



NEW RELEASES

All of Us Strangers

All of Us Strangers

Directed by: Andrew Haigh

©: 20th Century Studios,

TSG Entertainment Finance LLC

A Blueprint Pictures production

Presented by: Searchlight Pictures

In association with: Film4, TSG Entertainment

Executive Producers: Diarmuid McKeown,

Ben Knight, Ollie Madden, Daniel Battsek,

Farhana Bhula

Produced by: Graham Broadbent, Peter Czernin,

Sarah Harvey

Unit Production Manager: Amaka Ugwunkwo

Supervising Location Manager: Susie Booker

Post-production Supervisor: Alistair Hopkins

1st Assistant Director: Marco Petrucco

Script Supervisor: Stu Laurie

CASTING BY: Kahleen Crawford

WRITTEN BY: Andrew Haigh

Based on the novel by: Taichi Yamada

CINEMATOGRAPHY BY: Jamie D. Ramsay

VISUAL EFFECTS: Union, Goldcrest, Cheap Shot VFX

EDITED BY: Jonathan Alberts

PRODUCTION DESIGN BY: Sarah Finlay

SUPERVISING ART DIRECTOR: Bill Brown

COSTUME DESIGN BY: Sarah Blenkinsop

HAIR AND MAKE-UP BY/HAIR AND MAKEUP

DESIGNER: Zoë Clare Brown

MUSIC BY: Emilie Levienaise-Farrouch

PRODUCTION SOUND MIXER: Stevie Hayward

RE-RECORDING MIXER: Per Boström

SUPERVISING SOUND EDITOR: Joakim Sundström

STUNT CO-ORDINATOR: Jonathan Cohen

CAST:

Andrew Scott (*Adam*)

Paul Mescal (*Harry*)

Jamie Bell (*dad*)

Claire Foy (*mum*)

Carter John Grout (*young Adam*)

Ami Tredrea (*waitress*)

UK 2023

105 mins

Digital

Courtesy of Searchlight Pictures

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SIGHT AND SOUND

In an early scene in *All of Us Strangers*, Adam (Andrew Scott), a gay man entering middle age, leaves his London flat to visit the suburban area where he grew up. Across a field he spots a handsome man (Jamie Bell), who returns his gaze. Keeping some distance between them, they walk with nonchalant purpose in the same direction, crossing woodland, converging on a shop to buy booze and fags. 'Shall we go?' the man asks. 'Where?' Adam replies. 'Home,' comes the answer.

Home is not just where the man lives. It is where Adam spent his childhood. The man is his father. But not his father as an old man – as a young man, younger than Adam is now, still living in the 1980s house and mindset familiar from Adam's youth, yet somehow now available, with Adam's mum (Claire Foy), for social encounters, reminiscences and accountings. This is not a hook-up, then. Rather, Adam is cruising the past, seeking meaning and connection, an unlocking, a release, a path. He is a blocked writer but also a traumatised queer person reckoning with the intimate and profound consequences of structural homophobia and his parents' deaths. He wants to go home and to find a home and needs to learn the difference between the two. Written and directed by Andrew Haigh, the film is based on a 1987 Tokyo-set novel by Yamada Taichi. Haigh adapted it himself, shifting the protagonist's sexuality and placing the story in contemporary London. Adam lives in a new tower like those found in Nine Elms and Stratford, the most Ballardian spots in the city these days. His psychological alienation is accentuated by seemingly being one of only two residents: the other, Harry (Paul Mescal), is younger, also gay, also struggling. The two begin to connect, tentative and hungry, complementary and chafing. There are striking levels of intentionality, vulnerability and desire in their dynamic – superbly realised by Scott, rueful and pensive, and Mescal, puppyish and volatile. By contrast, Foy and Bell, also excellent, depict a couple who appear to be driven by convention more than intention. They are loving and decent but not inclined to question or reshape their world, let alone recognise its capacity to harm their son.

