

Back to Black (film)

Back to Black is a 2024 biographical drama film based on the life of British singer-songwriter Amy Winehouse, played by Marisa Abela. Directed by Sam Taylor-Johnson and written by Matt Greenhalgh, the film also stars Jack O'Connell, Eddie Marsan, and Lesley Manville.

Following the death of Winehouse in July 2011, several filmmakers attempted to create biopic projects but none of them progressed. In 2018, Winehouse's estate announced they had signed a deal for a film about her life and career. By July 2022, StudioCanal moved forward with production, and filming took place in London from January to April 2023.

The film was released theatrically by StudioCanal in Australia on 11 April 2024, and was released in the United Kingdom on 12 April 2024. Focus Features released the film in the United States on 17 May 2024. It received mixed reviews from critics and grossed \$42 million worldwide.

Plot

The film opens with scenes of Amy Winehouse's Jewish family background, her father Mitch and her grandmother "Nan" Cynthia, with their love for music and singing. Amy's friend Tyler hands his manager Nick a demo tape of Amy's recording and is impressed by her talent. She then signs a contract with Island Records and releases her first album, Frank.

After enjoying acclaimed success, her record label wish to alter some changes with her stage act, which Amy strongly disagrees with. Amy then reveals she needs time off to live her songs, and then meets Blake in a pub in Camden Town where they fall in love. Their relationship is soon troubled by Blake's cocaine addiction, Amy's alcoholism and her bulimia. After experiencing Amy's irritable behaviour, Blake reveals he thinks they would be better as friends and wants to work on things with his ex-girlfriend Becky, which leaves Amy heartbroken. Before going to New York City, she learns her grandmother is dying of lung cancer. After a difficult period of these traumatising events all happening at once, she then gathers inspiration to write her hit album Back to Black.

Back to Black



US theatrical release poster

Directed by	<u>Sam Taylor-Johnson</u>
Screenplay by	<u>Matt Greenhalgh</u>
Produced by	<u>Alison Owen</u> <u>Debra Hayward</u> <u>Nicky Kentish-Barnes</u>
Starring	<u>Marisa Abela</u> <u>Jack O'Connell</u> <u>Eddie Marsan</u> <u>Lesley Manville</u>
Cinematography	<u>Polly Morgan</u>
Edited by	<u>Martin Walsh</u> <u>Laurence Johnson</u>
Music by	<u>Nick Cave</u> <u>Warren Ellis</u>
Production companies	<u>Monumental</u>

Blake and Amy reconcile shortly after the release of her second album. They get married in Miami, Florida, much to Mitch's dismay. But soon after, Blake is arrested and then serves a two year-sentence in jail for perverting the course of justice. Before he is released and Amy has now become a drug addict, Blake reveals he has been having counselling and informs Amy that he wishes to divorce as he wants a fresh start.

After various blackouts, Amy decides to accept "rehab". She later receives five Grammy Awards. A last scene shows her new home in Camden Square, where Amy is now clean of drugs and trying to tackle her alcohol dependance. After saying goodbye to her father Mitch for the final time, the paparazzi appear outside her gate and reveal that Blake has a new girlfriend and will be having a baby. The film concludes with a tearful Amy singing "Tears Dry on Their Own" to herself and finishes with her walking up the stairs to her bedroom.

Cast

- Marisa Abela as Amy Winehouse
- Jack O'Connell as Blake Fielder-Civil
- Eddie Marsan as Mitch Winehouse
- Juliet Cowan as Janis Winehouse
- Lesley Manville as Cynthia Winehouse
- Sam Buchanan as Nick Shymansky
- Pete Lee-Wilson as Perfume Pete
- Thelma Ruby as Great Auntie Renee
- Matilda Thorpe as Auntie Melody
- Ryan O'Doherty as Chris Taylor
- Spike Fearn as Tyler James
- Harley Bird as Juliette Ashby
- Francesca Henry as Chantelle Dusette
- Liv Longbourne as Catriona Gourlay
- Bronson Webb as Joey the dealer
- Ansu Kabia as Raye Cosbert
- Miltos Yerolemou as Jimmy

Production

Development

After the death of Winehouse in 2011, filmmakers attempted to create a feature biopic with various projects, including one in 2015 with Noomi Rapace attached to star, but none moved forward.^[5] In October 2018, it was announced that Winehouse's estate had signed a deal to make a biopic about her life and career.^[6] In

	<div><div><div></div><div><u>Pictures</u></div></div><div><div></div><div><u>StudioCanal</u></div></div></div>
Distributed by	<div><div><div>StudioCanal</div><div>(United Kingdom)</div></div><div><div><u>Focus Features</u></div><div>(United States)</div></div></div>
Release dates	<div><div>12 April 2024</div><div>(United Kingdom)</div></div> <div><div>17 May 2024</div><div>(United States)</div></div>
Running time	122 minutes ^[1]
Countries	<div><div>United Kingdom</div><div>United States^[2]</div></div>
Language	English
Box office	\$42 million ^[3] ^[4]

July 2022, *Deadline Hollywood* reported that [StudioCanal](#) was moving forward with a feature film entitled *Back to Black*. [Sam Taylor-Johnson](#) directed from a script by [Matt Greenhalgh](#).^[5] [Alison Owen](#) and [Debra Hayward](#) produced under their [Monumental Pictures](#) banner, alongside [Nicky Kentish-Barnes](#).^[7]

