



RE-RELEASES

# Naked

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

In London, down tunnels and stairwells, empty streets and motorways, a grimy young man stalks the night. A black coat hangs down to his ankles, a dark contrast to the gingery mop of hair falling into his eyes. An air of gloom surrounds his entire being. This is Johnny, in his late twenties but easily mistaken for a few decades older, as one character notes later in the film. He prowls with a violent demeanour, a penchant for conspiracy theories and a quickfire tongue, telling anyone who will listen just how exactly they are all doomed.

Mike Leigh's 1993 Cannes Film Festival prizewinner *Naked* exposes Johnny (David Thewlis), and other men like him, by casting a bright light on all the hideous facets of their masculinity. A stripped-back tale of a man who roams a desolate London one night, engaging in odd, sometimes incoherent, often one-sided interactions with strangers and mostly violent encounters with women, Leigh's film is a tightly wrapped piece of artistry that interrogates the clash between societal failings and one's inner demons.

The film's sharp opening introduces the audience to Johnny as a fundamental aggressor. In a Manchester alleyway he is having a violent sexual encounter with a woman who screams out in pain and anguish, swearing her husband's revenge. Whether or not the encounter had been consensual in the moments before is unclear; Johnny commits the first of his violent acts and therefore becomes a challenging, yet unarguably compelling, focal point for the film. Leigh follows him on a nocturnal odyssey of loud-mouthing and harassment; sullen, sulky and too clever for his own good, Johnny is like a teenager trapped in a phase of obsessively reading Nietzsche or Kerouac, unable to see the line at which his intelligence becomes obnoxiousness.

To escape the city, and a possible beating, Johnny steals a car and drives to London to the home of ex-girlfriend Louise (Lesley Sharp). A curiously grand building with a deceptive façade that hides its front door, the Hackney property feels at once rundown and regal. A sweeping staircase curves around the front of the house, the first of many sets of stairs that feature in the film, and this is where Johnny settles on his arrival. Waiting for Louise's return, he is greeted by her fragile and frazzled roommate Sophie (Katrin Cartlidge). He quickly sets about inflicting his backwards kind of charm upon her, the jokes and self-deprecation that, for him, often precede a nihilistic and conspiratorial diatribe. Sophie is smitten. Neither the knowledge that he is her friend's ex nor the vicious side to him she will soon become aware of dissuades her from pining for him throughout the film; a delicate person, so often caught in the web of abuse, she can't see any other option for herself.

Running parallel to Johnny's narrative is that of Jeremy (Greg Cruttwell), or Sebastian as he pretends to be called, a misogynistic toff with a still greater disdain for women and basic decency. He is introduced in the gym, rudely propositioning a physiotherapist who later agrees to join him for dinner. At a fancy restaurant, he devours his food like a predator. Leigh holds these male characters side by side to explore the nuances in their behaviour in their

individual circumstances: the rich southerner with his bravado and flashy sensibilities, and the unemployed northerner with little to show for himself. Ultimately, though, as Leigh knows, this is not about pitying Johnny or excusing his behaviour. These men reflect the totality of a spectrum of misogyny and barbarity.

Leigh's cast of performers deliver this provocative and difficult narrative with effective, sensitive confidence. Thewlis as Johnny is wild and menacing, and his articulations of the character's rapid vitriol are note-perfect in a performance that suggests exhaustive preparation and total, terrifying, embodiment of such a character. Sharp as Louise is quietly stoic, in spite of the bruises life has given her; she has no time for the idiocy of the men around her and she's willing to stand her ground, even though when it comes to her own needs and wants her footing is less stable. The dynamic between Johnny and Louise is at once the film's warmest and most difficult. Laden with their own history and memories of the past they share, their patience and interest for one another breaks through in even the coldest of arguments.

As Johnny wanders the streets making friends and enemies alike, his isolation from the world and troubled state of mind becomes more apparent. His individualism, forged from what he sees as a society that has long rejected him, allows him to think he can do whatever he wants. Jeremy is the same, yet his individualism stems from the privilege that Johnny does not possess. While Johnny goes out into the night looking for people to listen, Jeremy ventures inside to Louise and Sophie's flat, invading their space to terrorise them.

This is a film about belonging, or a lack thereof – feelings of exclusion, the coldness of the city, the inability to settle. 'I've got an infinite number of places to go,' Johnny says. 'The problem is where to stay.' Action occurs in non-places; locations, like stairwells, marked by their transient nature where people only pass through and never linger. Characters occupy homes that aren't their own; Louise and Sophie are living in friend Sandra's (Claire Skinner) flat while she is away (Sandra in turn rents the space from the vindictive Jeremy), and a girl Johnny meets in a café (Gina McKee) has, in stranger circumstances, borrowed an apartment from people she doesn't know. In both flats, characters mock the interior design choices or the souvenirs lining the shelves. These are not homes with reflections of their own identities inside, but merely places to spend a period of time in and later leave. Leigh creates a city of non-places with a cast of drifters to wander through them.

It is also telling that the only character who feels a sense of entitlement to settle is Jeremy, as the wealthy landlord. Jeremy represents an elite establishment, someone who can inflict the same kind of damage and criminality as Johnny but who can drive away in a flashy sports car afterwards. Jeremy and Johnny are closely matched in their dangerous male energies in this film but Leigh ultimately steers Johnny away from the total, blank indifference of Jeremy. His caring side, while mostly smothered by his cruelty throughout the film, is nonetheless still there. Jeremy, on the other hand, scoffs and snorts with pomposity at the terror he has the power to unleash.

