

**STRAND
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presents

POSTCARDS FROM LONDON

A FILM BY STEVE MCLEAN

*Starring Harris Dickinson, Leonardo Salerni,
Jonah Hauer-King, Raphael Desprez and Leemore Marrett Jr.*

PRESS NOTES

*Official Selection:
BFI Flare: London LGBT Film Festival
Melbourne Queer Film Festival
Frameline Film Festival*

Country of Origin: United Kingdom
Format: DCP/Color
Sound Format: Dolby 5.1 Surround Sound
Running Time: 90 minutes
Genre: Drama
Not Rated
In English

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Please download photos from our website:
<https://strandreleasing.com/films/postcards-from-london/>

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Postcards From London tells the story of beautiful teenager Jim (Harris Dickinson: *Beach Rats*), who having travelled from the suburbs, finds himself in Soho where he falls in with The Raconteurs - a gang of unusual high class male escorts who specialize in post-coital conversation. From shy novice to sought after escort and eventually artist's muse, Jim would be the toast of the town if it wasn't for his annoying affliction. He suffers from *Stendhal Syndrome*, a rare condition which causes him to hallucinate and faint when he encounters real works of art. But when Jim is roped into the world of detecting art forgery, could his condition bring about his downfall?

LONG SYNOPSIS

Northern lad Jim is so beautiful you might think a Greek sculpture had just come to life. His future in the cultural-desert that is his small Cumbrian town would consist of working at the local nuclear power plant Sellafield, socializing at his local, and going to bingo as a treat. So like many before him, Jim journeys to the great Metropolis that is London to seek fame, fortune, culture and excitement. The epicenter of all this activity is of course Soho, with its bright neon lights, street life, and bars catering to every gender and whim.

On his first night Jim is robbed and left penniless. A Homeless Kid, with a penchant for making intricate sleeping quarters out of cardboard boxes, grudgingly allows Jim to spend the night in his DIY home for whatever money he has left. Jim acquiesces then promptly passes out whilst gazing at the cardboard makeshift homes. It's been a long eventful day after all. Later that night, the Homeless Kid suggests that Jim could make some money at a certain bar. This place is home to The Raconteurs, a group of escorts who deliver a unique service, intellectual discussion on some of the greatest artists in history from Caravaggio to Bacon, to brighten the difficult post-coital period. Delighted at the idea of being paid for a favorite pastime, Jim sets about studying the greats. Jim's meeting with his first client however, does not go well as he faints in front of a beautiful baroque painting. And so begins a string of engagements which always end the same way - i.e. Jim fainting (and hurting himself to boot).

Covered in plasters, unable to fulfill his job description (a side effect being not earning actual money), and a small stint as an artist's muse, Jim seeks professional help. He is diagnosed with Stendhal Syndrome a rare disorder causing fainting and hallucinations when the sufferer is exposed to art. Word of Jim's little "problem" gets out. He is approached by Paul, ex-Raconteur now shunned by the gang for "making money" out of art (he's an auctioneer). Paul wants Jim to verify the authenticity of some paintings - and earn some money to boot. Although not overjoyed at the prospect Jim agrees. The session is a total success, even though Paul was slow to understand the need for an improvised stunt mat. The Raconteurs however consider this work as Art Authenticator to be the ultimate act of betrayal. Behind his back, they discover their new "David", and Jim finds himself excommunicated from their colorful world.

A chance meeting with the Homeless Kid with his makeshift abodes turns a lightbulb on in Jim's head. Through all his trials, from failed escort, to artist's muse, and art work authenticator, Jim had not found his calling. However, here with the Homeless Kid, and the strangely beautiful cardboard structures, (and feeling a fainting spell

coming on) Jim sees them for what they truly are - a great artist with his works of art. Jim has found true north, not in studying the greats of the past but in discovering and championing the Caravaggio's and Bacon's of the future. Jim's London adventure is, at last, about to begin...

