

DAPHNE

Press Notes

CAST AND CREW

Daphne
Rita
Joe
David
Rachida
Beth
Billie
Kumar
Tom
Benny
Adam
Jay
Nacho
Sofia
Tracey

Director
Writer
Producers

Director of Photography
Production Designer
Editor
Sound Design
Sound Mixer
Composer
Costume Designer
Hair & Make Up Designer
Casting Directors

Line Producer
1st Assistant Director
Script Supervisor
Executive Producers

Duration
Format
Aspect Ratio
Sound
Original Language

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Emily Beecham
Geraldine James
Tom Vaughan-Lawlor
Nathaniel Martello-White
Ritu Arya
Karina Fernandez
Sinead Matthews
Ragevan Vasan
Osy Ikhile
Amra Mallassi
Stuart McQuarrie
Ryan McParland
Matthew Pidgeon
Rania Kurdi
Ruth Bradley

Peter Mackie Burns
Nico Mensinga
Valentina Brazzini
Tristan Goligher
Adam Scarth
Miren Marañón Tejedor
Nick Emerson
Joakim Sundström
Stevie Haywood
Sam Beste
Nigel Egerton
Nicole Stafford
Danny Jackson
Kableen Crawford
Victoria Goodall
Alice Caronna
Evelien Kortum
Lizzie Francke
Robbie Allen
Rosie Crerar
Vincent Gadelle

1h 27' 28"
HD
1:85
5.1
English

TECHNICAL DETAILS

SALES AGENT

SYNOPSIS

Sharp-witted, capable and charismatic, thirty-one-year-old Londoner Daphne Vitale seems to have everything going for her... if you catch her on the right day. Other times, she's scattered and self-destructive, prone to high-risk conduct and outbursts of temper. When Daphne finds herself drawn into a violent incident, her fragile grasp on her own behaviour loosens. Will the emotional fallout help her to find a new footing – or sink her altogether?



Workmates annoy her. Friends, too. Men want too much from her – or she assumes that they will, if she lets them close enough. And her mother's hippy attitude to life somehow fails to promote much peace and love between the two of them. Daphne's weapons against life's tests are smart remarks, withering looks and self-obliterating alcohol binges. She wants a promotion to sous-chef at the restaurant where she works – but is she up to the role? And what about the lingering sexual tension with her married boss, Joe? Then Daphne witnesses a robbery and stabbing in a shop. Impulsively,

she acts to save the life of the shopkeeper. Afterwards, the customary defences go up: Daphne savages those who try to help her, from the counsellor to whom the police refer her, to the guy who brings over her Indian takeaways. It takes the serious humiliation of showing up blind drunk at work, followed by Joe's sobering confession that he is in love with her, to force Daphne face-to-face with her issues. First, she builds bridges with her mother. Then she visits the stabbing victim at his home – and in those unfamiliar environs, unexpectedly finds her own reasons to keep living.



NOTES ON THE FILM

From sitcoms to romcoms to moody arthouse dramas, it remains pretty standard for a single female protagonist to be in search of a man to complete her. Not so Daphne, played in Peter Mackie Burns's vibrant contemporary drama by Emily Beecham. At thirty-one, Daphne barely has the patience to make a one-night stand stick, let alone a relationship. The only man who seems to get her is Joe (Tom Vaughan-Lawlor), head chef of the restaurant where she works – but Joe's married, with kids. So Daphne keeps her feelings to herself, and her confidences for the pet snake with whom she shares her London flat. We know she has a heart – before leaving work, she stops to make a sandwich for the homeless guy camped outside – but it's well-disguised, not least by a stinging line in put-downs. A would-be suitor gets decisively rejected ("You're SUCH a penis") for attempting to take a selfie with her. Love, she tells Joe, is "a necessary delusion to bind all us together to propagate our sh*tty species." A first date sees her expound further on the failings of love, before calling her date a tw*t and walking out... Maybe Daphne gets some of this attitude from her mother, Rita

(Geraldine James), who tends to greet her daughter with caustic judgments on her hairstyle or jokes about her potential for suicide. Then again, what does Rita know? She might have problems of her own to deal with, but her effort to address them using "f***ing mindfulness" is another target of Daphne's contempt. Touchy-feeliness, after all, is hardly Daphne's style. Part of what draws her to Joe is their shared disdain for emotional self-indulgence. "It's a tough f*cking world," he says, "and you've got to be tough too." Yet both are to find that toughness is no remedy for what truly ails them. Toughness can't prevent Joe from being inappropriately, extra-maritally in love with Daphne; nor can it defend Daphne against pain forever.

