



**PREVIEW**

# Rye Lane

+ Q&A with director Raine Allen-Miller and actor Vivian Oparah

*Rye Lane* is a modern-day romantic comedy based in South London about two young people falling in love while finding themselves in the process. Dom (David Jonsson) and Yas' (Vivian Oparah) story begins when they meet in an unlikely spot and follows the two through what turns out to be a serendipitous day for them both. Fresh from break ups – complete with drama and betrayal – the next hours take them on a journey of self-discovery. The more they learn about each other, the more they are drawn to one another as they go through encounters with their past loves and acquaintances. Dom and Yas start to see the place where they've always lived through new eyes, brought out especially by the work of director Allen-Miller who, with long-time collaborators, cinematographer Olan Collardy, production designer Anna Rhodes and costume designer Cynthia Lawrence-John, washes everything with extraordinary colour.

*Rye Lane* marks Raine Allen-Miller's feature directorial debut. 'I always insisted that I would write my first feature film, but when producer Damian Jones sent me the *Rye Lane* script I gave it a read and embarrassed myself laughing out loud on the train. I loved the dialogue, but also felt like there was a lot of room to develop the script and add my touch,' says Allen-Miller.

'I don't want to put the film solely in a rom-com box,' she continues, elaborating on the way the film includes elements of so many genres. 'It's a film that spends time with two people who you just love immediately. Yes it's funny, and yes it's romantic, but it exists as much more than that.'

The screenwriters, Nathan Bryon and Tom Melia, initially completed the script in 2018. On the surface, the two main characters are entirely different personalities, with Dom's natural tendency to stick to the rules in complete contrast to Yas' eccentricity and disarming curiosity about life. *Rye Lane* follows them on an eventful day around their native South London and ties them together through the shared experience of heartbreak and failed relationships.

Kharmel Cochrane was the casting director. 'I'm an indie film fan. I love independent films or films that have independent quirks/culture. This was genuinely one of the best experiences of my life,' Jonsson explains. Cochrane and Allen-Miller were blown away as soon as the pair were in a room together for a chemistry read. Jonsson continues, 'When I met Vivian, I knew immediately that "yes, this girl is something different".'

Yas has infectious energy and signature wit that immediately drew Oparah to the role. 'I liked how messy of a character she is. Usually in rom-coms, the guy does the grand gestures after messing everything up, but I like how the film subverts that. I enjoyed being a character that is allowed to be messy and have things to sort out. I feel like there aren't women characters that are allowed to just exist in their chaos and sort it all out freely, which I enjoyed.' Allen-Miller agrees, having worked with the writers and producers to shape Yas' character. 'With rom-coms, there is this archetypal story arc – the funny guy who can rely on just being funny, and then the portrayal of the really

attractive girl wandering around, who just exists to absorb his brilliance. With *Rye Lane*, I wanted to make the woman character truly funny, without the pressure of needing to be polished 24/7.'

Allen-Miller also felt the main character's background was essential to the authenticity of the film. 'It was originally written to be set in Camden. I'm from Manchester but I moved to South London when I was 12. It's an important part of London for me, but it's just an important place in general – the history of it, its identity, the multicultural influences. Growing up there, going to Nour Cash & Carry with my Gran to get seasoning did so much for me and I really wanted to showcase it in a different way.'

Both Jonsson and Oparah remark on the flexibility they were given with the nuances in the script, which ultimately ensured maximum authenticity. 'Our writers and director were amazing and handled the script with such sensitivity and we were always encouraged to say things in a different way if it felt more authentic to us,' explains Jonsson. 'They welcomed the fact that we were young and from London, and it genuinely felt like an immersive experience, one that evolved with us at the centre of it.'

*Rye Lane* was produced by Damian Jones (*See How They Run*, *The Iron Lady*, *Belle*) and Yvonne Isimeme Ibazebo (*Top Boy*, *Guerrilla*), who both describe the process as 'remarkable'.

Upon reading the film's script, Jones describes an instant affinity. 'I'd known Nathan, one of the co-writers, for a while, and as soon as I read the script, I loved it. It was exciting, it was young, I laughed – it ticked all the boxes for me. I was also very keen that we had a director on board from an early stage. After trawling around looking at different director options, it was actually Yvonne who suggested Raine.' Jones emphasises the collaboration that took place between cast and crew, explaining that everyone's perceptions of the script and different scenes added to the energy displayed in the film.

