

PHANTOM THREAD 2017 130 mins

Director/Writer Paul Thomas Anderson

Reynolds Woodcock	Daniel Day Lewis
Cyril Woodcock	Lesley Manville
Alma	Vicky Thrieps
Music	Jonny Greenwood

The genesis of the film originated with Anderson but the development of the storyline and script developed jointly between Anderson and Day Lewis, who had of course worked with Anderson most recently in “There Will be Blood”. Anderson had the idea of an inter-dependent relationship, a picture in his mind of man and a woman on a hill and then by chance read a biography of Balenciaga and from there we have got Phantom Thread.

(The title refers to Reynold Woodcock’s habit of sewing an embroidered phrase, as a message to a dead woman, somewhere into his creations. It is a phantom as only he knows it is there.)

Other influences were the films of Powell and Pressburger, David Lean’s “Passionate Friends”, plus “I know where I’m Going”, “Rebecca”, “Vertigo” and “Gaslight”. The sense of 1950’s Britain and the world of the omnipotent couturier with his devoted clients is sumptuously set against the inner regimented world that Reynolds Woodcock inhabits in his London house with his sister Cyril, whose whole existence is devoted to maintaining his life as he requires it to be.

As a method actor Day Lewis apprenticed himself to the costume director of the New York City Ballet, studied drawing, hand sewing and draping and made 100 buttonholes and a Balenciaga sheath dress from scratch as a preparation for the role. This is not a film about Balenciaga though, but about relationships. Into the duality of Reynolds and Cyril comes Alma, a young girl he encounters as a waitress in a tea shop. He brings her back to his life and house, where Cyril expects her tenure, like all the previous girls to be short, but Alma intends to create a relationship of her own with Reynolds and the film describes in precise but intensely visual terms how this plays out.

Besides the almost tangible sense of fabric, the film is also carried by the music of Jonny Greenwood, who was asked by Anderson to create a primarily romantic English soundtrack punctuated by the occasional sinister notes to represent the relationships on screen.

Peter Bradshaw described Phantom Thread as “a poisoned rose of a movie, inviting you to prick your finger on its thorns and succumb to its weird dark magic. The Phantom Thread is also a ghostly yarn that would haunt Victorian seamstresses, their exhausted fingers compulsively repeating sewing motions long after their work is done”. Woodcock’s thread messages to his mother are the recognition that she taught him his trade and at 16 he created a wedding dress for her. The film is “a sublimely eerie and immaculately constructed web”.

A further example of Day Lewis’s attention to detail is the use of the Christian name Reynolds which is an homage to Reynold Stone, the English wood engraver, typographer and illustrator who was a family friend and whose typography appears on a wall in the London house.

Day Lewis has said that this was his last film. Like many of his others it gained multiple nominations and awards for Academy Awards, Golden Globes and BATFAS.

Our next screening: ‘Jeune Femme’ on May 21. Only two films left for this season, and both real treats!

