

The Personal History of David Copperfield

The Personal History of David Copperfield is a 2019 comedy-drama film written and directed by Armando Iannucci, based on the 1850 novel <u>David Copperfield</u> by <u>Charles Dickens</u>. It stars <u>Dev Patel</u> as the <u>title character</u>, along with <u>Aneurin Barnard</u>, <u>Peter Capaldi</u>, <u>Morfydd Clark</u>, <u>Daisy May Cooper</u>, <u>Rosalind Eleazar</u>, <u>Hugh Laurie</u>, <u>Tilda Swinton</u>, <u>Ben Whishaw</u> and <u>Paul Whitehouse</u>.

The world premiere was at the <u>Toronto International Film Festival</u> on September 5, 2019 and was theatrically released in the United Kingdom on January 24, 2020 by <u>Lionsgate</u> and in the United States on August 28, 2020 by <u>Searchlight Pictures. [6][7]</u>

Plot

<u>David Copperfield</u> is born to his widowed mother, Clara, and begins saving noteworthy quotes from his life on scraps of paper. As a child, he visits his nanny <u>Peggotty</u>'s family in their upturned boathouse in <u>Yarmouth</u> and returns to find Clara has married the strict <u>Mr. Murdstone</u>. Bullied by his new step-aunt and beaten by his stepfather, David is sent to work in Murdstone's bottling factory in London, where he lodges with the Micawber family, who are always cheerful but pursued by their creditors.

As a young man, David still works at the factory, while the Micawbers are evicted by bailiffs and sent to <u>debtors' prison</u>. Informed of his mother's death only after her funeral, David wreaks havoc in the factory and departs for <u>Dover</u> to find his wealthy aunt <u>Betsey Trotwood</u>, his only living relative. Her lodger, the eccentric <u>Mr. Dick</u>, believes himself to be burdened with the late <u>King Charles I's</u> thoughts and, like David, jots them down. David attaches these notes to a kite for Mr. Dick to fly, helping clear his mind, and meets Betsey's accountant Mr. Wickfield (who likes his wine) and his daughter Agnes.

Admitted to a school for boys, David is befriended by classmate <u>James Steerforth</u>, who calls him Daisy and believes him to be a gentleman. Later, a butcher's lad mocks the two friends and David challenges him to a fight - David gets knocked out. Agnes tends to his wounds but David disappoints her by saying

The Personal History of David Copperfield



U.K. theatrical release poster

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Directed by	Armando Iannucci			
Screenplay by	Simon Blackwell			
	Armando Iannucci			
Based on	David Copperfield			
	by Charles Dickens			
Produced by	Armando Iannucci			
	Kevin Loader			
Starring	Dev Patel			
	Aneurin Barnard			
	Peter Capaldi			
	Morfydd Clark			
	Daisy May Cooper			
	Rosalind Eleazar			
	Hugh Laurie			
	Tilda Swinton			
	Ben Whishaw			
	Paul Whitehouse			
Cinematography	Zac Nicholson			
Edited by	Mick Audsley			
	Peter Lambert			
Music by	Christopher Willis			
Production	FilmNation			
companies	Entertainment			
	Littertailinent			
	Film4			

he thinks of her as a sister. Mr. Micawber briefly joins the school as a teacher, but is exposed by Steerforth as a former convict and fired. Mr. Wickfield's clerk Uriah Heep, who has previously been mocked by the boys, tries to blackmail David with knowledge of his past. At a farewell party at school, David meets Steerforth's mother, ignores his future employer, and falls in love with a somewhat ditsy girl named Dora Spenlow. He is hired as a trainee lawyer with Dora's father's firm in London, where he lives the life of a "young gentleman" and courts Dora.

Betsey arrives in London with Mr. Dick, having lost her fortune and home, and David is forced to decamp with them to a slum dwelling offered by Uriah, who has been keeping Mr. Wickfield drunk and persuaded him to make him a partner. Uriah is also courting Agnes. David visits Pegotty's family in their boat-house with Steerforth, who runs away with Pegotty's adopted daughter Emily, leaving her longtime fiancé Ham. Mr. Micawber now lives on the streets with his family and has pawned his beloved concertina, which he asks Mr. Dick to buy back. Instead, Mr. Dick steals it for him, and David invites the Micawbers to move in with him, Betsey, and Mr. Dick.