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

POSTCARDS FROM LONDON is my homage to a lost Soho, a Soho which no longer exists. Or perhaps it only ever existed in my dreams. So instead of trying to re- create a specific by-gone era, the Soho of my youth in the 1970's and early 80's - the streets inhabited by Francis Bacon, by Derek Jarman, by Lucian Freud - I wanted to create a Soho of the imagination, a Soho of memory. This is why I decided to shoot the film entirely in the studio. We built an alleyway, a bar, a hotel, and a bedroom on a stage. The look is very stylized, and I hope this gives POSTCARDS a timeless quality, or rather allows the audience to imagine their own time, to recall their own memories. I wanted to tell the story of a young man who travels to the big city from the suburbs, in search of his dream, in search of like-minded people. And I wanted to connect the story to the stories and characters inhabiting other streets and alleyways, from the past, from the time of Caravaggio. The streets of Rome and Naples. And finally I wanted to tell the story of a young man's obsession with art and artists, so I introduced Stendhal Syndrome as a means to take the main character out of "the present" and carry him back to "the past". POSTCARDS is not built around a conventional narrative, rather it imagines a series of episodes and moments, which hopefully build into something evocative of this elusive Soho which is no longer with us, but which still haunts the streets of central London.

Steve McLean, February 2018.

INTERVIEW WITH STEVE MCLEAN

You called the film *Postcards from London* – in what sense does it follow on from *Postcards from America* which you made in 1994?

There is a part in the middle of *Postcards from America* which is very stylized and you could say that *Postcards from London* is a follow-on from that section. At the same time, I wanted to make something more optimistic. I wanted to do something about a young gay man that wasn't about coming out or relationships but the experience of moving to a big city. I made *Postcards from America* at the height of the AIDS crisis in America when I was living in America, and it reflects that time. This is more optimistic in tone.

You don't seem to have made another film in the intervening years. What have you been up to?

I got out of the business, moved back to London from New York. I wrote a couple of scripts that never got made. It was the mid to late nineties, and the heyday of British gangster movies, and those were the films that were getting made. After three years of development and nothing happening I just thought: maybe it's not going to happen.

I always had friends who worked in hospitality and I went to run a couple of restaurants and I really enjoyed it, and did that for 15 years. Then I found myself tracked down by the BFI who were wondering where I was!

Anthony Minghella always said that growing up in his parents' café was good training for being a director...

I think running a restaurant is good training and has that same craziness. It's all about multitasking.

What's the film's 'pitch'?

A funny, sexy film about being gay and young, and discovering the big city, and discovering art.

What made you want to give Soho a starring role?

I remember being blown away by it. There are parts of London that still resonate for me. I was born in Twickenham and remember the first time I came into town and going to Asylum as it was called then - and meeting Derek Jarman and Isaac Julian and Jimmy Somerville within a few months. It was the miner's strike, pits and perverts. It was about discovering there are people on your wavelength. There were different scenes. But when I was in my 20's there were four or five dive bars in Soho where you would go down to a basement, where it was gangsters, would- be gangsters, drag-queens, gay men, gay women, a bit like Love is the Devil. That's definitely changed. Everything's more corporate. I was talking to someone the other day about it – the Soho of Bacon and Lucien Freud and the Colony Room is gone now. Although it seems to reference that period in the 1980s, I'm trying not to be specific about the decade within the context of the movie. Some characters are wearing a 1950's suit, so it hopefully is operating just outside a fixed point, and resonate with people older and younger than me.

The film is studio-based. Why did you make this choice?

I didn't want it to be a British realist film. I was adamant about that when the BFI came to me. I want to set one rule here that I do something that's *very* stylized. I wanted it to be very visual. Going into Soho and being bombarded by music and images and people. It's hopefully timeless, and a dream. I was really inspired by Hollywood Musicals – and you know it's a set.

Caravaggio is a big presence in the film. Did you worry about stepping on Derek Jarman's toes?

I didn't know Derek that well – though he was very supportive of my first film before he died. His Caravaggio is a bit austere and I wanted to take it a step farther. I wanted to do something a bit more comic and visually complicated.

Do you keep up with the Caravaggio industry and all the latest theories about him?

Not really. Our Caravaggio is this very moody, slightly depressed man. It's more about what he represents.

