

BRUCE WEBER SELECTS

ANDREW HAIGH

GAY FILM GETS A
VERY MODERN MAKEOVER

Photographer

Bruce Weber:

"Weekend is the kind of movie that stays with you. It has all the quietness of Antonioni's films but underneath it has this English reserve, which I thought was wonderful. You don't really see that in filmmaking today. When I see films, I want to have an experience that I can take with me. This is a film that quietly creeps up on you – a good film to go home and to bed with."

British director Andrew Haigh's small but incisive film *Weekend* (not be confused with the Godard classic of the same name) puts a fleeting romance between two gay men in a Nottingham club and the intense weekend that follows under the microscope. The result is a bracingly intimate, visceral two-hander that just might break your heart a little. "I'm interested in how someone defines themselves and how you struggle to define yourself as a person," says Haigh, explaining what drew him to the story. "The chance encounter is a perfect environment to explore

that because you show a lot of who you are as a person. Everybody has had those kind of meaningful but short-lived encounters. When you first meet someone you have a tendency to be more open, even more than when you're actually in a relationship. I think it's an interesting time to look at someone's character – when they're on that vulnerable ground." Haigh cut his teeth as an editor, working on films with Harmony Korine and Ridley Scott before taking the leap to writing and directing his own features, kicking off with the micro-budget docu-drama about the world of gay escorts *Greek Pete* back in 2009.

In *Weekend*, Haigh set out to address the dearth of gay films that aren't about coming-of-age crises or homophobia. "A lot of gay films

don't reflect how I see being gay," he says. "I wanted to have it about gay characters but also about other things. I wanted it to be about a love story as well." Haigh captures the love that deepens between brooding, reserved lifeguard Russell (Tom Cullen) and the prickly outsider artist Glen (played by Chris New) in raw conversations and long languorous takes drawn from his love of directors like John Cassavetes, Kelly Reichardt and Nicolas Roeg. The gay sex scenes

and the coke-fuelled binge Russell and Glen embark on are depicted equally unflinchingly, but never in an explicit way: "I think American audiences were concerned with the drug use more than the sex. In England, we are aware that people do take drugs – it's more openly discussed. They are young guys who are out having a good time – it would be foolish to say it doesn't happen."

The mounting buzz and awards the film has been garnering (at SXSW, Toronto and Nashville) has opened doors for Haigh, making it easier for the two new projects he's working on now: a remake of a French New Wave film, and an original drama about the disintegration of a marriage following the discovery of a long-lost love. They just might help him break out of the gay film niche he's inevitably been pigeonholed in. "I find it frustrating and I wish people would be more open-minded," he sighs. "It's not important that it's about gay people, but what's underneath."

Text KIN WOO

Photography

ALEX BISHON ROLAND