

12<sup>th</sup> February 2025

## It might be 30 years old, but *Before Sunrise* is still a masterpiece

It is not trying to be anything other than what it is – a beautifully crafted story that captures the magic of spontaneous romance. *Before Sunrise*, directed by Richard Linklater, premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in 1995 and is back in cinemas for its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

There is no better way to commemorate Valentines Day than to take a step back and enjoy what it really means to be young twentysomethings captivated by each other.

There is nothing extraordinary about their meeting. Jesse, a lovably smug American (played by Ethan Hawk) and Céline, an intelligent and beautiful French woman (played by Julie Delpy) find themselves in a train carriage with a German couple who are arguing loudly.

And yet, in contrast to today, no one is wearing headphones, or scrolling mindlessly on their phone. Everyone in the carriage is just there, perhaps with a book in their hand. Everyone can hear the argument and sense the awkwardness.

This provides the trigger for Jesse and Céline to share amused glances. Intrigued by the connection between them, Jesse decides to ask Céline if he can sit next to her.

Captivated by her, Jesse convinces Céline to get off the train with him in Vienna and spend the night exploring the city together. No Google Maps, no warnings from friends about the dangers of strangers — just one night of acting on impulse. Freedom.

Céline [left] and Jesse [right], [Susana](#): Available CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

People still seem to seek this kind of spontaneity. The longing for unscripted experiences hasn't faded, but the more we pursue it, the more artificial it can feel, leaving us in a kind of social fatigue.

Jesse and Céline are not fatigued. They meander through Vienna; two strangers whose collision feels like a secret only the city knows.

What happens? You could almost say absolutely nothing. But that is exactly why *Before Sunrise* is a masterpiece. Jesse and Céline just talk. They talk on a tram, in a record store, whilst playing pinball.

You will never watch a film - or its two sequels *Before Sunset* (2004) and *Before Midnight* (2013) - where you are so thoroughly entertained by the power and purity of human interaction. The film's conversational style gives it a documentary-like realism. It feels so incredibly natural and authentic.

*\*\*Spoiler in next paragraph.*

They do finally kiss. But only after you have been internally yelling at Jesse for what feels like hours to go for it. Even after he does, you are not satisfied. And neither are they. It is never explicit, but their deliberation is palpable. Should we have sex or would that ruin everything?

The modern love story often unfolds more through texts than in-person conversation. With our phones as our companions, real connection takes a backseat. *Before Sunrise* reminds us of

what we've lost but still desire – the spontaneity and thrill of meeting people, the kind of authenticity that Jesse and Céline surrender to so effortlessly.

To witness it for yourself, you could stream *Before Sunrise* on Amazon Prime. But why not go to the cinema and experience film as it is designed to be experienced – and maybe even leave your phone at home? You never know who you might share an amused glance with if you just looked up.

*This film is certified as a UK 15.*