The story is partly about the Stendhal Syndrome in which an individual is supposed to fall into a trance or syncope when faced with great works of art. What made you light on that as a component of the narrative?

A friend of mine read the first draft – we're talking 5 years ago- and there was no mention of that. And he then suggested Stendhal Syndrome and explained it. I thought it would be interesting to have someone who is magnetically beautiful to be himself unable to cope with a certain kind of beauty. I thought that twist would be quite interesting.

Has the script changed very much over the years? Was it always just about an ingénue coming to London and falling in with a crowd of high-end male hustlers you call The Raconteurs?

The original idea for the film was a triptych about Soho. The first part was about a fresh-faced kid who comes to town, the second part was a 20-something guy who was into the club scene and the third part was about a fifty-something survivor. Over a couple of drafts, the other strands seemed like they belonged to different films and we decided to concentrate on the young man.

Is this film in any way autobiographical? Did you hang out with hustlers in Soho?

(laughs) Yeah. Don't they say everything is autobiographical? I come from the suburbs really. It's hard for people who are young now to appreciate that before Google and Facebook that there was a place you went to, to find your own kind.

Francis Bacon does seem to be a governing spirit for the film...

I do have a slight obsession with Bacon. He was referenced more in earlier drafts but it made too much about a specific time, so I went with Caravaggio instead. I could have more fun with him.

I notice a picture of the French poet Rimbaud pinned on the set, on Jim's bedroom wall...

I just wanted to reference him. Bowie. Velvet Underground. Iggy Pop. We see Jim tearing something from a book and he's making a collage, which is his way of learning about these people, people who had gone before.

Tell me about the casting process?

We did an open casting. We saw a lot of guys for the role of Jim. People sent tapes and we had a great casting agent, Aisha Walters. I said he had to be young, a certain type of beauty, which was understated but the camera had to love him. The audience has to

buy the fact that he's attractive to Max the artist who makes him his muse, or The Raconteurs, and that he should suggest naivety as well. We saw lots of guys who were classically handsome in that leading man way but when I met Harris the second time I was looking at a monitor of him and I couldn't take my eyes off him.

Harris seems incredibly focused...

Harris just got the script immediately, and brought such enthusiasm and focus to the project. He inspired me, his delivery is so good, and he was a joy to work with.

The hustlers too must have taken some precision to cast?

I did want The Raconteurs to be foreign in the sense of really from where they were. I didn't want that to be fake or contrived.

I always imagined Max the artist being the Lucien Freud look. Topless with paint all over him. I imagined him tall and white-haired.

Visually, the film is very striking. What aesthetic discussions did you have prior to filming?

It was important to me that we didn't attempt to create, or re-create a "real" place. It's a Soho of the imagination. A Soho of memory. Narrow alleyways, lots of neon, cheap hotel rooms, a dive bar, all shot on a stage. I was really lucky to find collaborators who were excited by the vision and they embraced it, and inspired me to take it further. In terms of references, we talked about Caravaggio's paintings, about the cinema of Wong Kar Wai - Happy Together, In The Mood For Love. And Jarman of course.

Can you talk a little about the editing process?

It took a long time to find the film again in the edit, to find what we hope is the right pace and rhythm. It's not a conventional narrative, it's more a series of moments - postcards if you will - that hopefully build into something. For me that's what cinema is about - images and moments. I was blessed to work with a great editor, Stephen Boucher, who understood what I was aiming for, even if I sometimes didn't know how to get there myself! He taught me a lot actually. It was a long process, but a really fulfilling and enjoyable one.

The soundtrack is also great. Can you tell us about the music?

I wanted a punk soundtrack, lots of guitars - as a counterpoint to the visuals. I thought it would be interesting. Of course, there was very little money, but we managed to find some great songs through our Music Supervisor, Christian. The original score is by Julian Bayliss - mostly centered around the main character Jim, when he encounters the paintings - it's beautiful I think, but we wanted to have fun with it was well, be quite playful, like when he's having his photograph taken or when he meets the Raconteurs, it's Baroque with a twist. There are also a couple of songs performed by Jonah Hauer-King, who plays David in the film. He sings Funny Valentine in the hotel room. It's such a beautiful performance, it completely transforms the scene.

