



MIKE LEIGH

Career Girls

Mike Leigh on 'Career Girls'

Where did the idea for Career Girls come from?

All my films are full of ongoing, running ideas. It's not the kind of movie where there's one idea. And I'm fascinated, and always have been, by the way you run into people after a long time and they've changed, but they're still the same old them. It's about friendship, and it's about caring for people. It's about memory and the way things become fragmented that happened in the past. They're kind of things I've dealt with before in my films in different ways, and I just thought it would be good to look at this very specifically. I actually go back and see what they were like, and share those things with the audience a bit.

All my films are autobiographical, but not in a kind of specific way. I mean, I can't point to a particular character or event and say, that's me and that's what happened to me. But the spirit of my films are very much personal, and in that sense autobiographical. I am endlessly fascinated by the way that we change, we stay the same, we have these accumulated memories, and our memories become confused. And that there are certain passions for people that don't ever die. There's a bit of that explored in *Career Girls* and it's an important thing. Life is an untidy, unresolved, complicated bundle of order with a huge amount of disorder and bad timing. That's what I try to deal with in a small way in this film. We all have these experiences and feelings and they won't go away, and that's what it's about.

Is there any particular character in Career Girls that you identify most with?

The funny and strange thing is, if I think of all my characters, I suddenly find that there's bits of me in all of them, really. It's one of those curious things. I mean, obviously, if you take Hannah, whom Katrin Cartlidge plays, there are aspects of the kind of humour and role-playing, particularly when I was much younger, that I would identify with. But again, she's a different sort of person; she's a woman. Again, sometimes I feel like a very big lump that Ricky is, and sometimes I'm the sort of heel that the real estate agent is. It depends, really.

As a storyteller and artist, I am concerned with Us, with the relations between men and women and the way we are, and all these things are important to me. There's no way that I can specifically tell you that I have a particular reason for being concerned with female relations as such. It's just something that's as important to me as everything else, really. I'm a gregarious, sophisticated, experienced person who's known a lot of people and actually known various kinds of women ranging from my grandmother and my mother through to my sister, and all kinds of other women that I've known in various other capacities, some biblical and some not. But mainly I'm a person whose job as an artist is to explore, discuss and tell stories about the human condition.

You call your movie Career Girls, and yet what we really see are the characters away from work, and never at their jobs.

Well, there's a certain irony in that. We see them a lot of the time in the film when they're students, and they're very much not career girls. And here they

are in these official roles of career women, they've got it together. But actually it's not working in the strict sense for either of them, it's fractured in some ways. So they're playing this role, this career girl role, but again underneath it all, it's still the same old them a few years up the line. So that's why I've called it *Career Girls*. You don't see them in their work situation, because obviously I'm concerned with exploring their relationship with each other.

You're known for your unique method of organically crafting your scripts in collaboration with the cast. Do you ever feel this method distances you from your own original and personal conception of the story?

On the contrary, I cannot imagine working in a way that would allow me more ability to do what I want to do, and to explore more precisely what it is I want to explore. I think if I were to be forced by some fascist regime with a gun to my head to write scripts in a conventional way, I would then feel there was no way I could access what I really wanted to do. And to me the way I work, which I hope is getting more and more refined as time goes by, is very much a way of really being able to address what I really want to address, and make the film live and work just the way I want it to be. And it's because it's about filmmaking. It's not about writing a piece of literature, which you then convert into something called a film. It's about working, as it were, directly onto the canvas, creating the film in, as you say, an organic way, working from scratch. And that gives you absolute control over it.

We're talking about filmmaking here, and any filmmaker that feels they are making a film by themselves frankly neither understands the medium nor is a genuine filmmaker. There's no such thing as a film that you make by yourself. It is a collaborative process, and all I do is shift the boundary lines a bit. Even if you write a script conventionally, other people are going to make that film with you, actors are going to interpret those roles. So all I do is integrate the writing and conception of the film, the exploration, the research and all those things that lead to the film, with the actual organic process of making the film itself.

Has the popularity of your work affected you?

It just encourages me. I've been making films since 1971, and some of the films I've made have sunk into relative obscurity. That's not what I make films for.

In Career Girls we see a lot of signs of physical distress, like rashes and tics, that literally 'flesh out' your characters.

Yes, I think it's no big deal. I mean, with all due respect to everybody, we're all susceptible to tics and twitches of one kind or the other. That's idiosyncratic, and that's how people are. The only reason why you may be prone to interpret or decode them as a series of statements, images or symbols of some kind is that on the whole characters in movies don't behave like real people.

On the whole, characters in movies behave like actors behave when they're playing characters in movies. Which is to say, with all the twitches, tics and behavioural and physical characteristics and defects removed and sort of blanded and bleached out of existence. Here I am simply putting people on the screen the way we really are, and so it may seem that it's all about tics and twitches, but it's just about people really.

Mike Leigh interviewed by Prairie Miller, 1996

CAREER GIRLS

Director: Mike Leigh
Production Companies: Channel Four Television Corporation, Thin Man Films, Matrix Film Partnership
Producer: Simon Channing-Williams
Production Supervisor: Georgina Lowe
Production Co-ordinator: Deborah Reade
Location Manager: Neil Lee
1st Assistant Director: Nick Heckstall-Smith
2nd Assistant Director: Josh Robertson
3rd Assistant Director: Zerlina Hughes
4th Assistant Director: Hannah Titley
Script Supervisor: Heather Storr
Casting: Stern and Parriss
Screenplay: Mike Leigh
Director of Photography/Camera Operator:Dick Pope
Editor: Robin Sales
Production Designer: Eve Stewart
Art Director: Helen Scott
Make-up Designer: Christine Blundell
Assistant Make-up/Hair: Marese Langan

Title Design: Chris Allies
Title Opticals: Cine Image
Music: Marianne Jean-Baptiste, Tony Rémy
Music Engineer: Marcus Lindsay
Sound Recording: George Richards
Re-recording Mixers: Peter Maxwell, Mick Boggis
Dubbing Editor: Peter Joly
Foley Walkers: Dianne Greaves, Jack Stew
Foley Editor: Julian Rodd

Cast

Katrin Cartlidge (Hannah Mills)
Lynda Steadman (Annie)
Mark Benton (Richard ‘Ricky’ Burton)
Kate Byers (Claire)
Andy Serkis (Mr Evans)
Joe Tucker (Adrian Spinks)
Margo Stanley (Ricky’s nan)
Michael Healy (lecturer)

UK 1997
87 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 Soman, 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 Brid 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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