



MIKE LEIGH

Topsy-Turvy + Q&A with Mike Leigh

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

Imagine how startled you'd be to discover that Krzysztof Kieslowski had secretly made a series of knockabout comedies (*Three Colours: Nurse*, *Three Colours: Camping* and *Three Colours: Up the Khyber*) or that Martin Scorsese's next picture was to be set in an antique shop in Chipping Sodbury. Multiply that surprise a hundredfold and you'll be half way to grasping the shock value of *Topsy-Turvy*. It's a 'Mike Leigh film', but you'll scan the screen in vain for the images and sounds that phrase conjures up. Instead of tragi-comically half-articulate people in questionable cardigans, *Topsy-Turvy* – an account of a few key years in the career of the popular English operetta team Gilbert and Sullivan and their circle – offers lavish period costumes and screeds of florid dialogue. Leigh the poet of the underclass seems to have been replaced by Leigh the reveller in middlebrow theatrics. Mike the minimalist has delivered a film which frequently merits the adjective 'rollicking'. Has the man who I'd insist was Britain's greatest living filmmaker defected to that most reprehensible of tendencies, heritage mongering?

Mercifully not, though there are a few stretches in this film where he teeters on the brink. Leigh's appetite for the music is evidently immense, resulting in too many indulgent performances of their songs. Yet there's still plenty here to satisfy Leigh devotees, if they can peer past the aspidistras. The staging is as rich and complex as one would expect, there is the typically judicious balance of heartbreak and farce, and there are several diamond-sharp moments when an apparently casual observation illuminates a whole architecture of social assumptions.

Nonetheless, the film marks an inarguable departure. Leigh is dealing with real historical figures, flirting with traditional genres (the biopic, the backstage musical, the dreaded heritage movie), and shedding his trademark heightened naturalism for a full-blooded plunge into thespian excess. Theatricality is not just the hallmark of the film's method, it forms one of its principal subjects. This allows Leigh (who is also, let's not forget, a seasoned stage director) and his actors to have great fun recreating a world of backstage bitching and production politics while simultaneously indicating how people's egos, health and relationships suffer in such a hothouse atmosphere. Timothy Spall's performance as the ageing star Richard Temple, for example, is a perfectly judged study of juxtaposed fragility and bombast. Throughout the film, Leigh contrasts on-stage polish with private insecurity, the latter manifesting itself in alcoholism, drug dependency and dangerous levels of vanity.

He's also keen to explore the dynamics of creativity, setting the happily repetitive librettist Gilbert (Jim Broadbent) in conflict with composer Sullivan's loftier ideals. Gilbert finds it both perplexing and hurtful that Sullivan (Allan Corduner) wishes to dispense with a hit formula, while Sullivan is terrified of being so seduced by a profitable rut he might never fulfil his true potential. This tension between them is so fundamental Sullivan's abrupt change of

heart to embrace *The Mikado* strikes one of the film's few false notes. It's tempting to speculate how their dispute relates to Leigh himself. Following the huge success of *Secrets & Lies* (after which *Career Girls*, for all its deft pleasures, did little more than mark time), should he choose a Gilbertian path of more-of-the-same, or follow Sullivan towards ambition and risk? In such a context, *Topsy-Turvy*'s unexpected lurch into costume territory seems a bold move, paradoxically lending a dash of daring to this usually ultra-conservative format.

On the surface, Leigh's script urges us to root for Sullivan, not so much because he is particularly admirable but because Gilbert is such a buffoon. Broadbent, however, is so magnificent as Gilbert we can see beneath the gruff foolishness of the facade to the emotionally stunted man underneath. The son of two clearly deranged parents and the husband in a stilted marriage, Gilbert clings to his formulaic writing because formulas offer certainty, a certainty unattainable in the destabilising realm of emotions. This fear of feeling provides the film with an emotional climax that's one of the greatest scenes in any Leigh film, as Gilbert's wife Kitty (Lesley Manville, hitherto underused) finally, if obliquely, confesses her longing for children. Gilbert listens as she hovers on the edge of a breakdown but can offer her nothing but bluff masculine evasion. The English dread of open emotion is one of Leigh's abiding obsessions (it forms the core of his excruciatingly precise first film *Bleak Moments*), and his ability to locate it even here, amid all those galumphingly good-humoured songs, is another reason why *Topsy-Turvy* is more than just another costume outing.

