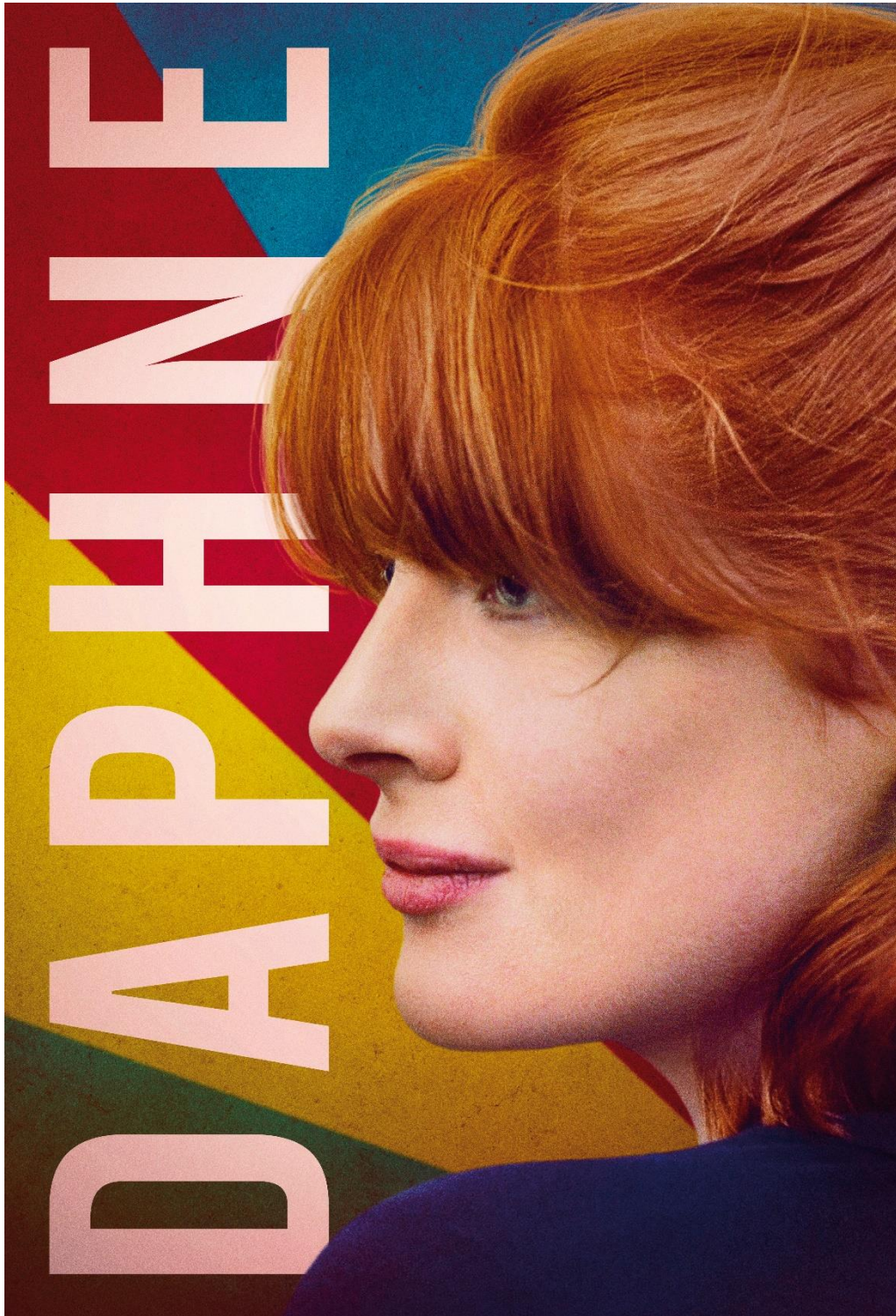


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release: 10/01/2018

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# SYNOPSIS

NL

Daphne is 31 jaar oud, te jong om zich te settelen, te oud om doelloos te leven. Lange nachten, drank en verschillende minnaars zijn een welkome afleiding van de vraag: wat wil ik? Een onverwachte gebeurtenis dwingt haar langzaam maar zeker om haar leven onder ogen te zien. Een confrontatie met zichzelf is onvermijdelijk.

