

MIKE LEIGH



IN FOCUS

Week Eight

Welcome to *Mike Leigh In Focus*

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Another study in contrasts this week, between two perhaps less celebrated (by the wider audience) Mike Leigh features in 2008's *Happy-Go-Lucky* and 2010's *Another Year*.

The first is that rarest of celluloid explorations – that of an unironically happy character, played with gusto by Sally Hawkins. The second takes on the relationship of an older married couple, over the course of – appropriately – a single year.

There are numerous Mike Leigh hallmarks in both films as well as many of his regulars coming back to play once again.

But there is a sense of growth in these two films that belies the – on the surface – smaller canvases on which they're painted, by comparison to the *big issues* of, for instance, *Vera Drake*.

These are personal stories – as so many of the films have been - but told with the accomplishment of a director with several decades of experience under his belt and with some new questions to ask.

Happy, in particular, is a fascinating experiment. We spend our lives in pursuit of happiness, but the reaction by some segments of the audience (and the other characters) to Sally Hawkin's Poppy is a curious one.

Her consistent chirpiness to some is relentless chirpiness to others, her optimism either a salve or an irritant.

It's a secondary layer to the film that forces us to examine our own perceptions, just as keenly as *Meantime* or *All or Nothing*. It's just done in a very different way. Post *Hard Truths*, in fact, it forms the flipside to the more recent film, with its intently pessimistic protagonist.

Another Year too, with the older characters at its centre, has its own preconceptions to prick. Which would seem to be the overarching theme of this period of Leigh's filmmaking.

FILMS – WEEK EIGHT

Happy-Go-Lucky (2008)

Another Year (2010)

SUGGESTED READING

Mike Leigh on Mike Leigh

Amy Raphael and Mike Leigh

Mike Leigh: Interviews

Howie Movshovitz