



ACTING HARD: WORKING CLASS MASCULINITY IN BRITISH CINEMA

Mona Lisa

An Every Day Act

Director: Gavin Scott Whitfield
UK 2020
20 mins

Mona Lisa

Directed by: Neil Jordan
©/Presented by: HandMade Films
Production Company: Palace Pictures
Executive Producers: George Harrison, Denis O'Brien
Produced by: Patrick Cassavetti, Stephen Woolley
Co-producers: Nik Powell, Ray Cooper, Chris Brown
Production Accountants: Bob Blues, Michael Larkins
Production Co-ordinator: Laura Julian
Production Manager: Linda Bruce
Location Manager: Laurie Borg
Assistant Location Manager: Simon McNair Scott
Special Production Consultant: Richard Starkey
Assistant Director: Ray Corbett
2nd Assistant Director: Chris Brock
3rd Assistant Director: Tony Aherne
Script Supervisor: Pat Rambaut
Casting Director: Susie Figgis
Screenplay by: Neil Jordan, David Leland
Director of Photography: Roger Pratt
Camera Operator: Mike Roberts
Follow Focus: Bob Stilwell
Clapper Loader: Bob Brock
Camera Grips: Porky Rivers, Bill Geddes
Chief Electrician: Ted Read
Still Photographer: Clive Coote
Special Effects: Effects Associates
Editor: Lesley Walker
1st Assistant Editor: Jeremy Hume
2nd Assistant Editor: Kevin Lane
Production Designer: Jamie Leonard
Art Director: Gemma Jackson
Assistant Art Director: Denise Ruben
Art Department Assistant: Chris Townsend
Prop Buyer: Kate Kilroy
Property Master: Les Benson
Chargehand Prop: Eric Strange
Propmen: Andy Palmer, Micky Swift, Stan Cook, Alf Smith
Construction Manager: Andy Evans
Costume Designer: Louise Frogley
Wardrobe Supervisor: Brenda Dabbs
Make-up Artist: Lois Burwell
Additional Make-up: Nick Dudman
Hairdresser: Stevie Hall
Opticals/Titles: Geoff Axtell Associates
Music Score by: Michael Kamen
Soundtrack Music Performed by: The National Philharmonic Orchestra
[Music] Engineer: Dave Hunt
[Music] Mixer: Andy Jackson
Sound Recordist: David John
Sound Assistant: Paul Cridlin
Boom Operator: Matthew Launay
Re-recording Mixers: Paul Carr, Brian Paxton
Sound Editor: Jonathan Bates
Footsteps Editor: Chris Kelly
Additional Post-synch Dialogue: Lyps Inc
ADR Editor: Brian Mann
Stunt Arranger: Terry Forrestal
Cast:
Bob Hoskins (George)
Cathy Tyson (Simone)

Contains strong violence, sexual violence and racist terms.

A bunch of chrysanthemums is hurled at a slammed front door, smartly followed by a dustbin. Enraged by the wife who wants rid of him, George, an amiable small-time Cockney crook, turns on the gathered crowd. Since he's been in prison, for seven years, on someone else's behalf, the neighbourhood has been colonised by West Indians. George looks for a face to punch. A slice of old-style working-class drama? Well, yes, in a way, but then – in this opening sequence of *Mona Lisa* – comes a whiff of new-style British fantasy.

George (Bob Hoskins) is plucked from the affray by his friend Thomas (Robbie Coltrane), a whimsical deadpan Scot, an entrepreneur-mechanic with a taste for whodunits. At the bottom of the street, Thomas has parked George's lovingly mothballed cream-coloured Jag, all walnut and maroon leather. This is George's real home: a sentimental symbol for his sentimental values, a proud British car, built before the invention of Maltese pimps or heroin or child sex, when crooks were honest and chipper, when delivery dates meant something and debts were honoured.

The London into which George reimmerses himself is, of course, overflowing with nastiness. Dinny Mortwell (Michael Caine, standing out of the limelight but not missing a moment), the vice baron for whom George took the rap, won't really see George right, though he does give him a job, of sorts, chauffeuring Simone, a diamond-hard top-bracket prostitute. Waiting dutifully in the foyer of a smart hotel, in the suit in which he emerged from prison, George discovers that service these days is strictly conditional. Cruising in the Jag with Simone, who regularly searches the infernal King's Cross meat-rack for that something which is the film's mystery, George observes the human debris, half incredulously: 'I've got a girl that age.'

The first attraction of *Mona Lisa*, directed by Neil Jordan, from a script by him and David Leland, is its immediate confidence and economy. Jordan and his editor Lesley Walker have a sure sense of proportion. To take a small example: the potentially scene-stealing white rabbit which George buys in order to remind Mortwell of his obligation. It is the subject of two comic lines (no more and neither overstated) and then is sent on its way; it is re-introduced at the climax (improbably, but that doesn't matter) and then allowed a telling final appearance. Exactly right.