Witnessing an attempted robbery and near-fatal stabbing in a corner shop doesn't unlock Daphne's buried feelings all at once. For a few more days, the sardonic, stropky façade to which the viewer has by now become rather attached remains in place. She gives brutally short shrift to an even-tempered trauma counsellor; rejects the patient attentions of her latest

love interest; and only opens up to a total stranger on the bus, in whom she confides that "I'm still wearing a sports bra because I can't be arsed... I've basically given up on my life." Something's been touched in her, however, something triggered... even if, before things get better, they need to get a whole lot worse. An afternoon bender leads to sex with an unsympathetic stranger; then, hopelessly drunk, Daphne ambles into work, there to embarrass herself thoroughly in front of Joe and her other colleagues.

Perhaps this is rock bottom; perhaps it isn't. Anyone who's been or been close to a reckless drinker knows that there can be several false rock bottoms before permanent change occurs. But certainly, this chapter in Daphne's life precipitates some decisive action. She finds more tolerance for her mother – even finding it in her heart to attend one of the Buddhist gatherings that bring Rita such mysterious solace. Finally, acting on the "surprisingly good advice" of that long-suffering counsellor, Daphne goes to visit Benny, the man whose stabbing she witnessed. As it turns out,

NOTES ON THE FILM

— Continued

Benny has his own ways of processing the experience. Rather than burying the memory, he's keen to re-enact the whole thing for the benefit of his kids...

Beautifully envisaged amid London streetscapes that are menacing and welcoming by turns, and lent extraordinary depth and dynamism by Emily Beecham's starmaking performance, Daphne has the grace and sass of an iconic sixties sweetheart played by Julie Christie or Charlotte Rampling. Yet the life that she leads – thirtysomething, single, just about self-sufficient, with no hunger to wed nor crushing fear of spinsterdom – was barely imaginable when those women were in their first flush of fame. Beecham's quicksilver performance – all sly looks, shifting moods and rapid-fire wit – is both a phenomenal achievement in its own right, and a trenchant comment on the range of personae required for a woman to sustain autonomy and independence in a world that would prefer to box her in. What looks like



liveliness is an elaborate set of self-protective mechanisms: "I haven't felt like I'm alive for a long time," she tells her trauma counsellor. It takes another stranger – Benny's wife – to identify the vulnerability behind that rigorously-maintained toughness. "She says you are like the kitten that is so skinny that the whole village kicks it away... She pities you!" Benny cheerfully translates from Arabic.

Fresh, biting funny and unafraid to confront taboos, *Daphne* marks a fiercely powerful feature debut for director Peter Mackie Burns and writer Nico Mensinga. The two previously collaborated on the short film

Happy Birthday To Me, which also starred Beecham. *Daphne* also marks another triumph for The Bureau, the British production company behind such forceful and idiosyncratic releases as *45 Years*, *Weekend, Julia*, *Joyeux Noel* and *London River*. Here – in no easy time for independent film – we find British cinema that flies free of dusty preconceptions about class, race and gender, turning its gaze instead upon a mixed-up world of citydwellers who are at once on the permanent defensive, and flamboyantly unconcerned with their personal safety. When neither your parents nor your wider society particularly care whether or not you act like a



grown-up, it asks, what outside pressures might induce you to take responsibility for yourself? Fear? Morality? Danger? Love? And might a "better" life present risks of its own?

It remains only to wonder what Daphne herself, that staunch critic of pretty much everything, might make of the film. She'd probably chuck her drink at the screen and walk out half-way through – but perhaps she'd sneak back another time, when no-one was looking, to find out what came next.



