



SENIORS

Mandy

Introduced by Marcus Powell (author and film historian)

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

Nightmare is never far away in Alexander Mackendrick's films. It's there in the street-pursuit of Sidney Stratton in *The Man in the White Suit* (1951), and in fat cop Harry Kello's beckoning cry of chastisement in *Sweet Smell of Success* (1957), and it inhabits all three films Mackendrick made with children in central roles: *Sammy Going South* (1963), *A High Wind in Jamaica* (1965) and *Mandy*.

An only child, raised by grandparents, Mackendrick had a miserable upbringing, yet while his films brilliantly convey the solitary melancholies of childhood, they also present children as dangerously intelligent, near-feral creatures, trapped within the horrors of the adult world yet with a powerful rage to survive. Nowhere is that more evident than in *Mandy*.

Adapted by novelist Nigel Balchin and Ealing screenwriter Jack Whittingham from Hilda Lewis's 1946 novel *The Day Is Ours*, Mackendrick's third Ealing film (his only non-comedy for the studio) was promoted as a social-issue vehicle, addressing the institutionalised care of 'deaf and dumb' children. It centres on the plight of middle-class parents Christine and Harry (Phyllis Calvert and Terence Morgan), and their young congenitally deaf daughter (brilliantly portrayed by eight-year-old Mandy Miller).

What astonishes about Mackendrick's film is how Mandy is presented as the film's central life-force, her screams, tears, and emotive expressions shown in stark contrast to the whispered prejudices of the adult world.

Shot in Festival of Britain year, *Mandy* ends on a compromised note of optimism, but throughout inhabits the darker visual landscapes of horror or fairytale, Douglas Slocombe's stunning low-key cinematography imprisoning Mandy and Christine within the 'old dark house' of Harry's snobby parents, surrounded by the forbidden wasteland of post-blitz London. Even the film's one character of hope, Mandy's teacher Dick Searle, is a haunted figure, played by Jack Hawkins as an irascible melancholy figure visibly traumatised by the (unnamed) events of his recent past.

On release, *Mandy* was faulted for the numerous ways in which its themes of reform were compromised by melodrama. Viewed today, the film's refusal to stay 'on message', and the continual glimpses of nightmare at its edges, are what give it its strange power.

Andrew Male, *Sight and Sound*, July 2017

Sandwiched between two pairs of comedies, *Mandy* was the only 'serious' work of the five films Alexander Mackendrick directed at Ealing Studios. A powerful and affecting drama about a deaf child and her parents' attempts to come to terms with her condition, it is remarkably free of the sentimentality which might so easily have weakened its impact.

Mackendrick's previous film, *The Man in the White Suit* (1951), combined humour with a bitter criticism of contemporary British society. Similarly, *Mandy*

uses a simple melodramatic story to examine the stagnant conservatism of middle-class family life in a postwar Britain already turning its back on change – the film was released in July 1952, nine months after a general election in which the country had turned its back on a Labour government which had created the National Health Service, and laid the foundations for the Welfare State.

Cut off as she is by her deafness, Mandy is as much a victim of the suffocating love of her parents, Christine (Phyllis Calvert) and Harry (Terence Morgan), and of an overprotective grandmother (Marjorie Fielding) and an emotionally distant grandfather (Godfrey Tearle). Realising that Mandy's best hope is to leave prison of her family in London for a Manchester school for the deaf, where she might learn to lip-read and, eventually, talk, Christine has to battle both Harry and his parents, and ultimately to leave her husband, until she finds herself accused of adultery with the school's headmaster, Mr Searle (Jack Hawkins).

The film ends on an apparently positive note, as Mandy speaks her name for the first time and is invited to play with a group of hearing children. For Christine, however, this breakthrough comes at the expense of her own freedom as she rejoins the family she briefly escaped.

Much of *Mandy's* impact is due to the extraordinary performance of its seven year-old star. Mackendrick had already decided against casting a truly deaf child in the lead role: 'Deaf-mute children can be extraordinarily intelligent and perceptive; but they have this terrible desire to make you feel they've understood you when they haven't really,' he later explained. Mandy Miller had made a brief but memorable appearance in *The Man in the White Suit*, but even Mackendrick was surprised at the intensity of the young girl's performance.

Mark Duguid, BFI Screenonline, screenonline.org.uk

MANDY

Director: Alexander Mackendrick
Production Company: Ealing Studios
Producer: Leslie Norman
Production Supervisor: Hal Mason
Unit Production Managers: Leonard C. Rudkin, Harry Kratz
Assistant Director: Norman Priggen
Continuity: Jean Graham
Screenplay: Nigel Balchin, Jack Whittingham
Based on the novel by: Hilda Lewis
Director of Photography: Douglas Slocombe
Camera Operator: Jeff Seaholme
Editor: Seth Holt
Art Director: Jim Morahan
Costume Designer: Anthony Mendleson
Make-up: Harry Frampton
Hairstyles: Barbara Barnard
Music: William Alwyn
Music Performed by: Philharmonia Orchestra
Music Conductor: Ernest Irving
Sound Supervisor: Stephen Dalby
Recordist: Arthur Bradburn
Advice on the tuition of the deaf: Ethel C. Goldsack

uncredited

2nd Assistant Director: John Assig
3rd Assistant Director: Jim O'Connolly
Casting Director: Margaret Harper Nelson
Small Parts/Crowd Casting: Muriel Cole
2nd Unit Director of Photography: Paul Beeson
Focus Puller: Hugh Wilson
Clapper Loader: Michael Shepherd
Stills Supervisor: Jack Dooley
Stills: Bob Penn
Special Effects: Syd Pearson
Assistant Editor: Harry Aldous
2nd Assistant Editor: Lionel Selwyn
Assistant Art Director: Len Wills
Draughtsmen: Jack Shampan, Norman Dorne
Junior Draughtsman: Tony Rimmington
Scenic Artist: Geoffrey Dickinson
Wardrobe Master: Ernest Farrar
Wardrobe Mistress: Lily Payne
Wardrobe Assistants: Ron Beck, Edith Crutchley
Make-up Supervisor: Ernest Taylor
Make-up Assistant: Harry Wilton
Hair Assistant: Daphne Martin
Boom Operator: Cyril Swern
Dubbing Editor: Mary Habberfield

Cast

Phyllis Calvert (*Christine Garland*)
Jack Hawkins (*Dick Searle*)
Terence Morgan (*Harry Garland*)
Godfrey Tearle (*Mr Garland*)
Mandy Miller (*Mandy Garland*)
Marjorie Fielding (*Mrs Garland*)
Nancy Price (*Jane Ellis*)
Edward Chapman (*Ackland*)
Patricia Plunkett (*Miss Crocker*)
Eleanor Summerfield (*Lily Tabor*)
Colin Gordon (*Woollard Junior*)
Dorothy Alison (*Miss Stockton*)
Julian Amyes (*Jimmy Tabor*)
Gabrielle Brune (*secretary*)
John Cazabon (*Davey*)
Gwen Bacon (*Mrs Paul*)
W.E. Holloway (*Woollard Senior*)
Phyllis Morris (*Miss Tucker*)
Gabrielle Blunt (*Miss Lerner*)
Jean Shepherd (*Mrs Jackson*)
Jane Asher (*Nina*)
Marlene Maddox (*Leonie*)
Michael Mallinson, Doreen Gallagher, Doreen Taylor,
Michael Davis, Joan Peters (*children*)

uncredited

Lesley Dudley
Jacqueline Cox
Jenny Jones
Anthony John

UK 1952©
93 mins

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