



Big Screen Classics

# My Beautiful Laundrette

## My Beautiful Laundrette

Director: Stephen Frears  
©/For: Channel Four  
Production Companies: Working Title Films, SAF Productions  
Producers: Sarah Radclyffe, Tim Bevan  
Production Manager: Jane Frazer  
Production Accountant: Bill Craster  
Assistant Accountant: Grainne Marmion  
Location Manager: Rebecca O'Brien  
Production Assistant: Sarah O'Brien  
Production Runner: Sam Garwood  
Unit Runners: Chris Bruce, Charlie McGrigor  
NFS Attachments: Jo Brown, Ronald Bailey, Abdul Chowdry, Andree de Silva  
1st Assistant Director: Simon Hinkley  
2nd Assistant Director: Waldo Roeg  
3rd Assistant Director: Gary Davies  
Continuity: Penny Eyles  
Casting: Debbie McWilliams  
Screenplay: Hanif Kureishi  
Director of Photography: Oliver Stapleton  
Focus Puller: Steve Keith-Roach  
Clapper: Fiona Cunningham Reid  
Camera Trainee: Anthony James  
Gaffer: Malcolm Davies  
Electricians: Dave McWhinnie, Martin Duncan, Tony Hare  
Camera Grip: Jim Monks  
2nd Camera Grip: Jamie Monks  
Stills: Mike Laye  
Graphics: Julian Rothenstein  
Editor: Mick Audsley  
1st Assistant Editor: Jason Adams  
2nd Assistant Editor: Chris Cook  
Designer: Hugo Luczyk Wyhowski  
Assistant Art Director: Alison Dominitz  
Production Buyer: Jeanne Vertigan  
Property Master: Ray Perry Sr  
Standby Props: Mark Allett, Ray Perry Jr  
Construction: Constructivist, Alastair Gow, Robin Thistlethwaite  
Painter: Bob Starrett  
Costume Designer: Lindy Hemming  
Wardrobe Mistress: Karen Sharpe  
Make-up: Elaine Carew  
Hairdresser: Wendy Rawson  
Titles: FrameLine  
Music: Ludus Tonalis  
Music Producers: Hans Zimmer, Stanley Myers  
Sound Recording: Albert Bailey  
Boom Operator: St. Clair Davis  
Dubbing Mixer: Peter Maxwell  
Dubbing Editor: 'Budge' Tremlett  
Assistant Dubbing Editor: Matthew Whiteman  
Stunt Co-ordinators: Rocky Taylor, Jim Dowdall, Bill Weston, Noshir Powell  
Stunt Performers: Tip Tipping, Tracey Eddon, Wayne Michaels  
Prop Driver: Harry Vincent  
Caterers: Locaters  
Projectionist: Andrew Young  
Cast:  
Daniel Day Lewis (Johnny)  
Richard Graham (Genghis)  
Winston Graham (1st Jamaican)  
Dudley Thomas (2nd Jamaican)  
Derrick Branche (Salim)  
Garry Cooper (squatter)  
Gordon Warnecke (Omar)  
Roshan Seth (Papa Hussain)  
Saeed Jaffrey (Nasser)  
Shirley Anne Field (Rachel)

The screening on Wednesday 7 January will be introduced by Melanie Bell, Feminist Film Historian and Principal Investigator for the Film Costumes in Action project

Designing costumes for films with present-day settings is not for the faint-hearted. Everyone has an opinion, and isn't afraid to share it, and only clear-sighted designers with nerves of steel withstand the pressure. Multi-award-winning designer Lindy Hemming reflects 'you have to work hard for the costumes of the real, the here and now, to be accepted by the audience ... people can immediately smell if they are wrong.' Hemming's costumes for *My Beautiful Laundrette* brilliantly encapsulate the 'here and now' of British society in the mid-1980s where slick entrepreneurialism meets the casualties of Thatcherism. At the core of Hemming's creative practice is a deep and profound engagement with people; 'I have an innate, inquisitive and abiding interest in human beings of every age, type and class ... where do they come from, and why do they dress like that?' After a stint in theatre Hemming began working with Mike Leigh, famously dressing Beverly (Alison Steadman) in a low-cut C&A dress for *Abigail's Party* (1977), an inspired design choices which met her brief of ensuring 'the character is noticed, not the clothes.' She would collaborate with Mike Leigh several times (*Meantime*, *High Hopes*, *Life Is Sweet* and *Topsy Turvy*), and Leigh's method of improvisation and working collaboratively with actors perfectly suited Hemming's style. It also suited the style of director Stephen Frears.

The modest budget and six-week production schedule of *My Beautiful Laundrette* did not faze Hemming who was used to hand-to-mouth ways of working. Her designs had to capture the 'here and now' of south London, its wealthy British-Asian families, slick businessmen, and racist skinheads. Written for the screen by Hanif Kureishi, the film seamlessly blends social and magic realism. Wealthy entrepreneur Nasser (Saeed Jaffrey) gives his seemingly naïve nephew Omar (Gordon Warnecke) a dilapidated laundrette to renovate. Omar promptly recruits the support of a former schoolfriend and racist skinhead Johnny (Daniel Day Lewis), and the pair quickly become lovers, the renovated laundrette –evocatively described by Nasser as 'a jewel in the jacksie of south London' – testament to the couple's compelling portrayal of gay desire. Other key characters are Omar's violent uncle Salim (Derrick Branche), his strong-minded cousin Tania (Rita Wolf), and Nasser's mistress Rachel (Shirley Anne Field).