De 31-jarige Daphne is een echte liefdescynicus, gevangen in een existentieel vacuüm. Met de uitspraken van filosoof Slavoj Žižek in de hand pareert ze gevat en succesvol elke vorm van emotionele toenadering. Schijnbaar doelloos banjert ze rond in haar weinig enerverende leven dat bestaat uit werken in een hip restaurant, haar zieke moeder afbekken, terloopse seks en heel veel drank, waarmee ze steeds dringender opkomende levensvragen en gevoelens op afstand houdt. Maar door een dramatische gebeurtenis wordt ze van toeschouwer ineens deelnemer en barst haar pantser van meedogenloosheid.

In dit ingehouden drama, met een randje zwarte humor, volgt de camera Daphne (Emily Beecham) op de voet, daarbij de subtiele emoties vangend van de weerbarstige, vuilbekkende en toch kwetsbare dertiger, en de nuances van de ongedefinieerde, maar herkenbare wereld om haar heen..



FR

Daphne atteint l'âge de 31 ans, trop jeune pour s'établir, trop âgée pour vivre comme elle vit, sans but. Les longues nuits, l'alcool et les différents amants sont une distraction bienvenue pour la question : qu'est-ce que je veux. Un événement imprévu la force lentement mais sûrement de faire face à sa vie. La confrontation avec elle-même est inévitable.

Daphne est une vraie cynique d'amour, emprisonnée dans un vide existentiel. Avec les citations du philosophe Slavoj Žižek dans sa main, elle réussit à riposter promptement chaque forme de rapprochement émotionnel. Apparemment sans but, elle flâne dans sa petite vie excitante qui consiste à travailler dans un restaurant, à s'engueuler avec sa mère malade, de sexe occasionnel beaucoup d'alcool, comme ça elle garde sa distance des questions et des sentiments sur sa vie.

Mais à cause d'un événement dramatique elle devient d'un coup une participante au lieu d'une spectatrice et son armure de cruauté éclate.

Dans ce drame sobre, avec une pointe d'humour noir, on suit Daphne (Emily Beecham), capturant les émotions subtiles de la trentenaire indisciplinée, dégoûtante et pourtant vulnérable, et les nuances du monde indéfini mais reconnaissable autour d'elle.

**duur / durée: 88 min.**

**ondertiteling: Nederlands & Frans, dialogen in het Engels**

**sous-titrage: néerlandais & français, dialogues en anglais**

**formaat / format: 1: 1,85**

**geluid / son: 5.1**

## CAST

Daphne	Emily Beecham
Rita	Geraldine James
Joe	Tom Vaughan-Lawlor
David	Nathaniel Martello-White
Rachida	Ritu Arya
Beth	Karina Fernander
Billie	Sinead Matthews
Kumar	Ragevan Vasan
Tom	Osy Ikhile
Benny	Amra Mallassi
Adam	Stuart McQuarrie
Jay	Ryan McParland
Nacho	Matthew Pidgeon
Sofia	Rania Kurdi
Tracey	Ruth Bradley

## CREW

regie / réalisation	Peter Mackie Burns
scenario / scénario	Nico Mensinga
art direction / direction artistique	Valentina Brazzini, Tristan Goligher
cinematografie / photographie	Adam Scarth
montage	Miren Marañon Tejedor
productie / production	Victoria Goodall
productiehuis / société de production	The Bureau
geluid / son	Joakim Sundström, Stevie Haywood
muziek / musique	Sam Beste
casting	Danny Jackson, Kathleen Crawford
kostuums / costumes	Nigel Egerton

## 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 Machie 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 feeling to herself, and her confidences for the pet snake white 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 judgements 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-martially 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, 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 kick 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 like that 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, Robiie 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 naïve,

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, 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 Cassavates and Mike Keigh in terms of their approach to character work.

Nico and I have 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 the 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. 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 pieces, Happy-Go-Lucky among 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 criticized 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. 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.

-Press notes by  
*Hannah McGill*





## 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 as 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' mother and returns to collaborate with The Bureau after being cast opposite Charlotte Rampling and 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*

Other theatre credits include *The Brother 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.

## 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.



## PETER BURNS

## MACKIE

Peter Mackie Burns has gained major international short film awards including the Holden Beat 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





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