angst it imposes is quite enough for a character – and screenwriter – to contend with. Expect that, too, to change as this most universal, indiscriminating of subjects evolves on screen.

Guy Lodge, *Sight & Sound*, Summer 2021

SUPERNOVA

Directed by: Harry Macqueen
©: British Broadcasting Corporation, The British Film Institute, Supernova Film Ltd
a Quiddity Films *and* The Bureau *production Developed with support from:* Wellcome
Developed with the assistance of: BBC Films
Quiddity Films supported by the: BFI’s Vision Awards
Made with the support of the: BFI’s Film Fund
Presented by: BBC Films, British Film Institute
International Sales by: The Bureau Sales
Executive Producers: Mary Burke, Eva Yates, Vincent Gadelle
Produced by: Emily Morgan, Tristan Goligher
Line Producer: Joanna Thapa
For Quiddity Films (Development & Production Executives): Gabby Kardar, Diana Pödra
For The Bureau: Head of Production: Gerardine Flynn; *Head of Development:* Valentina Brazzini
For BBC Films: Director of BBC Films: Rose Garnett; *Head of Development:* Claudia Yusef; *Head of Legal and Business Affairs:* Geraldine Atlee; *Legal and Business Affairs Manager:* Livy Sandler; *Head of Production and Finance:* Michael Wood; *Production Executive:* Emma Kayee
For BFI: Production & Development Executive: Emma Duffy; *Head of Production:* Fiona Morham; *Head of Production Finance:* Ian Kirk; *Director of Legal and Business Affairs:* Clare Coulter; *Production Manager:* Iris Cohen
Production Managers: Jessica Hodges, Elizabeth Small
Production Co-ordinator: Jessica Moran
Production Accountant: Lesley Broderick
Unit Manager: Bruce Gill
Location Manager: Joel Cockrill
Post-production Supervisor: Gerardine O’Flynn
1st Assistant Director: Toni Stapes
2nd Assistant Director: Iain Atkinson
3rd Assistant Director: Daniel Pemberton
Script Supervisor: Silvia Bellitto
Casting Director: Shaheen Baig
Written by: Harry Macqueen
Cinematography: Dick Pope
Camera Operator: Dick Pope
1st Assistant Camera: Graham Martyr
2nd Assistant Camera: Aaron Champion
Digital Imaging Technician: Kevin Bell
Gaffer: Tom Gates
Best Boys: Toby Flesher, Ana Krkljus
Key Grip: Colin Strachan
Stills Photographer: Chris Harris
VFX by: Technicolor VFX

Special Effects Supervisor: Scott McIntyre
Editor: Chris Wyatt
Production Designer: Sarah Finlay
Art Director: Philippa Mumford
Set Decorator: Cathy Featherstone
Graphic Artist: Jess Alexander
Production Buyers: Jessica Chadwick, Caitlin Fraser
Prop Master: Mark McIntyre
Costume Designer: Matthew Price
Costume Supervisor: Lisa Mitton
Hair and Make-up Designer: Tamsin Barbosa
Titles Designed by: Studio Ninetyone
Colourist: Greg Fisher
Colour and Finish by: Company 3
Composer/Music by: Keaton Henson
Conductor: Mark Knoop
Orchestration by: Ben Foscett
Production Sound Mixer: Stevie Haywood
Sound Re-recording Mixer: Per Bostrum
Supervising Sound Editor: Joakim Sundström
Animal Wrangler: Bozena Bienkowska
Unit Publicist: Charles McDonald
Digital Intermediate by: Technicolor Services London
Special Thanks: Lenny Abrahamson, Eve Gabereau, Frances Harvey, Sally Potter, Peter Strickland

Cast

Colin Firth (*Sam*)
Stanley Tucci (*Tusker*)
Pippa Haywood (*Lilly, ‘Lil’*)
Peter Macqueen (*Clive*)
Nina Marlin (*Charlotte*)
Ian Drysdale (*Paul*)
Sarah Woodward (*Sue*)
James Dreyfus (*Tim*)
Lori Campbell (*Lola*)
Daneka Charlotte Etchells (*Rachel*)
Halema Hussain (*shop assistant*)
Julie Hannan (*waitress*)
Truffles (Ruby)
Imogen Barnfather, Ruth Crane, Toby Gaffney, Adi Jones, Ian Mackenzie, Millie Macqueen, Paul Martin, Alex Morrison, Tina Louise Owens, John Alan Roberts, John Seymour, Lewis Sowerby, Justin Storey, Chinty Turnbull (*party guests*)

UK 2020©
93 mins

A Studiocanal release

NEW RELEASES & RE-RELEASES

After Love Continues from Jun
Nashville Continues from Jun
The Father Continues from Jun
Ultraviolence Continues from Jun
Supernova From Fri 2 Jul
Another Round From Fri 9 Jul
Jumbo From Fri 9 Jul
Deerskin From Fri 16 Jul
Girlfriends From Fri 23 Jul
Mandabi From Fri 23 Jul

IN PERSON & PREVIEWS

Censor + Q&A with director Prano Bailey-Bond
Thu 1 Jul 20:45
Mark Kermode Live in 3D at the BFI
Mon 5 Jul 18:00
African Odysseys Present: European Premiere: The Milkmaid + Q&A with writer-director Desmond Ovbiagele and producer Oluseun Sowemimo
Sat 10 Jul 14:00
Black Lens Festival Opening Night: UK Premiere: How to Stop a Recurring Dream + Q&A with director Ed Morris and actor Ruby Barker Fri 16 Jul 18:00
Woman with a Movie Camera Preview: Girlfriends
Fri 16 Jul 18:15

THE CINEMA OF MÁRTA MÉSZÁROS

The Girl (Eltávozott nap)
Mon 5 Jul (preceded by ‘Introducing Márta Mészáros’ talk); Fri 16 Jul 20:50
Binding Sentiments (Holdudvar)
Tue 6 Jul 20:50; Sat 17 Jul 15:20
Don’t Cry, Pretty Girls! (Szép lányok, ne sírjatok!)
Wed 7 Jul 17:40; Sun 18 Jul 18:40
Woman With a Movie Camera Presents: the World Restoration Premiere of Riddance (Szabad lélegzet)
Sat 10 Jul 17:30 (+ pre-recorded extended intro by Márta Mészáros); Wed 21 Jul 21:00
Adoption (Örökbefogadás)
Mon 12 Jul 18:00 (pre-recorded intro by Selina Robertson, Club des Femmes); Thu 22 Jul 20:30
Nine Months (Kilenc hónap)
Tue 13 Jul 17:40; Sun 25 Jul 12:30
The Two of Them/Two Women (Ők ketten)
Wed 14 Jul 20:50; Mon 26 Jul 18:10
The Heiresses (Örökség)
Sun 18 Jul 15:20; Tue 27 Jul 20:30
Diary for My Children (Napló gyermekeimnek)
Sat 24 Jul 14:10 (+ pre-recorded extended intro by Márta Mészáros); Wed 28 Jul 17:50
Diary for My Loves (Napló szerelmeimnek)
Sat 24 Jul 17:30; Sat 31 Jul 20:30
Diary for My Father and Mother (Napló apámnak, anyámnak)
Sat 24 Jul 20:45; Sat 31 Jul 14:40

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