Distributed by	Lionsgate (United Kingdom) Searchlight Pictures (North America)
Release dates	September 5, 2019 (TIFF) January 24, 2020 (United Kingdom) August 28, 2020 (United States)
Running time	119 minutes $^{[1]}$
Countries	United Kingdom United States
Language	English
Budget	\$15.6 million ^[2]
Box office	\$14.4 million ^{[3][4]}

David begins to write the story of his life as a book, using the fragments he has saved since childhood. Agnes asks David, Micawber, Betsey, and Mr. Dick for a letter written by Mr. Wickfield as evidence of Uriah's misdeeds. They confront Uriah, who has been embezzling funds — including Betsey's missing fortune — by forging Mr. Wickfield's signature, presenting the letter as proof. David punches Uriah after the villainous clerk strikes Betsey, and dismisses him. Recognising that she no longer fits in David's "story", Dora calls off their engagement, asking him to write her out of his book.

Emily is spotted in London and confronted by Steerforth's mother, but rescued by David and Pegotty's family. She reveals that Steerforth abandoned her in France, but he will return the following day to Yarmouth. When a storm wrecks Steerforth's boat off the Yarmouth beach, Ham swims out on a line, but Steerforth refuses to be rescued and is drowned. Mourning his feckless friend's death, David realises he is in love with Agnes, who reciprocates. He publishes his book to great success, performing <u>public readings</u> of his story. His new career as a writer allows him to buy back Betsey's home for her and Mr. Dick and continue to support the Micawbers, and he and Agnes marry and have a daughter.

Cast

- Dev Patel as David Copperfield
 - Ranveer Jaiswal as 4–7-year-old David
- Peter Capaldi as Mr. Micawber
- Hugh Laurie as Mr. Dick
- Tilda Swinton as Betsey Trotwood
- Ben Whishaw as Uriah Heep
- Benedict Wong as Mr. Wickfield
- Gwendoline Christie as Jane Murdstone

- Aneurin Barnard as James Steerforth
- Morfydd Clark as Dora Spenlow / Clara Copperfield
- Daisy May Cooper as Peggotty
- Rosalind Eleazar as Agnes Wickfield
- Paul Whitehouse as Mr. Peggotty
- Nikki Amuka-Bird as Mrs. Steerforth
- Darren Boyd as Edward Murdstone
- Matthew Cottle as Mr. Spenlow
- Bronagh Gallagher as Mrs. Micawber
- Anthony Welsh as Ham Peggotty
- Aimee Kelly as Emily
- Anna Maxwell Martin as Mrs. Strong
- Victor McGuire as Creakle
- Peter Singh as Tungay
- Ruby Bentall as Janet
- Divian Ladwa as Dr. Chillip
- Rosaleen Linehan as Mrs. Gummidge
- Sophie McShera as Mrs. Crupp

Production

It was announced in February 2018 that <u>Armando Iannucci</u> would write, direct and produce a new adaptation of the <u>Charles Dickens</u> novel. Iannucci wrote the screenplay with <u>Simon Blackwell</u>, [8] <u>Dev Patel</u> was cast in the title role later that month. [9] In April, the supporting cast was added, which included <u>Tilda Swinton</u>, <u>Hugh Laurie</u>, <u>Aneurin Barnard</u>, <u>Ben Whishaw</u> and <u>Morfydd Clark</u>. [10] In May 2018, <u>Peter Capaldi</u> was cast as Mr. Micawber and pre-production was underway. [11]



Filming took place in Bury St Edmunds in July 2018

Filming began in June 2018 in <u>Norfolk</u> and Suffolk, with Gwendoline Christie, Benedict

Wong, Paul Whitehouse and Daisy May Cooper joining the cast. [12][13] Scenes were shot in Hull, [14][15] Bury St Edmunds, [16] Weybourne and King's Lynn in July. [18][19] Aimee Kelly was added to the cast that month. [20] Principal photography concluded in August 2018. [21] It was the first theatrical film production of Dickens's novel in 50 years, and the first on-screen adaptation in 19 years. [22]

Release

The film had its world premiere at the <u>Toronto International Film Festival</u> on 5 September 2019, [23] followed by its European premiere on 2 October 2019, acting as the opening film of the 63rd <u>BFI London Film Festival</u>. It was the Surprise Film at the 39th <u>Cambridge Film Festival</u>. It was released in the United Kingdom by <u>Lionsgate</u> on 24 January 2020. [25] In August 2019, Fox Searchlight Pictures acquired North

American rights to the film and scheduled the release on 8 May 2020. However, due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on cinema and the name *Searchlight Pictures* which was changed by Disney, it was theatrically released later on 28 August 2020. [28]

Reception

Box office

Although it received critical acclaim, *The Personal History of David Copperfield* underperformed at the box office, as its North American release came during the <u>COVID-19 pandemic</u>, when many cinemas were restricted from opening. [29]

In the United Kingdom, it took \$2m in its first week and a total gross of around \$8 million by the start of March, when the pandemic began to affect cinemas. In the United States, it debuted \$520,000 from 1,360 cinemas in August; playing in 1,550 cinemas the following weekend it fell 24% to \$361,000. It went in to gross \$1.9 million in the United States and Canada, and \$12.5 million in the rest of the world, for a worldwide total of \$14.4 million $\frac{[30]}{}$ against a production budget of \$15.6 million.