Ibazebo also embraced the importance of collaboration on set. 'Damian worked on the initial stages of production,' she explains, 'and then a few drafts in I came on board and was able to get involved. Working with Raine was great, she had clear ideas, and the other creative heads of department did too – because filmmaking is all about collaboration, and we all worked together to bring particular visions to life. From the filmmaking team to the cast, we all wanted to elevate the film and the genre and I think that was so evident on set and throughout production.'

The film was produced on location in South London, an area known for its character and diversity. 'I sincerely believe that this film will speak to all ages, all ethnicities, all types of people – it's a comedy at its heart, with a romantic story weaved within it,' Jones continues. 'It could be easy to take all of that against the backdrop of South London and get confusing, but actually the film highlights the area as this sort of weird and wonderful place, much like the film's main characters,' a sentiment that director Raine Allen-Miller reiterates. 'I like to elevate reality, make the mundane magical. I wanted to showcase the location, and the characters in way that felt fresh and unique.'

The on-location shooting, which occurred in areas of South London, added to the authenticity of the film. A scene filmed in Aylesham Centre, the shopping centre and indoor market on the real-life Rye Lane, features nuances that would feel entirely realistic for those familiar with the area, and beautifully nonsensical for those unfamiliar with the area as a sequinned cowboy moonwalking through the centre past Dom and Yas.

Anna Rhodes, the film's production designer, explains the importance of the on-location shooting. 'South London is so important to the story and is a character in the film in its own right. We were really specific with all the locations and didn't want to fake anything. We were shooting things in real locations that these characters would be hanging out in.' Writers Bryon and Melia added, 'As much as we love those glossy rom coms set in London, we wanted to show our version of London, and show the heart and soul of the area.'

Rhodes also spent time to make sure locations were specific to the personalities of the characters. 'We brought to life the story by researching everything. We read the script and allowed it to sink in and watched beautiful old films that Raine had been inspired by,' explains Rhodes. 'Then we started with mood boards and collecting loads of references and put them all together. Then finding out where we felt the biggest art department moments are in the script. For example, Yas' bedroom was a really big moment and Jules' flat too.'

Olan Collardy, the film's director of photography explains, 'I remember reading the script and I thought, "This is amazing," it was a page turner. I read it all in one sitting, and I think, for me, what's great about it is the dialogue. How intelligent, how smart and how funny the dialogue is.' Remarking on how his own personal influencers allowed him to bring life to *Rye Lane*, 'I think for me the more I mature in my craft, the more I reference paintings, especially the golden age of Dutch painters, so your Vermeers, your Rembrandts, and also I rely a lot on photography. There are also cinematographers that I look up to, folks whose ideologies and principles I love, in terms of how they approach image-making and how they bring themselves to say things – how that permeates into their work and how they're able to imprint their philosophy into their work, and I think for me, that was something I was keen to implement here too.'

*Rye Lane* is a feature film debut for multiple key members of the cast and crew, including Allen-Miller, Jonsson, Oparah, Rhodes and Collardy himself. Commenting on the collaborative nature that allowed a great and honest flow of work, while also being challenging, he adds, 'You can't just go rogue, everything is connected – my work, the work of the AD, the vision Raine has. But we worked together and it was worth it.'

## Production notes

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### RYE LANE

*Directed by:* Raine Allen-Miller  
*a DJ Films and Turnover production*  
*Presented by:* Searchlight Pictures, BBC Film, BFI  
*Written by:* Nathan Bryon & Tom Melia  
*Produced by:* Yvonne Isimeme Ibazebo, Damian Jones  
*Executive Produced by:* Eva Yates, Rose Garnett, Kristin Irving, Sophie Meyer, Paul Grindey, Charles Moore  
*Director of Photography:* Olan Collardy  
*Production Design by:* Anna Rhodes  
*Costume Design by:* Cynthia Lawrence-John  
*Hair and Make-up by:* Bianca Simone Scott  
*Casting by:* Kharmel Cochrane  
*Edited by:* Victoria Boydell  
*Original Score by:* Kwes

### Cast

David Jonsson (*Dom*)  
Vivian Oparah (*Yas*)  
Karene Peter (*Gia*)  
Benjamin Sarpong-Broni (*Eric*)  
Malcolm Atobrah (*Jules*)  
Alice Hewkin (*Tabby*)  
Simon Manyonda (*Nathan*)  
Poppy Allen-Quarby (*Cass*)

UK 2022  
82 mins

A Searchlight Pictures Release