

ERIC CANTONA STEVE EVETS

LOOKING FOR ERIC

DIRECTED BY KEN LOACH



FESTIVAL DE CANNES

OFFICIAL SELECTION

COMPETITION



A Canto Bros. Productions, Sixteen Films, Why Not Productions, Wild Bunch present



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COMPETITION

LOOKING FOR ERIC

A FILM DIRECTED BY KEN LOACH

written by Paul Laverty

"It all began with a beautiful pass from Eric Cantona..."

With Steve Evets
Eric Cantona
John Henshaw
Stephanie Bishop

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SYNOPSIS

Eric the postman is slipping through his own fingers. . .

His chaotic family, his wild stepsons and the cement mixer in the front garden don't help, but it is Eric's own secret that drives him to the brink. Can he face Lily, the woman he once loved 30 years ago? Despite outrageous efforts and misplaced goodwill from his football fan mates, Eric continues to sink.

In desperate times it takes a spliff and a special friend from foreign parts to challenge a lost postman to make that journey into the most perilous territory of all — the past.

As the Chinese, and one Frenchman, say :
"He who is afraid to throw the dice will never throw a six."



INTRODUCTION

PAUL LAVERTY, writer

When Ken first told me that Eric Cantona wanted to meet him I wasn't sure if it was another of his wind-ups. I knew he had been suffering; his beloved team Bath City had been in trouble and I thought he might have been fantasising again. But there Eric was... the King himself, sitting in our offices.

We met to discuss a short treatment Eric and his brothers had prepared for French film company Why Not about a real fan who had followed Eric from Leeds United to Manchester United and as a result lost his job, his mates and his family. I think it had strong possibilities, but in the end a fictional story, and the freedom therein, has its own enormous pull.

Maybe it was the terrible flu I had when we met that day, but as we talked my mind kept drifting off to many of those wonderful goals Eric scored, his flashes of inspiration, his temper, the infamous karate kick, the 'Sardine' press conference, the songs of the crowd, and for no good reason other than it stuck in my mind, that absolute peach of a goal he scored against Sunderland. But it was crystal clear to both Ken and myself that Eric's intriguing character both on the field and off opened up fascinating possibilities.

After having recently completed two tough films ('It's a Free World' and 'The Wind that Shakes the Barley') Ken, Rebecca (Producer) and myself had a firm inclination that no matter what our next project would be, there would have to be a strong element of mischief in it to keep us sane.

For quite some time too I had been talking to Ken about a possible story involving grandparents. I knew this wasn't going to get financiers salivating but since my own kids were born I have become more and more curious about the complex interweaving and multifaceted roles grandparents have in our lives. In many ways they keep the world turning, but with few exceptions, they are invisible on screen, or grossly stereotyped.

Older protagonists open up an incredible well of past lives, so I have always been intrigued by the possibility of a story that would look just as much to the past as unfold in the present. Our past isn't gone, but is fiercely loaded.

A cluster of questions and contradictory notions kept coming to mind in one big unmanageable tangle. I found myself wondering how we define turning points in our lives; how people we have met along the way have left an indelible impression on our souls and whom we will probably recall on our deathbeds; I wondered about accidents of timing, of when couples meet and who they are at that moment. Past mistakes may fester; hurt and blame can tumble over each in a endless cycle that can still cast a shadow on our present. I thought about our fantastic gift of memory that can make 30 years ago burn with the intensity of yesterday. I reflected on how we can get 'stuck', what makes for change, and what a complex endeavour it is to understand each other. What is hidden, and what is just too painful to confront? I wondered about our capacity to forgive, not just the other, but ourselves.

And as we grow older, what happens to our confidence and that fragile sense of ourselves? What we become seldom matches what we might have imagined in those fearless days of our early twenties. A long life can be a right bloody mess and it is a never-ending challenge to manage all the new layers, which are in a constant state of flux. Sometimes it is a closer call than we dare admit to slide from moments of crisis over to breakdown and possible madness.

Maybe some of the above fermented with the flu, my conversations with Ken, and the unexpected - Eric's goal against Sunderland. It is no ordinary strike, but a moment of beauty; his physical prowess, the dribble around two defenders, his sublime one-two with team mate Brian McClair - and all the while you can sense the excitement of the crowd swell - and then the final audacious flash of imagination to chip and swerve the ball in a beautiful arc to land a few inches inside the left hand post. The crowd roared with pleasure and amazement. No wonder Eduardo Galeano calls a goal football's orgasm. But it wasn't the orgasm that got me, but Eric's pose after he struck. He sticks out his chest, honours all those present with a full circle as if looking every single one of the 50,000 fans in the eye, and saying, "My gift to you"! It was a moment of supreme self-confidence, man and stadium in communion.

For no good reason I caught an imaginary glimpse of a man called Eric Bishop on the terraces that day. That goal kept him going for months as he struggled through his chaotic life. When we join Little Eric, father, step father, grandfather, and at least twice separated, the Cantona days of going to the football with his mates are long gone. Unlike Big Eric, he senses people see through him. He not only feels he is losing control of everything around him, but much more terrifying he feels he can't even rely on himself. When Little Eric looks himself in the eye he confronts a lost man, heading for the precipice. I day dreamed about the possibilities of throwing these two Eric's together to see what would happen - and what freer place to meet than in the mind of Eric Bishop as he struggled to keep his sanity, ambushed by both the past and the present, and hiding away from the world in his little bedroom. Could Eric Bishop find himself again?



Ken and I entertained ourselves with many possibilities but it was all in the abstract until we met again with Eric to discuss this rather strange juxtaposition. Did Big Eric fancy being a figment of a mentally unstable grandfather's imagination... how would he like to be a nonconformist shrink smoking spliffs... and could he dance rock and roll? At least I knew he would love the proverbs.

In all honesty as I made my way to Paris to meet Eric again I had no idea how this would all turn out. The first thing was to see if Eric was open to this madness, and secondly, to get some sense of the man. It turned out to be a fantastic few days with Eric laughing out loud at some of the daft scenes we had imagined and suggesting many more. From the outset he was remarkably modest, and best of all,

he was prepared to laugh at himself. It was important for me too that he genuinely had some empathy for the fictional Eric and his life. This gave me a tremendous sense of freedom when I came to write the script.

