

New Romantics

Starring in British rom-com *Finding Emily*, Australian actor Angourie Rice is in the mood for love – of the unpredictable, messy, “wild and mad” variety.

by **Scarlet Lili Thomas**

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At just 25 years old, Angourie Rice has already built a career spanning international blockbusters and quieter character-driven films and shows. Audiences might recognise her from Australian doomsday flick *These Final Hours* (2013), crime gem *Mare of Easttown* (2021), where she starred alongside Kate Winslet, or Marvel’s *Spider-Man* franchise – the list goes on. But her latest role in *Finding Emily* places her right at the centre of a story that is playful, messy and emotionally conflicted.

Set in Manchester, the film follows Rice’s character, Emily, an American uni student on a visa who is studying psychology. She approaches romance with a degree of scepticism – at first. When she meets Owen (Spike Fearn), who is searching the campus for “the woman of his dreams”, armed with nothing but her first name, she initially treats the encounter as something curious, almost a case study for her dissertation. But what begins as observational distance gradually turns into something far more complicated. It is this contradiction that drew Rice to the role.

“I love to play characters who change,” she says. “That is the juiciest thing to do as an actor.”

For Rice, Emily’s internal conflict is where the performance lives. She is a character who often says one thing while feeling another, caught between intellectual understanding and emotional vulnerability. “I love those layers,” Rice explains. “Getting into a situation where you’re trying to hide your genuine feelings.”

Emily is not unaware of her own contradictions. As Rice describes it, there is a constant negotiation

happening beneath the surface, which is balanced by very real stakes. Emily wants to stay in Manchester and secure her future. Her choices are not purely romantic; they are practical, messy and at times self-serving.

As *Finding Emily* unfolds, that guardedness begins to break down. What looks like cynicism is gradually revealed as something closer to fear. “She’s actually a massive romantic,” Rice says. “She’s trying to reject that because she’s worried about getting hurt, like we all are.” Owen becomes the catalyst for that shift. His openness unsettles Emily but also reflects something she recognises in herself.

The dynamic between the two characters is central to the film, and Rice describes working with Fearn as unexpectedly easy. “He’s so energetic, he’s just crackling,” she laughs. Both Rice and Fearn built playlists for their characters and spent time together outside filming. “It didn’t feel like hard work. It was just fun.” The sense of spontaneity extends into the tone of the film itself, which draws on the tradition of the romantic comedy while still feeling contemporary. Key influences include films like *Notting Hill* (1999) and *Bridget Jones’s Diary* (2001), whose titular protagonist, played by Renée Zellweger, was pivotal in shaping this role. “She’s frazzled and trying to get her life together,” Rice says. “Emily is the same.”

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In one particularly specific homage, Rice recalls being inspired by a moment in *My Best Friend’s Wedding* (1997) where Julia Roberts’ character wears two pairs of sunglasses at once. “I thought that was brilliant,” Rice says. “I pitched this idea that Emily would do the same thing, like she’d forget she already had a pair and grab another.” It is a small detail but one that captures the character’s distracted, slightly chaotic energy.

Emily’s wardrobe feels lived-in and personal, built from repeated clothes rather than constant change. “We talked about her being someone who collects cool vintage things,” Rice explains. Re-wearing pieces throughout the film, from worn-in jackets to the same few bags and shoes, helped ground the character in the real-world fashion of a university student. “That’s what people actually do,” she says. “They have the same things they wear all the time.” Hair and makeup followed a similarly naturalistic approach. Rice brought in a reference image of Goldie Hawn from *Private Benjamin* (1980), drawn to its slightly undone, expressive quality. The result is a style that feels authentic to a student life defined by late nights and rushed mornings.



Beyond aesthetics, Emily’s academic focus on psychology shapes the film’s thematic core. Before filming began, Rice attended a lecture on Carl Jung, whose theories explore the unconscious mind, dreams and archetypes. Engaging with these ideas influenced how she approached the role. “It made me think about love and the self in a really analytical way,” she says. “Like you could almost boil these big emotions down into something structured.” This tension between analysis and experience becomes one of the film’s central ideas. Emily tries to quantify love – to understand it through theory – but ultimately finds that it resists that kind of control. “In the end, it’s just messy,” Rice says. “Love is kind of wild and mad.”

Manchester is not just a backdrop but an active, unpredictable presence within the film. Rice draws comparisons to rom-coms in which setting is integral to the story, such as *When Harry Met Sally* (1989) and *Sleepless in Seattle* (1993). Spending two-and-a-half months living and filming in Manchester allowed her to experience it in a way that mirrored Emily’s own journey. “I’d go somewhere on a day off, and then we’d film there later,” she says. “It felt like I was discovering it at the same time as the character.”

Rice’s off-screen experiences blurred into something closer to the fantasy of a romantic comedy itself. Cast and crew spent time together outside of work – going to pubs, playing games and building friendships. “When you watch it, it feels like how it felt to make it,” Rice says. “It’s fun and vibrant.” Despite filming almost every day, Rice describes the experience as energising.

“It was a lot,” she admits. “But, when you’re having fun, you’re just high on life and energy.”

Alongside her acting work, Rice is also stepping further into writing. Her upcoming young adult novel, *My Wonderful Disgrace* – her second book co-written with her mother, Kate Rice – explores teenage relationships, miscommunication and the chaos of a single night gone wrong. The book is structured through journal entries, text messages and other fragments, creating a layered narrative that unfolds gradually.

For Rice, writing offers a different kind of creative satisfaction. “It’s about the big picture,” she says. “With acting, you’re there to tell the story. But, with writing, you have to solve the problems yourself.” While the processes differ, they ultimately serve the same purpose. “It’s all connected,” she adds. “It’s all about telling stories.” Balancing multiple projects is something she has come to embrace. “If I have nothing to do, I’ll invent something,” she admits – a mindset that carries across film, writing and everything in between.

In *Finding Emily*, this impulse is reflected in a character constantly trying to intellectualise her emotions instead of surrendering to them. What emerges is a portrait of someone caught between caution and desire, certainty and risk. Rice says that that contradiction is exactly what makes Emily compelling. She is “taking big swings and just crossing her fingers,” the actor says, “and I love that about her.” ■

FINDING EMILY IS IN CINEMAS NOW

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