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**Call Me by Your Name (15)**

*dir:* **Luca Guadagnino**

*Starring:* **Timothée Chalamet, Armie Hammer**

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**Synopsis:** Italy, 1983. Each summer Professor Perlman and his wife welcome a visiting researcher to their Lombardy home. Oliver arrives to continue work on a book. 17 year old Elio, the son of Professor Perlman, is fascinated by Oliver. As the summer progresses, he and Oliver begin a relationship. When Oliver's stay comes to an end, he and Elio spend time together visiting other parts of Italy. Oliver returns to America. Elio is distraught. Professor Perlman understands his son's reaction and consoles him. Later, Elio is devastated to learn that Oliver is getting married.

Many critics were enamoured of Luca Guadagnino's last two features, *I Am Love* (2009) and *A Bigger Splash* (2015), both of which set Tilda Swinton's uniquely self-enclosed sensuality against striking Italian backdrops (Milan and San Remo in the former, the Sicilian coast in the latter). I found them beautiful yet bloodless, lacking a certain warmth. *Call Me by Your Name*, on the other hand, radiates heat. It is a lush, lusty affair, all pounding hearts and blazing loins. Guadagnino has shown a fondness for imbuing the gastronomic with metaphorical significance; in his fifth feature he gives us splattered egg yolks and blood dripping onto lamb chops, and a repeated motif of ripening fruit, culminating in a sex scene involving peaches that will no doubt become notorious. Not since *American Pie* (1999) has fruit been so thoroughly defiled.

The peach scene is lifted almost entirely from the 2007 novel by André Aciman, an American scholar specialising in the work of Proust. It is a story of adolescent sexual awakening set in the well appointed home of an academic in mid 1980s Italy. Elio is the 17-year-old only child of American professor Perlman (Michael Stuhlbarg) and his beautiful, cosmopolitan wife (Amira Casar). Until now he has been mostly heterosexual and has an ongoing flirtation with childhood friend Marzia. But when 24 year-old Oliver, the latest in a series of visiting postdocs to spend a summer at the villa, usurps Elio's bedroom, he also seizes Marzia's place in Elio's sexual fantasies. We first glimpse Oliver with Elio from an upper window; as he mounts the staircase, Marzia casually kisses him, as if passing on the mantle.

Oliver (Armie Hammer, perfectly cast) is the aggressively handsome embodiment of all things American; an academic who speaks in abbreviations though he is clearly extremely articulate, as demonstrated by a grandstanding monologue on the etymology of the word 'apricot'. Elio is puppyish, wiry rather than chiselled, more naive than the older man but also sensitive and reckless. Timothée Chalamet is sensational in the roll; fierce and articulate, his hooded eyes flickering with secret thoughts. He looks a little like Melvil Poupaud or Louis Garrel (whose sister Esther coincidentally stars as Marzia), but he has a purposefulness they lack.

For much of the film little happens, and we watch Elio and Oliver move in circles while seemingly no closer to making a move. One feels the influence of Eric Rohmer (Aciman is an admirer) and



James Ivory (the film's screenwriter), that great chronicler of repressed desire. The tone is languorous but the pace relentless. Scenes are short and cuts abrupt. It's not clear whether Elio wants to be Oliver - borrowing his swimsuits, copying the Star of David he wears around his neck - or have him. Despite their physical differences, the would-be lovers seem strangely fungible as they trade bedrooms, clothes and names.

Of course, *Call Me by Your Name* is a queer film, albeit one that has more in common with the work of André Téchiné than Barry Jenkins: the milieu is so middle class it's almost fantastic, packed with references to antiquity, to Liszt and Bach, Heidegger and Heraclitus. In this regard and in others, Guadagnino is remarkably faithful to Aciman's text, though he transposes the action from the Italian Riviera to the Lombardy countryside and streamlines the narrative by culling certain characters. He also - intriguingly - does away with a framing device that casts the main narrative as a flashback (the book has the men meet in middle age, while Guadagnino's film finishes 6 months after the events of the summer). Still, the film retains a certain Proustian sensibility. The camera pays an almost hyperreal attention to detail, pouring over certain words and touches with the obsessiveness of an infatuated teenager. Apichatpong Weerasethakul's regular DP Sayombhu Mukdeeprom's images are precise, saturated with cerulean blues, limoncello yellows, cherry reds and blushing apricot, but at the same time slightly warm and fuzzy, like a well-washed shirt. The world beyond Elio and Oliver's immediate sphere is somehow faded (women, in particular, seem to hover out of focus in the background). Even the sound edit seems to over-amplify their voices.