Eric passed on a few gems over those days. And perhaps befitting the man, he often turned expectation on its head. I asked him what it felt like to have 50,000 people chanting his name and singing songs about him. He told me it was scary; so scary that it might stop. (It reminded me of Maradona: "I need them to need me.") He told me he set out to surprise the crowd every game he played, but to do that, he had to surprise himself first. I asked him about his greatest football moment ever, fully expecting a winning goal in a cup final or league decider. He surprised again, telling me it was a pass he made to Ryan Giggs. (We couldn't find footage of this pass and subsequent goal but his pass to Irwin, which we use in the film, was ingrained in my memory.) But what if Giggs had missed? Eric's reply: "You must trust your team mates. Always." This fitted in perfectly with what I imagined would be a key idea in the film, of Little Eric finding the courage to take a risk, and trust his mates and Lily again, with his own fragility.

I asked him about his nine-month ban, a horrendous length of time when you consider how short the career of a professional footballer is. After such an ordered, disciplined life, the routine of the weekly fixtures, to say nothing of the adrenalin-high of playing in front of a packed stadium I asked him how he managed to confront the solitude of it all. He told me he had to find something to fill him up. What I asked? He replied, "I tried to play the trumpet." How about that... this footballing genius in front of a worshipping crowd one week, and the next, in the loneliness of his room, all fingers and thumbs struggling with a trumpet.

In one fell swoop, celebrity culture punctured; no matter who we are, Big Eric or Little Eric, here we are battling to make sense of each day I love that surreal scene in the film when Big Eric armed with his trumpet, and Little Eric armed with his memory, stand on a council flat balcony and look out over Manchester and the world beyond. I find each misplaced note magical, a hymn to all those imperfect messy lives out there, a celebration of our fragility, and a clarion call to make that leap of faith to confide in those that love you. Always.

KEN LOACH director

"I got a message that Eric Cantona was trying to get in touch..."

It was about two or three years ago. Without him there would be no film. A very nice French producer, Pascal Caucheteux, spoke with Rebecca [O'Brien, Producer] and suggested that he and Eric and we met. Obviously we knew Eric Cantona, knew his public persona very well, and knew him as a fantastic footballer. And they knew that Paul [Lavery, Writer] and I were interested in football. So we met. Eric had a few ideas that were all very interesting, in particular a story of his relationship with one fan. Paul and I couldn't really make that work in terms of narrative and characters and development, but we thought it was an interesting area to explore - not only the enjoyment of football and the part that football plays in people's lives, but also the notion of celebrity and how celebrities are built up in the press and on television: they have a superhuman quality in people's minds.

Paul went away with a blank sheet of paper and wrote a story that tried to bring in all these elements. There were no major misgivings about showing it to Eric because we'd met two or three times and we had a good sense of who he was: he just seemed somebody who was not reverent about himself and had a twinkle in his eye about the whole project. It was fun, rather than some heavy-handed affair. We were just hoping he would enjoy it and he was kind enough to say that he did.

Why Cantona?

He's original and bright and sharp and perceptive. He thinks a little outside the game and his jousts with journalists were always funny and witty. He's obviously a man of some substance - we knew that about him just from the way he'd been in public, from the seagulls quote both before and afterwards. As we talked to him - particularly as Paul talked to him - his thoughts on the game and on his place in it and what he tried to do and how he approached it all became part of the project.

When Eric walks in a room you really know he's there. It's true of very few people but he's a man with considerable charisma and a magnetism. Actors talk about natural projection, in that you can communicate from the stage to the back of the auditorium without apparently doing anything. Eric did that on a football field - he communicated to 70,000 people. That's an extraordinary natural ability.

In Manchester he was treated with reverence and affection. We had to keep him under wraps a bit - it's the first time I've ever had paparazzi lurking round a set. And if you were with him in the street the traffic would slow down and people would seize him by the hand.

I went to a game with him at Old Trafford. Even without knowing he was there they were singing the Cantona songs - they were singing his name when he hadn't been there for a decade. Then when they discovered he was there the roof went up. Grown men wept! As we were leaving old fellas were coming up to him shaking him by the hand. Very few players have inspired such affection.

Why Football?

I only know it as a spectator but to go to a game is very social: you meet the same, quite large group of people and what you have in common is support for the team. It's nothing to do with work, it's nothing to do with anything except the game and that wide selection of disparate people.

But the game itself is like a gymnasium for your emotions. You experience everything. Hope, joy, sorrow, grief, suspense, anguish. Delirious ecstasy when the goal goes in. It's all those things but they're all contained in a safe framework that - I can't say, 'it doesn't matter' - but in the end it is only a game and in the end real life carries on. It's a huge therapeutic exercise where you have all these emotions but nevertheless they're within a safe environment.



Who is Eric Bishop, your lead character?

He's an intelligent man who suffers from panic attacks and it's really interfered with his ability to stay in a relationship. His response to it is just to put his head in the sand, go out with the lads, go to the games, have a drink and not deal with it. The consequence is his first marriage broke down. He then married someone else who developed a drink problem. She had two sons by different fathers. When she finally went off the rails he was left with these two lads and because at heart he's a very generous person, when they were younger he did have a reasonable relationship with them. But as they've become teenagers they do what teenagers do, which is if they see a weakness they exploit it. They destroy him. He's left with a big house that he can't manage, and of course chaos breeds chaos. He can barely hold his job together and when we first see him he's in the middle of a panic attack.

How was the film cast?

Next to the script the casting is the most important thing. I worked with Kahleen [Crawford, Casting Director] again and we saw unknown actors, well-known actors, everybody - we just try to be as inclusive as possible. It's always important that the film is rooted somewhere specific, so we did restrict it to people from Manchester or nearby. The Eric in the film is a Manchester United supporter when most Manchester United supporters came from Manchester. So we thought it was important that he was played by a Manchester man. With Steve Evets we were able to sense that he was a man on the edge. He's also funny but not in a way that he's playing comedy: he's just being true. We look for true responses and then when somebody reveals themselves, that they reveal themselves in a way that is in line with the character. Because you can get somebody who's really brilliant - right social class, everything right - but as they reveal themselves in their performance it's something different to the character. You've got to find somebody who's good in all those ways but also true to the character you want on the screen.