Casting

In January 2023, it was reported that [Marisa Abela](#) would star as Winehouse, and [Jack O'Connell](#), [Eddie Marsan](#) and [Lesley Manville](#) were also cast.^{[8][9]} O'Connell portrays [Blake Fielder-Civil](#), Amy's husband from 2007 to 2009.^[9] Marsan and Manville play Amy's father and grandmother, [Mitch Winehouse](#) and [Cynthia Winehouse](#), respectively.^[9] [Juliet Cowan](#) portrays Amy's mother, [Janis Winehouse](#). [Nina Gold](#) served as casting director.^[7]

Filming

Principal photography took place in London from January to April 2023, with [Polly Morgan](#) serving as cinematographer.^{[2][10]} Scenes were filmed at [Ronnie Scott's Jazz Club](#), outside Winehouse's first flat in [Camden Town](#), and at [Primrose Hill](#).^{[11][12]} In February, scenes were shot inside the [Metropolis Studios](#) in [Chiswick](#).^[13] From 13 March to 18 March, production moved to [Fitzrovia](#) to film scenes at the [Fitzroy Square](#).^[14] The following week Abela and O'Connell shot scenes at [London Zoo](#).^[15]

Music

Back to Black features many of Winehouse's songs from [Universal Music Group](#) and [Sony Music Publishing](#).^[2] with Abela's vocals throughout the film.^[16] [Nick Cave](#) and [Warren Ellis](#) scored the film, while [Giles Martin](#) served as the music producer.^[17]

In March 2024, a compilation soundtrack of Winehouse's original recordings was announced along with tracks from her inspirations such as [Dinah Washington](#), [Minnie Riperton](#) and [the Shangri-Las](#). Their voices are featured in the film. A new song from Nick Cave, "Song for Amy", will be included.^[18]

Release

Originally scheduled to be released by [StudioCanal](#) in Australia on 18 April 2024, the film's release there was moved forward by a week to 11 April.^[19] The film was respectively released by [StudioCanal UK](#) and [Kino Swiat](#) in the UK and Poland on 12 April 2024, followed by Germany and the Netherlands on 18 April, and France and New Zealand the following week.^[20]

[Focus Features](#) purchased the US and some international distribution rights for \$20 million, which according to *Deadline Hollywood* limited the film marketing.^[21] Its parent company [Universal Pictures](#) handled some international distribution, excluding territories where StudioCanal or its affiliates have rights to the film.^[2] Focus Features originally scheduled the film to be released in the US on 10 May 2024, but that release date was subsequently moved a week later.^{[22][7]}

Reception

Box office

As of 21 May 2024, *Back to Black* has grossed \$3.5 million in the United States and Canada and \$38.5 million in other territories, for a worldwide total of \$42 million.^{[3][4]}

Back to Black debuted at number one in the UK and Ireland with £2.77 million (\$3.4 million), ahead of *Civil War*.^[23]

In the United States and Canada, *Back to Black* was released alongside *IF* and *The Strangers: Chapter 1*, and was projected to gross \$4–6 million from 2,008 theaters in its opening weekend.^[24] The film made \$1.2 million on its first day (\$375,000 from Thursday night previews), and went on to debut to \$2.9 million, finishing in fifth.^[21]

Critical response

On the review aggregator website *Rotten Tomatoes*, 35% of 151 critics' reviews are positive, with an average rating of 4.7/10. The website's consensus reads: "*Back to Black*'s sympathetic approach to its subject's story is an overdue antidote to the tabloid treatment she often received in life, even if the end results are disappointingly pedestrian."^[25] *Metacritic*, which uses a *weighted average*, assigned the film a score of 43 out of 100, based on 41 critics, indicating "mixed or average" reviews.^[26] Audiences polled by *CinemaScore* gave the film an average grade of "B+" on an A+ to F scale.^[21]

Variety's Owen Gleiberman found that "Sam Taylor-Johnson's jazz-meets-rock-star drama exerts an authentic fascination, even as its dysfunctional-addict love story keeps us at a distance".^[27] Nick Levine of *NME* also rated *Back to Black* four out of five, stating "This film was always going to face accusations of being exploitative – given the way Winehouse was scrutinised when she was alive – but the naysayers needn't have worried. Taylor-Johnson's film (particularly the ending) is impressively deft and delicate".^[28]

Hamish Macbain of the *Evening Standard* was critical of the film, writing "The final scene, in particular, with its completely and utterly baseless, sensationalist implications, made me physically gasp in horror".^[29] Charlotte O'Sullivan of *The Independent* gave the film a score of two out of five, stating that "Despite strong performances from Marisa Abela and Jack O'Connell as the late icon and her one-time husband Blake Fielder-Civil, Sam Taylor-Johnson's controversial film tiptoes around judging anyone who isn't part of the paparazzi – Blake and Amy's father Mitch get off scot-free".^[30] Vikram Murthi writing for *IndieWire* concluded "The palpable sincerity behind *Back to Black* almost makes its myriad weaknesses more glaring. Everyone involved in the film approaches the late artist with love and respect, but its tawdry instincts and misguided sense of responsibility let her memory down. Its refusal to delve into the ugly realities of addiction or pop stardom generates a vague portrait of a lost girl in need of saving".^[31]

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External links

- Official website (<https://www.studiocanal.com/title/back-to-black-2024>) at StudioCanal
 - Official website (<https://www.focusfeatures.com/back-to-black>)  at Focus Features
 - *Back to Black* (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt21261712/>) at IMDb
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