



IN PERSON & PREVIEWS

Last Night in Soho + Q&A with Edgar Wright

Louis CK once pointed out in a routine that the only people who could truly use a time machine to travel into the past would be white heterosexual men. Time travel for any other group would involve a loss of freedom and an increase in danger. And yet our culture is obsessed with nostalgic recreations of decades, particularly the 80s, the 70s and the 60s. There is a constant hankering for the past, but it is a foreign country, a pre-#MeToo world which might be a delightful prospect for certain comedians, but not for a large section of the population.

Watching Edgar Wright's new film *Last Night in Soho*, this routine sprang to mind. The film is about the dangers of nostalgia, even as it revels in it: the ghosts you can raise and the zombies that still lumber on into the present day, refusing to die. Thomasin McKenzie stars as Eloise, or Ellie, a young woman who leaves Cornwall for the delights and dangers of the Big Smoke to study to be a fashion designer. She is obsessed with the 60s, the fashion and the music, but haunted by the ghost of her mother, who took her life. She's further haunted by a worry that these apparitions might indicate that she inherited her mother's mental health struggles. Modern student life proves uncongenial. Ellie has little in common with her fellow students and they think her a bit odd, so she moves into an old house in Fitzrovia, north of Soho (leave aside for a moment the science fiction of an affordable bedsit in central London). Here, she begins to experience vivid visions of the past, embodying a young woman Sandy (Anya Taylor-Joy) who is trying to break into show business. At first these dreams are delicious fantasies which have Ellie turning down a date with a fellow student in order to rush home, crank up her vinyl collection and lose herself in the London of the Swinging 60s.

As Tarantino did with Los Angeles in *Once upon a Time in Hollywood*, Wright and his production designer Marcus Rowland delight in recreating an immersive 360-degree version of 60s London. A huge billboard for *Thunderball* (1965) has Sean Connery glowering down at a street full of vintage cars when they were new and nightclubs where the men wore sharp suits and the girls beautiful dresses, while everyone smoked and Cilla Black sang live. Other ghosts from the 60s live on in the casting, with Rita Tushingham as Ellie's grandmother, *Avenger* Diana Rigg as Ellie's landlady and Terence Stamp stalking past in a camel-hair coat.

However, the fantasy turns into a nightmare as Sandy takes up with a manager, Jack (Matt Smith), who promises to make her a star but then leads her into a life of sexual exploitation and abuse. The past begins to bleed into

Ellie's waking life as Sandy's life becomes more and more intolerable, and the men who abused Sandy haunt her, their faces a horrible blur. It is a testament to Thomasin McKenzie's performance that she manages to maintain a lightness while at the same time suggesting a woman who could also be slipping into madness. As she tells her grandmother before leaving for London, she's a scrapper.

Last Night in Soho has the energy of a Jacques Demy musical, with a cavalcade of period hits and musical sequences, including a breathtaking a cappella performance of 'Downtown' and a thrilling dance scene that has Sandy and Ellie swap places as Jack spins them across the floor. Mixed in are references to George Romero, Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom* (1960) and *10 Rillington Place* (1971). Wright has created a fascinating melange, a mix tape of different genres, light and dark, pop and profound. It has the exhilaration of an old fairground ride, where there's always a risk that the rickety contraption might fly to pieces. But somehow Wright and co-screenwriter Krysty Wilson-Cairns manage to hold things together, even as they spin faster and faster.

The past might be idealised but it isn't as if the present is perfect. On arriving in London, Ellie is harassed by a taxi driver whose patter quickly turns threatening. The appeal of the past is partly to escape the feeling that, as Blur once told us, modern life is rubbish. But if, as Freud argued, nightmares can be disguised fantasies, so it makes sense that fantasies can also hide nightmares. Wright's film reminds us that the past may have looked and sounded great, but it had bad breath and a dangerous temper.

John Bleasdale, *Sight and Sound*, November 2021

Edgar Wright explores the allure of a rose-tinted past through a neon and neo-*giallo* lens in his latest feature, *Last Night in Soho*, a love letter to Soho and the culture of the 1960s – as well as a cautionary tale for nostalgia tourists. It's named after a song by Dave Dee, Dozy, Beaky, Mick & Tich, which Wright's friend Quentin Tarantino put him on to while he was making *Death Proof* in 2006, recalling that *Gas Food Lodging* director Allison Anders regarded it as 'the greatest theme tune for a movie that doesn't exist'.

