

Cannes 2015: Amy (Asif Kapadia, 2015)



It may have been nearly four years ago, but to this day I still remember the palpably discomfiting atmosphere when I visited Amy Winehouse's home in the days following her death. The pavement was festooned with slowly withering flowers and chalk drawings of the Star of David. Everyone around seemed sombre. It is, of course, entirely understandable. Winehouse was considered the bluesy voice of a generation. A vocal powerhouse; emotive and, as Asif Kapadia seeks to show in his latest documentary about the star, a deeply misunderstood woman.

A chronicle of the life of soul singer Amy Winehouse from her early life in North London to her untimely, publicised death.

There's a debilitating heartache that runs through Amy – a film that delivers a seemingly unfiltered look into the life of one of modern music's most profound figures. Granted access to Winehouse's home video tapes and to interview her closest family and friends, Kapadia has combined the two, avoiding the visual use of his interviews and instead making her relatives the narrators. As a result, the work is terribly intimate; sometimes in a manner that shows her loving soul and others in a way that depicts her public degradation.

This is as much a film about the brutality of substance abuse as it is a music documentary. Its most harrowing moments lie in the revealing interviews about the times we heard of, but never saw. The times during which Winehouse was introduced to heroin by her partner Blake Fielder-Civil, just days following their wedding. The relationship seems both on-and-off, breaking apart from each other and crumbling as a consequence.

Its unembellished, visceral attitude makes your heart swell and shatter; hearing things that, as a Winehouse fan, you never truly want to hear.

Perhaps half of the story behind Amy lies in the controversy that stems from it. According to Mitch, Amy's father, the doc fabricates the life of Amy in her final years. His words seem unjustified as Winehouse's friends are the ones telling the story; the ones closest to her when, allegedly, he wasn't.

When you watch Amy, it becomes incredibly easy to forget that its gifted, sultry subject is no longer with us. Commemorating her wonderfully, Kapadia does an impeccable job of shaping her life into the medium of film; depicting her battle with drug abuse as one she simply could not stop. As a result, it's a hope of mine that people see the documentary and change their opinion of a woman who was so frequently misunderstood. She was, as is Kapadia, a true master at heart.



Amy had its World Premiere at the 68th Festival de Cannes