The 1980s setting heightens this effect. *Call Me by Your Name* is awash with details such as a Robert Mapplethorpe print, a Talking Heads t-shirt, a Penguin classic. At an outdoor discotheque, Elio and Oliver dance to The Psychedelic Furs. It's a backdrop that will raise a fond smile for many viewers. But Guadagnino's setting is in a sense of platonic ideal of the 1980s. How many of us were ever so live and gorgeous, so intelligent and self-possessed? How many of us once knew the longing, and how many, really, the having? As Professor Perlman tells his son in an extraordinarily moving scene, a love like Elio and Oliver's is rare indeed, and before we even know

it, our best days are behind us. On the strength of this film, let's hope that Guadagnino's are not.

## Credits

<b>Oliver</b>	Armie Hammer
<b>Elio Perlman</b>	Timothée Chalamet
<b>Mr Perlman</b>	Michael Stuhlbarg
<b>Annella Perlman</b>	Amira Casar
<b>Marzia</b>	Esther Garrel
<b>Chiara</b>	Victoire Du Bois
<b>Mafalda</b>	Vanda Capriolo
<b>Anchise</b>	Antonio Rimoldi
<b>Art historians</b>	Elena Bucci, Marco Sgrosso
<b>Mounir</b>	André Aciman
<b>Isaac</b>	Peter Spears
<b>Director</b>	Luca Guadagnino
<b>Screenplay</b>	James Ivory ( <i>from the book by André Aciman</i> )
<b>Director of Photography</b>	Sayombhu Mukdeeprom
<b>Editor</b>	Walter Fasano
<b>Production design</b>	Samuel Deshors
<b>Sound mix</b>	Yves-Marie Omnes
<b>Costume</b>	Giulia Piersanti
	<b>Italy/USA/Brazil/France 2017.</b>
	<b>131 mins</b>

## Another View

Have you ever regretted not reaching out to someone, or telling them how you really feel? Love makes us do crazy, stupid things. It can inspire bold declarations and uncharacteristic bravery, just as it can strangle us with the fear of rejection. In any case, love tends to leave its mark in mysterious ways, and in order to fully understand it we must first learn to take the bad with the good.

Based on André Aciman's 2007 novel of the same name, this beautiful film concerns a brief but lasting romance between a 17-year-old Italian-American boy and a twentysomething American man who is more experienced in matters of the heart but no less susceptible to its sudden, all-consuming desires. The when and where are established with two handwritten subtitles that feel like the opening lines of an unselfconsciously earnest teenage confessional. Summer 1983; Somewhere in Northern Italy.

It's here that Elio (Timothée Chalamet) meets Oliver (Armie Hammer), a handsome PhD student who is staying with Elio's family at their idyllic countryside villa for six weeks. Dressed in chinos, Converse and a loose-fitting Ralph Lauren shirt, Oliver cuts a cool, self-assured figure as he introduces himself to Elio's father (Michael Stuhlbarg) with a firm handshake and mother (Amira Casar) with a warm kiss on either cheek.

The arrival of a new guest is an annual event in the Perlman household, and so Elio, being the good host that he is, welcomes Oliver by offering to take his bags up to the bedroom which Elio has temporarily vacated, then continues his cordial routine by showing Oliver around. But what starts out as yet another lazy summer spent reading books, swimming and transcribing music under the hot Lombardian sun quickly turns into a journey of self-discovery and sexual awakening.

Initially, Elio seems blissfully unaware of the chemical reaction that has already been set off inside him, until an innocent game of lawn volleyball triggers a deep yearning he simply cannot ignore. Later, when Elio's mother reads aloud to him from a 16th century French Renaissance novel about a knight who worries that his love for a princess might be unrequited, one existential question strikes a chord: 'Is it better to speak or to die?' Should Elio express his true feelings to Oliver or should he keep them bottled up? Does he take a leap of faith now or risk living with the question of 'what if?' forever? Being a somewhat precocious, somewhat naïve young man, he decides to find out what it means to open oneself up to another person.

Emotionally speaking, this is director Luca Guadagnino's most honest and intelligent work to date, a lyrical, sensuous, aching love story that skips all the usual coming-of-age beats in favour of finding a gentler, less conventional rhythm. There's none of the brashness of his 2016 English-language debut, *A Bigger Splash*, nor the staginess of his previous feature from 2009, *I Am Love*.