It's this attention to the anxious underbelly of Victorian culture that does most to save *Topsy-Turvy* from descending into pictorialism. The film leaves us in no doubt that 19th-century England was a society founded on sexual hypocrisy and funded by imperial exploitation. The first threads through the film in various guises: Sullivan's trips to overseas brothels, the Gilberts' barren marriage, the fine lines actresses must tread between propriety and scandal, the repression and hysteria in the home of Gilbert's mother and unmarried sisters. Imperialism emerges in the unadorned racism prompted by the news of General Gordon's defeat at Khartoum and the greedy appropriation that twists the nuances of Japanese culture into the slant-eyed pantomime of *The Mikado*.

There are other, more tantalising asides which further underline how the gathering momentum of modernity was unsettling the texture of the times. A running joke concerns the impact of new-fangled technologies such as the electric doorbell, the fountain pen and the telephone, but it's a joke with darker implications about how older ways of communicating were being sidelined. These social comments are never crassly driven home, but they resonate strongly in the mind afterwards. *Topsy-Turvy*, like *Life Is Sweet* or *Meantime*, steeps you in a culture so deeply it's only by looking back and peering closely you can detect how wider forces have cruelly impinged on individual lives. In that sense, despite its initially disorienting costume trappings, it's very much 'a Mike Leigh film' after all.

Andy Medhurst, *Sight and Sound*, March 2000

TOPSY-TURVY

Director: Mike Leigh
©: Untitled 98 Limited
Production Companies: Untitled 98 Limited, Thin Man Films, The Greenlight Fund, Newmarket Capital Group
Supported by: National Lottery through the Arts Council of England
Producer: Simon Channing-Williams
Associate Producer: Georgina Lowe
Production Co-ordinator: Paula McBreen
Location Manager: Neil Lee
Post-production Supervisor: Deborah Reade
1st Assistant Director: Nick Heckstall-Smith
2nd Assistant Director: Josh Robertson
3rd Assistant Directors: Paula Spinks, Hannah Titley
4th Assistant Director: Echo Ward
Script Supervisor: Heather Storr
Casting: Nina Gold
Screenplay: Mike Leigh
Director of Photography: Dick Pope
Camera Operator: Dick Pope
2nd Camera Operator: Lucy Bristow
Focus Puller: Lucy Bristow
Clapper Loader: Iain Struthers
Grip: Colin Strachan
Action Graphics: Tanya Miller
Editor: Robin Sales
Production Designer: Eve Stewart
Art Director: Helen Scott
Set Decorators: Eve Stewart, John Bush
Draughtsman: Charles Leatherland
Scenic Artists: Loraine Schneider, Justin Overhill
Costume Designer: Lindy Hemming
Wardrobe Supervisor: David Crossman
Make-up/Hair Designer: Christine Blundell
Make-up Artists: Trefor Proud, Kirstin Chalmers, Dianne Jamieson
Hairdresser: Tony Martin
Title Design: Chris Allies
Music: Carl Davis
From the works of: Arthur Sullivan
Musical Director: Gary Yershon
Orchestra Lead by: Michael Davis, Paul Willey, Josef Fröhlich
Supervising Music Editor: Michael Connell
Music Editor: Denise Connell
Music Engineer: John Timperley
Choreography: Francesca Jaynes
Additional Choreography (Brothel): Julia Rayner
Sound Recording: Tim Fraser
Re-recording Mixers: Adrian Rhodes, Mike Prestwood Smith
Supervising Sound Editor: Peter Joly
ADR Mixer: Ted Swanscott
Foley Walker: Roy Baker
Foley Walker: Pauline Griffiths
Foley Mixer: Ed Colyer
Foley Editor: Paul Wrightson

Cast

Jim Broadbent (William Schwenck Gilbert)
Allan Corduner (Arthur Sullivan)
Timothy Spall (Richard Temple)
Lesley Manville (Lucy ‘Kitty’ Gilbert)
Ron Cook (Richard D’Oyly Carte)
Wendy Nottingham (Helen Lenoir)
Kevin McKidd (Durward Lely)
Shirley Henderson (Leonora Braham)
Dorothy Atkinson (Jessie Bond)
Martin Savage (George Grossmith)
Eleanor David (Fanny Ronalds)
Alison Steadman (Madame Leon)
Dexter Fletcher (Louis)
Sukie Smith (Clothilde)
Roger Heathcott (stage door-keeper)
Stefan Bednarczyk (Frank Cellier)
Geoffrey Hutchings (armourer)
Francis Lee (Butt)