How was Cantona himself introduced in to the action?

There was a moment! It was very elaborate. Surprise is the hardest thing to act, and Steve (Evets) had no idea - he knew that Eric Cantona was involved as a producer but he didn't know that he was in the film. On the day he was going to be in it we brought him in to the house and in to the bedroom. I said to Steve, "The light's not quite right. We're going to have to put up a bit of black to minimise the reflection. Give us ten minutes." Steve went out for a smoke, Eric Cantona hid behind a black drape that we'd put round the camera and then we played the scene. Steve was looking towards the life-size Cantona poster and Eric slipped out and stood behind him, and spoke. Unfortunately we had some Belgian camera assistants and when Steve heard the voice he thought it was one of them speaking. So he stood there and he didn't know what to do. The first take it didn't quite work. But there was still surprise enough for the second take.

Tonally, how do you go from comic scenes to more serious moments?

You can only be truthful. And that again is down to finding people who can be truthful and naturally funny. Or truthful and naturally touching. The moment there's a sense of, 'Now it's a comedy scene,' and 'Now it's a sad scene,' it wouldn't work. That's why somebody like John's [Henshaw] a good actor. He's serious and he's funny without a change of step. Ricky Tomlinson is like that as well. He can be funny and in exactly the same mood he can be serious. That he doesn't have to change gear is the essential thing.

What do you hope an audience will take from the film?

Just the fact that it's about friendship and about coming to terms with who you are. It's a film against individualism: we're stronger as a gang than we are on our own. You can be pretentious about this but it is about the solidarity of friends, which is epitomised in a crowd of football supporters. But also where you work and the people you work alongside. Although that seems an almost trite observation, it's still not the spirit of the age. Or it hasn't been the spirit of the age for the last 30 years, where people are your competitors, not your comrades.

Cantona plays the trumpet in the film. Does he have a future as a musician?

When George Fenton recorded the music and heard Eric playing, I sent Eric a text saying, 'The musicians are impressed but suggest you don't give up the football just yet.' He texted back and said, 'Maybe they think I take their work.'



ERIC CANTONA

When I met with the French co-producers [Pascal Caucheteux and Vincent Maraval], we all said that a story about my relationship with the fans needed an English director. The relationship with the fans in England is very special. The director had to be a football fan to understand, somebody who had experienced this kind of feeling. The first name was Ken Loach. We were a bit crazy to think about it but we thought we would give it a try - we said the worst thing that can happen is he says no.

We met him with Rebecca [O'Brien, Producer] and Paul [Lavery, Writer] and they said, yeah, maybe it's a good idea. We will try to develop and write it but we don't promise anything. If after a few weeks we feel that we cannot do it... They were being very, very honest. And they found a way with Paul to write a great script. We received it and read it and we loved it - we have been very, very lucky.

Paul and I had spent an afternoon talking about the games, football, everything. All of the proverbs are from him. They made me laugh a lot when I read them - and I think perhaps he laughed a lot also when he wrote them! I didn't mind saying them at all - no, no - I loved it.

The goals were chosen by them, but I agree with the choice. I think it's a good balance - some goals from 20 or 30 yards, some goals with chips, some headers - different types of goals. There were maybe some better goals - for instance, the goal scored against Arsenal when we won at home 5-0. It was a beautiful goal and it is not in the movie. Some are not so nice, but you have also to find a rhythm and a balance.

It was nice to be back in Manchester. I love the people there. That never fades, or not from my side, no. It seems to be always the same. It is strange, of course, when you stop playing football. But I have been lucky to have other passions, like acting. And the trumpet, yes, like you see in the film - but I'm having to practice a lot.

In the film I am Eric Cantona in Eric Bishop's mind, in his imagination. That's the way he sees me. That gives me a lot of distance from myself - how do you say, 'auto-derision'? [self-deprecating humour] - so I liked it a lot.

I have worked in other movies and there I can hide behind the character. In this one I have to be myself. It was a strange feeling. I asked Ken questions that I have never asked before because in the days before the shooting I didn't feel very comfortable and I need to be comfortable with the character. It was a good experience - something special. It's like being... and watching yourself being. You have to find spontaneity, be yourself, but in a fiction. It was a strange exercise but very interesting.

If I play the relationship between a fan and myself very seriously I think it is a bit pretentious, arrogant, and not very interesting. Ken has a very light touch - not in the wrong sense, but he can make things funny and also real. So in this film there is a lot of humour, a lot of sensitivity, emotion... auto-derision!

Me, I was very proud of how the film showed the feeling I had with the fans, the way I saw the fans, the way I received the energy of the fans. That is all there in this movie. It's unusual to capture that - they are nice people, nice, beautiful people, always a lot of solidarity, a lot of friendship. I was moved by their energy. I love this kind of thing because these days it's unusual, solidarity, friendship. In the film we can see that on the inside they are beautiful people.

Eric Bishop, the love story, the relationship he had with his kids, the misunderstanding he has with his wife 20 years before... sometimes we don't want to say things and we break relationships because we don't speak enough. It's why I appear in his life - to encourage him to speak. Or if he can't speak, write - but communicate. If you cannot be together you cannot be together, but you must say things. That is very important and this film speaks about that also.

STEVE EVETS (Eric Bishop)

Steve Evets, 49, describes himself as 'just a jobbing actor', but not many jobbing actors have lived like he has.

"I'm a working-class lad from Salford. I left school without a clue what to do but on the last day some guy came in and showed me a film on the Merchant Navy and I thought, 'Why didn't you show us this before? No saluting officers, no uniforms...' So I joined the Merchant Navy."

Three years later he was kicked out. "I got up to all sorts of things: I jumped ship twice in Japan, I spent my 18th birthday in a Bombay brothel - it was really liberating! I was a bit of a loose cannon in them days. Then I got a job delivering industrial pipes for some firm, because I didn't have any other options. I got married and my marriage didn't work out and that firm laid me off. So I decided to follow what was in my head which was to do some kind of acting or something creative."