Q&A

with director Peter Mackie Burns
and screenwriter Nico Mensinga

*What were the origins
of this project?*

PMB: The project originated from a desire to create a film about a complex character who refuses to be defined by the roles commonly assigned to many women – namely wife, girlfriend, partner, mother, dutiful daughter – the list is quite exhaustive. We also wanted to create a character who has a sense of humour, and who can't resist using it as a psychological weapon. What appealed when making the story was how to try to create a distinctive character who was funny, complex, often difficult, vulnerable, a bit selfish – and relatable.

NM: The origin of the story comes from a short film script I wrote. Peter and I had been working together on something else, when he asked me if I had any short film scripts knocking about, as he wanted to make something. I sent him a few and he chose one, which he then went off and made. It ended up being called *Happy Birthday To Me*, and Emily Beecham played the main character in it. After I saw the finished short film, I just found it so captivating and true; and in particular the work Peter and Emily had done on the main character really inspired me.

*How do your two styles
work together?*

NM: I tend in my writing to want to veer towards life as seen through the movies. What I

mean by that is, no-one really talks like characters in movies. Nora Ephron characters, Woody Allen characters – people don't really talk that like in real life. (Maybe they do in New York. I'm willing to admit that that is possible!) But I love the way life is in the movies. And I can veer towards that. Whereas Peter always wants to come at things the other way round: he's always asking, is this true to life? Not true to life as it is in the movies, but to life as it is really lived. How people would really behave; how they'd really talk.

*DAPHNE has an unpredictable,
intimate, slow-burn narrative.
Was there pressure to make it
more obviously or conventionally
dramatic?*

PMB: The story unfolds in a way that we hope is compelling and exciting in the context of a character-based film. We spent some time finding the structure but of course it had to come from the central character. I think it isn't always easy for backers to 'get' the tone of a film that isn't entirely conventional. We were fortunate in that we had the short, which really helped people understand the tone we wanted to create. We were also very fortunate in that our execs Lizzie Francke, Robbie Allen and Rosie Crerar saw what we were trying to achieve.

*Does the finished film resemble
what you imagined in the
writing of it?*

NM: The finished version of the film stays very close to what was in all our minds through the development, when Peter, Valentina [Brazzini, producer], Tristan [Goligher, producer] and I would talk about what we felt the film was really about. How it was about a character who doesn't know how to connect with people, and how this

inability to form meaningful connections – although she is just about managing to ignore the problem – is actually an acute form of suffering. And how the events that happen in the film would be catalysts to make her confront her inability to connect, to let people close enough to see the real Daphne – the vulnerable and struggling Daphne behind the mask. We wanted to show how in a massive, multicultural city like London – one of the most connected cities in the world – it's so easy for people to become isolated. And that there are always little bridges back to feeling connected to people, to life – but you have to want to cross them. The stance Daphne takes is that hopefulness is naive, so the only honest option is cynicism. But where has that got her? What if it's stopped working? What if it's actually the problem?

*What aspects of modern London
did you want to capture?*

PMB: We wanted to capture a contemporary London that is rapidly changing, so we chose Elephant and Castle. It's an area currently experiencing unprecedented change and redevelopment, which in some sense mirrors Daphne's interior world. We aimed to create the world of a young woman who is economically and emotionally just about managing to live. London is a fascinating city that is perhaps a victim of its own success. To remain a vibrant world city, it needs to answer some of the questions that its inhabitants face on a daily basis. High on that list is accommodation. Namely, where and how can ordinary people live in the city?

*It's hard to imagine any actress
other than Emily Beecham
playing the role of Daphne. It's an
incredibly striking performance.*

PMB: Even when we did the short film with Emily, one could see that there was something very special about her. She lights up the screen, but isn't flashy or showy in anyway. In her physicality, she reminds me of a young Gena Rowlands (very high praise indeed!). I love John Cassavetes and Mike Leigh in terms of their approach to character work. Nico and I have a slightly unusual way of working. I would do the character work and write Daphne's biography. I would share this with both Emily and Nico, and this would inform both character and story. One example is that we spent a long time finding out what Daphne reads. We decided that reading is her great pleasure and escape – so we forced Emily to devour Daphne's reading list. And numerous musical playlists too – in conjunction with the more traditional methods of creating a character.