'Soho is such an interesting mix of being the centre of the show business, the centre of the film industry and an entertainment district. In Soho, it's impossible to escape the shadows of the past,' Wright tells me. Wright moved to London 26 years ago, and by his own account has spent more time in Soho 'than on any couch in any place I've lived in'. It's an area he still loves, but one that has long had a shadowy side. 'I always used to feel that there was an energy change at night, especially after 2am – there's a feeling that what's fun is starting to turn potentially dark.'

The film opens with Eloise, an 18-year-old soon-to-be fashion student, played with wide-eyed enthusiasm by *Jojo Rabbit* star Thomasin McKenzie, dancing

around her bedroom in present-day rural Cornwall. Eloise's bedroom is drenched in the 60s: Shirley MacLaine and Twiggy posters on her walls, her grandmother's records spinning on a Dansette turntable, her mind full of fantasies of Technicolor movie houses and A-line minidresses. She's heading to London with dreams of being a fashion designer. From the outset, a darkness hangs over Eloise, manifesting in visions of her late mother, who also had dreams of being a designer: she suffered from an unnamed mental illness and, we're told, couldn't handle the intensity of London.

'I didn't find this out until after we'd made the film,' Wright says, when I ask him about Eloise's almost fetishistic relationship with the 60s, 'but there is a term, "anemoia", which is an obsession with a past that you didn't live through.' Wright's own obsession with the 60s is stamped over every element of the film, right down to the casting. Rita Tushingham, Terence Stamp, Margaret Nolan and Dame Diana Rigg all appear, each of them an icon of 1960s British cinema. There is a distinct visual separation between the two Sohos we see in the film: the contemporary reality is disappointing and scary, but the past explodes in vivid colour and frenetic movement. 'I was really struck by 1960s films shot in Technicolor,' Wright explains. 'It's so rich and expressionistic, not quite real life. In films like *Sapphire* [Basil Dearden, 1959], *Peeping Tom* [Michael Powell, 1960] or *The Collector* [William Wyler, 1965], the colours are so hallucinatory. The idea was that when we go back to the 60s, we make the past more vivid than the present. You're seduced by it.'

Last Night in Soho is a snapshot of Edgar Wright's love for London. During lockdown, he would walk around Soho late at night, taking in the uncanny eeriness of a deserted metropolis. At the end of the film, there are shots of empty Soho streets. He knew he had to shoot it then, in the summer of 2020, because 'maybe it'll never be like this ever again. When things reopened and the restrictions lifted, people didn't go to Trafalgar Square. People, and the news cameras, went to Soho. I have a theory born out of the pandemic: Old Compton Street is the centre of London.'

Anna Bogutskaya, *Sight and Sound*, November 2021

LAST NIGHT IN SOHO

Director: Edgar Wright
©: Focus Features LLC, Perfect Universe Investment Inc.
a Working Title / Complete Fiction production
Presented by: Focus Features, Film4
In association with: Perfect World Pictures
Executive Producers: James Biddle, Rachel Prior, Daniel Battsek, Ollie Madden
Produced by: Nira Park, Tim Bevan, Eric Fellner, Edgar Wright
Unit Production Manager: Jeremy Burnage
Production Supervisor: Lisa Curry
Financial Controller: Kerry Smith
Production Accountant: Ana Stichini
Unit Manager: Bobby Ray Prince
Supervising Location Manager: Camilla Stephenson
Location Managers: Callum Green, Cat Ho
Location Manager, Devorr: Rebecca Pearson
Post-production Supervisor: Miranda Jones
2nd Unit Director: Jeremy Lovering
1st Assistant Director: Richard Graysmark
Casting by: Nina Gold, Martin Ware
Screenplay by: Edgar Wright, Krysty Wilson-Cairns
Story by: Edgar Wright
Director of Photography: Chung-Hoon Chung
2nd Unit Director of Photography: Oliver Curtis
A Camera/Steadicam Operator: Chris Bain
Still Photographers: Parisa Taghizadeh, Will Mitchell
Visual Effects Supervisor: Tom Proctor
Visual Effects by: DNeg, Technicolour VFX
Special Effects Supervisor: Stephen Hutchinson
Editor: Paul Machliss
Production Designer: Marcus Rowland
Supervising Art Director: Tim Blake
Art Directors: Victoria Allwood, Katie Money, Emily Norris
Set Decorator: Jude Farr
Graphic Designer: Sophie Powell
Property Buyer: Colleen Macleod
Property Masters: Adam McCreight, Adam McCreight
Costume Designer: Odile Dicks-Mireaux
Make Up & Hair Designer: Lizzie Yiani Georgiou
Prosthetics Designer: Barry Gower
Title Design: Matt Curtis
Colourists: Joshua Callis-Smith, Asa Shoul, Andy Dickinson
Music by: Steven Price
Conductor: Geoff Alexander
Orchestrator: David Butterworth
Music Supervisor: Kirsten Lane
Choreography: Jennifer White
Production Sound Mixer: Colin Nicolson
Re-recording Mixer: Julian Slater
Supervising Sound Editors: Dan Morgan, Julian Slater
Stunt Co-ordinator: David Forman
Unit Publicist: Stacy Mann
In Memory of: Margaret Nolan
Studios: Ealing Studios, Warner Bros. Studios Leavesden

