Peterborough Arts Cinema

Films that make you think

Thursday 17th December
7:00pm at Wildwood

Ish

Cert 15 mins UK 2025

Director; Imran Perretta
Stars; Stefan Mihalache, Zubin Varla, Avin Shah

Set and filmed in Luton, Ish follows 12-year-old best friends Ish (Farhan Hasnat) and Maram (Yahya Kitana), who wrestle to hold onto their friendship in the wake of a police stop and search. As the ripples take hold, the boys try to make sense of the men they are becoming – and how letting go can be the hardest part of growing up



The Guardian Interview Imran Perretta

The similarity to other coming-of-age films with three letters in the title: Kes by Ken Loach, and Satyajit Ray's Apu trilogy is being noted. As the reviews trickle in, the comparisons to Kes and Apu keep coming. Like them, Ish is a poetic film that grabs you by the heart and pulls you into a child's perspective on the world.

"It's nice that people have compared Ish to those films rather than Kidulthood. I did worry about that." Why, because it features kids speaking in slang and getting into scrapes? He nods. "I always say that I don't read reviews, but of course I've read every single one. I can't help myself. And we've been really lucky; the reviews have been amazing. A couple have been middling. Then you read them, and the subtext is: 'I thought it was going to be like Kidulthood.'"

Imran grew up in Streatham, south London, the son of a British Italian dad who worked as a music journalist. His mother, who was born in Bangladesh, was a child protection social worker: "She was super political, a firebrand." She died from cancer when he was 21. Perretta studied architecture for three years, before switching to art. During Covid in 2020, when the Turner prize was cancelled, he was one of 10 artists to receive £10,000 bursaries. But it never crossed his mind that he could direct a film, he says: "Not in a million years did I think I would ever get to do that. That's something that happens to other people." It was the head of BBC Film at the time, Rose Garnett, who approached him to write a film treatment after seeing The Destructors at a gallery in London.

Ish is partly autobiographical, based on the first time Perretta was stopped and searched by police aged 13. This was in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks in a climate of increasing Islamophobia. "My mate got away. They pulled me into a van and just started asking me loads of weird questions," he remembers. "I was so young, I didn't really understand what was going on. It was incredibly traumatic. That was 100% the moment in my childhood when I lost my innocence. Because I understood how I was seen outside my family home, outside school, outside the community, all these protected spaces. In that moment, I understood I was seen as a deviant or some sort of threat."

It politicised him, says Perretta. "That kind of made me. From that point I had something to make work about. If I look at everything I've done for years, making work that is viewed by the public on the walls of a gallery or whatever, it all comes from that moment of seeing oneself as other people see you." He co-wrote Ish with the Irish playwright and scriptwriter Enda Walsh.

Ish was shot in Luton over five weeks in the summer of 2024. Perretta's wife, a secondary school teacher, grew up down the road, and he has been visiting the area for years. Perretta says that commuter towns take a lot of stick. Luton in particular has frequently been in the news for negative reasons, as the home town of Stephen Yaxley-Lennon (AKA Tommy Robinson) or labelled as a centre of Islamic extremism. "But at the heart of it was just a community going about their business," he says.

He shot the film in luminous monochrome. Why, I ask? "What I figured is black and white didn't negatively aesthetise Luton. It gave it grandeur. It made the concrete feel like marble. When you shot in colour, you immediately felt the fact that it had been at the sharp end of austerity."