

# The Long Day Closes

UK : 1992 : dir. Terence Davies : BFI / Film Four : 95 min †  
 prod: Olivia Stewart : scr: Terence Davies : dir.ph.: Michael Coulter  
[Leigh McCormack](#) .....  
 Karl Skeggs; Marjorie Yates; Anthony Watson; Nicholas Lamont; Ayse Owens; Tina Malone;  
 Jimmy Wilde; Robin Polley; Peter Ivatts; Joy Blakeman; Denise Thomas; Patricia Morrison;  
 Gavin Mawdsley; Kirk McLaughlin; Victoria Davies

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[ † elsewhere given as 82 minutes]

**Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide**  
 2001 review:

"Poignant, painterly slice of life, an autobiographical remembrance by writer-director Davies of working class England in the 1950s. The depiction of family life is far rosier than in Davies' earlier **"DISTANT VOICES, STILL LIVES"**, picturing a dreary postwar England yearning for an idealised beauty found in Hollywood movies and romantic pop songs.  
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**The Variety Movie Guide** 1993 review:

"Terence Davies' **"THE LONG DAY CLOSES"** is a technically elaborate, dryly witty moodpiece centred on a shy young day-dreamer in mid-1950s working class Liverpool. Pic builds on the basic elements of Davies' 1988 **"DISTANT VOICES, STILL LIVES"**, with a free-form ride down the helmer's memory lane of family, friends, Catholicism and cinema.

Central character is Bud (movingly limned by 13-year old newcomer Leigh McCormack), a shy loner who's given a hard time at school, idolises his mom (Marjorie Yates) and elder sister (Ayse Owens), and finds escape from the greyness of Britain in movie theatres. There's little resolution in conventional terms: Davies simply builds a kaleidoscope out of memory fragments and shakes it every which way in a series of visual vignettes.

Pic's major weakness is its stop-go tempo. Individual segs are stunningly mounted but

there is a lack of a longer dramatic line, a reluctance to go with the flow. Davies is still a miniaturist working in a feature-length format.

Nonbuffs could be flummoxed by the soundtrack, a knowing mix of popular melodies, snatches of movie dialogue and M-G-M baubles. But strength of Davies' vision is the crux, and holds the line to the final, confident fadeout. Perfs by the no-name cast are all on the money."

**Time Out** review:

"Like **"DISTANT VOICES, STILL LIVES"**, Davies's final autobiographical film rings wholly true, due to the richness and the rightness of the allusions he makes through sets, costumes, dialogue, music, radio and cinema itself. To see it is to rediscover a vanished, largely forgotten culture; such is Davies' artistry that he shapes his material (an impressionistic series of brief, plotless scenes recalled from 1955-56, when he was about to leave junior school) into a poignant vision of a paradise lost. Indeed, it's primarily about the small, innocent but very real joys of being alive, recreated with great skill and never smothered by cloying sentimentality. Beautifully poetic, never contrived or precious, the film dazzles with its stylistic confidence, emotional honesty, terrific wit and all-round audacity."

**Radio Times** review:

"Anyone who has ever been lost in wonder at the magic of the movies will find this enchanting feature strikes repeated chords. In the second of his films set in the Liverpool of his childhood, Terence Davies fondly recalls those marvellous moments at the local fleapit when the drabness of everyday life receded the instant that the opening credits appeared on screen. Leigh McCormack is absolutely superb as the 11-year old whose life revolves around film and family, and his performance lends dramatic unity to this kaleidoscopic autobiography. If you only watch one film this week, make sure it's this one. \*\*\*\*\* "

"The second of tonight's two films in the best of "Film on Four" season is Terence Davies's autobiographical drama about growing up in Liverpool in the mid-fifties. Starring Marjorie Yates, Leigh McCormack. A man recalls a year from his contented, but solitary, childhood. As an 11-year old living with his widowed mother, brother and four sisters, he becomes obsessed with the cinema and experiences the traumas of starting at a new school and his developing sexuality<sup>1</sup>. Showing in widescreen. \*\*\*\*\* "

[no listing in "TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995" "Video Movie Guide 1993" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

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<sup>1</sup> *There's not a fragment anywhere in the film concerning the boy's "developing sexuality"*

A huge disappointment after reading such glowing tributes. So far from being an enchanting *homage* to the magic of the movies (a sort of Liverpudlian "**NUOVO CINEMA PARADISO**"), the film is as static as a taxidermist's window, and far less about cinemagoing in the fifties than, by comparison, Woody Allen's "**RADIO DAYS**" was about the radio culture of the forties. The central boy, Bud, in contrast to the boy in "**RADIO DAYS**", does not discuss films at home, or with his friend Albie, or avidly read the film magazines. He has no movie star idols that we know of, does not relive favourite scenes from Westerns, swashbucklers, war movies or whatever. Instead, after seeing - of all things - the musical "**CAROUSEL**" with his mother, the family stroll mesmerised through a local fairground.. *very slowly*. The absence of contemporary movie clips is filled by snatches of dialogue from "**KIND HEARTS AND CORONETS**", "**THE LADYKILLERS**" or romantic tunes like "Tammy's In Love". And a neighbour, Curly, does bad movie star impressions. He and his grizzling wife are indeed about the most memorable characters here.

"**THE LONG DAY CLOSES**" has more the pace and mood of a "**CIDER WITH ROSIE**", but in place of a lyrical rustic setting we have incessant downpour and the cheerless brick warrens of Liverpool. It is, however, a Liverpool where it managed to snow in time for the Christmas scenes, and where sight of a black face was so unusual as to make the boy squeal out loud in alarm. Bud moves up (very slowly) to a Roman Catholic secondary school, which is delineated chiefly in terms of caned hands, nit inspections - "What nasty creatures you little boys are", and dull lessons taught by rote - "Erosion is the cumulative effect of a great variety of processes. Full stop..".

"FULL STOP" would actually have been a good title for this film, now that I come to think of it. We're told it is "impressionistic", but that translates chiefly as "torpid and static". Full of long contemplative staring-out-window shots, long sitting-on-the-stairs listening-to-mother shots, and long fervently-at-prayer-in-church shots, you might think the boy was limbering up for life in a monastery. And nothing is revealed by these interminable ruminations, nothing is illuminated by the disjointed fragments of dialogue the *Radio Times* critic pleases to call "kaleidoscopic". What do we learn about Bud's family, beyond him being his mother's darling? We do not hear that she is a widow, for example. The boy is simply growing up in a one-parent family like so many kids do today, unremarked upon and unexceptional.

Finally, on Leigh McCormack's central performance as Bud, I'd like to agree with the critic who calls him "absolutely superb", but unfortunately the script gives him so little to do, and next to nothing to say, that describing his performance as superb is like a slap in the face to those hundreds of overlooked boy actors who have turned in a serious dramatic performance in a film, typically to find the director being credited for their talent. McCormack looks a fragile, sensitive boy, and is photographed to pleasing effect, but one would have liked to know more about him beyond that he was bullied in the playground (weren't we all?), didn't like swimming, and was something of a loner. The photography is the chief asset in "**THE LONG DAY CLOSES**", with some striking images and semi-abstract compositions.

See subject index under AUTOBIOGRAPHY, CHURCH / RELIGION and SCHOOL.