He took a foundation course in drama at a local college. "It was boring, all sort of academically inclined. So I packed that in and I formed me own little street theatre company with two friends." Extras work, fringe and profit-share theatre all followed. In order to get his Equity card Evets changed his surname from Murphy to the palindromic Evets. He has since dabbled in spoken-word and comedy (performing as Adolph Chip-pan) and music (Evets has played bass with The Fall but has now, as is traditional, fallen out with its lead singer Mark E Smith). But acting is his first love, and latterly there's been television work in everything from 'Shameless' to 'Heartbeat'.

"It's always been tough going. But I've never been in this thing for the money otherwise I'd have packed it in years ago. I've just stuck to it because you've got to have something you enjoy doing, and this just happens to be what I like."

For the part of Eric Bishop, a football-mad postman in a tailspin, Ken Loach was looking for native Mancunians, between 40 and 50. Evets went through recall after recall, as part of Loach's usual extensive audition process.

"Ken wants to see what you're made of, how you cope in certain situations, how quickly you think on your feet. He takes his time over the casting because at the end of the day, none of us know what the film is, so we're trusting him. And he's trusting us - because he's spent so much time analysing you."

Evets got the part without seeing a script or knowing what the film was about. That meant he had no idea that Eric Cantona himself was to be his co-star. "Shortly after I was cast there was an article in a newspaper and it had a picture of Ken with Cantona at Old Trafford. It said Cantona was co-producing. I didn't for one minute think he'd be in it. When I got the bit of script where my character talks to Eric Cantona the poster, I thought to myself, well, they'll use his voiceover for the poster to talk back at me. At a push I thought that at a certain point where I'm particularly deranged, they might superimpose his face on the poster and have it talk. I never in a million years dreamed that Eric Cantona would be in it to the extent that he is."

He describes the moment when Loach smuggled Cantona in to the room. "They'd got him in there like a military operation behind this curtain. There he was, bang, in my room. It was dead surreal. It was like an acid trip condensed in to a minute. I was in a scene with Eric Cantona. In the film. And of course when he cut it was like, 'My god.' Then it was dinner time and they gave me the next bit of script. This is the scene you're doing with Eric this afternoon. So read it..."

Evets is not an avid football fan. "But of course everybody knows about Eric Cantona. He is a legend. Everybody knows about the seagulls thing. Which by the way makes total sense. Anyway, he has kind of adopted Manchester and people love him. I'm still in awe of him, although I have got to know him a bit better. He does seem quite distant, but his distance isn't arrogance. I think he's quite a shy person, a true gentleman."

In 'Looking for Eric', Evets' character Eric Bishop is a man who has lost his confidence. "He's one of them guys that has just settled in to a mundane existence. His heart's in the right place. Doesn't always think before he puts his mouth in gear. Couldn't face up to responsibility in the past with his first wife Lily, which is kind of the root of his problems - that and his childhood with a belligerent, bullying father. He's not always been strong enough to say, 'No, I'm not having this.'

Enter Cantona. "He's my mentor in the film. He comes out with these gems of wisdom to help my character build his confidence, get his nerve back and gather a bit of self-respect."

Evets says Loach encouraged him to ad lib. "I put in a little bit, yeah. In one scene we're talking about the time he was banned for karate kicking that fan at Palace. I said, 'That twat got what he deserved.' He didn't seem to mind. And then there was a moment when my character has had it up to here with Cantona's philosophies. I said, 'I'm still trying to get my head round the seagulls one for Christ's sake.' After that I apologised. He said, 'That's okay.'"



Evets downplays his talents but people are starting to take notice. Last year he starred in Kenny Glennan's 'Summer', alongside Robert Carlyle, and 'Looking For Eric' is his first lead.

"This whole thing has been a dream job. I hate to pre-empt things by saying this is my break because who knows. I'm a jobbing actor me. Have been for years. This certainly won't do me any harm. But it doesn't matter because I've worked with Ken now, it's an ambition fulfilled. Eric Cantona's in it, I've got the lead role... I mean what actor wouldn't die for that job? It's on my CV and if I never work again, this has been an absolute adventure."

JOHN HENSHAW (meatballs)

John Henshaw is one of several sons of Manchester on the cast of 'Looking For Eric' who's been forced to swap shirts.

"I'm a Man City fan. There are a lot of us - it's because we're filming here in Manchester. Most United fans, as you know, live in Essex..."

Henshaw plays Meatballs, the point man of the Postmen. "He's one of the lads at the Post Office. He's a good bloke, he'll stand up for family and friends; he'll stand his corner. He doesn't take any shit and he sees himself as an intellectual. He probably isn't but he's been on more courses than Red Rum. He's a good mate of Eric's, so he's trying to help him out of his current depression. Then the wheels fall off a little bit when Eric's stepson Ryan comes unstuck with a local gangster... Meatballs and the lads are forced to take action."

Henshaw says he has always wanted to be in a Ken Loach film. "I worked with Tony Garnett on 'The Cops' and he said, 'You should work with Ken.' I said, 'Chance would be a fine thing.' Thank God it's happened because I like the way he and his team work."

Although Henshaw doesn't have scenes with Cantona himself, Loach asked Henshaw to help prepare Cantona for his scenes (in a foreign language) with Steve Evets. Evets, of course, was not told that Cantona himself would be appearing.

"When the cloak and dagger stuff was going on we did a couple of rehearsals myself and Justin [Moorhouse]. We were in on the secret for many days. So next time we saw Steve - to quote him verbatim - he said, "You bastards! You Loached me!"

'Looking For Eric', Henshaw says, is about mates mucking together. "It's working class men making the effort for one of their mates. The primary instinct is, "You kick him, you kick us" - which is great. Without getting preachy, society's broken down now. We don't have the extended family, with aunties and uncles and grandmas and all the rest of it looking after the kids like they did in the old days. Everybody keeps themselves to themselves. It's very rare to see a gang of lads together. I think the last bastions of communal friendship are the workplace and the football - the game. They bring people together, and that's what turns out with this."

STEPHANIE BISHOP (Lily)

The brief for the character of Lily, Eric Bishop's ex-wife, was succinct, but it was ready made for Stephanie Bishop.

