



PREVIEW

Polite Society

Polite Society

Directed by: Nida Manzoor

©: LLC Focus Features

Production Company: Working Title Films

In association with: Parkville Pictures

Presented by: Focus Features

Executive Producer: Cecilia Frugiuale

Produced by: Tim Bevan, Eric Fellner,

Olivier Kaempfer, John Pockock

Co-producer: Rachel Alabaster

Production Manager: Daniel Watkins

Financial Controller: Gemma Kent

Location Manager: Keith Hatcher

Post-production Supervisor: Hannah Dunnell

1st Assistant Director: Clare Awdry

2nd Assistant Director: Darren Baba

Script Supervisor: Francesca Brooks

CASTING DIRECTOR: Aisha Bywaters

WRITTEN BY: Nida Manzoor

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY: Ashley Connor

STEADICAM OPERATOR: Will Lyte

VISUAL EFFECTS 1: Automatik VFX

EDITOR: Robbie Morrison

PRODUCTION DESIGNER: Simon Walker

ART DIRECTORS: Sophie Lockwood, James Cross

SET DECORATOR: Amanda Sorrin

GRAPHIC DESIGNER: Kate Trevessey

PROPERTY MASTER: Tom Roberts

COSTUME DESIGNER: PC Williams

HAIR AND MAKE-UP DESIGNER: Claire Carter

TITLE DESIGNER: Peter Anderson Studio

SCORE BY: Tom Howe, Shez Manzoor

ORCHESTRA LEADER: Everton Nelson

CONDUCTOR: Tom Howe

ORCHESTRATORS: David Butterworth, Evan Rogers

SCORE RECORDIST: Marc McCouig

SCORE MIXER: Jake Jackson

CHOREOGRAPHY: Choreographer

PRODUCTION SOUND MIXER: Alastair Widgery

RE-RECORDING MIXERS: Simon Hill, Tushar Manek

SUPERVISING SOUND EDITOR: Jay Price

STUNT CO-ORDINATOR: Crispin Layfield

FIGHT CO-ORDINATOR: Rob Lock

MARTIAL ARTS ASSISTANT: Adam Rhys Williams

CAST:

Priya Kansara (*Ria Khan*)

Ritu Arya (*Lena*)

Nimra Bucha (*Raheela*)

Akshay Khanna (*Salim*)

Seraphina Beh (*Clara*)

Ella Bruccoleri (*Alba*)

Shona Babayemi (*Kovacs*)

Shobu Kapoor (*Fatima*)

Jeff Mirza (*Rafe*)

Renu Brindle (*Mrs Nawaz*)

Rekha John-Cheriyian (*Mrs Abbas*)

Sally Ann (*Edith*)

Jenny Funnell (*Ms Spence*)

Sophie Aisling (*Mrs Iqbal*)

Su McLaughlin (*Mrs Ahmed*)

Tia Dutt (*Jezah*)

Ryan Loccohee (*Sensei 1*)

Ulli Ackerman (*security guard*)

James McNicholas (*head waiter*)

Tom Bonington (*registrar*)

Eunice Huthart (*herself*)

Sania Shireen Haq, Hemali Patel, Anjilee Bathia,

Aliya Meghjee (*dancers*)

Rob Lock (*Sensei 2*)

Adam Rhys Williams (*Magnus*)

UK 2023 103 mins

Courtesy of Universal Pictures

+ intro with writer-director Nida Manzoor

16-year-old Ria is an aspiring stuntwoman, dreaming of her future excelling in the film business while her older sister Lena becomes a world famous artist. But Lena has been withdrawing from her art, and instead becomes swept up by a charming suitor, heading into a marriage at speed. Ria doesn't trust her future in-laws – can she use her martial arts training to stop Lena's wedding and rescue her in the name of sisterhood? Nida Manzoor's (*We Are Lady Parts*) creative and original feature directorial debut is a fun, fast-paced Austen-esque comedy packed with smashing action and shenanigans.

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The Origins of 'Polite Society'

The spark of the idea that ultimately became *Polite Society* – an immensely fun and original action comedy about two sisters navigating cultural and parental expectations – was first ignited by writer-director Nida Manzoor over ten years ago. She wrote the first draft of the script in her early 20s, but it took the years that followed for her to find the perfect partners to bring the film to vibrant, action-packed life on screen. 'It's been a long road but I have now been able to make the feature film of my dreams,' shares Manzoor.

One of those collaborators was producer Olivier Kaempfer, who came on board with his company Parkville Pictures to help develop the project early on. Kaempfer immediately fell in love with the project and brought BFI on board as early development financiers. 'I first came across Nida in 2016 when I saw her short, *Arcade*, which is still one of my favourite shorts to this day,' Kaempfer recalls. 'It immediately felt so different and fresh compared to so many other shorts that I was seeing. She was a filmmaker I wanted to meet and ideally develop a feature with and that feature became *Polite Society*.

