



MIKE LEIGH

# Meantime

+ Q&A with Mike Leigh, Marion Bailey and Phil Daniels

'I get cross with filmmakers who say "Oh I hate my films. How can you watch your own films?" That pisses me off. I don't get it because if you don't like it, how in hell's name can you expect anyone else to? When the NFT shows *Meantime*, I will go and sit at the back because it will be good to see a print on the screen, it will be good to see it with an audience and I've got a real soft spot for *Meantime*.' (Mike Leigh, 1997)

**SPOILER WARNING** The following notes give away some of the plot.

## **'Meantime': a contemporary review**

How can the reality of a lifetime of enforced leisure, a lifetime on the dole, a lifetime spent accepting week by week the charity of an indifferent nation, be brought home to those of us fortunate enough to be in work, in Britain, on New Year's Day 1984? Mike Leigh, a percipient analyst of human subterfuge, of the games we play to avoid our responsibilities, addresses the subject. In *Meantime*, his latest 'devising', he seizes the audience by the lapels and delivers the sort of ferocious head-butt which one of his characters, the East End skinhead Coxy, seems forever on the point of administering to every immovable object which comes his way.

The Pollocks – defeated Frank, the father; ferret-like Mark, the older son; and slow Colin, his brother, called 'Muppet' – live out their unchanging workless days on a Chigwell housing estate. Nothing happens: rubbish blows across the neglected lawns, slouching fatigue overcomes all but the most hardy. Mavis Pollock, the wife and mother, a sort of Dandy Nichols without the caricatured music hall charm, scowls at her useless menfolk, sullenly ministers to their needs. She escapes to the bingo palace, but even there things go wrong: her handbag is full of ballpoint pens which won't, at the crucial moment, write.

Elsewhere, on some alien planet, at the other end of the Central Line, lives Mavis' sister Barbara, who years ago took herself in hand, learnt secretarial skills, spruced herself up, married the obtuse John Lane, obtained a middle-class sufficiency. But Barbara has no children: she takes pity on the gormless Colin, with his twitch, his skew-whiff, taped-up specs, seduces him away from Chigwell with the offer of a token job, makes great play over the hours he must keep, seems to be giving him a start. Charity, Mark knows, is hard enough to take from the servants of the Crown, let alone from one's own family ... Matters come to a head.

The Pollocks and the Lanes are observed disinterestedly, some would say with a cruel disinterest. They are in many ways, like most of Mike Leigh's characters, an appalling shower. But spend time with them (and as usual their lives, their litanies of woe, have a mesmeric power) and one begins to discern the authentic lineaments of their humanity. The squabbling which marks every waking minute of the Pollocks' lives is a sign that they are still alive: a couple of rounds in the gym, a tonic to keep them on their toes.

Barbara, repressed, chattering Barbara, shooing poor suet-like Mavis out of her immaculate kitchen, has a wholly unexpected streak of firmness in her character. She holds her own with notable good sense when arguing with the council's Zen housing officer who comes to inspect the Pollocks' defective windows but who instead offers a tendentious lecture on grains of sand which should not be allowed to grow into heaps, the moral of which escapes the uncharacteristically silent Frank and Mavis. She may have offered Colin charity, have lacked the sense to realise the hurt she caused or the insight to see why she made the offer in the first place, but she nevertheless likes Colin, is patient with him, can ruffle his hair with genuine affection.

*Meantime* is at times painfully funny. But one has the feeling that Mike Leigh has not pulled the throttle all the way out: the mockery is more muted than on occasions in the past. From time to time, however, he and his faultless ensemble (Marion Bailey, Phil Daniels, Tim Roth, Pam Ferris, Jeff Robert, Gary Oldman) go all out: there is, for example, one marvellously choreographed scene, in which the Pollocks crisscross the screen with farcical precision in an attempt to extract Colin from the bathroom, which is infused with pure good humour. Mike Leigh and his photographer Roger Pratt focus one's attention with compelling ease: the skinhead rolling in a barrel, thumping the sides in manic desperation; Hayley, the object of Colin's affection, so shy that she seems intent on shrivelling up every time one sees her; Frank and Mark Pollock drawing their money with twisted, feverish contempt.

In the end, Colin negotiates the Central Line and somehow stumbles his way to Aunt Barbara's house (a bedroom is to be redecorated, the equipment has been laid out in apple-pie order), but Mark beats him to it and after a tug-of-war with Barbara persuades Colin not to take the job. Barbara is one of those controlled heroines whom Mike Leigh delights in testing to the limit until they snap with dramatic effect. In this case, after the boys' departure, Barbara hits the bottle and gives herself over to inconclusive tears: John, needless to say, is baffled. This however, is not the heart of the matter.

Colin finds his way back to Chigwell, swathed in a parka, hood up. There is a row to end all rows. Why on earth did he turn down the job? Mark half-defiantly confesses his devilish role. The storm rages, Colin remains sunk in silence on the bed. And then, in an unprecedented show of animation, he yells at his thunderstruck parents to leave his room. He goes to bed still in the jacket. Next morning, an awe-struck Mark cautiously pushes back the hood; the brothers regard each other; Mark extends a hand and reverently caresses his brother's shaven dome. The haircut is a first sign of independence, cost £1.20, a peculiar act of half-understood defiance. This is no longer the myopic Muppet Kermit but the dauntless 'Kojak'. The bleak landscape is lit up by a moment of optimism.

