

The Personal History of David Copperfield

Director: Armando Iannucci. Screenplay: Simon Blackwell
UK, 2020. 119min. (PG)

With Dev Patel, Hugh Laurie, Tilda Swinton, Ben Wishaw



Dickens' works tend to be adapted as serials, which is how he wrote them; the last cinema version of *David Copperfield* appeared over 50 years ago. The format imposes difficult choices: what to include, compress or omit? how to handle the novel's first-person narrative and autobiographic perspective? Blackwell and Iannucci are both Dickens enthusiasts, and – far from setting out to break moulds – there was even an early, experimental version where they tried to use only Dickens' dialogue.

With playful costumes, seeming improvisations, touches of magic and bouts of slapstick, there is, despite the period setting, no place for stuffiness. "You start walking different when you put on a top hat," Patel found, before Iannucci told him: "It needs to feel very relaxed and lived in. This is your present, so you're not a guy in 2019 going back in time to play this role." That also holds for the film's uncredited star, London, a global city in 1850, with diversity and disparities, energy and hardships. "We were determined to make it feel as if it was the present tense of the people living it and it felt resonant for contemporary London," says Loader.

Post-screening Q&A with the film's producer Kevin Loader.

"More than any other classic author, Dickens would have got the movies. He was halfway to inventing them." Anthony Lane, *The New Yorker*

"Of course, it feels hurried. But Iannucci's great trick is to make that hurtling momentum a vital part of the experience. The dizzying rush is its own delight." Donald Clare, *The Irish Times*

Eleven BIFA nominations

You can rate the film by a show of 1 - 5 fingers (5 = top) at the door on the way out. A committee member will be noting the scores.

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