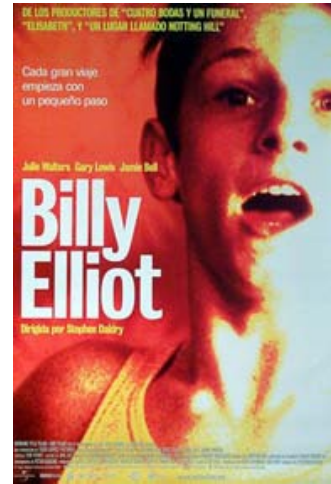


## BILLY ELLIOT

UK, 2000, *Stephen Daldry*



Miners in the north of England are on strike. Billy Elliot lives near Durham. He is eleven. Billy's recently-widowed father and his older brother, Tony, with whom he shares a room are also out on strike. They go every day to the picket lines to pillory scab labourers being bussed into the mines.

Billy takes boxing lessons at the local club. He is not very good at it. One day, he watches the ballet class and is fascinated. Dared by Debbie, the daughter of the dancing teacher, Mrs Wilkinson, he auditions for her. While he finds it difficult to perform the steps, he continues to come to the lessons. He does not dare tell his family.

Billy practises and, despite misgivings, he improves. When his father finds out about the lessons he forbids them. His brother ridicules him. However, Mrs Wilkinson has faith in his ability and trains him privately for a regional audition. When Tony is beaten by the police, Billy misses his appointment.

Billy's father sees him dance. Billy wants to show him the energy (and anger) that boils inside him. His father finally acknowledges his son's talent. To pay for Billy's trip to London to the Royal Ballet, he crosses the picket line. The other miners stop him and agree to raise the money for Billy. He and his dad travel to London for the audition where Billy is aggressively outspoken in his responses to the judges but dances powerfully. He is offered a place.

Years later, his father and Tony go to see the adult Billy dancing the lead role in *Swan Lake*.

The original title of this movie was *Dancer*. A great hit at the Cannes Film Festival, a decision was made that it would do much better avoiding 'dancer' and focussing on the name of the young boy whose story it tells, Billy Elliot. It is a very entertaining movie and should have audiences both laughing and crying.

Lee Hall's screenplay includes all the expected fights with father and brother about sissy dancing as well as discussions about equating dancing with sexual orientations. This gives the film a great deal of bite. The relationship between Billy and his father is well drawn, the working man who has never travelled, whose life is focussed on the mine, his family and his mates and who is challenged to come to terms with a son who has great ability as a dancer.

This is theatre director, Stephen Daldry's first movie, made with great assurance. Particularly striking are several sequences where Billy dances exuberantly with his teacher (a rather acerbic but generous Julie Walters). He also dances vehemently to vent his anger with his family, to show his father what it all means to him. There is vehemence as well in his audition.

Jamie Bell is completely convincing as Billy. When we first see him at home, and with his boxing gloves, he does not seem to be a natural dancer. When we see him finding the lessons so difficult, falling off balance, we really believe he cannot yet dance. Perhaps you have to be a very good dancer to act being unable to dance. This means that his performance rings completely true in terms of both acting and dancing.