Critical response

On <u>review aggregator</u> website <u>Rotten Tomatoes</u>, the film holds an approval rating of 92% based on 248 reviews, with an average rating of 7.6/10. The website's critics consensus reads: "*The Personal History of David Copperfield* puts a fresh, funny, and utterly charming spin on Dickens' classic, proving some stories truly are timeless." On <u>Metacritic</u>, the film has a weighted average score of 77 out of 100, based on 39 critics, indicating "generally favourable reviews". <u>[32]</u> <u>PostTrak</u> reported that 74% of audience members gave the film a positive score, with 50% saying they would recommend it. <u>[33]</u>

Writing for $\underline{\textit{The Observer}}$, $\underline{\textit{Mark Kermode}}$ awarded the film a full five stars and stated: "It really is a wonderfully entertaining film, managing to both respect and reinvent the novel from which it takes its lead." [34]

Accolades

Award	Date of ceremony	Category	Recipient(s)	Result	Ref.
		Best British Independent Film	Armando Iannucci, Simon Blackwell & Kevin Loader	Nominated	[35][36]
		Best Actor	Dev Patel	Nominated	
		Best Supporting Actor	Hugh Laurie	Won	
		Best Supporting Actress	Tilda Swinton	Nominated	
		Best Screenplay	Armando Iannucci and Simon Blackwell	Won	
British Independent Film Awards	1 December 2019	Best Casting	Sarah Crowe	Won	
		Best Cinematography	Zac Nicholson	Nominated	
		Best Costume Design	Suzie Harman and Robert Worley	Won	
		Best Editing	Mick Audsley and Peter Lambert	Nominated	
		Best Make Up & Hair Design	Karen Hartley-Thomas	Nominated	
		Best Production Design	Cristina Casali	Won	1
London Film Week 1 December 2019	1 December	Best Film	Armando Iannucci	Nominated	
		Best Screenplay	Armando Iannucci and Simon Blackwell	Won	
British Academy Film Awards	2 February 2020	Best Casting	Sarah Crowe	Nominated	
Boulder International Film Festival Awards	5 March 2020	Best Feature Film	Armando Iannucci	Won	
European Film Awards	12 December 2020	Best Production Designer	Cristina Casali	Won	
St. Louis Film Critics Association Awards		Best Production Design	Cristina Casali	Nominated	
Satellite Awards	15 February 2021	Best Motion Picture – Comedy or Musical		Nominated	[37]
		Best Actor in a Motion Picture – Comedy or Musical	Dev Patel	Nominated	
		Best Costume Design	Suzie Harman and Robert Worley	Won	

		Best Art Direction and Production Design	Cristina Casali and Charlotte Dirickx	Nominated	
Golden Globe Awards	28 February 2021	Best Actor in a Motion Picture – Musical Comedy	Dev Patel	Nominated	[38]
1.0.1711000.00	5 March 2021	Best Comedy/Musical		Nominated	[39][40]
		Best Costume Design	Suzie Harman and Robert Worley	Won	
		Best Production Design	Cristina Casali	Nominated	
Critics' Choice Movie Awards	7 March 2021	Best Costume Design	Suzie Harman and Robert Worley	Nominated	[41]
		Best Production Design	Cristina Casali and Charlotte Dirickx	Nominated	11
Casting Society of America	15 April 2021	Feature Big Budget – Comedy	Sarah Crowe	Nominated	[42]

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External links

- Official website (https://www.searchlightpictures.com/thepersonalhistoryofdavidcopperfield/)
- The Personal History of David Copperfield (https://www.imdb.com/title/tt6439020/) at IMDb
- *The Personal History of David Copperfield* (https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the_personal _history_of_david_copperfield) at Rotten Tomatoes
- The Personal History of David Copperfield (https://www.metacritic.com/movie/the-personal-h istory-of-david-copperfield) at Metacritic

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