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Special Programs: Discovering

Mike Leigh

If you walk away from this year's Festival having discovered one new talent, let it be Mike Leigh, the brilliant director whose independent films form the cornerstone of a new British cinema but who remains virtually unknown here. One critic has called Mike Leigh the British Ozu, a perverse comparison which somehow fits. His subject is the British lower middle class or working-class family for whom daily life holds only the promise of more daily life, with its kernels of reassurance to ward off total despair. The tyranny of tea time, the torment of chops and sprouts, day in and day out, the allure of the pub and the glow of the telly, the grey sameness of weather and work—the exquisite agony of being British, of being grown-up, and finally, of simply being: this is the world of Mike Leigh.

Having said this, it may sound incongruous to say that Leigh's films are funny, but they are, sad and funny—the more so for being filled with painfully accurate details of dialogue, attitudes, and pacing. Ken Wlaschin has noted Leigh's "bizarre mocking style that bears comparison to Harold Pinter," but there is no patronizing here; Leigh rather anguishes with his creations (in the end, for them), like a minimalist Douglas Sirk.

The films are rooted in experimental theater in that they are the collective creation of a stock company of actors who invent the dialogue based on Leigh's conception; Leigh then hones this dialogue into a script, so that the films themselves, while not improvised, come across as a miracle of spontaneity.

—Judy Bloch

U.S. PREMIERE

Nuts in May

This "holiday film" is about a young city-dwelling couple (Roger Sloman and Alison Steadman) on a "back-to-nature" camping holiday in Dorset. The most popular of Leigh's films, its brilliantly observed comedy is underscored throughout by a touching portrait of

two extremely vulnerable people clinging to each other for comfort in a less than perfect world.

—National Film Theatre, London.

Devised and directed by Mike Leigh. Produced by David Rose. Photo: Michael Williams. Cast: Roger Sloman, Alison Steadman. Production Co./Print Source: BBC-TV, London. 1975, 84 mins.

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U.S. PREMIERE

Grown Ups

Dick and Mandy are young marrieds settling into their first row-house while their neighbors, Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Butcher, are old hands at the marriage game. Dick and Mandy want a baby but instead get Mandy's ubiquitous older sister Gloria, whose normality has reached critical mass and who is now looking for a safe place to explode into babbling idiocy. *Grown Ups* is a surprisingly funny film of postures and squints which build to a ravaging climax in the upstairs hallway, just outside the loo. It has the look of nausea, yet it is a kind film, an almost loving film.

—Judy Bloch

Devised and directed by Mike Leigh. Produced by Louis Marks. Photo: Remi Adefarasin. Cast: Philip Davis, Lesley Manville, Sam Kelly, Lindsay Duncan, Brenda Blethyn, Janine Duvitski. Production Co./Print Source: BBC-TV, London. 1980, 90 mins.