"I read it and thought, 'This is just me.' It said that she's competent and ordered, she's got a good job in the NHS, she can be guarded at times but there is an enormous amount of warmth there. I thought, 'All my life experiences really can slot in to that brief.' So I put myself forward for it, got a call from the casting office to say I had a meeting. I will not forget because it was the day before my birthday. It was just a ten minute chat with Ken. He wanted to know about my life. I got three further recalls from that. They didn't tell me anything about what I might be doing, but I will never forget finally getting the call."

Bishop is Manchester born and was brought up in Droylsden. Her family moved to Stockport when she was seven and then on to Denton, but she has always been a Mancunian.

"I didn't do a lot at school. I got married when I was 26, but it didn't last that long. At that point I started looking at my life and asking what I was going to do. So I did extras work for nine or ten years. Best days of my life, I can't tell you. From there I went to a drama teacher called Andy Devine [who plays Shadrach in Emmerdale] and stayed with him for just over a year. I had five jobs to pay my mortgage on my own. But once I did my acting class I thought, 'I really, really love this.' I got a part in a commercial, got an agent, and now this. I've been very, very fortunate."

In the film, Lily and Eric's relationship fell apart long ago after Eric balked at the responsibilities of fatherhood and settling down. "They've not seen much of each other really since Eric left her, other than the occasional birthday party for their daughter Sam, so it's never actually come to the point of talking about how it broke down."

Thirty-odd years have passed, until Sam has a baby herself and Lily and Eric are brought together to look after it. "That's the point we start trying to build bridges."

Crucial to Bishop's understanding of their relationship was seeing how her character first fell in love. "They showed us the filming of the flashback scenes - how we met, at a dance competition, with young actors playing our young characters. It was the best, best thing. You could just see the spark in their eyes. That was vitally important to build on. From the day they met there was that bond there."

But since Eric left her Lily has moved on. "I wondered how would this person get over something so bad happening to them? It cuts deep. I think it took a long time to say, 'Right, I've got to move on with my life.' Now she's got her head screwed on. She retrained to do physiotherapy, she's got a lovely little home, her daughter's moved away so she does really sweet things like go away to the countryside for weekends. So she's at one with herself. But when she's faced with this thing it brings it all flooding back."



LUCY-JO HUDSON (sam)

Lucy-Jo Hudson suspects that Ken Loach had no idea that she had starred in 'Coronation Street' and Wild At Heart when he cast her in 'Looking For Eric'.

"At the wrap party I was chatting away to Jonathan [Morris, Editor] who's a massive Corrie fan and he went to Ken, 'You do realise that she was Killer Katy?' And his face was 'What?' Jonathan went, 'In Coronation Street!' His face was like, 'Oh.' He didn't have a clue what I'd done before — and thank god, I'm kind of happy about that."

At 25 Hudson is already a TV veteran, but she says that Sam, her character in 'Looking For Eric' is closer to her real self than any part she's played before.

"I'm quite similar to Sam really. I come from a divorced background and I'm a lot older than my years. I think that's what he [Ken Loach] does - chooses you as the character."

Sam is a 25-year-old who has recently had a baby girl. Her parents, Eric and Lily, divorced when she was quite young. "She became the mediator between her mum and her Dad. She's like the parent in all this, trying to tell them what to do, when actually she's the one that needs that guidance from her parents with being a young mum."

Hudson confesses to not being much of a football fan, so she went to her fiancé Alan Halsall, a diehard Red, for tips. "There's a few flashbacks in the film where I play a 15 year old - myself in pig tails with no make-up in a little horrible denim skirt and a Man U top - it was literally me and a load of big sweaty men on a bus chanting Cantona songs. So I had to speak to Alan: 'Give me some help, I don't know what I'm singing.'"

It wasn't the last time she found herself thrown. "Half way through one scene, unexpectedly, there was a big bang on the door. I thought, 'Is this part of the scene?' When the police charged in I absolutely shit myself. I was physically shaking. It was great afterwards because me and Steve were going, 'We've been Loached! Yay!' All the crew knew; he'd kept it quiet for weeks. But I have to say that should be done on every single job because you don't know what's going to happen next and you get a real reaction. I was crying - and it was real."

THE STEPSONS

GERARD KEARNS (ryan)

"I had no inkling what the film was about when we started filming. You're kept completely in the dark. A bit of script the night before and that's it. The most I thought was that Cantona was producing it. Until Steve Evets told me that he was doing a take and he heard this deep French voice go, 'Turn around.' And he'd been hiding in the cupboard."

It was brilliant learning what happens to Ryan. And disappointing at the same time, and then uplifting as well. Ryan's Eric's stepson, a young lad who's finding his way and has got in with the wrong crowd. He's been led down the wrong path, seeing this guy with a car and a big house, suited and booted, taking him to United games. Everything that a young lad admires - and everything that's a shell. Ryan gets led down the path and then ends up in circumstances that he's got no control of.

I'm a Man City fan. I'm not a bitter Blue but it hurts to have to wear a United shirt - so I wore a blue protesting top underneath."

STEFAN GUMBS (JESS)

"I'm from Manchester and I'm 20 years old. My background is a bit like Jess's. We're both from Manchester, both like music, we're in to video games and girls. Just everything that a teenager is in to.

I told my friends I'd got a part in a film. They wanted to know what I was doing in it. I told them I didn't know yet! It's different but as soon as I got on set I just felt well relaxed because Ken's just a well relaxed guy.

Jess is from a previous marriage, Eric's his Dad and Ryan's his stepbrother. He's a bit of a bad kid. Gets up to mischief and stuff, got friends round the house all the time. My dad's trying to get them out. I don't tidy at all. We don't do anything apart from go out, come back in, sleep, eat, bring friends round, have parties.

But Jess wants to be loved by his family and he wants his brother and his Dad and him to be happy. Behind it all he's a bit of a soft guy.

One day I was eating my dinner and Cantona just walked past. Me, as a United fan, I was beside myself. So I ran out and phoned my sister. I was just shocked. I couldn't believe I was in a film, then a Ken Loach film, never mind Manchester United. And then Cantona? I've got a picture of him on my mobile now. And I've put it on facebook."

