

MY BEAUTIFUL LAUNDRETTE

Followed by a Q&A with STEPHEN FREARS and HANIF KUREISHI CBE

Hosted by LESLIE FELPERIN

My Beautiful Laundrette exploded onto our screens thirty years ago and cemented the reputation of director Stephen Frears as one of our most original and distinguished film makers. The film's screenplay, by Hanif Kureishi, was a landmark debut that received a BAFTA nomination and established Kureishi as a major screenwriting talent.

The film became an international success and received wide critical acclaim. The film critic Roger Ebert reviewed the film on its US release and is reproduced here in an edited version.

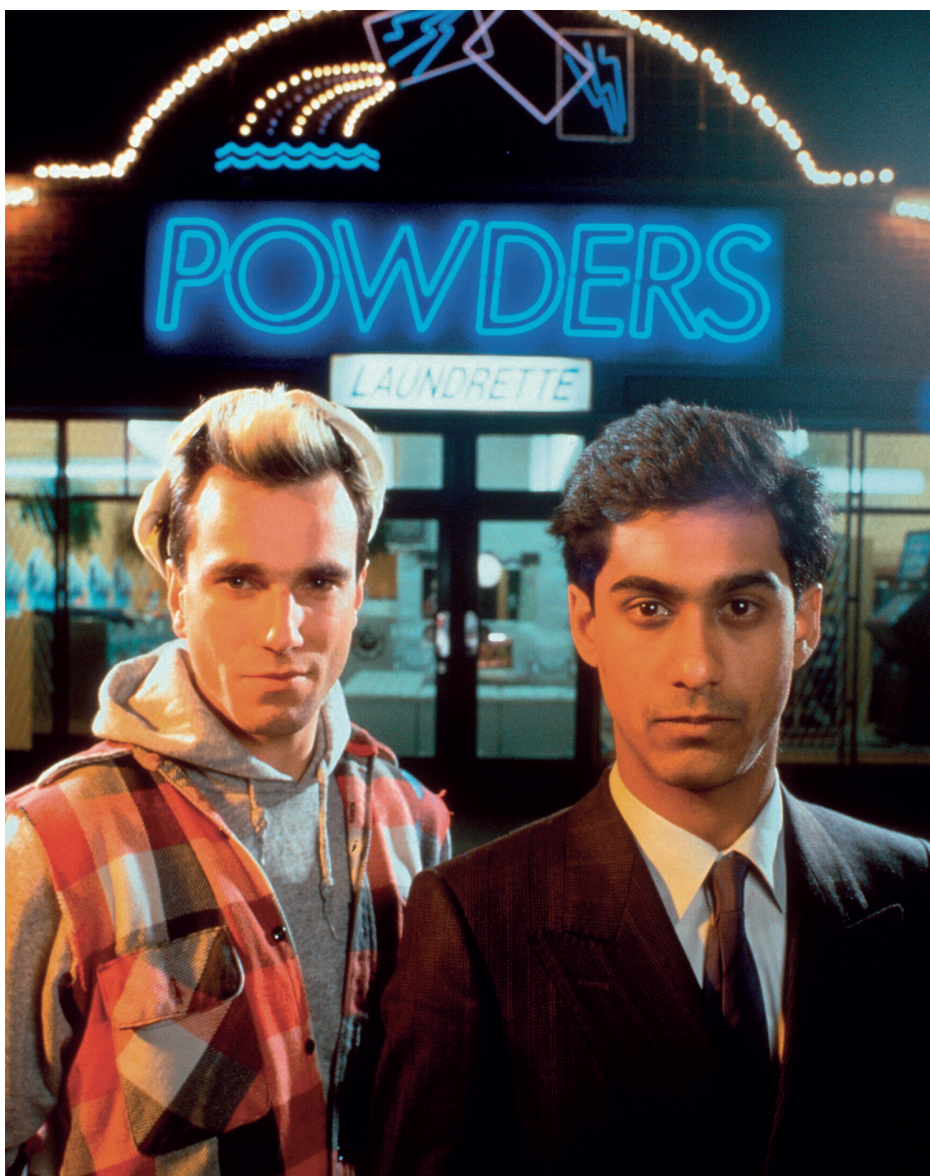
RELEASE YEAR: 1985

RUNTIME: 97 mins

DIRECTOR: Stephen Frears

PRODUCERS: Sarah Radclyffe, Tim Bevan

SCREENWRITER: Hanif Kureishi



When people told me they'd seen *My Beautiful Laundrette* and it was a good movie, I had a tendency to believe them, for who would dare to make a bad movie with such an uncommercial title? The laundry in question is a storefront operation in one of the seedier areas of London, and it is losing money when a rich Pakistani decides to entrust its management to his nephew. But this is not the saga of a

laundry. It is the story of two kinds of outsiders (Omar and Johnny) in modern London.