THURS 3/20 FRI 3/21 TUES 3/25

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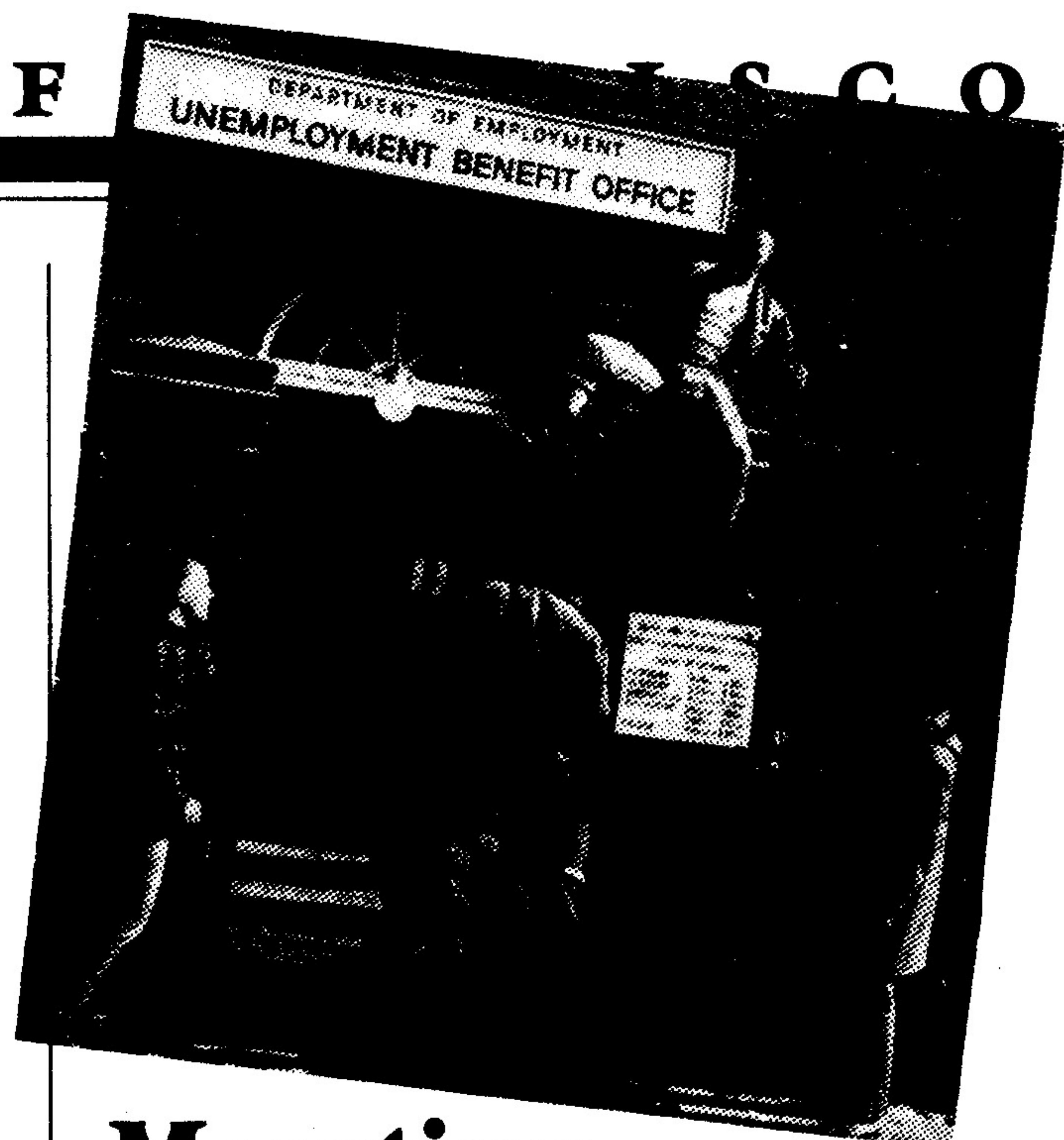
Home Sweet Home

Home Sweet Home, Leigh's melancholy variation on "Postman's Knock" centers on three postmen whose domestic lives on a suburban estate are more loosely (and painfully) entangled than they realize. *Home Sweet Home* has been described by Clive James as "the most daring raid on the inarticulate yet."

—National Film Theatre, London.

Devised and directed by Mike Leigh. Produced by Louis Marks. Photo: Remi Adefarasin. Cast: Eric Richard, Timothy Spaul. Production Co./Print Source: BBC-TV, London. 1981, 90 mins.

SUN 3/23



Meantime

Meantime is the portrait of a London family who share a cramped East End apartment and little else. A standout among an excellent cast is Tim Roth as the simple-minded son Colin, who has gone into his father's line of work—the dole line—while his mother spends her days playing bingo and his cynical older brother, Mark manages to beat him at every turn in an already miserable life.

—Judy Bloch

Devised and directed by Mike Leigh. Produced by Graham Benson. Photo: Roger Pratt. Marion Bailey, Phil Daniels, Tim Roth, Pam Ferris, Jeff Robert, Alfred Molina, Gary Goldman, Tilly Vosburgh. Production Co./Print Source: Central Television, London. 1983, 100 mins.

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Four Days in July

Mike Leigh's pointed drama concerns two couples, one Catholic and one Protestant, living in Belfast. Although near neighbors, they have nothing in common but one thing: the wives are expecting their first babies, which will be born in the same hospital on the same day.

From this simple premise Leigh and his wonderful actors have fashioned a painfully accurate portrait of the divisions of Northern Ireland.

Acting, as in every Leigh film, is beyond praise, and the on-location camerawork in the troubled war-torn city brings the tragedy of Northern Ireland vividly alive.

—David Stratton, *Variety*

Devised and directed by Mike Leigh. Produced by Kenith Trodd. Photo: Remi Adefarasin. Cast: Brid Brennan, Des McAleer, Charles Lawson, Paula Hamilton, Shane Connaughton, Eileen Pollock, Stephen Rea. Production Co./Print Source: BBC-TV, London. 1984, 99 mins.

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