Like those films, this one is visually ravishing and filled with erotic motifs – never have such mundane acts as cracking a soft-boiled egg or drinking a glass of apricot juice been imbued with such palpable frisson. (Incidentally, *Call Me by Your Name* was lensed not by Guadagnino's regular cinematographer Yorick Le Saux but by Sayombhu Mukdeeprom, whose

credits include Miguel Gomes' *Arabian Nights* and Apichatpong Weerasethakul's *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* and who recently shot Guadagnino's upcoming remake of *Suspiria*.)

At one point Elio's father asks Oliver to help him catalogue a set of slides consisting of ancient Athenian sculptures, which he describes in amorous, homoerotic terms. If this scene causes eyebrows to arch, it's only because Hammer himself has a body worthy of being cast in bronze. Looking like Michelangelo's muse, Oliver is a picture of classical masculinity, all firm muscles and impossible curves, and Guadagnino makes sure that it is not only Elio who spends time gazing at his impressive form.

*Call Me by Your Name* was shot on location just a few miles from Guadagnino's home in Crema, and he makes no attempt to hide the fact that his affection for the period and setting is as strong as his fondness for the characters. Throughout the film Guadagnino adorns the already evocative milieu with era-specific pop culture trinkets – everyone from Phil Collins and Robert Mapplethorpe to Talking Heads and Fido Dido – which presumably must have had some bearing on the director's formative years.

In addition to superficially indulging his own nostalgia, Guadagnino makes several other artistic choices that speak to his personal influences and tastes, chief among them being the use of two wistful ballads written for the film by Sufjan Stevens, 'Mystery of Love' and 'Visions of Gideon', the second of which plays out over the devastating final shot.

On a more contentious note, it's worth noting Guadagnino's decision not to show same-sex intercourse. When Elio and Oliver do eventually sleep together, we see them clamber onto bed and clumsily undress each other before the camera drifts suggestively towards an open window. It's surprising that, having spent so long teasing this climactic union, Guadagnino should exert restraint in the moment, though in doing so he arguably preserves the intimacy of the scene. Lust may be the spark that ignites Elio and Oliver's passionate affair, yet by not explicitly scratching that particular carnal itch Guadagnino further emphasises the universality of his film's core themes.

Like the book, *Call Me by Your Name* will almost certainly be championed as a vital queer text, but at its most nakedly unambiguous – as when Elio de-stones a piece of fruit with no intention of eating it, or when Marzia (Esther Garrel), the local girl with the long-term crush, makes a kind gesture just to let him know she still cares – the film is a profound study of the different ways people, regardless of their sexual orientation, process complex physiological impulses.

All the while there is the nagging sense that the summer – and with it Elio and Oliver's relationship – is nearing its inevitable end. After Oliver leaves for America, a visibly distraught Elio is consoled by his father, who offers a sage piece of advice that doubles as a devastating eulogy for his own squandered want. He tells his son not to bury his pain because, as he so eloquently puts it, to feel nothing so as not to feel anything is a terrible waste. The framing of this scene is crucial, as by cutting from a two-shot to a close-up of Stuhlbarg, Guadagnino encourages us to reflect on these wise words not just as they relate to Elio but also our own experiences of love and loss.

Maybe you'll recall the vivid sensation of your fingertips tentatively dancing with another's, or the flush of nervous excitement which preceded that first kiss, or the mournful, lingering thought of what might have been had you only spoken from the heart.

**Adam Woodward: Little White Lies**

## Our next film: Friday, May 11, 7.30pm Sweet Bean (Japan 2015. Cert PG)

Sweet Bean is a gentle, unhurried tale about the power of food to bring harmony and comfort into people's lives. It introduces us to Sentaro, who runs a café that's on its knees - that is until he recruits elderly Tokue, whose recipe for the sweet bean filling in the *dorayaki* pancakes transforms everyone's fortunes. But Tokue isn't quite who she seems...

## Latest news

Membership for the new season opens on May 14th...and the good news is, there's no increase in subscriptions.

We are collaborating with The Venue on 2 events later in the year. On June 8 & 9, two films - *Dark Blue World* and *A Matter of Life and Death* - help commemorate the RAF centenary; while from July 6-9, we are organising a festival of films for and about children, to celebrate the work of county schoolchildren who are involved with BFI Film Academy and Cinemathèque projects Details will be announced soon.