My Beautiful Laundrette refuses to commit its plot to any particular agenda, and I found that interesting. It's not about whether Johnny and Omar will remain lovers or about whether the laundrette will be a success. And it's not about the drunken father or about Nasser's daughter, who is so bored and desperate that, during a cocktail party, she goes

outside and bares her breasts to Omar through the French doors.

The movie is not concerned with plot, but with giving us a feeling for the society its characters inhabit. Modern Britain is a study in contrasts, between rich and poor, between upper and lower classes, between native British and the various immigrant groups – some of which, such as the Pakistanis, have started to prosper. To this mixture, the movie adds the conflict between straight and gay.



A movie like this lives or dies with its performances, and the actors in *My Beautiful Laundrette* are a fascinating group of unknowns, with one exception: **Shirley Anne Field**, who plays Rachel, and whom you may recognize from *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* and other British films.

The character of Johnny may cause you to blink if you've just seen the wonderful *A Room with a View*. He is played by **Daniel Day-Lewis**, the same actor who, in *Room*, plays the heroine's affected fiancée, Cecil. Seeing these two performances side by side is an affirmation of the miracle of acting: That one man could play these two opposites is astonishing.

Omar is played by **Gordon Warnecke**, an actor unknown to me, as a bright but passive youth who hasn't yet figured out the strategy by which he will approach the world. He is a blank slate, pleasant, agreeable, not readily showing the sorrows and angers that we figure ought to be inside there somewhere. The most expansive character in the movie is Nasser (**Saeed Jaffrey**), an engaging hedonist who doesn't see why everyone shouldn't enjoy life with the cynical good cheer he possesses.

I mentioned *A Room with a View* because of the link with Daniel Day-Lewis. There is another link between the two films. They are both about the possibility of opening up views, of being able to see through a window out of your own life and into other possibilities. Both films argue that you have a choice. You can accept your class, social position, race, sexuality or prejudices as absolutes, and live entirely inside them. Or you can look out the window, or maybe even walk out the door.

Roger Ebert, *Chicago Sun Tribune*, April 11, 1986

STEPHEN FREARS

Stephen Frears is one of our most original and distinguished film makers and has received no fewer than twelve BAFTA nominations with three BAFTA wins. Stephen made his name in TV drama, before turning to film in the mid-1980s with *The Hit*, followed by



My Beautiful Laundrette. After directing its companion piece *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* and the Joe Orton biopic *Prick Up Your Ears*, he began working in Hollywood, with *Dangerous Liaisons* and *The Grifters* among his most notable titles.

Back home, he made *The Snapper* and *The Van*, both based on Roddy Doyle stories and after a second spell of making American films (*The Hi-Lo Country*, *Accidental Hero* and *High Fidelity*) based himself largely in Britain. Frears' extraordinary versatility was seen in his next two films, *Dirty Pretty Things* (a realistic account of immigrant life in London) and *Mrs. Henderson Presents* (a nostalgic backstage comedy-drama). *The Queen*, in 2007, won a BAFTA for Best Film and earned Helen Mirren a BAFTA for Actress in a Leading Role, whilst being nominated in another ten categories. It was followed by *Chéri*, *Tamara Drewe* and *Muhammad Ali's Greatest Fight*. Frears' most recent film *Philomena* (2013) won one BAFTA and received four nominations. Later this year, his much anticipated film *Icon*, about disgraced Tour de France champion Lance Armstrong, is set for release.

HANIF KUREISHI CBE

Hanif Kureishi read philosophy at King's College, London and is the author of numerous novels, short story collections, screenplays and plays. In 1984 he wrote *My Beautiful Laundrette*, which received a BAFTA and Oscar nomination for Best Screenplay. His second screenplay, *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*, was followed

by *London Kills Me*, which he also directed. *The Buddha of Suburbia* won the Whitbread Prize for Best First Novel in 1990 and was made into a four-part drama series by the BBC and BAFTA-nominated for Best Drama Serial. His second novel, *The Black Album*, was published in 1995 and his first collection of short stories, *Love in a Blue Time*, was published in 1997. *My Son the Fanatic*, a story from that collection, was adapted for film and released in 1998. *Intimacy*, his third novel, was published in 1998, and was adapted for film in 2001. A film of his script, *Venus*, directed by Roger Michel, was released in 2007. He collaborated with the director again in 2013 for *Le Week-End*, starring Lindsay Duncan and Jim Broadbent.

LESLIE FELPERIN

Leslie Felperin was born in the US but has lived in the UK for over 30 years and studied at the University of Glasgow. She has worked as an editor at *Sight & Sound*, the UK trade magazine *Moving Pictures* and *Variety*. Felperin is currently a film and theatre critic for *The Hollywood Reporter*, and also writes regularly for *The Guardian*, *Radio Times* and the Danish film magazine *EKKO*, although she does not speak Danish.

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