

SINGULAR SUPER



TOM FORD

Tongue twister time: fabulously famous fashionista Tom Ford has financed his first feature film. Yes, it's super-stylish, but it's also a substantial and spiritual story. **Stuart Brumfitt** met its stars **Colin Firth**, **Matthew Goode** and **Nicholas Hoult** and found out what the film means about gay life in the past, the present and the future.

With a starry red carpet premiere and Oscar and Golden Globe nominations, *A Single Man* is clearly the big gaybuster of the year; this year's *Milk* in terms of its acclaim and mainstream appeal. Shot in California when Proposition 8 – which bans gay marriage – was being passed, it's an elegant fuck you to all those people who see gay unions as abnormal, since at its heart is a simple and very universal love story between two men.

George Falconer, played with great gravity and good humour by Colin Firth, is a British college professor struggling to live with the death of his long-term partner Jim (the super sexy Matthew Goode). Detached and dispirited, we follow him through a single day, where a series of encounters and flashbacks lead him to decide whether there's any meaning to life.

The film is adapted from Christopher Isherwood's book, and funnily enough, director and ex-Gucci mastermind Tom Ford used to hang out with the legendary writer at artist David Hockney's California pad back in the 1960s, when Tom was 20 and Isherwood around 80. It provides a nice circular feel to the whole story, as Nicholas Hoult (best known for *About a Boy* and *Skins*) plays a young Kenny who's drawn to the older English professor just as a young Tom Ford was attracted to the older, highly cultured scene of Hockney and Isherwood.

The irony that a film about a gorgeous, devoted gay couple was being made whilst anti-gay rhetoric burned around California was not lost on any of the cast. Colin Firth said, 'Proposition 8 went through when I was filming that film, which takes you back to the dark ages. How modern are we now?' and Goode adds, 'It's amazing how far we haven't come.'

The film makes you realise that at any time there are forward and backward-thinking scenes. It's pleasant to see that before the gay liberation of the 70s, there were still pockets of progressive life, but it's bleak



MATTHEW GOODE & COLIN FIRTH

that almost 50 years after the book and with all this liberation, somewhere like California still can't see that gay couples are plain old normal.

Firth, passionate about his gay role and politics despite being straight, told us, 'There was a very alive bohemia in LA at that time. Isherwood writes in an extremely modern and unassuming way about being gay. He doesn't really write about being gay in fact – that's what's so modern about it. Isherwood didn't make a point of it. He just allowed his characters to have male lovers that almost seemed mainstream at a time when it must have been very difficult.'

But whilst Ford and co were keen to tell this gay love story, the marketing men behind the film came up for some stick from certain groups in America because all the promotion there seemed to downplay the gay element of the film. Matthew Goode admitted, 'There was a slight reworking of the billboards and the trailer to make it look as if it's a heterosexual relationship. Harvey Weinstein came in for a bit of criticism for that, but ultimately he's trying to get the story across to as many people as he can and ultimately he's a businessman.'

It's all testament to a lingering fear about fags in America, a fear that's reflected in American actors being scared to 'play gay'. Goode reckons, 'Brits don't worry about it too much. Also, because of the state of the script, which is such a compelling and beautifully told story, you would jump to be involved. There's much more of a protection of image over there and there's more testosterone. It's a fucking generalised statement from me really. I'm not saying all American actors are afraid of playing gay. I mean Sean Penn does it. But it's a different land and it's certainly something that British actors lean to more easily.'

And Firth and Goode leant rather easily to the man-on-man snog too, with Firth telling the *Metro* 'I enjoyed my gay kiss in *A Single Man*' and Goode telling gay American magazine *The Advocate*, 'Sometimes you see straight actors trying to portray gay men as very aggressive, so the kissing is super-aggressive and rough. I'm sure that does exist, but we liked that our kissing was sensitive.' So for sensitive kisses, Tom Ford superstyle and some Oscar-worthy performances, *A Single Man* is the single best gay film for ages.