MAURICE
Directed by James Ivory
UK 1987, 140 mins, Cert 15
A BFI release

Hugh Grant, James Wilby, Rupert Graves

A new 4K restoration of Merchant Ivory’s landmark drama

Opening at BFI Southbank, Broadway Nottingham, Newcastle Tyneside, HOME Manchester, IFI Dublin and more cinemas UK-wide on 27 July 2018 (previews at 23 Picturehouse sites on 24 July and at Bristol Watershed’s Cinema Rediscovered on 26 July)

16 July 2018 – After a sell-out UK premiere screening, introduced by its stars Hugh Grant and James Wilby at BFI Flare: London LGBTQ+ Film Festival in March, the sumptuous new 4K restoration of Maurice, Merchant Ivory’s award-winning adaptation of E.M. Forster’s autobiographical novel, will open at BFI Southbank and selected cinemas UK-wide from 27 July 2018.

Originally released in 1987, 30 years before the James Ivory-scripted 2017 smash hit Call Me by Your Name, Maurice is a landmark film, as important as any in the history of gay cinema. One of the most respected and popular mainstream gay-themed films of its day, it still has hugely broad appeal in its moving portrayal of the agony and ecstasy of first love. All three of its young leading cast went on to successful careers and are still working in film and television today. Hugh Grant was awarded a BFI Fellowship in 2016.

Written by E.M. Forster in 1914, Maurice was the second of his novels to be adapted by Merchant Ivory (following 1986’s A Room with a View and ahead of Howards End in 1992). First published in 1971, a year after Forster's death, the novel takes on a subject that no major bildungsroman (or, loosely, “coming of age novel”) in the genre had ever addressed: the problem of coming of age as a homosexual in a restrictive society.
Starring James Wilby (Maurice) and Hugh Grant (Clive) as two Cambridge undergraduates who fall in love, the film Maurice is set amidst the hypocritical homoerotic subculture of the English university in Forster's time. In an environment in which any reference to "the unspeakable vice of the Greeks" is omitted, and any overture toward a physical relationship between men might be punishable by law, Maurice and Clive struggle to come to terms with their own feelings towards each other and towards a repressive community.

Maurice was co-written for the screen by director James Ivory and first-time feature writer Kit Hesketh-Harvey (marking a rare instance that Ivory did not collaborate with his usual writing partner Ruth Prawer Jhabvala). Hesketh-Harvey, who is best known as a musical performer, composer and translator, was a Cambridge graduate and thus familiar with the novel's milieu. Jhabvala did, however, look at the script and make suggestions, including the addition of a more convincing reason for the character Clive's sudden decision to live his life exclusively as a heterosexual.

Maurice was strikingly shot on location largely in the halls and quadrangles of King's College, Cambridge (including stunning interiors in the college's world famous Gothic chapel), where Forster was educated and later returned as a Fellow. The other interiors were primarily shot at Wilbury Park, an early Palladian house in Wilshire. Called Pendersleigh in the film, this setting is where Maurice visits his friend Clive; and here he later meets the under-gamekeeper Alec Scudder played by Rupert Graves.

Under Ivory's thoughtful direction, James Wilby infuses his character with a quiet sensitivity and an underlying sense of desperation to create a person who, as Forster wrote, has "an ingredient that puzzles him, wakes him up, torments him and finally saves him." Hugh Grant plays Clive with a blend of English public school arrogance and intimate vulnerability that attracts, and then nearly destroys, Maurice.

The film had its world premiere at the Venice Film Festival in 1987 (during the height of the AIDS crisis), where James Ivory was awarded a Silver Lion as Best Director, sharing the prize with Italian filmmaker Ermanno Olmi for his film Long Live the Lady! James Wilby and Hugh Grant were jointly awarded Best Actor, and composer Richard Robbins received the Golden Osella prize for his score.

In celebration of its 30th Anniversary in 2017, Cohen Media Group brought Maurice back to the big screen in a brand new 4K scan and restoration from the original camera negative and magnetic soundtrack, held at the archive of the George Eastman Museum, and featuring a new 5.1 audio mix from the stereo 35mm mags, all approved by director James Ivory.

Thirty years on, Maurice remains a wonderfully mounted and outstandingly acted period drama, its themes of repression, dignity, compromise and love in the face of persecution are still as relevant today as they were in the 1980s and, indeed, as they were when E.M. Forster penned his novel more than a century ago.

-for further information please contact:
Jill Reading, BFI Press Office
Tel: 020 7957 4759
E-mail: jill.reading@bfi.org.uk
www.twitter.com/bfi
@bfi

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