

THE BADLANDS COLLECTIVE
PRESENTS

*The
Long
Day
Closes*

A 35MM SCREENING
ICA LONDON
10 SEPTEMBER, 2014
WITH SPECIAL GUEST TERENCE DAVIES

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PRESENTS

The Long Day Closes



1992 / UK / 85 MINS / DIRECTED BY TERENCE DAVIES / PHOTOGRAPHED BY MICHAEL COULTER
STARRING LEIGH MCCORMACK, MARJORIE YATES

Movie lovers often talk of cinema as being their church. In *The Long Day Closes*, the parallel of these places of worship is made explicit, with an overhead shot of punters watching a film fading into a matching one of heads bowed in prayer. And in the films of Terence Davies in general, there is a constant working out of the obsessions of religion and drama - narratively, as Davies recalls his Catholic upbringing and lifelong romance with movies, and spiritually, as his films use rich tableaux, experimental rhythm and haunting pop, classical and choral music to summon subjective memory with all the stark, contemplative authority of a cathedral mass.

The Long Day Closes is a hypnotic, bittersweet ode to boyhood that follows Bud, the autobiographical surrogate for Davies, a lonely lad growing up in postwar Liverpool and navigating the nascent realisation of his homosexuality, the difficulties of schoolmasters, the love of his mother and the sensations of movies, church, candy floss and glacial erosion. Unfolding as a trance of memories and moments, it's contradictorily at once solipsistic, self-pitying and demanding while being a tribute to a real, fading time and place, an affirmation of family love and life's beauty, and an entrancingly unique entertainment that displays Davies as one of the most important artists in British filmmaking.

-The Badlands Collective



SPECIAL GUEST TERENCE DAVIES

Born in Kensington, Liverpool in 1945, Terence Davies worked as a clerk through most of his twenties before receiving BFI funding for his debut film, *Children* (1971), followed up by *Madonna and Child* (1980) and *Death and Transfiguration* (1983) to form the 'Terence Davies Trilogy.' His *Distant Voices, Still Lives* (1988) and *The Long Day Closes* (1992) were internationally praised as masterpieces. He adapted John Kennedy Toole with *The Neon Bible* (1995), Edith Wharton with *The House of Mirth* (2000) and Terence Rattigan with *The Deep Blue Sea* (2012.) Davies has also written his own memoir, *Hallelujah Now* (1984), and directed an essay-film documentary about his personal relationship with Liverpool, *Of Time and the City* (2008), which the BBC Culture Show called the best film of its year. He is currently completing *Sunset Song*, an adaptation of Lewis Grassic Gibbon's widely hailed Scottish novel filmed on large-format 65mm film.



“THE RUG SHOT”

Terence Davies crafts images that are beholden only to his own artistic sensibility and are unique in narrative cinema for their compositional daring. “I’ve no idea where my style comes from. I’ve not studied painting, I’ve not studied sculpture. It’s all just visual intuition.”

One of the most galvanising shots in *The Long Day Closes* is inconspicuous in the script: “Hold on floor.” The image is an example of both the impressionistic lengths to which Davies will go and the limits the narrative cinematic form can handle. It was even a primal moment for Gillian Anderson, who would go on to star in Davies’s *The House of Mirth*: “I remember sitting in the theater and bursting into tears. There was just something about it that was so rich and so full and said so much, even though it was centered on a rug. I was just blown away by it.”

The responses of audience members were quite different, according to Davies on the DVD audio commentary track. “[The shot] caused a lot of controversy. I cannot tell you how appoplectic with anger some people get!”

The sequence directly follows Bud’s terrible nightmare of two male hands reaching out to grab him from the shadows of his dark bedroom. Held in his mother’s comforting arms after she has rushed to console him, Bud glances down to the floor, and the camera tracks his gaze, settling on a rug patterned with crosshatched green leaves. The moonlight shining through the rain-spattered window casts a cascading shadow, giving the rug’s expressive design the feel of a living nighttime jungle. Yet Davies doesn’t allow the viewer much time to contemplate this pattern, as the screen dissolves to a different carpet, this one knit with irregular shapes, including elongated diamonds, squiggly lines, colour patches and circles. At first the carpet is covered by what appears to be afternoon shadow, which gives it a colourless uniformity. But then very gradually sunlight begins to dance over its textures, revealing its beiges, whites, greys, and dull oranges.

The camera’s fixed position is made all the more acute by sunlight moving back and forth on the rug as though a glissando across a piano. After one full minute of stillness—a cinematic eternity—with alternate patches of shadow and light, the camera finally tilts up and we see Bud from the back, kneeling on the couch and staring out the window, the curtain draped over him like a veil, the light from outside giving him the sense of glowing from within.

Davies has said that this sequence was, like so many others, based on his memories. In this case, he recalls the occasional boredom of childhood, when he would find himself at home, fixating on small details. What is particularly fascinating about what the camera reveals when it moves up is that we are not seeing this rug directly through the eyes of Bud, who is instead looking outside. Rather, the gaze here appears intended to be the viewer’s alone, dissociated momentarily from Bud and from the narrative. Davies seems to want us to see the world anew; to defamiliarise the familiar; to find the loveliness in the odd patterns of a shabby, tattered carpet; to appreciate the beauty of a natural dance of sunlight; to experience boredom, to crave movement, to both fear and embrace stasis; to just look, and to be.

Inseparable from the visual splendour of the image is the rhapsodic orchestral passage Davies takes from George Butterworth’s *A Shropshire Lad*. While the camera is immobile, the music is transporting—a glistening harp conjures images of sun-dappled fields and waving grasses. As the camera begins to rotate, however, violins grow more insistent, and the piece takes on a boldly dramatic, even romantic turn. Timed in this fashion, the music quite blatantly calls attention to the attendant camerawork.

Rather than adhere to strict naturalism, Davies makes the audience aware of the cinematic apparatus that creates these necessarily artificial images. In Film Comment, Graham Fuller called him “the acknowledged master of tableau that, framed and arranged with adroit self-consciousness, memorialises a fragment in time as it passes, or as it is perceived.”

In a way, the film’s insistent focus on the rug is a queering agent, not only for how it implies an identification with a marginalised child on the verge of homosexual puberty but also for the way it forces a close reading—a luxurious lavishing of attention—on an object that another film might consider visual debris.

The amount of time that is expended upon our watching and scrutinizing the rug challenges our presumptions about mainstream film grammar. Davies’s aesthetic is bound up in a queer temporality—which in the carpet’s case manifests as a stillness that threatens to place this film outside of traditional notions of time. It is an image that, however unadorned, intends to alter the viewer’s perceptions, upending expectations of what cinema can be—and perhaps more importantly, implying that the often contradictory nature of beauty lies in the (camera) eye of the beholder. -**Michael Koresky, film critic of *Reverse Shot* and *The Criterion Collection***

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