THE POSTMEN

JUSTIN MOORHOUSE (spleen)

"I'm a stand-up comedian and a United fan. It was an open casting: they wanted to see comedians. Ken wanted to know what you were about and what your history was. I know Smug and Monk and Mick and Des, so these are my mates in real life as well.

I play Spleen. So called because he vents his spleen about certain things. He's a postman, a friend of Eric's and he's now an FC United fan. He's quite opinionated about that. What appeals to Spleen about FC United is the democracy of it I think. He does spout some ideology sometimes."

DES SHARPLES (Jack)

"I've been a stand-up for eight years. Before that I worked at a timber yard, bar work, cutting bricks, making garden sheds. All around Manchester.

I was born in Old Trafford but I'm a City fan. That side of it was quite hard. I play it from the heart as if I am a United fan - but I'm one of them fans who don't sing that much on the coach.

Jack's my character. He's a workmate and a long-time friend of Eric's — they've been going to football together for years. Jack's more mischievous and a bit slimmer than the others. Bit more of a Jack the Lad.

I got invited in for a chat with Ken. We were talking about City's glory days, the last of which was '76. Turns out Ken has met Tony Book, City's manager at the time — he played for Bath City, who Ken supports. So we had that in common - we both support unsuccessful teams."

GREG COOK (monk)

"I haven't been a comedian for long - I'm five years in. Before that there's not much in my range of capability I haven't had a bash at - building jobs, pub and club doorman, taxi driver, pubs, been a market trader, worked in the rigs, street sweeper...

I'm from Blackpool and Ken used to come there watching football back in the day. I'd picked up an old Blackpool player up in my cab and that was Jimmy Armfield - Ken remembered him from his playing days, so we talked about that at our first meeting. I kind of surmised there was some sort of football element involved."

MICK FERRY (Judge)

"I'm a stand-up comic, a United fan, I live in Oldham, and I started in comedy 11 years ago. Before that I was an upholsterer.

I play Judge - they call him The Judge because of the hairstyle. It's just my hair, not grown especially for the film I should add. That's how it naturally is. Anyway, The Judge is a bit of a know all."

SMUG ROBERTS (smug)

"I'm one of the posties. My stage name is Smug too which is good because nobody forgets who I am. I'm a stand-up and I'm also an actor. I did 'Buried', had a small cameo in '24-Hour Party People' and I also did 'Phoenix Nights'.

This is massively different. It's really exciting - sometimes you have bits of script that nobody else has got. It keeps you on your toes.

We work on the same circuit the comics. Ken's seen the chemistry between us. Bring a group that have worked together to work together on a film - it's an inspired move in a way."

JOHNNY TRAVIS (travis)

"I've been a soul singer in Manchester for the last 23 years. I was working in Liverpool installing fire cables as a day job, covered in soot, and I got a text from my agent saying, 'Johnny, can you act?' I looked at the mess around me and replied, 'Yeah, course I can.' It had to be better than this. Anyway, I'd seen a few of Ken's films and I just wanted to meet my hero really.

Travis is one of Eric's friends, a United supporter, as am I. As it's all unfolded it's just been one of the best times of me life. When I found out Eric Cantona was in it I was just buzzing. He's a god in these parts. I asked him what his greatest goal was. He said, 'The next one.'"

REBECCA O'BRIEN

producer

It was Eric who broke the ice. He wanted to do a film about football fans and he brought it to us. Our best territory is France, and like many of the French, he had a wide knowledge of Ken's films. Ken and Paul are known football supporters — there are so many games in their previous work. It was a simple equation.

Pascal Caucheteux, a French producer who has a company called Why Not, and Vincent Maraval, one of the bosses of the sales company Wild Bunch, came over with Eric to discuss Eric's idea. It was a slightly nervous first meeting because Ken was a bit in awe of Eric and Eric was a bit in awe of Ken. Eric had a few ideas that we discussed, then Paul met Eric for a couple of days and chewed the fat. And from that Paul came up with the story of the film.

Because Pascal and Vincent came to us with Eric, they said they would work with us to bring our usual European co-producing partners to the table. It could be a French/British co-production and we could just make it. It's been a really good partnership and it will obviously crystallise with the launch of the film. They brought French money - television money and government support - that we wouldn't normally have because of Eric's involvement and their involvement.

After that I worked with them to get a distributor here. We did one unusual thing, which I've never done before: when the script was ready, Pascal and Vincent came over and we invited all the main distributors in the UK to pitch to us as to why they wanted to have the film. They were all very interested because you just said 'Cantona' and Ken and the combination was just like 'Bing!' We've worked with Icon before so we were very happy to do that again, and then Channel 4 came on board as well.

What was particularly nice about having the cashflow support from the French was that it meant that I could get on with the job of just getting the film made. I'm so used to being bogged down in the legals but the French took a large part of the weight off my shoulders. It was a very liberating experience and I hope to work with them again.

When it came to filming we tried to keep a low profile in Manchester and not let Little Eric, as we called Steve, know that Eric Cantona was arriving. Trying to smuggle Big Eric in and out of Manchester was hilarious. The first time he came over, he came to do some rehearsal and meet some of the people in the film - but not Steve. That was when we got to go to a match at Old Trafford, which was something else. It was the Champions' League Quarter Final vs Roma, the second leg. We went with Eric, and by the time we actually reached the inner sanctum of the directors' box we were on telly, because they had filmed him arriving. Word was out that Eric was in town.

It took us half an hour to get to our seats. Then once we were in Eric went down to see the boys in the changing room and he brought Sir Alex [Ferguson, Manchester United manager] back with him. This is quarter of an hour before the match. Sir Alex comes in and he shakes Ken warmly by the hand, says hello to me and starts talking about 'The Wind That Shakes The Barley'. He said he's seen it several times - he started quoting from the film .

At half time they made an announcement over the tannoy that Eric was in the building. It's something else, having 70,000 people singing to the man next to you. He signed autographs for 20 minutes before the match started and then going through to back stage afterwards, as you walked through people were pinned against the wall. It was as if they'd been touched by his presence. It was an extraordinary event, and that was before we started making the film.

