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Entertainment : Film & TV : Interviews

Liam Boyle And Nicky Bell

22 May 2009

Ah, the sorrows of unrequited love. It happens to us all. What's less common is a gay football hooligan suffering a stab in the heart from a straight football hooligan. Que?! What's that about?

Awaydays is the film adaptation of Kevin Sampson's book about a group of football fans obsessed with scraping and trendy clobber. The film's two stars, Liam Boyle (23) and Nicky Bell (24), weren't even born in 1979 when the film is set. Boyle plays Elvis, an established member of The Pack, a group of football Casuals who live to duff up the opposing teams' fans while maintaining a tidy aesthetic in an immaculately pressed Lacoste tennis shirt and spotless Adidas sambas.

Desperate to be the groups new recruit is Nicky Bell's Carty. He's just buried his mum and is looking for somewhere to belong. He meets Elvis in a club, they bond over Echo and the Bunnymen and Carty realises Elvis is his pathway to acceptance by The Pack.

Of questionable sexuality, Elvis has a crush on Carty. As Sky Sports commentator Andy Gray once said, "The most vulnerable area for goalies is between their legs..." This is a phrase that Carty might heed if he's going to convince Elvis of his hooligan credentials.

Rachael Scott had a jolly good banter with both the boys, who deliver outstanding performances, and found out why anyone in their right mind would want to be a football hooligan in the first place.

What made you decide to take the parts?

Liam: It was beautifully written. You could absorb yourself into the script because of the music and the writing. There was also a great team of people working on it so it was lucky really...was it lucky? [*Beckons to Nicky*].

Nicky: We were lucky to be given the opportunity and to be working with the actors on board.

Liam: Yeah, it was a great little team that we had in The Pack.

Nicky: For ourselves, who are just starting out, we could learn a lot, we really could.

"Is it going to the gay side or is it holding onto something that you've got for as long as you can? But the affection between Elvis and Carty could be considered homosexual."

Did you know much about the Casual movement before you accepted the part?

Liam: To be honest, no.

Nicky: No. We didn't know anything about it, but it's all there in black and white because Kevin Sampson paints such a vivid picture of the period.

Liam: When we got the script we did some research and it was really interesting to learn about the whole fashion side. Being one of those characters was quite a challenge.

One of the things that I found strange about the movement is that everyone is very bothered about keeping their clothes pristine and then they go and mess it all up by getting into a fight.

Nicky: Yeah. It's weird that they call themselves 'Casuals' when there's nothing casual about it.

Liam: They take meticulous time over what to wear. I think most of it's based on the music. Actually, no, to be fair, I don't think it's based on the music. I think The Pack and gangs like that were just doing it for the agro and a sense of belonging.



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What research did you do into football hooliganism? I'm assuming you've never been part of a movement like that yourselves...

Liam: We got on YouTube. You can see some proper fights on YouTube and get a sense of what it's about.

Nicky: Really heavy stuff.

Liam: I mean, fighting in itself is a bit silly, isn't it? Arranging to go to meet people for a fight is so daft. I watched a lot of clips of Polish people fighting, but they've got rules. They know what happens...just fists when you're on the ground. You're not allowed to stamp on heads, so you've basically got to run around punching people.

Nicky: It's more like boxing.

Liam: Yeah, the adrenaline they get from it is enough for them to get a massive erection! I don't know. There was a scene taken out of the script, wasn't there?

Nicky: There's a scene when Carty comes home after his first fight and he sits down and, er, you know, pleasures himself and then his sister comes in and breaks up the mood.

Liam: That would have been too incestuous if that had happened, I think.

Nicky: When Kevin wrote that I think that's what he was getting at you know, the thrill. And I think it would have been too strong for the movie.

"If he's gay or if he's not, he's always been that way, but he's always wanted to escape...then Whoa! Bam! he's got someone who's basically what he wants."

I think the average person watching the way these characters behave simply won't understand the motivation behind the fighting.

Liam: We didn't get it either, but I think it's just a sense of finding something to belong to and being a part of something when you've got nothing else.

Nicky: It's something different that not a lot of people are doing at the time.

Liam: And to be the first to be part of this kind of culture was probably quite inspiring for a young thug. It's just the thrill, the buzz and I've never experienced it and I'm sure Nicky hasn't.

