

# CULTURE CLUB

## NOWHERE BOY

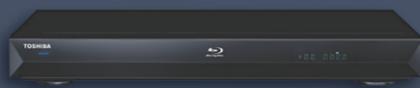
ALL JOHN LENNON NEEDED WAS LOVE



All John Lennon needed was love. Poignant and powerful, *NOWHERE BOY* is the untold true story of the boy who created The Beatles, starring Aaron Johnson and Kristin Scott Thomas. To celebrate the release of *NOWHERE BOY* on DVD and Blu-ray, thanks to Icon Home Entertainment, reader's have a chance to win this fabulous prize including *NOWHERE BOY* on DVD and Blu-ray, a Toshiba 46" Full HD LCD TV and Blu-ray player to bring the movie to life and enjoy every finest detail in high-definition at home, a DVD entertainment pack including *The Private Lives of Pippa Lee*, *Sleepwalking* and the entire *Portraits Collection PLUS* discover the legend before and after The Beatles with Lennon the Legend CD and a John Lennon biography.

To win this *NOWHERE BOY* prize pack, tell us in 25 words or less, which Beatles song is your favourite and why?

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SPRINGTIME in Verona and there is no escaping the lovebirds. Couples are everywhere in this historic city: holding hands, whispering sweet nothings, licking each other's gelatis. The Piazza Bra teems with starry-eyed newlyweds. The Hotel Giulietta e Romeo is booked out.

Lines from *Romeo and Juliet* are quoted on the menus adorning tables for two and stitched into the red velour hearts that hang in bunches inside souvenir shops. "What light through yonder window breaks" reads the plaque under Juliet's (rebuilt) balcony, on which you can stand for 16 (\$8.45). But while Shakespeare's lovers were star-crossed and tragic, up here in northern Italy happy endings are big business.

"Star-crossed is just Shakespeare's very lovely way of saying that things happen in life that nobody planned or wanted," says Vanessa Redgrave, 73, sitting in a sun-dappled hotel courtyard tucked away from tourist traffic and breaking a banana into chunks.

Her husband of three years and on-off boyfriend of four decades, Italian actor Franco Nero, has just made his exit; having farewelled him in Italian the great British actress fixes me with her astounding cornflower blue eyes and sighs a little crossly. "But it has nothing to do with destiny," she says. "Where in the film does destiny come about?"



Amanda Seyfried, Vanessa Redgrave and Christopher Egan on the trail of Romeo in *Letters to Juliet*

Hmm. The notion of destiny is threaded right through *Letters to Juliet*, a light romantic comedy in which Redgrave plays Claire, an Englishwoman searching for her long-lost love, Lorenzo (played by Nero), with the help of her grandson Charlie (Australian actor Chris Egan, with hammy British accent) and American journalist Sophie (Amanda Seyfried).

Fifty years previously the lovelorn Claire had written to the fictional Juliet asking for her advice and left the letter in the courtyard of Casa di Giulietta, a tradition that began in the early 1800s and — albeit with Post-It notes and SMS text language — continues today.

Sophie's subsequent discovery of the letter sets off a chain of events that moves the action from Verona to Lake Garda, Siena and through the picturesque Tuscan countryside, the beautiful scenery diverting attention from the rather flimsy plot.

Nonetheless, it is lovely watching Redgrave and Nero acting in tandem again after first coming together on and off screen in 1967's *Camelot*. Claire and Lorenzo's reunion takes place in a rolling vineyard after Nero comes galloping in, Lancelot-like, on a

horse. "It's never too late for love" is the film's tagline. "Do you believe in destiny?" asks Sophie, pointedly.

"Mmm," concedes Redgrave through a mouthful of banana. "Maybe you're right. I don't believe in destiny, though."

She gestures to the fruit platter on the table between us. "Would you like a strawberry?" she says in her husky, melodious voice. "I can't bear to eat without you having something."

I pick up a physalis, a tiny orange fruit sheathed in transparent leaves. "What are those called?" A smile. "Cumquats? Persimmons? Aren't they Australian? No?"

Redgrave is a curious interviewee: alternately spiky and distant, warm and inquisitive. During the course of a remarkable six-decade stage and film career that has bagged her an Oscar (for the 1977 wartime drama *Julia*), two Golden Globes, two Emmys, a Tony and innumerable other accolades including this year's BAFTA fellowship in Britain, she has tended to give short shrift to some questions and long, rambling answers to others.

"Oh I don't know," she mutters when I ask if she thinks Italian men appreciate older women, given all the various Lorenzos who fall at her feet in the film. "Do you mind if I smoke?" she says, tapping at her packet of cigarettes.

Some of this po-faced-ness comes down to politics; Redgrave takes the greater good of humankind very seriously indeed. While not the radical she once was — there was that anti-Zionist Oscar acceptance speech; those expressions of sympathy for the PLO and the IRA; her devotion to the Workers Revolutionary Party — she remains high-minded, high feeling, with a passionate abhorrence of injustice.

Rumoured to have declined a damehood in 1999 ("Being a dame of the British Empire doesn't fit my skin," she told BBC radio), she now channels her political energies into UNICEF, for which she is a celebrity goodwill ambassador. "The convention of the rights of the child is at the foundation of everything I do," she says fiercely.

The statement seems poignant, given Redgrave is still grieving for her eldest daughter, actress Natasha Richardson, who died from a skiing-related head injury in March last year. In her 1992 autobiography she expressed regret at being too busy changing the world to emotionally support her three children; she is also mother to actress Joely Richardson and filmmaker Carlo Nero.

She has said that her five grandchildren are a great comfort to her; more so, perhaps, since the death last month of her younger brother, activist and actor Corin.

His funeral at the Actor's Church in London's Covent Garden saw Vanessa and her younger actress sister Lynn, frail from breast cancer, applauding and cheering his coffin, and his life.

It's not that Redgrave never knew about grief. For most of 2007 she played writer Joan Didion on Broadway and in London in *The Year of Magical Thinking*, a monologue adapted from the memoir about the sudden death of the author's husband, followed by the death of her adult daughter.

"Life changes so fast, life changes in an instant. You sit down to dinner and life as you know it ends," run its opening lines, which took on extra resonance when Redgrave reprised the role at a Manhattan