The story's magic-realist approach enables an almost dreamlike dramatisation of the unconscious turmoil such conditions have generated for generations of queer children like Adam: children left with the thought that these people, my straight parents, are my best hope of love and support, and also apparently incapable of understanding and nurturing me as I actually am. Like Céline Sciamma's *Petite Maman* (2021), which uses a similar timeslip concept, Haigh's film is engaged with generational patterning and the impact of grief; but it is more invested in exploring the possibility of ultimately irreducible difference. Adam's parents remain at once comforting and apart. When, dressed in childhood pyjamas that don't reach his wrists or ankles, he cuddles up in their bed, we feel the cosy warmth. But they are not given names.

Their everyday inadequacies are understood structurally, their homophobia motivated less by hatred than by heedless, fearful ignorance. The dismissal of emotional expression as 'poofy shit', the supposition that coming out heralds 'a very lonely kind of life', the reflexive notion that '[no] parent wants to think that about their child', much less take any steps to mitigate its consequences – such notes convincingly evoke the banal and crushing mainstream

NEW RELEASES

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From Fri 9 Feb

All of Us Strangers

From Fri 9 Feb

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Getting It Back: The Story of Cymande

From Fri 16 Feb (Preview + Q&A on Tue 13 Feb)

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understandings of the time. Meanwhile, the film's soundtrack pays glorious tribute to the queer sensibility then hiding in plain sight in the charts: Erasure and Alison Moyet pop up while lyrics to Frankie Goes to Hollywood and Pet Shop Boys hits are woven into the screenplay to poignant, devastating effect. The period production design is spot-on too. The film here brings to mind *Blue Jean* (2022), Georgia Oakley's powerful feature about Thatcher-era homophobia, which takes its title from a 1984 Bowie song.

All of Us Strangers isn't a work of horror or science fiction but its fantastical elements spur comparison with the queer uses of such genres. There's a particularly rich seam of horror with more or less overt LGBTQ+ resonance. Frankenstein's monster and his bride, the cat people, hosts of vampires, werewolves and a certain sort of serial killer: all have proven useful vessels for exploring the disturbing potency of difference, the queerly monstrous and the monstrously queer. If *All of Us Strangers* has genre connections, though, they are not to monsters but to ghosts and time travel, supernatural concepts linked by their capacity to enable intercourse with the past.

Encounters across time are of particular value to queer people, long encouraged by mainstream norms to understand themselves as people with no collective, nourishing past and no realistic or hopeful future. Yet while LGBTQ+ filmmakers have increasingly leaned into horror (particularly of the slashing and/or shapeshifting kind), ghosts and time travel have been less popular. There are examples, though. Marc Moody's *Almost Normal* (2005) offered a curious, belated twist on the *Back to the Future/Peggy Sue Got Married* concept, with a middle-aged gay man cast back to a high-school setting in which homosexuality was the norm. Lloyd Eyre-Morgan's short *Closets* (2015) used a bedroom wardrobe as a portal enabling solidarity between isolated teens across decades. In Monica Zanetti's *Ellie & Abbie (& Ellie's Dead Aunt)* (2020), a lesbian relative returns from the grave to shed intergenerational light on hidden history. On the small screen, shows like *American Horror Story* (2011-) and the Netflix film trilogy *Fear Street* (2021) find queer fellow feeling across centuries. Haigh's film retains a naturalistic plausibility absent from all these works, while sharing their implicit suggestion that the terms of engagement available in normal everyday life just aren't enough to reckon with or account for queer experience.

All of Us Strangers chimes too with Haigh's own earlier work: *45 Years* (2015) was built around the discombobulating return of the past, while *Greek Pete* (2009) and the HBO series *Looking* (2014-16) followed gay men in search of meaning and belonging. Most resonant is *Weekend* (2011), Haigh's comparably thoughtful and incrementally intense portrait of gay men connecting across difference and trauma. Those characters are still young, not yet thinking of parents as peers, but still thinking of them. At one point in *Weekend*, one of them pretends to be the other's absent father in hopes of understanding and healing, a gambit writ large in *All of Us Strangers*. 'Everything's different now,' Adam tells his mother across the decades. Yet queer alienation persists.

Ben Walters, *Sight and Sound*, Winter 2023