

# You Are A Lucky Man!

A little zine about an obscure song, a dead gay director, a cult film, an actor who was once the hottest thing on screen, a pretend band, a forgotten songwriter and a shambolic performance at the final event organised by club that probably won't exist by the time that you read this



The future is in your hands, Mr Travis. Take it... now!

## Explanation

O Lucky Man! is a British film, the second in the Mick Travis trilogy (If.... 1968, O Lucky Man! 1973 and Britannia Hospital 1982) directed by Lindsay Anderson and starring Malcolm McDowell. It's a film with music, written and performed by Alan Price and his band.

Television introduced me to Anderson. I saw If.... when I was a little kid and the film was broadcast late at night. I sat and watched it with my dad as he gulped down a Party 7. It took me until I was an adult to understand the film, but as a kid I remember being completely drawn in, and the iconic images from this film have always remained with me.

I first saw O Lucky Man! on TV a few years later when I was a teenager and the scene with the man who has his head fused onto the body of a pig in a hideously misguided medical experiment freaked the shit out of me, not to mention the creepy sex that infuses the film – some aspect of Anderson's gay sexuality? Christ knows. I remember being really glad that I wasn't watching it with my parents.

I've seen it several times since, including one occasion when McDowell talked about it to an audience and Price sang some songs live. It's a film that's become part of my inner self, such as that exists, and it feels like an old friend. Until now I never really thought about why I like this film so much, I've just let it wash over me.

The story is nuts. McDowell starts out as a coffee salesman who finds himself in a series of bizarre events. He remains hopeful, optimistic and ambitious until he gets ground down and finds himself at the start again. The film is about, amongst other things, the idea that life is unpredictable, you can't guarantee success no matter how hard you work, and success and failure are meaningless anyway, just try to

This is Lindsay Anderson as he appears in O Lucky Man!



## O Lucky Man!

If you have a friend on whom you think you can rely, you are a lucky man!  
If you've found the reason to live on and not to die, you are a lucky man!

Preachers and poets and scholars don't know it,  
Temples and statues and steeples won't show it,  
If you've got the secret just try not to blow it, stay a lucky man!

If you've found the meaning of truth in this old world, you are a lucky man!  
If knowledge hangs around your neck like pearls instead of chains, you are a lucky man!

Takers and fakers and talkers won't tell you,  
Teachers and preachers will just buy and sell you,  
When no one can tempt you with heaven or hell, you'll be a lucky man!

You'll be better by far, to be just what you are  
You can be what you want if you are what you are  
And that's a lucky man!

Because on and on and on and on we go,  
Around the world in circles turning,  
Earning what we can  
While others dance away the chance to light your day.

And that's a lucky, a lucky, a lucky man!  
A lucky, a lucky, a lucky man!  
A lucky, a lucky, a lucky man!



be happy in the moment. There's a lot of stuff about colonialism and class and corruption too. It could be a bitter film but it's not, instead it says: here we are, this is life. It's also a very funny film, though the humour is bleak.

Anderson presents the story as a kind of Brechtian parable, with musical interludes and gimmicks that prevent viewers from suspending disbelief. Arthur Lowe in blackface, for example, and Price singing his heart out, looking so great. McDowell is at his finest, jeez, what an actor, he tumbles down a hill, he gets blown up, he runs and dances, he breastfeeds, can do it all! There's a fantastic supporting cast too: Ralph Richardson, Helen Mirren, Dandy Nichols, Bill Owen, Geoffrey Palmer, Brian Glover and more. Actors play multiple characters and Anderson has fun reintroducing actors and characters from If...., his previous film in the trilogy.

One Sunday, a long time ago, Simon and I got up early to catch a morning double bill screening of Zéro de Conduite and L'Atalante at the Lumière Cinema in St Martin's Lane. Anderson was there to introduce the films, explaining that they were amongst his favourites. There were few people in the cavernous cinema, which is now a hotel. Anderson died not long after, in 1994, and I'm still sad that he's gone. If ever Britain needed a filmmaker like him, it is now. Oh well, we'll have to content ourselves with the pictures that he left behind him because a film like O Lucky Man! could never be made today, it's a real piece of time locked and saved for us people of the future to observe. The film's sentiment feels so applicable to the confusing times that we live in.

