



PREVIEW

# The Score

+ Q&A with director Malachi Smyth and actor Johnny Flynn

Two mismatched small time crooks Mike and Troy (Johnny Flynn and Will Poulter) stop at a roadside cafe ahead of a rendezvous with a big pay-out. At the café, Troy is immediately enamoured by a headstrong waitress (Naomi Ackie). Powered by original songs from Flynn's band Johnny Flynn & The Sussex Wit, this is a sweet, musical-crime-thriller with a splash of romance and plenty of heart.

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Writer director Malachi Smyth's main inspiration for *The Score* came from French New Wave cinema, as he explains: 'It was the combination they had of being very free to experiment, but also drawing on the traditional Hollywood gangster and western films of the 30s and 40s that inspired me. That combination, with the added fit of European flair, resulted in some very distinctive films'.

Smyth also credits more recent indie cinema such as Paul Thomas Anderson's *Hard Eight* and David Mackenzie's *Hell or High Water* as further sources of inspiration. 'They are films which combined character driven stories about small time criminals with a real sense of a thriller,' Smyth continues.

When Smyth set about writing *The Score*, he wanted to make sure his film stood out from others and started to wonder what he could do to make that possible. 'I had a script that was compelling with a great story and characters, but I wanted to lift it to another level; make it bolder, fresher and richer,' he recalls.

It was when he was writing another draft of the script, whilst listening to Johnny Flynn's 2017 album 'Sillion', that inspiration struck. 'The songs just seemed to fit into the script in an extraordinary way,' Smyth explains. An on-going joke with producer Ben Pullen whilst going through the re-drafting process was the idea of turning the script into a musical. The next time they met, Smyth presented Pullen with exactly that. 'I had included one of Johnny's songs into the opening to show him how it would work and he loved it, so then it became the question of finding other songs which was surprisingly easy as they all seemed to fit into the script.'

The perfect example of that can be heard in the song 'In the Deepest'. Smyth felt that fate had intervened when, having already called his lead character Gloria, the chorus line included the name as well. Other songs were less obvious in their inclusion, but Smyth knew they were the right choice. 'There is a wonderful song called "Hard Road" which is our finale. The moment I heard it I knew it was our closing song,' Smyth remembers. 'The opening song also felt providential in the way that each of the four main characters had

a verse which was essentially telling their story without me having to intervene.'

Having been working together for a while on one of Smyth's previous scripts, Pullen went to long time collaborating producer Matthew James Wilkinson to join the team, who had previously produced the musical *Yesterday*. 'With *The Score*, the songs weren't telling the story, they were telling the emotional journey of the characters, which was something completely different,' he explains.

However, for Wilkinson, it was the chance to work on another script of Smyth's that enticed him to board the project. 'Malachi is such an unusual and individual writer; I love his style and tone of voice. He's got a wonderful way of making characters' feel relatable, but also giving a lyricism and romanticism about them,' Wilkinson explains. 'His words always take me into a world that interests me; it's cultured and intelligent, but also witty and charming.'

Johnny Flynn had previously worked with Pullen as a composer on one of his short films, so the pair organised to meet and Pullen presented Flynn with a script full of his songs. An ongoing creative dream of theirs was to collaborate on a musical, although Flynn didn't expect it to be from his back catalogue. 'The songs were a curation from old albums of mine. Malachi had chosen songs that reflected the spiritual subconscious of the characters and had used them as fantasy moments in the story, almost like soliloquies where you can see the inner lives of the characters,' Flynn explains. For Flynn, seeing his songs reflected in moving image was a great opportunity. 'I write my songs in abstract pictures, slightly poetic, impressionistic lyrical forms,' Flynn explains. 'Suddenly my songs had real images and a story.'

When it came to casting the film, the filmmakers already knew that the character of Mike was perfect for Flynn. 'Once Johnny agreed to the use of the songs and playing Mike, everything fell into place as he was a great draw to the other cast,' Smyth explains. The next main role that was cast was Gloria, with casting director Kelly Valentine Hendry insisting that the only actress they should consider was Naomi Ackie. 'To my great shame, I wasn't aware of Naomi, but thankfully I trusted Kelly,' Smyth admits. 'I'm delighted I did because Naomi is fabulous and perfect as Gloria.' Initially intrigued by the sound of a genre-bending heist musical, Ackie was sold when she learnt it would involve Flynn's music and fell in love with Smyth's writing. 'There was a really great quality in Malachi's script, he had created a grounded story that somehow felt like a fairy tale,' Ackie explains. 'There were lovely magical moments that felt heightened but also realistic, which Johnny's beautiful folk music added to that whimsical fairy tale feeling.'