Hemming relished the challenge of dressing this cast of characters and turned her ethnographic eye first to Daniel Day Lewis. In true Mike Leigh style, Hemming spent time hanging out with the actor – 'we went to his house and had a discussion about jeans ... and spent hours looking in his wardrobe and trying things on, looking at his silhouette'. After this, Hemming built a wardrobe for a streetwise character, layering a grey hooded sweatshirt under a heavy plaid shirt with patch pockets, removing the sleeves to turn it into a jerkin, and cleverly suggesting a character of no fixed abode who dresses for warmth and carries his possessions about his person. This kind of messaging is carried through into the choice of the black donkey jacket, its rough texture offset by reflective orange shoulder pads. This came about through Day Lewis and

Charu Bala Choksi (*Bilquis*)  
Souad Faress (*Cherry*)  
Rita Wolf (*Tania*)  
Persis Maravalala (*Nasser's elder daughter*)  
Nisha Kapur (*Nasser's younger daughter*)  
Neil Cunningham (*Englishman*)  
Walter Donohue (*Dick O'Donnell*)  
Gurdial Sira (*Zaki*)  
Stephen Marcus (*Moose*)  
Dawn Archibald (*1st gang member*)  
Jonathan Moore (*2nd gang member*)  
Gerard Horan (*telephone man*)  
Ram John Holder (*poet*)  
Bhasker (*Tariq*)  
Ayub Khan Din (*student*)  
Dulice Liecier (*girl in disco*)  
Badi Uzzaman (*dealer*)  
Chris Pitt (*1st kid*)  
Kerryann White (*2nd kid*)  
Colin Campbell (*Madame Butterfly man*)  
Sheila Chitnis (*Zaki's wife*)  
UK 1985©  
98 mins  
Digital



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Hemming speculating about how the Johnny character probably got money doing odd jobs, picking up work here and there. For Hemming, 'once we got the jacket all the other things fell into place. [...] It was my favourite find of all.' This kind of sartorial signalling of a character's back story is a hallmark of Hemming's intelligent design-work.

Other characters are similarly on point. The obnoxious Salim is all smoke and mirrors, his luxurious lifestyle – bankrolled by drug-dealing – reflected by his Aviator sunglasses and sheer, satin shirts. Nasser's zipped suede bomber jacket, worn over a shirt and tie, was a popular fashion item for men at the time. Symbolising a smart-casual look, it suggests here that, for all Nasser's ease and confidence, he too has to 'fit in' to British society. It is through costume that the younger generation's 'trying on' of different aspects of British-Asian identity is suggested. As the story unfolds, Omar's fine-knit pullovers in pastel shades of powder blue and cream (connected visually with the soft blue cravat worn later by his father) are replaced by smart, pin-stripe suits, crisp cotton shirts and a beige, double-breasted trench coat complete with epaulettes and a storm flap, a classic item of British outerwear. The performative aspect of Omar's suit-wearing is entirely in keeping with the character's movement from the socialist values of his father to the entrepreneurialism of his extended family. Tania's costumes are similarly performative: a traditional sari to dutifully serve food at her father's house, a little black party dress to challenge her father, a grey trench coat and dramatic red scarf to leave home. That she looks a different character in each scene suggests femininity as masquerade, something entirely in keeping with the character's depth and intelligence as a young woman working out her place in contemporary Britain. In a similar vein, Rachel is a relatively minor part but Hemming dresses her in a fur coat which speaks volumes, its deep, luxurious folds suggesting a whole backstory for the character. The coat is a good example of what Hemming describes as 'work that is often so subtle it is pretty subliminal.'

The success of the *My Beautiful Laundrette* is well-documented. Initially shot for television on 16mm, its success at the Edinburgh Film Festival led to international distribution for cinema on 35mm, with Kureishi earning an Oscar nomination for Best Screenplay. Over the last 40 years the film has consistently featured in 'Best British Film' polls, and is frequently screened at film festivals, testament to how the characters, and the situations they face, continue to resonate with audiences. Costumes are central to the film's sense of authenticity, with Hemming reflecting in a recent interview, 'I am proud of the costumes because I think they do completely reflect the characters and who they are in that world ... perhaps you'd say about them that they're not remarkable in any way, but the costumes are just perfect.'

Melanie Bell, University of Leeds, November 2025

#### References

Ryan Gilbey, 'It was a buddy movie – and then they kissed': Stephen Frears and Hanif Kureishi on

*My Beautiful Laundrette* at 40', *The Guardian*, 25.7.25

Lindy Hemming, 'The Art of Costume Design', *Network Nine News* (2010)

Lindy Hemming, Interview for *Film Costumes in Action* project (23.4.24)