**John Pym, *Sight & Sound*, Winter 1983/84**

MEANTIME

Devised/Directed by: Mike Leigh  
Production Companies: Central Production, Mostpoint, Channel Four  
Producer: Graham Benson  
Production Manager: Vivien Pottersman  
Production Assistant: Caroline Hill  
Production Accountant: Neil Chaplin  
Accounts Assistant: Lisa Whitmore  
Unit Runners: Simon Henson, Hugo Wyhowski  
1st Assistant Director: Chris Rose  
2nd Assistant Director: Steve Finn  
Continuity: Heather Storr  
Casting Director: Sue Whatmough  
Director of Photography: Roger Pratt  
Focus Puller: Brian Herlihy  
Clapper Loader: Adam Walton  
Camera Grip: John Abrahams  
Gaffer Electrician: Ted Read  
Electricians: Roger Bonnici, John Cantwell  
Stills: Ed Buziak  
Graphic Design: Mon Mohan  
Editor: Lesley Walker  
Assistant Editor: Jeremy Hume  
2nd Assistant Editor: Toby Reisz  
Art Director: Diana Charnley  
Assistant Art Director: Chris Seagers  
Carpenter: Steve Ede  
Painter: Jim Ede  
Prop Master: Dave Newton  
Prop Man: Steve Wheeler  
Prop Buyer: Peter Walpole  
Costume Designer: Lindy Hemmings

Wardrobe Supervisor: Sue Gibson  
Makeup Artist: Sandra Shepherd  
Music: Andrew Dickson  
Musicians: Andrew Dickson, George Khan  
Sound Recording: Malcolm Hirst  
Boom Operators: Mike Shoring, Eddie Dougall  
Dubbing Mixer: Trevor Pyke  
Dubbing Editor: Charlie Ware  
Assistant Dubbing Editor: Peter Joly  
Unit Driver: Roger Pomphrey  
Unit Publicist: Joanna Campling

Cast:  
Marion Bailey (Barbara)  
Phil Daniels (Mark)  
Tim Roth (Colin)  
Pam Ferris (Mavis)  
Jeff Robert (Frank)  
Alfred Molina (John)  
Gary Oldman (Coxxy)  
Tilly Vosburgh (Hayley)  
Paul Daly (Rusty)  
Leila Bertrand (Hayley’s friend)  
Hepburn Graham (boyfriend)  
Peter Wight (estate manager)  
Eileen Davies (unemployment benefit clerk)  
Herbert Norville (man in pub)  
Brian Hoskin (barman)

UK 1983  
110 mins

MIKE LEIGH A COMPLETE FILM SEASON

**Bleak Moments**  
Mon 18 Oct 20:40; Thu 28 Oct 18:00  
**Nuts in May**  
Wed 20 Oct 18:00; Sun 31 Oct 11:20 (+ Q&A with Mike Leigh, Alison Steadman, Roger Sloman, Anthony O’Donnell, Stephen Bill and Sheila Kelley)  
**The Kiss of Death + The Permissive Society**  
Sat 23 Oct 12:50  
**Hard Labour**  
Sat 23 Oct 15:10  
**Happy-Go-Lucky**  
Sun 24 Oct 14:50 (+ Q&A with Mike Leigh, Sally Hawkins, Alexis Zegerman and Kate O’Flynn);  
Mon 15 Nov 20:40  
**Meantime**  
Sun 24 Oct 18:00 (+ Q&A with Mike Leigh, Marion Bailey and Phil Daniels); Thu 11 Nov 20:45  
**Secrets & Lies**  
Mon 25 Oct 14:30; Sat 6 Nov 19:00 (+ Q&A with Mike Leigh); Sat 27 Nov 15:00  
**Abigail’s Party**  
Tue 26 Oct 20:50; Sun 14 Nov 12:00 (+ Q&A with Mike Leigh)  
**High Hopes**  
Thu 28 Oct 14:30; Tue 2 Nov 18:45 (+ Q&A with Mike Leigh, Ruth Sheen and Phil Davis);  
Thu 11 Nov 18:00; Sat 20 Nov 20:30  
**Life Is Sweet**  
Tue 28 Oct 17:50 (+ Q&A with Mike Leigh);  
Thu 4 Nov 18:15; Tue 23 Nov 20:50  
**Grown-Ups + The Short and Curlies**  
Sat 30 Oct 17:15 (+ Q&A with Mike Leigh);  
Tue 30 Nov 14:15

**Home Sweet Home**  
Mon 1 Nov 17:50 (+ Q&A with Mike Leigh);  
Sat 6 Nov 11:45  
**All or Nothing**  
Wed 3 Nov 20:30; Wed 10 Nov 20:30;  
Sun 21 Nov 17:10 (+ Q&A with Mike Leigh, Lesley Manville and Marion Bailey)  
**Career Girls**  
Fri 5 Nov 20:50; Fri 12 Nov 18:15;  
Tue 23 Nov 18:00 (+ Q&A with Mike Leigh)  
**Vera Drake**  
Fri 12 Nov 20:40; Fri 26 Nov 17:40 (+ Q&A with Mike Leigh, Imelda Staunton and Phil Davis)  
**Topsy-Turvy**  
Sun 14 Nov 17:30 (+ Q&A with Mike Leigh and Jim Broadbent); Sun 28 Nov 17:40  
**Another Year**  
Fri 19 Nov 17:30 (+ Q&A with Mike Leigh, Ruth Sheen and Lesley Manville); Mon 29 Nov 20:30  
**Four Days in July**  
Sat 20 Nov 11:50 (+ Q&A with Mike Leigh and Bríd Brennan); Wed 24 Nov 14:15  
**Peterloo**  
Sat 20 Nov 16:20 (+ Q&A with Mike Leigh);  
Mon 29 Nov 17:40  
**Mr. Turner**  
Sun 21 Nov 13:10 (+ Q&A with Mike Leigh, Marion Bailey and Dorothy Atkinson); Sat 27 Nov 17:30  
**Who’s Who + A Sense of History + A Running Jump**  
Sat 30 Nov 14:00

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