The casting of Troy proved the trickiest, until Will Poulter's name was thrown into the mix. 'It was a revolutionary moment,' Smyth recalled. 'We all pounced on the possibility of having him in our film.' After being told the film was going to be a genre-bending musical heist romance, Poulter wasn't sure what to expect when he read the script. 'I fell in love with Malachi's writing, it was incredible unique and immensely special,' Poulter recalled. 'It was whimsical, but also gripping. Then to have Johnny's music added an amazing texture to the whole thing.' Poulter was an admirer of both Flynn and Ackie's work

before joining the cast, so was excited at the prospect of working them. ‘The fact they were involved was a massive pull for me,’ Poulter explains. ‘They’re both such extraordinary actors who encourage you to be your best and were fantastic singing partners; everything you could hope for.’ ‘I really enjoyed the repartee and banter that flowed between Mike and Troy,’ Flynn adds. ‘It’s been a pleasure working with Will, I’d love to do it again.’

Wilkinson believes that what audiences crave most now is escapist storytelling, something *The Score* is able to provide: ‘I hope audiences feel *The Score* is bold and different, but also be charmed by the film and enjoy its upbeat nature’.

## Production notes

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### THE SCORE

*Directed by:* Malachi Smyth

©: Score Films Limited

*Production Company:* Stigma Films, Sentinel Entertainment

*Made with the support of the:* BFI Locked Box Initiative, BFI's Film Fund

*Presented by:* Quickfire

*In association with:* Westend Films, Pont Neuf Productions, Trigger Films

*International Sales by:* Westend Films

*Executive Producers:* Johnny Flynn, William Pullen, Nick Angel, Tim Dellow, Phil Rymer, Marika Lemos, Samantha Corsellis, Jan Pace, James Atherton, Maya Amsellem, Sharon Harel-Cohen, Reinhard Besser, Walter Mair

*Produced by:* Ben Pullen, Matthew James Wilkinson

*Co-producers:* Isabelle Georgeaux, Neil Jones

*Associate Producer:* Kelly Valentine Hendry

*Production Manager:* Rowena Woolford

*Production Accountants:* Paresh Shah, James Baldwin

*Unit Manager:* Anthony Adejaiye-Clinton

*Location Manager:* Paul Giordani

*1st Assistant Director:* Nick Justin

*2nd Assistant Director:* Danielle Harvey

*3rd Assistant Director:* Jack Justin

*Script Supervisor:* Gabrielle Wood

*Casting Director:* Kelly Valentine Hendry

*Written by:* Malachi Smyth

*Director of Photography:* Darran Bragg

*1st Assistant Camera:* Joanne Smith

*2nd Assistant Camera:* Josefina Thieme

*Digital Imaging Technician:* Thomas Rogers

*Gaffer:* Howard Davidson

*Key Grip:* Steve Wells

*Visual Effects by:* Capture

*Special Effects Supervisor:* Mark Meddings *Editor:* Sadaf Nazari

*Production Designer:* Paul Cripps

*Art Director:* Stacey Dickinson

*Standby Art Director:* Caroline Reilly

*Props Buyer:* Kate Goodman

*Construction Manager:* Antoine Robin

*Costume Designer:* Holly Smart

*Costume Supervisor:* Hortense Franc

*Hair & Make-up Designer:* Scarlett O'Connell

*Make-up & Hair Artist:* Chloë Dixon

*Title Design:* Capture

*Colour by:* Film Shed

*With Songs by/All Songs by:* Johnny Flynn

*Additional Score by:* Johnny Flynn, Joe Zeitlin

*Choreographer:* Suzy Willson

*Production Sound Mixers:* Kieron Teather, Christian Bourne

*Re-recording Mixer:* Jamie Roden

*Supervising Sound Editor:* Nick Baldock

*Dialogue Editor:* Jamie Roden

*Sound Effects Editors:* Simon Gershon, Fred Myers, Jonathan Smith

*Foley Recordist/Editor:* Chris Richmond

*Stunt Co-ordinator:* Jude Poyer

### Cast

Will Poulter (*Troy*)

Naomi Ackie (*Gloria*)

Johnny Flynn (*Mike*)

Lydia Wilson (*Sally*)

Lucian Msamati (*the photographer*)

Orla Coverley (*Angel*)

Danny Morgan (*station attendant*)

Song-hung Chang (*man 1*)

Erol Mehmet (*man 2*)

Roger Ashton-Griffiths (*Frank*)

Louis Vause (*the pianist*)

Lillie Flynn (*Claudia*)

Phillipa Flynn (*mum in café*)

Ben Pullen (*dad outside café*)

Orla Coverley (*girl in café*)

UK 2021

100 mins

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