*What's your take on the way that
Daphne lives?*

NM: I don't really have a strong opinion about her lifestyle – only that it reflects what I and I think a lot of my friends are experiencing in our early thirties, that the lifestyle of drugs and late nights and casual hook-ups has begun to fall prey to the law of diminishing returns. Daphne's at that stage where the hangovers and the comedowns are starting to feel like they are not worth whatever gains are to be had from getting fucked up. The lows are beginning to outweigh the highs. It's an age thing – it's about being in her early thirties. She's still chasing the freedom of her twenties, but time is catching up with her.

*How does the incident in the shop
affect her?*

PMB: It forces her to examine her life. What she does and doesn't do. What she asks of herself and others. After a brief period of dislocation, she tries to carry on as before – but fails. What directs the story is her failure to shake off a random event; that's what opens the character up. Something she would rather avoid.

*I was reminded of pretty disparate
works, among them Phoebe
Waller-Bridge's play and TV
series Fleabag, and the Dardenne
brothers' The Unknown Girl. What
influences came into play for you?*

PMB: We were influenced by some great films – *Margaret*, *Five Easy Peices*, *Happy-Go-Lucky* amongst others. Visually, we were very inspired by *Manhattan* and by the work of cinematographer Gordon Willis and photographer Saul Leiter. The book *The Death of Great American Cities* by Jane Jacobs was something of a personal starting point for the project too. (In fact, I would love to make something about Jane Jacobs – but that's for another day.). And I believe Nico was reading Caitlin Moran's *How To Be A Woman* when he started writing, so that might have had its impact too!

*Two men depicting the intimate
life of a woman... was that
particularly difficult, and might
you be criticised for it?*

PMB: I make films about what I find interesting. To date, most of the work I have made is about female characters – or at least dilemmas that I find fascinating. I don't know why I find them so; it's probably something for my therapist and I to get to the bottom of. My nine-year-old daughter often tells me that the

world is a sexist place. Sadly, she's right.

NM: I can honestly say I didn't think of it as an issue when I started writing. I think it's because of the genesis of the script: that it was written as a direct response to a performance, Emily Beecham's performance. I just wrote it as best as I could as an act of ventriloquism. I watched the short film a lot while writing the feature. And I just tried to think: the character that Emily and Peter fleshed out in the short film, what would she say if she was in this situation; what would she do if this happened to her? There's a fine history of writers writing roles for specific actresses, and that's what happened here. Also there were two women who were intimately involved in the creative process, Emily Beecham of course, but also our producer Valentina Brazzini; so it was never just me, a man, writing about a woman in isolation, it was always a collaboration and a team effort from a number of people working together to tell, in this instance, the story of a woman.



EMILY BEECHAM

A LAMDA graduate, **Emily Beecham**'s profile is quickly rising in the UK and in the US, where she played opposite Ralph Fiennes & Alden Ehrenreich in the latest Coen Brothers' comedy, *Hail Caesar!* She is also starring in the hit AMC show *Into The Badlands*, now at its second season. Her film work includes, Juan Carlos Fresnadillo's *28 Weeks Later* and *The Calling*, with Brenda Blethyn, which gained her the Trailblazer Award at Edinburgh International Film Festival. Other credits include the BBC series *The Village* and *The Musketeers*, FX *Damages* and the

Bush Theatre play *How To Curse* directed by Josie Rourke.

GERALDINE JAMES

Geraldine James (*Made In Dagenham*, *Sherlock Holmes*, *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo*, *Calendar Girls*) plays Daphne's mother and returns to collaborate with The Bureau after being cast opposite Charlotte Rampling and Tom Courtenay in Andrew Haigh's *45 Years*. Other credits include: *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*, *Sherlock Holmes*, *Alice In Wonderland* and Channel 4's

hit series, *Utopia*. On stage, Geraldine played Gertrude in Michael Grandage's Donmar & Broadway production of *Hamlet* opposite Jude Law. Other theatre credits include Sir Peter Hall's productions of *Lysistrata*, *Cymbeline* & *The Merchant of Venice*, for which she won the Drama Desk Award and was nominated for a Tony Award. She is a four time BAFTA nominee for her work in television and was awarded an OBE in 2003.

