



REFUGEE WEEK PREVIEW

Name Me Lawand

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Director: Edward Lovelace

©: Lawand Film Limited, Pulse Films, ESC Studios,
British Film Institute

a Pulse Films production

This film was made with and for:

The Royal School for the Deaf in Derby

Presented by: BFI Doc Society Fund, Pulse Films,
Electric Shadow Company

Executive Producers: Tim O'Shea, Thomas Benski,
Diene Petterle, Lisa Marie Russo, Kwesi Dickson,
Isabel Freer

Produced by: Fleur Nieddu

Producers: Sam Arnold, Beyan Taher,
Neil Andrews, Marisa Clifford, Edward Lovelace

Line Producer: Lottie Allen

Written by: Edward Lovelace

Director of Photography: Ben Fordesman

VFX: FrameStore

Edited by: David Charap, Shahnaz Dulaimy,
Michael Nollet, David Whitakker

Film Titles by: Lucia Garcia

Colourist: Matthieu Toullet

Original Score by: Tom Hodge

End Credit Music by: Danny Lane

Sound Designer & Mixer: Ed Downham

Sound Recordists: Joe Harris, Stephen Hodge

Deaf Consultant: Sean Chandler

Cast:

Matthew Gurney (Steve)

Alan Bury (Lawand)

Nali Tawfeeq (Rawa)

Aso Sherabayani (Rebwar)

Shaniaz Hama Ali (Gulbahar)

Erin Hutching (Esther)

UK 2022

91 mins

A BFI release

+ discussion with director Edward Lovelace, Steve Crump OBE, founder and chair of Deaf Kidz International and Sophie Stone, deaf artist, activist and support teacher

Convinced of the potential of their deaf son, a Kurdish family leave Iraq and finally arrive in Derby, where Lawand joins the Royal School for the Deaf Derby. Empowered with British Sign Language, he reveals himself as a witty and popular student, while his family navigate a new common language and fight to remain in the community that has embraced them. Director Edward Lovelace (The Possibilities Are Endless) spent years alongside Lawand and his family, to produce this striking, affecting portrait. On World Refugee Day we are proud to present this powerful documentary, highlighting the importance of community and the transformative effect of finding your voice.

bfi.org.uk

From Mat Whitecross's *Moving to Mars* (2009), a study of two Burmese refugee families resettling in Sheffield, to recent fictional evocations of immigrant dislocation such as Ben Sharrock's *Limbo* and Remi Weekes's *His House* (both 2020), plenty of recent films have explored the truism voiced by the protagonist's father in *Name Me Lawand*: arriving in the UK in search of sanctuary is 'not the end of the journey, just the beginning'. Where Edward Lovelace's portrait of a young Kurdish refugee in Derby shuffles the deck is in the nature of Lawand's identity and condition: born profoundly deaf, he was consigned to incapacity and isolation in his poorer homeland; at six, his family has brought him to the UK to find sign-language education, to help him communicate, live and grow. Here, the challenges of exile intersect with other forms of difference and exclusion. As Lawand's elder brother Rawa tells us, in a prologue cut to outer-space imagery, Lawand feels he belongs on another planet.

The film gives us an inside-out portrait of Lawand, especially early on: close-up, shallow-focus camerawork emulates the dampened, muffled sound space he lives in; cut-in phone-camera flashbacks gesture to his trauma. Until now, Lawand has been pressured to conform: even his parents want him to speak to fit in. At the Royal School for the Deaf in Derby he learns British Sign Language; a winning teacher and budding friendships draw him out of his shell. But his progress is delicate, and when news filters in that the Home Office wants to return him to Iraq, Lawand is burdened with banishing a state's doubts about his potential, on top of upholding his own fragile self-confidence.

Structured in seven pithy, thematically titled chapters ('Discovery', 'Courage', 'Truth', 'Faith' etc), the film is carefully, considerably crafted, mediating between subject and viewer through a language of elegant impressionism and collaborative expression rather than more imposing forms of documentary encounter (four editors worked on the rich sensory weave). Viewers – at least those of us different from Lawand – grow into his shoes, approaching an understanding of his needs and outlook. For Lawand, a breakthrough moment is a journey to a rally for BSL rights in London: amid placards saying 'Hear your deaf voice roar', he finally feels belonging, on what, Rawa concludes, may after

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Thu 22 Jun 18:20

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Mon 26 Jun 18:15

Black Self-Building On Screen + discussion

Tue 27 Jun 18:30

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all be his 'perfect' planet. What with the gentle, low drone-shots of Derbyshire wheat-fields, and soft-pedalled piano blanketing the soundtrack, the film's later style, as Lawand blossoms, does occasionally veer towards butter-ad rhetoric. But it's hard to think of telling his story – heartening, yet insistent – any way but softly.

Nick Bradshaw, *Sight and Sound*, Summer 2023

Director statement

Name Me Lawand is a story about the power that language gives us, the freedom that a real home allows us, and the burning light of hope that never goes out.

This is a film that feels, instead of tells. It constantly searches, at first unknowingly, for a sense of understanding. Its audience is asked to experience Lawand's journey just as he did.

Fear initially turns into truth, friendship and connection. As it becomes clearer in Lawand's mind who he is, and what the world around him feels like, we too begin to understand.

Lawand is someone who for most of his life has had other people speak for him, represent him. This has been his greatest frustration, desperately wanting to communicate to the world who he is, in his own way. For Lawand it is simple – when he communicates in British Sign Language, he is the real Lawand.

The film's goal is to show the world what can happen when someone is given the freedom to express themselves in their language of choice, in a place they feel they can be celebrated as their true self.

I discovered Lawand and his brother through a photo taken by a photographer who had visited the family when they first arrived in Derby. On learning more about their story, I visited his school and met him and his family early in 2019. Then, we didn't have a shared language, but we quickly bonded as I learnt British Sign Language and we started to build our film team – with a Kurdish and a deaf producer.

I wanted to build trust and a strong foundation, so I spent most of 2019 being present at Lawand's school (The Royal School for the Deaf Derby), talking to teachers and forging bonds. They saw that I felt inspired just to exist there.

Our connection with the family has also been something we have been so proud of. We have assisted them on their visits to court and helped in various ways in their Home Office case. Possibly, the most notable moment was a segment from the film showcasing Lawand's fluency in British Sign Language which became a pivotal moment in the Home Office's understanding of the importance of this language to Lawand.

To become a part of Lawand's journey, however small, is one of my proudest achievements. I want the film to celebrate the light that shines from Lawand.

Production notes