This film is certainly different to 'It's A Free World', or 'The Wind That Shakes The Barley', but we always try and make each film as different as we can from the one before. We haven't done a film with a light heart for a long time. This, dare I say it, is a romantic comedy really, and it's quite a while since we've made something like that.

BARRY ACKROYD

director of photography

Ken and I have done 12 or 13 films together and Ken is always very much the master of the set. He knows what he wants to get from the actors, the sound and the location - and from the camera. For the first two or three films I worked on with Ken I was just doing what I was told, but saying, "Yeah, yeah, that's right. The camera should be here, you're quite right Ken..." I think I've worked all that process out now and I try to contribute something. But it's a matter of fulfilling a brief that is very particular to Ken. The key thing you've got to do as a cinematographer is not to occupy the space that belongs to the actors or the performers or the story. You have to know how to light something that will give that space to the actors again.

This film is like magic with social realism. You wouldn't want to step too far outside of the norms and the look of a Ken Loach film. But other times you wanted to add a little something. Sometimes they were almost coincidental: Eric would sit down and we'd have the back of a sofa or a chair behind him, things suggesting to me that they were wings. Like he was kind of an angel.

I've always tried to add something to each film. Originally Ken never moved the camera unless it was a handheld and it was running or chasing or pushing in to something. Now we occasionally might just move the camera - probably off a vehicle or something like that. The truth of the matter is that Ken gets what he wants. We might all be thinking we're working to a separate brief sometimes - I have my agenda, an actor might think they're improvising, saying just what they think they want to say at this point. And actually you find out we're doing pretty much what Ken Loach likes - which is to say a great thing to do because he is a master not just of directing films but of the whole construction of films.

I've got to say that every film we've done has always had a huge element of humour in it, no matter what the subject is. One of the tricks Ken always uses is to juxtapose the two - you always get a funny thing before you're going to get the bailiffs knocking on the door or the police coming in or the enemy attacking you. So in a way I don't feel this is a different kind of film.

The element that was slightly different was Eric Cantona. He has this presence. Paul's script understands that Cantona's strengths are not just his football but his philosophy, so it's got both those elements in there in great numbers. It's beautiful and it's funny.

Cantona's very photogenic, a huge personality and has a history you can't ignore. But he's gentle, and he's a very generous guy as well. The strange thing was, I think he was in awe of Ken Loach and that was a lovely thing to see.

FERGUS CLEGG

production designer

After having worked on ten films with Ken this was the most different. Actually they're all different but this was unexpected - from reading the script through to the last day's shooting I was kind of thinking, is this really happening?

We found Eric's house in Chorlton-cum-Hardy, a fantastically named place on the outskirts of Manchester. It's a very nice area but it had obviously become run down. A lot of multiple occupancy flats.

The tricky thing was how rough to make it because it's a fine line - it's quite a large house so we assumed they'd bought the house as a project when Eric was married and then the wife had left home. So it was a great, unfinished work. The place we found had been inhabited by various tenants who'd left just before we were there and it was in a fairly dilapidated state so we had to reconfigure the kitchen and a few other rooms to make them habitable for us and to work as a space. It's all about making it real with Ken, so you go to

lengths that you wouldn't normally do with a conventional film. The layering, the ageing of things - you could turn it in to a pastiche of how that kind of person would live but Ken is always clear that he wants it as realistic as possible.

When it came to doing Eric's bedroom we read in the script that it is a bit like a shrine. For the Man United memorabilia we trawled eBay and we had a lot of help from Andy Walsh at FC United. They all collect like lunatics so they've got collectibles going back to the beginning of time and they know it from the inside out. Andy gave us stuff signed by Eric... that he asked us to get resigned by Eric because it had faded slightly. We had the life size poster that Little Eric talks to specially made.

Our biggest challenge was the Cantona masks. We thought it couldn't be that difficult, but we went everywhere to get them. That was one outcome of our meeting with Cantona at the Roma match. We asked Eric if he could rummage in his attic for a mask. He made a phonecall while we were sitting in the back of the car and his brother came up with one.

When it came to recreating Eric's workplace we had no help whatsoever from the Post Office - they would not play ball, wouldn't even let us use the logo. So Ken and I managed to sneak in to a post office sorting room early one morning and we based it on that, building most of it.

Most memorably we did this strange fantasy moment where we had Eric and Little Eric dancing together. We were in a film studio with the two of them, rock and roll music being played, CDs hanging on nylon so you had a strange optical effect of light flashing. People kept rubbing their eyes because they couldn't believe it: we never thought we'd see the day with Ken Loach in a studio doing a pop video.

JONATHAN MORRIS

Editor

Editing 'Looking For Eric' was a bit different to usual because we have a character in the film who disappears from time to time onscreen. He's a figment of someone's imagination but there are no special effects. It's done with very, very, very - write this down - clever editing.

Another difference in this one is that we have a couple of football montages. So we do have archive material and a lot of Eric Cantona's great goals to choose from.

Putting that together was great fun. There are three or four DVDs of Cantona's best goals around and Ken said, 'Come up to Manchester and put together a little sequence of about 20 goals so that Steve Evets can have a look'. Steve's not a huge football fan so Ken wanted him to see the character that he is infatuated with. When I was up there it was before filming and this guy came in and said, 'Do you mind mate? If I sit next to you?' I thought, 'Well alright, he's a cleaner or something.' And he sat next to me for a while and it turned out to be Steve our leading man, just having a look!

We went back to the cutting room and put together sequences of the best goals and then eventually we showed the film to Eric Cantona himself. Ken did get a text from Eric saying thank you, he enjoyed it... but there were a couple of other goals he wouldn't mind us considering. He never said, 'Put them in,' but he wanted us to have a look at one or two that he thought were better than one or two that were in there.

There was one goal that we had left out because he's wearing the green and yellow Man U top - we thought it would confuse people, the non-football fans. But he suggested it and we did put it in - if that's all Eric would ask for it was the least we could do.

As it happens I'm an Arsenal supporter. When I met Cantona for the first time at the screening he came up to me and said, 'You're the Arsenal supporter aren't you?' Which was wonderful. He probably didn't know that the one thing I had made sure of was that there was no goal scored against Arsenal in the film. There was one on the shortlist, a free kick against Seaman. I used my influence and power to make sure that didn't make it in.