TOM VAUGHAN-LAWLOR

Tom Vaughan-Lawlor, two-time IFTA (Irish Film & Television Awards) winner for Best Actor in the hit crime drama *Love/Hate*, takes on the role of Daphne's boss and unlikely best friend Joe. Tom's most recent screen credits are Brad Furman's *The Infiltrator* where he stars opposite Bryan Cranston and Jim Sheridan's *The Secret Scripture*, with Rooney Mara and the upcoming drama about the infamous 1983 prison breakout of 38 IRA prisoners *The Maze*.



NATHANIEL MARTELLO-WHITE

Nathaniel Martello-White plays David, the bouncer who throws a drunken Daphne out of a club. Nathaniel starred in the widely praised National Theatre production, *People Places Things* and its sell-out transfer to the West End. Other theatre credits include *The Brothers Size* which was nominated for the Laurence Olivier Award for Outstanding Achievement in an Affiliate Theatre. Nathaniel is currently starring alongside Idris Elba in Showtime and Sky Atlantic's new TV series, *Guerrilla*. Also a celebrated playwright, his first play *Blackta* at the Young Vic and his latest play *Torn*, Royal Court received rave reviews.



Other principal cast include **Karina Fernandez** (*Pride*, *Mr Turner*, *Another Year*), **Stuart McQuarrie** (*Trainspotting*, *Young Adam*, *Mr. Turner*) **Ruth Bradley** (*Humans*, *Love/Hate*) and 2015 Screen Star of Tomorrow, **Osy Ikhile** (*Mission Impossible: Rogue Nation*, *Kill Your Friends*, *The Legend of Tarzan*).

PETER MACKIE BURNS

Peter Mackie Burns has gained major international short film awards including the Golden Bear at Berlinale and a BAFTA nomination for his short film *Milk*, starring Brenda Fricker (Oscar Winner for *My Left Foot*) and Kathleen McDermott. He also directed a feature documentary called *Come Closer*, portraying the poetry in people and places of Glasgow.

In every one of his shorts, Peter has worked with excellent cast such as European Film Award Best Actress and regular Mike Leigh contributor Ruth Sheen, Kate Dickie (*Red Road*, *Game of Thrones*, *Prometheus*) and Paprika Stein (*Festen*) to name a few. He has been commissioned by the BBC (on his short *Run*) and Channel4 – with the Coming Up *The Spastic King*, written by Jack Thorne.

NICO MENSINGA

Nico Mensinga wrote the feature *Titus*, which won the Audience Award at Dinard British Film Festival and was nominated for a BIFA for best directorial debut. Prior to this, he has written several short films, including *Watching* (starring Ian Hart) and *The Birthday Gift* (with Tobias Menzies), both directed by Max Myers. His first collaboration with Peter Mackie Burns was on the short, *Happy Birthday To Me*, starring Emily Beecham.

VALENTINA BRAZZINI & TRISTAN GOLIGHER

Valentina Brazzini and Tristan Goligher produce for The Bureau. The Bureau is an established, BAFTA winning company well known for launching new filmmakers such as Asif Kapadia (*The Warrior*) and Andrew Haigh (*Weekend*) and Alexis Dos Santos (*Glue*). The Bureau has worked on almost 40 feature films.

THE BUREAU

The company also co-produced Roger Michell's *Le Weekend* with Free Range Films, starring Jim Broadbent and Lindsay Duncan, and produced in tandem with Potboiler Productions Alan Rickman's *A Little Chaos*, starring Kate Winslet and Matthias Schoenaerts.

The Bureau's latest production is *Lean on Pete*, with Charlie Plummer, Steve Buscemi and Chloe Sevigny. The film

marks the third collaboration with director Andrew Haigh, whose previous feature *45 years* garnered a string of prestigious nods including Silver Bears for the performances of Charlotte Rampling and Tom Courtenay, the Michael Powell Award for Best British Film at EIFF 2015 and an Oscar® nomination for Best Actress.





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