William Neenan (cook)
Adam Searle (Shrimp)
Kate Doherty (Mrs Judd)
Kenneth Hadley (Pidgeon)
Keeley Gaine (maidservant)
Gary Yershon (pianist in brothel)
Katrin Cartlidge (madame)
Julia Rayner (Mademoiselle Fromage)
Jenny Pickering (second prostitute)
Sam Kelly (Richard Barker)
Charles Simon (Gilbert’s father)
Philippe Constantin (Paris waiter)
David Neville (dentist)
Matthew Mills (Walter Simmonds)
Nicholas Woodeson (Mr Seymour)
Nick Bartlett, Gary Dunnington (stage hands)
Amanda Crossley (Emily)
Kimi Shaw (spinner)
Toksán Takahashi (calligrapher)
Akemi Otani (dancer)
Kanako Morishita (shamisen player)
Theresa Watson (Maude Gilbert)
Lavinia Bertram (Florence Gilbert)
Togo Igawa (first kabuki actor)
Eiji Kusuhara (second kabuki actor)
Naoko Mori (Miss ‘Sixpence Please’)
Eve Pearce (Gilbert’s mother)
Neil Humphries (boy actor)
Vincent Franklin (Rutland Barrington)
Michael Simkins (Frederick Bovill)
Cathy Sara (Sibyl Grey)
Angela Curran (Miss Morton)
Millie Gregory (Alice)
Jonathan Aris (Wilhelm)
Andy Serkis (John d’Auban)
Mia Soteriou (Mrs Russell)
Louise Gold (Rosina Brandram)
Shaun Glanville (Mr Harris)
Julian Bleach (Mr Plank)
Neil Salvage (Mr Hurley)
Matt Bardock (Mr Tripp)
Brid Brennan (mad woman)
Mark Benton (Mr Price)
Heather Craney (Miss Russell)
Julie Jupp (Miss Meadows)
John Warnaby (Mr Sanders)
Kacey Ainsworth (Miss Fitzherbert)
Ashley Artus (Mr Marchmont)
Richard Attlee (Mr Gordon)
Paul Barnhill (Mr Flagstone)
Nicholas Boulton (Mr Conyngham)
Lorraine Brunning (Miss Jardine)
Simon Butteriss (Mr Lewis)
Wayne Cater (Mr Rhys)
Rosie Cavaliero (Miss Moore)
Michelle Chadwick (Miss Warren)
Debbie Chazen (Miss Kingsley)
Richard Coyle (Mr Hammond)
Monica Dolan (Miss Barnes)
Sophie Duval (Miss Brown)
Anna Francolini (Miss Biddles)
Teresa Gallagher (Miss Coleford)
Sarah Howe (Miss Woods)
Ashley Jensen (Miss Tringham)
Gemma Page (Miss Langton-James)
Paul Rider (Mr Bentley)
Mary Roscoe (Miss Carlyle)
Steven Speirs (Mr Kent)
Nicola Wainwright (Miss Betts)
Angie Wallis (Miss Wilkinson)
Kevin Walton (Mr Evans)

UK 1999©
160 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

MIKE LEIGH’S CHOICES

Tokyo Story (Tôkyô monogatari)

Mon 18 Oct 20:20; Thu 21 Oct 14:30; Sat 13 Nov 14:10; Tue 30 Nov 14:00

Jules et Jim

Tue 19 Oct 20:50; Wed 10 Nov 14:30

The Tree of Wooden Clogs (L’albero degli zoccoli)

Wed 20 Oct 14:00; Fri 29 Oct 13:30; Sun 7 Nov 13:50

I Am Cuba (Soy Cuba)

Wed 20 Oct 14:30; Sat 13 Nov 20:10

Radio Days

Sat 23 Oct 13:20; Tue 16 Nov 18:10

H3

Mon 25 Oct 18:00 (+ Q&A with director Les Blair); Wed 24 Nov 20:50

A Blonde in Love (AKA Loves of a Blonde) (Lásky jedné plavovlásky)

Mon 25 Oct 20:40; Fri 19 Nov 21:00

The Story of Gilbert and Sullivan

Sun 14 Nov 14:40; Sun 28 Nov 14:50

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