GEORGE FENTON

composer

With Ken I don't get a script, in fact he more or less doesn't let me see the film until he's finished it. Then I see it and literally within a day or so we sit down and try and decide where the music is going to go and what it's going to do. Since music is part of the finishing process the emphasis of the film is evident to you by that point.

It's hard for me to be objective about 'Looking For Eric' because it stars Eric Cantona, who is one of my greatest heroes. I just sat there beaming the whole way through because he's very, very charismatic.

I did think about whether I had a responsibility to the audience to tell them, 'This is going to be funny,' or, 'It's going to be okay really,' because the story begins with our Eric in a bad way. Sometimes the music needs to stand away from the film slightly and help you through it, rather than intensifying what you see. The hard thing with this film was to do that on one level but at the same time to be faithful to Eric Bishop the character. I have never scored a film in my life that began in a more minimal way; I was very, very anxious about it. But Ken is very brave. I started with the sound of a stand-up bass because it seemed like it was a kind of little signature for the postman. It began like that and then we just stripped things away until we ended up with literally just the bass. Which for a musician is not a happy place to be I can tell you!

When Cantona plays the trumpet, even though he's not a trumpet player there is a magnificence about the way he plays. I thought we should give it as much help as we could, so I orchestrated the 'Marseillaise' around his trumpet playing. It is a wonderful moment because he's not a good player, and yet in the eyes of our Eric he's just fantastic. And then you see this cutaway of these kids, all of whom dream of only one thing at night and that's ending up being Wayne Rooney, or Berbatov, and it's just magical, him playing the trumpet for them while they play football.

The music behind the montages of Cantona's greatest goals is kind of my anthem for Eric. It's a very simple piano tune - just two shifting chords and then it modulates up. It was the first thing I wrote. I was sitting there thinking what a great job this is, I just played this thing and Ken said, 'Oh, I like that,' so that was that. It's a weird thing football - the way it can make your heart soar.

SARAH RYAN

costume designer

Ken and I talked about Eric Bishop, about what his life was like and his current mental state. We looked at photographs of the locations to get an idea of his background. Obviously Eric didn't have much money and his house is a bit of a mess, so you just know that his life is quite run down and his clothing will be quite run down too.

Obviously we needed a fair few Man U shirts. I actually threw in some old ones because Eric and his postmen have been fans for so long. Whether you notice it on screen I don't know because they are often underneath his clothing. When he takes off a layer you might get a flash of another shirt. He has several different ones. There was one he wore under his uniform a lot from the late 80s.

His daughter wears the one with the laced up neck from the early 90s in the scene on the bus. Eric also has that one on when he's training with Big Eric. Then there's another one made of blue cotton that's an old 50s away strip. They're nice - I prefer them to be honest.

As the film goes on, as Eric's mental state improves, that's reflected in his dress but it's quite subtle. When he meets Lily he makes a little bit of an effort. He's put on a shirt. He starts off in a postal uniform that's really scruffy and then a few days later it's a better blue colour and slightly pressed. Nobody would know that but we ironed it and changed it from a grey blue to a better blue. And then we moved him on from there so when he even when he's dressed casually he's starting to think, 'I need to look a bit better' - he's thinking about himself in a way he wasn't before.

When it came to Eric Cantona, that was a bit of a thing. Initially, we were saying that because he just appears, is he appearing from the past, is he a ghost, is he the king? In my head I thought he could be dressed in a white suit or as this mad regal character. Ken was like, 'No, he's just like he is as he is now.' I'd got all excited but when you read the script it makes sense. So we tried to make him nondescript, in all these dark colours, even when he's training. Ken was just happy that he was who he was.

KEN LOACH director



1967	Poor Cow
1969	Kes
1972	Family Life
1979	Black Jack
1977	Looks and Smiles
1986	Fatherland
1990	Hidden Agenda
1991	Riff-Raff
1993	Raining Stones
1994	Ladybird Ladybird
1995	Land and Freedom
1996	Carla's Song
1998	My Name is Joe
2000	Bread and Roses
2001	The Navigators
2002	Sweet Sixteen
2002	11'09'01 (Short film)
2003	Ae Fond Kiss
2004	Tickets (Short film)
2006	The Wind That Shakes The Barley
2007	Happy Ending (Short film)
2007	It's A Free World
2008	Looking For Eric

CAST

Eric BishopSTEVE EVETS
Eric Cantona.....ERIC CANTONA
LilySTEPHANIE BISHOP
SamLUCY-JO HUDSON
RyanGERARD KEARNS
JessSTEFAN GUMBS

The postmen

MeatballsJOHN HENSHAW
SpleenJUSTIN MOORHOUSE
Jack.....DES SHARPLES
MonkGREG COOK
Judge.....MICK FERRY
SmugSMUG ROBERTS
TravisJOHNNY TRAVIS

Young Eric.....MATTHEW MCNULTY
Young Lily.....LAURA AINSWORTH
ZacSTEVE MARSH
Fenner.....RYAN POPE

CREW

DirectorKEN LOACH
ScreenwriterPAUL LAVERTY
ProducerREBECCA O'BRIEN
Executive Producers.....ERIC CANTONA, PASCAL CAUCHETEUX, VINCENT MARAVAL
Line Producer.....TIM COLE
Director of PhotographyBARRY ACKROYD , B.S.C
Production DesignerFERGUS CLEGG
EditorJONATHAN MORRIS
Sound mixerRAY BECKETT
Music ComposerGEORGE FENTON
Costume DesignerSARAH RYAN
Casting DirectorKAHLEEN CRAWFORD
Set PhotographerJOSS BARRATT

A Canto Bros.Productions, Sixteen Films, Why Not Productions, Wild Bunch

Film4, Icon Film Distribution, North West Vision Media, France 2 Cinéma, Canal +, Ciné Cinéma, Sofica UGC 1,
Diaphana Distribution, RTBF (Télévision belge), BIM Distribuzione, Les Films du Fleuve, La Région Wallonne,
Cinéart, Tornasol Films, Alta Producción

A British / French / Italian / Belgian / Spanish Co-Production