We're singing these songs because we believe them, because we want to make something together and because we really love them.

Charlotte Cooper



## Changes

Everyone is going through changes  
No one knows what's going on  
And everybody changes places  
But the world still carries on

Love must always change to sorrow  
And everyone must play the game  
It's here today and gone tomorrow  
But the world goes on the same



The drama of *O Lucky Man!* is interspersed with songs that comment on the action, performed in dark rehearsal rooms like this. Characters in the film come and go, Anderson shuffles some papers and acts as though he's giving Price some kind of directorly instruction, the camera makes a circuit of the band. There's a lot of smoke and beer bottles litter surfaces. There are unnamed onlookers, Everyone looks professional and intense.

## The 123s

The 123s are a pretend band consisting of me, Kay Hyatt and Simon Murphy. The three of us are a funny queer family who share each other's lives, and The 123s is a means of doing creative stuff together.

We're a pretend band because we don't really exist outside the time we take to prepare for a performance. We've only ever performed twice (both times at Homocrime), and when we perform we only ever really perform one song, an old song, a song we really love, written by someone else. In addition, we have no intention to hone our craft, or get on the gigging circuit, or become great musicians, or stars, or have a Myspace presence. It's doubtful we'll ever perform any songs that we've written ourselves. We're just imposters, pretending. I don't know if there will be places for us to perform after Nomocrime.

We last performed in 2004, we sung *View From Gay Head*, which is a really ridiculous yet heartfelt song of 1970s lesbian separatism. Although we practised for months, our performance was shambolic. Oh well! Tant pis! People say that they remember it fondly, and that's good enough for us.

So we practise in our basement, we sing badly,, we can hardly play our instruments, the songs we like are obscure and people don't understand why we're singing them, we bicker amongst ourselves sometimes, and we get nervous about performing, but we love doing this; practising and making something together makes us so happy, and we're very glad and grateful to be here.



## Unlucky!

Early in Travis' coffee selling adventure, his faith in the boys in blue is shaken when they threaten to implicate him in a fatal car accident if he refuses to keep quiet about witnessing it. They reward his discretion with a huge cheese ("there you go, chummy...").

This is his first encounter with corruption, and an indication that things aren't going to go exactly as planned. It also illustrates the dark misanthropic sense of humour that shows up in all of Anderson's films. It's not really mean, it's more like an exaggeration of what he saw as the reality of petty, selfish indifference of life in Britain; this also comes across in his diaries and writings.

*Simon Murphy*



## Important Facts for You to Memorise

1. This zine was made for a performance by The 123s at Nomocrime, 3 June 2006 at Barden's Boudoir in Stoke Newington
2. A recording of us singing *O Lucky Man!* is available from [www.homocrime.org](http://www.homocrime.org)
3. This zine was made by Charlotte Cooper. You read more of her writing at [www.CharlotteCooper.net](http://www.CharlotteCooper.net) and you can contact The 123s via [beefergrrl@hotmail.com](mailto:beefergrrl@hotmail.com)
4. If you have some spare money, you should buy the *O Lucky Man!* soundtrack by Alan Price, it is fantastic. *O Lucky Man!* has not been officially released on DVD, though there are bootleg copies around, but there are still VHS copies for sale online, and the script is also available to buy and read.
5. We love Homocrime! Thank you, o excellent Homocrime organisers, for the nights and events you've put on over the years! We will miss you!
6. At the end of the film Travis comes across an open casting for a film, the film he's just been in. Anderson spots him in the crowd and gets him to adopt poses that Travis will later use in *If....* Oh, it's so clever! Anderson orders Travis to smile and, for the first time in the film, Travis is unable to muster his bright, gleaming, optimistic grin. Anderson whacks him over the head and Travis half smiles. You could read anything into this expression but I think it's our hero's dawning realisation that nothing matters, that life goes on, around and round; it's his moment of enlightenment. And now, too, so we must also go on and on...onwards!

