

NOWHERE SPECIAL (12A)

Dir. Uberto Pasolini



2020 | 96 mins

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Following his 2013 film *Still Life* **Uberto Pasolini** has been welcomed back to the big screen – with *Nowhere Special*, about a single, terminally ill father (**James Norton**), trying to find the right family for his small son.

The following notes were taken from an interview with Director and Cineuropa at Venice Film Festival 2020.

Cineuropa: Last time we spoke about *Still Life*, you said it was a film about life, not death. Now, you could basically repeat the same thing, couldn't you?

Uberto Pasolini: This film is about accepting death, in a way, but it's about two characters, not just one. The way we go into the story, although not necessarily how we finish it, is from the perspective of

the father, in terms of how to handle what is happening and how to hide what is happening from his son. It's a journey towards understanding his obligations towards him, preparing him for a different future. So yes, it's about life, but death is what makes it important. This is just an extreme example of that, an example I once again found in a newspaper.

You show the absurdity of the adoption process – he has to make the biggest decision in his life based on a short meeting.

You don't know if these prospective parents are putting on a show or having a bad day.

I should emphasise that this situation is quite rare. Normally, whether it's adoption or fostering, the parent is not involved. They have either died or the child has

been taken away, so the decisions are made by the agencies or the social workers. This time, John is involved, but he is dying. His son's mother has left, so the responsibility of making this decision is very much his. It's very strange, very difficult, and I hope this journey reflects it. The way I saw it, at the beginning, he has this clear image of what he wants to offer his child. Then, gradually, he sees that what's *really* good for one's child might not be what he initially thought.

He also has to decide whether he wants his son to know he existed. Even just via a "memory box", where people leave something for their children to remember them by.

It's this notion that, at one point, the child will have a right to know who his biological parents were, and if that desire comes into play, it should be facilitated. It's helping the child, now not a child any more, to understand where he comes from. But when we first encounter this duo, John wants his son to move on. At first, he thinks it's better if he forgets what has happened.

When I discovered this article, I was also interested in why people adopt and the way they get to make these decisions. I read tons of material, interviewed people, and it's like a marriage sometimes – you like somebody or you don't. Of course, they are checked out by the agencies, so they aren't bad people, but they are different people motivated by different reasons.

You seem to be able to elicit very tender performances, first from Eddie Marsan and now from James Norton. How do you go about it?

You just get a great actor [laughs]. And then you opt for a low-key, low-register performance, because I don't like melodrama. By keeping it inside, by making what's dramatic on paper not dramatic on screen, they make it powerful. It's just what I like tonally: I like soft things, which catch you unawares. The more dramatic the situation, the lower the volume I want. The lower it is, the closer you get to the speaker. Things just get under your skin better.

John is more of a listener than a chatterbox, but you give him one scene where he opens up.

Just like with Eddie Marsan's John May [from *Still Life*], these are people who don't express much and who lead, in their own way, solitary lives. One was dedicated to his work, the other to his son. That's where their worlds end, in a way. But then they open up, like in John's search for these parents. In the scene you are referring to, he expresses doubts about his ability to make a decision. It's a very brave thing to do, but it's a moment of desperation: his whole internal drama comes up to the surface. He carries this burden, which gets heavier and heavier, also because he tries to safeguard the soul of his child. If you can share it, then maybe it's easier, but he thinks he can't – not with the person that counts, because of his age and because of the effect it would have on him.

Was it interesting to show a father, rather than a mother, going through something like this?

On the whole, a single parent usually happens to be a woman. Men leave, and women tend to stay, and thank God for that. This situation was particularly unusual because not only did he stay, but he also had no family to rely on. I can relate more easily to men – women are a wonderful mystery to me, even in my old age. It was easier to get inside the head of a father, as I am one, too – of three girls. Some of that experience made its way into the film, I guess.