Dead time is banished; dialogue counts, all the time; and an occasional hard-bitten line smacks home with transatlantic weight (Simone, in her flat, chilly, Liverpool voice, on the ponce who humiliated her: 'An animal born in a butcher's shop'). The locations, from off-season Brighton to Mortwell's Blackheath mansion with its studiously rambling English garden, have a cinematic freshness which even a comparable up-to-the-minute TV series such as the BBC's accomplished *Big Deal* cannot hope to match.

The production design is by Jamie Leonard, the camerawork by Roger Pratt; and it is to the credit of both that the movie's disparate elements – the fantastical interior of Thomas' Aladdin's cave, with its Japanese food sculptures and illuminated madonnas; the sumptuous location sequences in hotel foyers and saloons – seem all of a piece. The film has no false modesty

Robbie Coltrane (*Thomas*)
Michael Caine (*Dinny Mortwell*)
Clarke Peters (*Anderson*)
Sammi Davis (*May*)
Kate Hardie (*Cathy*)
Zoë Nathenson (*Jeannie*)
Rod Bedall (*Terry*)
Joe Brown (*Dudley*)
Pauline Melville (*George's wife*)
Hossein Karimbeik (*Raschid*)
John Darling (*hotel security*)
Bryan Coleman (*gentleman in mirror room*)
Robert Dorning (*hotel bedroom man*)
Raad Raawi (*Arab servant*)
David Halliwell (*Tim Devlin*)
Stephen Persaud (*black youth in street*)
Maggie O'Neill (*girl in Paradise Club*)
Gary Cady (*hotel waiter*)
Donna Cannon (*young prostitute*)
Perry Fenwick (*pimp*)
Dawn Archibald (*wig girl in club*)
Richard Strange (*porn shop man*)
Alan Talbot (*bath house attendant*)
Geoffrey Larder (*hotel clerk*)
Helen Martin (*peep show girl*)
Kenny Baker, Jack Purvis, Bill Moore
(*Brighton buskers*)
Joanne Sellar (*woman in strip club*) *
Alex Hoskins (*sunglasses seller in kiosk*) *
UK 1986©
104 mins
35mm A BFI National Archive print

* Uncredited

ACTING HARD: WORKING CLASS MASCULINITY IN BRITISH CINEMA

Mona Lisa

Sun 24 Sep 18:20; Fri 29 Sep 20:30

Govan Ghost Story

Mon 25 Sep 18:30

Sweet Sixteen

Mon 25 Sep 20:40

The Football Factory + intro by Danny Dyer

Mon 25 Sep 20:45

My Beautiful Laundrette

Thu 28 Sep 20:30

Sexy Beast

Mon 2 Oct 20:30

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about its size; it's right, like that of a provincial French mystery by Chabrol.

The Soho clip-joints into which George doggedly ventures looking for Simone's lost friend Cathy are as one imagines them (sulky hostesses, flat champagne, a cup of tea being brewed behind a bead curtain); and Jordan brings a touch of dry humour (a marching column of second-division Bluebell Girls) to the sequence in the upmarket revue bar in which George finally says his piece to the fork-tongued Mortwell. In the small parts, only perhaps the Arab Raschid, one of Simone's regular clients, and the elderly gentleman with the surgeon's gloves who abuses Cathy to a duet from *Madame Butterfly* hint at caricature; but even they have life-giving lines which make one pleasantly ironical, for a moment, and the other genuinely and displeasingly cruel.

The story – which takes its title from Nat 'King' Cole's silky song ('Are you warm, are you real, Mona Lisa? Or just a cold and lonely, lovely work of art') – has seen service. George falls for Simone, his 'tall, thin, black tart' ('Too many t's,' Thomas comments, as George tries to fit her into a whodunit of his own devising); but Simone's heart belongs to the drug-addicted Cathy and she inevitably lets George down.

If this was all, then there would not perhaps be much to go on about. *Mona Lisa*, however, is buoyed by two notably assured and sustained performances. Cathy Tyson plays Simone as a girl purged of self-pity, grown old and watchful and unfeeling long before her time: her angular face, her whole bearing in fact, has a hard edge which she does nothing to soften. Miss Tyson has a slight, boyish build, and her awkward designer clothes – every outfit announcing her profession-accentuate her inescapable bind. Bob Hoskins, for whom Jordan created the part of George, is the perfect sparrow-like foil.

George has an entertainer's not a point-scorer's wit. It protects him; without it, he might have been reduced to self-deprecation. Hoskins relishes the role and his relish is infectious. George can head-butt a real villain to the deck of Brighton Pier (though this requires a ludicrous bunny hop to gain the height) and he can gallantly put up an arm to take the razor slash intended for a lady's face: but he makes little of this, it's part of what he has picked up along the way.

Once, as Simone is about to keep yet another appointment, George impulsively licks a finger and puts to rights two strands of her hair; he then straightens her clothes, a father sending his daughter on the first date she cares about. George may be something of a self-parodying Cockney sentimentalist, but he has, too, that plain old-fashioned likeability which wins audience hearts and fills cinemas.

John Pym, *Sight and Sound*, Autumn 1986