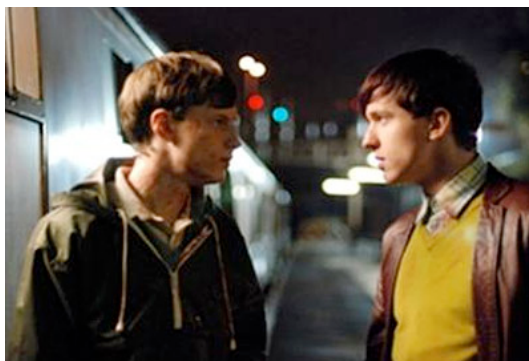
Nicky: I don't want to.

Liam: I think when people fight with each other and they win there's that sense of...something about masculinity...but that was the thing about Elvis as well, because his masculinity was reflected with being passionate about who he is and what he wore. He was a contrast to all the masculinity. He was masculine, don't get me wrong, but Kevin wanted to show sides and reasons for what young men were doing. There's a lot of that in the music with, say, Bowie. There's a lot of homoerotic appeal to Bowie and I think the fact that if you're a hard bastard then you're a hard bastard, but also being quite homosexual-esque.

I know it was never acknowledged, but Elvis is obviously gay and for a gay person to be a football hooligan seems like an ill fit.

Nicky: Was he gay?

Liam: Well, I think you take what you want to take from the film and I would question whether his feeling towards Carty was love as a gay person or whether it was loving someone because that was the only thing he had – caring, caressing and moulding something the way you want it. Is it going to the gay side or is it holding onto something that you've got for as long as you can? But the affection between Elvis and Carty could be considered homosexual.



If you did consider it homosexual, do you think Elvis's involvement with The Pack was his need to grab onto some kind of lost masculinity because he's gay and unhappy about it?

Liam: That's an interesting question. Maybe. I think the fact that he was masculine made it much more interesting, even though he had purple hair and wore skinny jeans and makeup, but a lot of the kids at the time

dressed like that. In the beginning of the film when he slashed someone, I think he's always been that way. If he's gay or if he's not, he's always been that way, but he's always wanted to escape. Within three months he said, "Actually, I don't want to be part of The Pack", and then Whoa! Bam! he's got someone who's basically what he wants. So I think that's probably the trigger.

How did Carty feel about Elvis?

Nicky: I think he loves him. Not necessarily in a homosexual way, but they share a bond that's deeper than anything he's ever experienced in his life. He's got his uncle Bob and no mother, outside of that he has no friends. He goes to all the clubs and knows the local bands but you don't really see him interact with anyone.

When Elvis comes along, it's like they click on a certain level and I think he just loves him, like having a brother, you know? He cares about him deeply, but it becomes apparent pretty quickly that he won't be able to change him and Elvis is going to go Elvis' route. He just straps in for the ride and goes along with it.

Why do you think Carty is so obsessed about being in The Pack?

Nicky: He just wants something to belong to. It goes back to that excitement of being in a gang. It's escaping the mundane reality of everyday life, looking at your mum and dad and thinking, 'I don't want to end up like them so I'm going to go and do this', which is something completely left-field and I think it's belonging to that which really drives him forward and that's why he goes so headfirst into it all.

"There's a scene when Carty comes home after his first fight and he sits down and, er, you know, pleasures himself and then his sister comes in and breaks up the mood."

How would you have felt if there'd been a sex scene between the two of you? Would you still have taken the role?

Nicky: Yeah.

Liam: Yeah, definitely.

Nicky: Without a shadow of a doubt.

Liam: No problem whatsoever, but it's much better to keep it ambiguous.

Nicky: C'mon, I'd get my kit off for more or less anything. *[Laughs]* If the story's good and it warrants it, then yes.

Liam: Maybe in the next film.

When Carty headbutts the shop assistant in the record shop, was that based on the record shop that Pete Burns used to work in?

Nicky: Yes. The record shop is Probe, but we couldn't use Probe itself.

Liam: It's a Ted Baker now, but Ted Baker wouldn't give us permission and you can see in the credits it says, "Thanks to absolutely no one at Ted Baker". So that's quite a shame, but Pete Burns used to work there.

What are you going to be doing next?

Liam: Well, after promoting this it's back to the auditioning stage. I was going to do another TV series this month but because of the recession it got cancelled. There was no money, so it's difficult and that's why when we got this part in a film like this for our age range - you just don't get that. Maybe once in every ten years. So basically it's keeping our fingers crossed and being positive. And hopefully things will happen when the film comes out because it's an advert for what we did.

Nicky: I'm back to the drawing board the same as Liam. Back to the 9 to 5 slog working in my pet shop with my girlfriend.

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Awaysdays opens in UK cinemas on 22 May 2009.

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