

Peterborough Arts Cinema

Films that make you think

Thursday 24th May at 7:30pm

Film Stars Don't Die in Liverpool (2017)

R | 1h 45min UK/US

Director; Paul McGuigan.

Stars; Annette Bening, Jamie Bell, Julie Walters.

Based on Peter Turner's memoir, the film follows the playful but passionate relationship between Turner (Bell) and the eccentric Academy Award (R)-winning actress Gloria Grahame (Bening) in 1978 Liverpool. What starts as a vibrant affair between a legendary femme fatale and her young lover quickly grows into a deeper relationship, with Turner being the person Gloria turns to for comfort. Their passion and lust for life is tested to the limits by events beyond their control.



Gloria Grahame arrived at the 25th Academy Awards on the verge of superstardom. It was March 19, 1953, and the 29-year-old had spent the previous year melting away a tart-with-a-heart image that took root with the 1944 sex comedy *Blonde Fever* and crystallized with her sultry turn as Violet in *It's a Wonderful Life* with James Stewart. She'd appeared in four major releases in 1952, including a reunion with Stewart in Cecil B. DeMille's *The Greatest Show on Earth* — which ultimately won Best Picture. Her Hollywood peers recognized her arrival as a serious actress, nominating her performance in *The Bad and the Beautiful* for a Supporting Actress Oscar, her second career nod following 1947's *Crossfire*.

Sadly, following her Oscar victory, the beauty Grahame embodied so artfully on screen never reflected the personal turmoil festering under the surface. At 29, she was already two divorces deep into a turbulent romantic life: one from allegedly abusive actor Stanley Clements, the other from boozy *Rebel Without a Cause* director Nicholas Ray, with whom she had a son, Timothy. Her crippling self-doubt had long served as fodder for journalists. Hedda Hopper pegged her “a shy little introvert [who's] so self-conscious it hurts,” while an April 1952 *Los Angeles Times* profile painted her as a helpless worrywart who begged crew members to lambaste her performative flaws on set.

In subsequent years, her image hardened as the mysterious bad girl of noir cinema in films like *The Big Heat* and *Human Desire* — until, in 1954, she began filming the adaptation of Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein's musical *Oklahoma!* as the “girl who can't say no,” Ado Annie, the same year she married writer-producer Cy Howard. “She was pushed and belittled [by the crew] and stumbled her way through because she felt so inadequate doing a musical,” remembers Grahame's niece Vicky Mitchum, claiming it was her aunt's *Oklahoma!* colleagues who instigated a hostile working environment after learning Grahame couldn't carry a tune despite her Academy-verified status. “Everybody told her how horrible she was.” Grahame herself may not have been an innocent party. She allegedly assaulted costars Charlotte Greenwood and Gene Nelson on separate occasions, and purposely stepped on scene partners' lines. Scarred by her *Oklahoma!* experience, Grahame scaled back her work to care for her children in 1955, divorced Howard in 1957, and married former stepson Tony Ray (son of Nicholas) in 1960. Later, when she battled Howard for custody of their daughter, Marianna Paulette, rumours circulated that Grahame had initially seduced Tony when he was just 13 — news that, along with her tarnished professional reputation, made her a Hollywood outcast.

Thus, Grahame dedicated herself to raising her growing family after having two sons with Tony. She popped up as an occasional guest on TV series, and when she found her way back to the big screen, it was on the cult circuit of schlocky exploitation films like *Blood and Lace* (1971) and *Mama's Dirty Girls* (1974). Still, wherever Grahame went, her reputation followed.

Amid the wilted remains of her faded career, however, Grahame's personal life finally began to blossom. She met aspiring actor Peter Turner, nearly three decades her junior, while she was in Britain working on a 1978 production of W. Somerset Maugham's *Rain*, and their whirlwind romance forged a bond that carried through to Grahame's 1981 death at age 57 from cancer-related complications.

