

**A Taste of Honey [12]** 1961|UK|101 min

Thrown out by their Salford landlady, Helen and her schoolgirl daughter Jo escape through the basement window and take another dingy furnished room. Helen immediately speeds off to meet her latest boyfriend Peter, leaving Jo alone. Wandering by the dockyards, Jo meets Jimmy, a coloured sailor. Helen, meanwhile, has decided to marry Peter. Jo spends the night with Jimmy; the next day he leaves with his ship. Helen drives off with her florid new husband to the bungalow he has bought. Jo finds herself a job and moves into a big bare room of her own. She takes up with Geoffrey, a homeless, sisterly young homosexual, who moves in and takes over the cooking, cleaning and decoration. When Jo discovers that she is to have Jimmy's baby, Geoffrey does his best to look after her. Abandoned by her husband, Helen comes back to Jo as relentlessly self-absorbed as ever. She drives Geoffrey out of the home he has made, and Jo and her mother face each other in a room that suddenly seems as bleak as all the others they have known.

UK release date	<b>15<sup>th</sup> September 1961</b>
Director	<b>Tony Richardson</b>
Screenplay	<b>Shelagh Delaney, Tony Richardson</b>
Cinematographer	<b>Walter Lassally</b>
Cast	<b>Rita Tushingham (Jo); Dora Bryan (Helen); Murray Melvin (Geoffrey); Robert Stephens (Peter); Paul Danquah (Jimmy)</b>

A Taste of Honey arrives with an advance, theatre-made reputation exceeded only by that of Woodfall's two John Osborne adaptations. It is remarkable that so shapeless, slender and unpretentious a film manages almost completely to stand up to this reputation. But then in some ways it is a realisation rather than an adaptation of Shelagh Delaney's play, with the music-hall mannerisms of the stage production largely removed and the locale vividly filled in. The film has the advantage of some lived-in non-studio settings by Ralph Brinton, and the script, though it misses a little of the verbal richness and precision of the original, achieves a warm feeling for relationships. Murray Melvin's wistful homosexual, with his pinched, troubled face and nervous kindness, and Dora Bryan's restless, casually effusive Helen, her broad shapeless features occasionally clouded by bitter self-awareness, could hardly be bettered. Rita Tushingham's Jo lacks technical accomplishment but makes up for it with a spirited North Country protest and grave, haunting eyes which express exactly that bleak independence, the sudden snatching after ephemeral happiness in the midst of drab hopelessness, which is at the core of the play.

Tony Richardson's direction, though geared throughout to the right mood, has not quite the rhythm and poetry to carry it through. His Blackpool fairground sequences are obviously handled along lines familiar from his previous films; and there is still too much putting-on of style (crowds of singing or playing children) as opposed to the natural lyricism of the sailor's leavetaking in silhouetted long-shot on the bridge. Certain passages are unnecessarily abrupt, while seem either dragged-out on the one hand or inconsequential and irrelevant on the other. But these remain minor considerations in the light of the simple, fresh appeal of the whole. A Taste of Honey, tart and lively around the edges and bitter at the core, is Richardson's best film to date.

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Coming Soon....

**Sanctuary (15)** – Monday 14<sup>th</sup> May  
**3 Billboards Outside Ebbing Missouri (15)** – Monday 21<sup>st</sup> May  
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## Tony Richardson (1928 – 1991)

For some ten years, from the mid-Fifties to the mid-Sixties, the influence of Tony Richardson on the performing arts in Britain was unrivalled. In 1956, he and George Devine set up the English Stage Company, based at the Royal Court Theatre, where Richardson staged John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, *The Entertainer* and *Luther*, as well as plays by Brecht, Ionesco and Tennessee Williams, transforming the face of British theatre. At the same time he was a prime mover, with Lindsay Anderson and Karel Reisz, of the Free Cinema documentary movement.

In 1958, Richardson and Osborne founded Woodfall Films, the company that was to produce most of the key films of the British New Wave. In 1962 his marriage to Vanessa Redgrave allied him with one of England's leading acting dynasties, and the following year he directed *Tom Jones*, among the most profitable British Films ever made. Its success brought Hollywood capital flooding into the British film industry and inaugurated the mythical era of Swinging London.

He was born in Yorkshire, the son of a pharmacist, and started directing plays while still at Oxford. After a stint at the BBC, he co-directed (with Karel Reisz) **Momma Don't Allow** (1955), a documentary short about young working-class Londoners at a trad jazz club. Together with films by Lindsay Anderson and Lorenza Mazzetti, it was included in the first Free Cinema programme at the National Film Theatre.

Richardson's first two feature films were adaptations of Osborne plays he had directed on stage: **Look Back in Anger** (1959) and **The Entertainer** (1960). Neither did well at the box office. To raise funds for his next project, a film version of Shelagh Delaney's play *A Taste of Honey*, which he had directed on Broadway, Richardson took on a Hollywood assignment. **Sanctuary** (1960), adapted from William Faulkner's novel, proved "a nightmare from beginning to end", and Richardson returned vowing never again to make a studio-based film. From now on, whenever humanly possible, he would shoot entirely on location.

This approach worked well for the realism of **A Taste of Honey** (1961), with its Salford settings, and for **The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner** (1962). But the critics were tiring of grim northern streets, and so was Richardson. As his 'holiday film' he chose Fielding's classic novel *Tom Jones*, shooting in colour with funding from Universal. Starring Albert Finney in roguish form, and packed with modish camera trickery, the film scored a massive international box office hit.

Returning to Hollywood on his own terms, Richardson directed an adaptation of Evelyn Waugh's black humour classic **The Loved One** (1965), followed by two films starring Jeanne Moreau, **Madmoiselle** (1966) and **The Sailor from Gibraltar** (1967), neither of which were critical or commercial successes. **The Charge of the Light Brigade** (1968), a swingeing assault on hidebound British institutions in the guise of a costume drama, proved something of a return to form, and the action was marvellously enhanced by Richard Williams' brilliant linking animated sections.

During the last two decades of his life, Richardson directed a dozen more films in a wide range of genres. These included a Nabokov adaptation, **Laughter in the Dark** (1969); **Ned Kelly** (1970), with Mick Jagger in the title role; **Dead Cat** (1974), a Dick Francis thriller; and **Joseph Andrews** (1977), and attempt to repeat his *Tom Jones* triumph with another Fielding-based romp. Some of his American films were critically acclaimed, notably **The Border** (1982), with Jack Nicholson as a conscience-tormented cop on the Tex-Mex frontier, and **The Hotel New Hampshire** (1984), which caught something of John Irving's sprawling, polysexual family saga. Richardson's last film, **Blue Sky** (1994), delayed and only released after his death, featured outstanding performances from Jessica Lange and Tommy Lee Jones and earned him the best reviews he had enjoyed for years.

From **A Taste of Honey** film notes - BFI