



Rye Lane

Director: Raine Allen-Miller

Country: UK

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A review by Mark Kermode for The Guardian:

British director Raine Allen-Miller, who became the toast of Sundance in January, has jokingly characterised her praise-laden debut feature (from a script by Nathan Bryon and Tom Melia) as a tale of two people spending a day together and having a lovely time. That's a deceptively simple description of a hugely enjoyable romp that effortlessly combines the "limited time" romcom format of Richard Linklater's *Before* trilogy with the in-your-face visual cheekiness of *Peep Show*. Unfolding against the vibrantly photographed backdrop of sunny south London locales (Peckham, Brixton and the South Bank), *Rye Lane* blends the warmth and charm of a formulaic love story with the colourfully street-smart grit of Brit pics such as Shola Amoo's *A Moving Image* or more recently Reggie Yates's *Pirates*, creating something that is at once playful, poignant and personal.

Rising stars Vivian Oparah and David Jonsson are thrillingly engaging as Yas and Dom, two young guns who meet-cute in the gender-neutral loos of an art gallery ("Of all the toilets in all of London"), where he is crying his heart out after breaking up with his girlfriend Gia (Karene Peter). "This is private," Dom blubs from the sanctuary of his cubicle, to which aspiring costume designer Yas tartly replies: "It's not that private" – a truth borne out by the fact that the newly-mets spend the rest of the day walking and talking their way through the "mess" of their respective lives.

Having been rudely usurped by his longtime friend Eric (Benjamin Sarpong-Broni, channelling puppyish, disruptive energy), accountant Dom is now back living with his parents, subsisting on a diet of video games, self-pity and boiled eggs. As for Yas, she's split from her pretentious artist partner after realising that he's not the kind of guy who would wave at passing boats on the Thames – a sure sign of incompatibility. Yas and Dom both have unresolved issues with their exes, and in the ensuing hours will set out to settle a few old scores (which include retrieving a slice of vintage vinyl) while inevitably – if falteringly – falling into each other's arms.



Describing an exhibition of giant closeup photos of mouths, artist Nathan (Simon Manyonda) hilariously declares that it's "the Stonehenge of the face!" That's the kind of laugh-out-loud line that could have been written by Richard Curtis, something deftly acknowledged in a cameo-assisted encounter at the "Love Guac'tually" burrito joint that both nods to and sidesteps *Rye Lane*'s genre history. Elsewhere, the script delivers wry chuckles and raucous guffaws as our star-crossed couple breeze their way through encounters that juggle slapstick and melancholia with ease.

From their casually counterposed wardrobes (beige, brown and purple for Yas; green, blue and pink for Dom) to the eye-catchingly choreographed hues of the streets and houses through which they wander (I was unexpectedly reminded of Michelangelo Antonioni's heavily colour-coded swinging London mystery *Blow-Up*), *Rye Lane* offers a fiesta of primary tones that seem simultaneously real and artificial, with plaudits due to production and costume designers Anna Rhodes and Cynthia Lawrence-John.

Fluid camerawork by cinematographer Olan Collardy (who, like Allen-Miller, was named one of Screen International's "stars of tomorrow" in 2021) follows the pair in dreamy fashion, charting a course from one perfectly chosen location to another: from the shelves of the Nour cash and carry in Brixton, where Dom ill-advisedly compliments a fellow customer on his trousers, through a tearful flashback at the Ritzy, to the sanctuary of Peckham Soul record shop and the expansive world of Rye Lane market, where the couple make unexpected connections. Meanwhile, Collardy's lenses bend the world around them, creating a widescreen bubble that becomes its own self-contained emotional universe.



With composer-producer Kwes at the controls, Rye Lane seems to teeter on the brink of becoming a musical, with the intimate dance of Jonsson and Oparah's interaction (for all the script zingers, their performances are profoundly physical) augmented by outbursts of karaoke and a surreally impromptu rendition of Sign Your Name at an afternoon barbecue. The result will leave you with a smile on your face, a spring in your step and (hopefully) a renewed confidence in next-wave British film-making.

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