Nida is quite rare in that she has very bold and original ideas but she can also execute them. She was very much our creative leader and she has the vision that we're all behind so it's been fantastic.'

Manzoor is best known as the creator, writer, and director of the acclaimed series, *We Are Lady Parts*, about a Muslim female punk band. The series has been celebrated for its electrifying humour, fusion of styles and nuanced, complex characters. 'My favourite thing about making film and television is the opportunity to bring marginalised communities into mainstream genres – action, sci-fi, comedy,' says Manzoor. 'Occupying areas of storytelling we are so often invisible in. I love writing comedy. It's my goto form of expression when I put pen to paper, my most natural form of storytelling. I feel comedy is the most disarming of all the genres. If done well it can make us warm to characters from different backgrounds deeply and immediately.'

The filmmaker had loved collaborating with the gifted creative team on *We Are Lady Parts*, and as the feature film script evolved, many of them enthusiastically signed on to bring her latest vision to life, including Working Title's Tim Bevan and Eric Fellner who produce the film.

'We really loved the TV show and thought that Nida had a very original voice for writing and directing characters that we weren't really aware of,' says

IN PERSON & PREVIEWS

The Duellists + Q&A with composer Howard

Blake

Mon 24 Apr 18:10

Theorem (Teorema) + intro and talk with Bruce

LaBruce, and Doesn't Exist magazine launch

Thu 27 Apr 18:00

Enys Men with Live Score by The Cornish Sound

Unit

Mon 1 May 18:40

Preview: Brainwashed: Sex-Camera-Power +

Nina Menkes in Conversation

Wed 10 May 18:00

Dario Argento in Conversation

Fri 12 May 18:20

Mark Kermode Live in 3D at the BFI

Mon 15 May 18:30

TV Preview: Best Interests + Q&A with Sharon

Horgan and Jack Thorne

Mon 22 May 18:15

Preview: The Old Man Movie: Lactopalypse! +

Q&A with directors Mikki Magi and Oskar

Lehemaa

Fri 26 May 18:15

World Premiere: Straight 8 2023 Top 25

Sat 27 May 18:00

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Bevan. 'I asked her what else she was about and the script of *Polite Society*, which she developed with Olivier, landed on my desk.'

Bevan was delighted by the early draft but suggested expanding the world even more. 'We said, "We're interested in doing *Polite Society* but we don't want to do it as a tiny, little movie",' he remembers. 'We wanted to do it as something much bigger, making it more genre-driven and including elements that would make it cinematic, unexpected, and generally a lot of fun to watch. So, we all worked on the script and upped the fight sequences, came up with the plot twist, and generally made it even madder.'

Manzoor hoped the film would feel like an ode to all the films that had shaped her, but she also wanted to see something on screen that she hadn't experienced before. 'I wanted to make this film for many reasons but predominantly so I could see a South Asian teenage girl as an action hero,' she shares. 'I grew up loving the spectacle of action movies but feeling extremely left out, so this film is for my teenage self. South Asian characters are often relegated to shop owners and terrorists, token friends to the white leads. It meant everything to me to centre the film around a South Asian girl – who is flawed and funny and kicks ass.'

Other members of the *We Are Lady Parts* team were equally excited to board the film including series producer John Pockock, who serves as a producer on *Polite Society*. 'I was really keen to work on *Polite Society* with Nida after doing *Lady Parts* together,' he says. 'I read it and thought it was so exciting and different. There was a lot of comedy, fight sequences, and drama. What a great project to work on!'

Also reuniting for the film were *Lady Parts*' production designer Simon Walker, costume designer P.C. Williams, makeup artist Claire Carter, and editor Robbie Morrison, along with several cast members.

Director of photography Ashley Connor had not previously collaborated with Manzoor, although she had worked with Kaempfer on another film and the producer instinctively felt that Connor and Manzoor could create something visually spectacular together. 'I'm very invested in telling stories for young women, and seeing this kind of heroine is really exciting to me,' says Connor of her attraction to the project. 'The film is intelligent and doesn't speak down to its audience. There's a desire to change the ways and means by which we produce content, make films and TV shows, and somebody like Nida and her process are at the forefront of that change. She's creating sets that have different energies on them, different motivations, and different means of collaborating and working.'

Of walking onto a set every day filled with women at the top of their game, Ritu Arya, who plays Lena, says it was a special experience that won't be forgotten. 'Nida is a fantastic director who is doing amazing things,' she observes. 'It's the third time I've worked with her and every time it's just gotten better and better. Our DP, Ashley, is such a badass and she was always trying out different things as well. Then even the grips and the sound department were full of women which felt so cool. On top of all of that, it has been so empowering to have this ensemble consist of such a diverse – primarily South Asian – cast. I'm so happy that this film exists. It's what I've been waiting to see for a very long time.'

Production notes

Programme notes and credits compiled by Sight and Sound and the BFI Documentation Unit

Notes may be edited or abridged | Browse online at thebfi.org.uk/programme-notes

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