Cast

Thomasin McKenzie (*Eloise Turner*)
Anya Taylor-Joy (*Sandie*)
Matt Smith (*Jack*)
Diana Rigg (*Miss Collins*)
Terence Stamp (*silver haired gentleman*)
Rita Tushingham (*Peggy Turner*)
Synnove Karlsen (*Jocasta*)
Michael Ajao (*John*)
Jessie Mei Li (*Lara*)
Kassius Nelson (*Cami*)
Rebecca Harrod (*Ashley*)
Aimée Cassettari (*Eloise's mother*)
Colin Mace (*taxi driver 1*)
Alan Mahon (*Toucan bartender*)
Connor Calland (*drunk student*)
Pauline McLynn (*Carol*)
Josh Zare (*student at party*)
Jacqui-Lee Pryce (*college administrator*)
Elizabeth Berrington (*Ms Tobin*)
James Phelps, Oliver Phelps (*cloakroom attendants*)
Beth Singh (*Cilla Black*)
Paul Brightwell (*Cubby*)
Will Rogers (*Café de Paris bartender*)
Terence Frisch (*Rialto Club owner*)
Celeste Dring (*shop assistant*)
Jeanie Wishes (*Marionetta*)
Andrew Bicknell (*Mr Pointer*)
Adam Sopp (*Toucan drunk*)
Richard Corgan (*Toucan drunk's mate*)
Michael Mears (*punter 1*)
Tom Hartwell (*punter 2*)
Paul Hamilton (*punter 3*)
Wayne Cater (*punter 4*)
Sam Parks (*punter 6*)
Alan Ruscoe (*punter 7*)
Margaret Nolan (*Sage barmaid*)
Christopher Carrico, Ian Harrod, Ian Hartley, Luke Hope, Kent Goldfinch, Daniel Maggott, Richard O'Sullivan (*additional punters*)
Michael Jibson (*male detective*)
Lisa McGrillis (*female detective*)
Al Roberts (*librarian*)
Derek Lea (*taxi driver 2*)
Melissa Fox, Jodie Hassell, Stephanie Lamey, Amy Andrea Murray, Alison Parsons, Ashley Shaw (*Rialto dancers*)

USA/UK 2021

116 mins

Courtesy of Universal Pictures

EDGAR WRIGHT'S LONDON AFTER DARK

Passport to Shame (aka Room 43)

Mon 18 Oct 20:50; Sat 13 Nov 18:10

Peeping Tom

Tue 19 Oct 20:30; Sat 6 Nov 18:20

Beat Girl

Fri 22 Oct 20:40; Sun 31 Oct 16:20

West End Jungle + Look at Life: Market Place

+ Look at Life: Rising to High Office

Sat 23 Oct 20:40; Sat 20 Nov 14:40

The Pleasure Girls + Look at Life: Members Only

Mon 25 Oct 20:50; Mon 29 Nov 18:20

Frenzy

Wed 27 Oct 20:45; Fri 19 Nov 18:30

Darling

Thu 28 Oct 20:30; Sat 20 Nov 13:20

Bitter Harvest + Look at Life: Coffee Bar

Fri 29 Oct 18:00; Tue 9 Nov 20:45

The Small World of Sammy Lee + Look at Life: In Gear

Sat 30 Oct 20:30; Sat 6 Nov 20:45; Tue 23 Nov 14:30

Primitive London + Look at Life: Goodbye Piccadilly

Mon 1 Nov 20:50; Thu 25 Nov 20:50

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