While clearly a portrait of masculinity and all its toxicities, *Naked* honours its female characters with tenderness and power. They are women attempting to carve a singular path in life – Louise with her new job in London away from her

family in Manchester, Sandra as a nurse, and Sophie, who seemingly isn't sure what she wants just yet – away from, or in spite of, the damage that the men that enter their lives force upon them. Leigh also explores the ways in which emotional and physical abuse cannot always be untangled from love or attachment. Even when Louise returns home to find Johnny and Sophie have become sexually involved, or when Johnny stumbles back through their door having been beaten up by a gang, she sees a goodness in him that few others can. They share the film's most tender moments and, albeit in vague terms, plan some kind of future together back in Manchester. In the circumstances of the film, it's easy to assume their former relationship was bound by many of the difficulties and aggressions Johnny displays and so Leigh puts Louise in *Naked's* most compromising position. How can it be so easy to return to someone who causes nothing but pain? It is, ultimately, less about Johnny and more about her own emotional state, her homesickness and loneliness in London. In her life, where nothing feels like home, the sudden return of a figure from the past is all Louise can cling to in order to feel normal again.

*Naked* embraces complexity throughout, exploring difficult characters living difficult lives in difficult, post-Thatcher Britain. What is there to be hopeful for in a world that, politically, morally and socially feels like it's coming to an end? Now 28 years old, the film retains a depressing contemporaneity. Perhaps a man like Johnny would feel more at home in today's climate of alt-right misogyny, political fearmongering and crackpot delusions while still suffering under an oppressive government.

Leigh's title is appropriately barren and bare; everyone in the film is naked in one way or another, bodies, feelings and aggressions exposed by Leigh's storytelling in a landscape devoid of identity or protection. His film is unflinching and desolate, yet brilliantly gripping. While we may relish men like Johnny and Jeremy being thrown out into the world, shown in an honest light, there is a longing that circumstances might change for Louise, Sophie, Sandra and the girl in the café; that they might find a way to settle into a happier, more fulfilling life.

**Caitlin Quinlan, 'Naked Truth', BFI Blu-ray booklet, 2021**

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## NAKED

*Directed by:* Mike Leigh  
©: Channel Four Television Corporation  
*Production Company:* Thin Man Films  
*Presented by:* Channel Four Films  
*With the participation of:* British Screen  
*Produced by:* Simon Channing-Williams  
*Production Manager:* Georgina Lowe  
*Production Co-ordinator:* Stephanie Faugier  
*Production Accountant:* William Tyler  
*Location Managers:* Mark Mostyn, Neil Lee  
*1st Assistant Director:* Rupert Ryle-Hodges  
*Script Supervisor:* Heather Storr  
*CASTING:* Paddy Stern, Susie Parriss  
*Written by:* Mike Leigh  
*Director of Photography:* Dick Pope  
*Camera Operator:* Dick Pope  
*Steadicam Operator:* Andy Shuttleworth  
*Focus Puller:* Gary Turnbull  
*Clapper Loader:* Simon Starling  
*Gaffer:* John Parsons  
*Camera Grip:* Colin Strachan  
*Stills Photographer:* Simon Mein  
*Edited by:* Jon Gregory  
*Production Designer:* Alison Chitty  
*Art Director:* Eve Stewart  
*Property Master:* Steve Wheeler  
*Costume Designer:* Lindy Hemming  
*Assistant Costume Designer:* Debbie Scott  
*Wardrobe Supervisor:* Sharon Long  
*Make-up Artist:* Chris Blundell  
*Title Design:* Chris Allies  
*Title Optical:* David Smith, Peerless Camera Company  
*Music by:* Andrew Dickson  
*Harpist:* Skaila Kanga  
*Viola:* Roger Chase  
*Double Bass:* Paul Spiers

*Sound Recordist:* Ken Weston  
*Post-production:* De Lane Lea Sound Centre  
*Boom Operator:* Loveday Harding  
*Dubbing Editor:* Sue Baker  
*Dubbing Mixer:* Peter Maxwell  
*Foley Editor:* Imogen Pollard

## Cast

David Thewlis (*Johnny*)  
Lesley Sharp (*Louise*)  
Katrín Cartlidge (*Sophie*)  
Greg Cruttwell (*Jeremy*)  
Peter Wight (*Brian*)  
Claire Skinner (*Sandra*)  
Deborah Maclaren (*woman in window*)  
Gina McKee (*cafe girl*)  
Ewen Bremner (*Archie*)  
Susan Vidler (*Maggie*)  
Elizabeth Berrington (*Giselle*)  
Carolina Giammetta (*masseuse*)  
Darren Tunstall (*poster man*)  
Robert Putt (*chauffeur*)  
Lynda Rooke (*victim*)  
Angela Curran (*car owner*)  
Peter Whitman (*Mr Halpern*)  
Jo Abercrombie (*woman in street*)  
Elaine Britten (*girl in Porsche*)  
David Foxe (*tea bar owner*)  
Mike Avenall, Toby Jones (*men at tea bar*)  
Sandra Voe (*bag lady*)

UK 1993  
132 mins

A BFI release

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## NEW RELEASES

### The French Dispatch

From Fri 29 Oct

### Becoming Cousteau

From Fri 12 Nov 14:40

### Petite Maman

From Fri 26 Nov

### Rebel Dykes

From Fri 26 Nov (+ Q&A Fri 26 Nov 18:20)

### Swan Song

From Fri 17 Dec

## RE-RELEASES

### Seven Samurai (Shichinin no Samurai)

From Fri 29 Oct

### Naked

From Fri 12 Nov (Sat 13 Nov 17:20 + Q&A with director Mike Leigh, Lesley Sharp and Dick Pope)

### The Shop around the Corner

From 3 December

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