What is the audience for the movie?

Gay or straight, it doesn't matter. I'm trying to talk in an optimistic way about the city and what it can offer. People of my generation I think will recognize something familiar in it. People who remember Soho before it became more corporate.

Have you enjoyed being back in the saddle? In the director's seat?

I've had moments of self-doubt. But I'm very lucky to be surrounded by people who were totally committed. I hope I don't have to wait another 20 years to do another one! I'm writing something else...

DIRECTOR / WRITER

STEVE MCLEAN

Steve McLean studied politics and philosophy at the University of East Anglia. Everything was going according to plan, until one day he enrolled in a "History of Film" class where he was exposed to *Vertigo* by Alfred Hitchcock. On returning to London, he pursued his new found interest in the visual arts by working in the Art Department on commercials and music videos.

Over the years Steve worked with artists such as George Michael, The Communards, and Depeche Mode. He then directed pop videos for, amongst others, Jimmy Sommerville.

Steve moved to New York to develop a feature project based on the writings of the American artist David Wojnarowitz. The critically acclaimed film – '**Postcards From America**' – produced by Christine Vachon at Killer Films – played in competition at Sundance, Berlin and The New York Film Festival.

Following the success of **Postcards From America**, Steve found himself working in other fields, until a chance meeting with Lizzie Francke, one of the Senior Film Fund Execs at the BFI. The meeting ignited Steve's passion for film once more, and with the financial and creative support of Lizzie and the BFI, Steve created **Postcards From London**. **POSTCARDS FROM LONDON** is his second feature.

JIM – HARRIS DICKINSON

Harris Dickinson was born in London in June 1996. From an early age, he expressed a keen interest in both acting and filmmaking. He trained in theatre with RAW Acting Academy and partook of the highly respected LAMDA examination program. At the age of 16, Harris received council funding to write and direct his first short film. In 2014, he performed in Pauline McLynn's *ANGELS* at London's Royal National Theatre. In 2015, he was cast in his first feature film *THE MEDIUM*, and then co-starred in Brad Anderson's *HOME* for Jerry Bruckheimer Television. In 2017, Harris starred as Frankie in Eliza Hittman's *BEACH RATS*, which premiered at the 2017 Sundance Film Festival and earned him a Critic's Circle Award for 'Young British Performer'. Alongside *POSTCARDS FROM LONDON*, 2018 sees Harris star as 'John Paul Getty III' in Danny Boyle's latest TV project *TRUST*, showing on FX from 25th March; and in upcoming Sci-Fi thriller *DARKEST MINDS* for Fox, opposite Amandla Stenberg.

CAST

Jim
David
Jesus
Marcello
Victor
Street Kid
Paul
George
Stuart
The Prostitute/The Doctor
Barmaid
Caravaggio
Beautiful Young Man
Drug Dealer/2nd Modernist
Max
Jim's Mum
Jim's Dad
Hotel Porter
1st Modernist
Art dealer/Tour Guide
Photographer
Tony

Harris Dickinson
Jonah Hauer-King
Alessandro Cinadamore
Leonardo Salerni
Raphael Despereze
Jerome Holder
Leemore Marrett Jr
Silas Carson
Stephen Boxer
Leo Hatton
Emma Curtis
Ben Cura
Lew Hogan
Archie Rush
Richard Durden
Johanne Murdock
Giles New
Shaun Aylward
Rhys Yates
Georgina Strawson
Reuben Johnson
Trevor Cooper

CREW

Written and Directed by
Produced by
Executive Produced by
Music by
Cinematography by
Film Editing by
Casting by
Production Design by
Art Direction by
Set Design by
Costume Design by

Steve McLean
Soledad Gatti-Pascual
Patrick Fischer, Lizzie Francke, David Gilbery
Julian Bayliss
Annika Summerson
Stephen Boucher
Aisha Bywaters (as Aisha Walters)
Ollie Tiong
Sally King
Fiona Albrow
Kate Forbes