# Josh O'Connor and Paul Mescal are lovers in Oliver Hermanus’s The History of Sound



Oliver Hermanus’s poignant The History of Sound charts a gay romantic journey framed by a shared passion for traditional folk music, centering on Paul Mescal’s Lionel and Josh O’Connor’s David. The narrative unfolds with their first encounter at the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston, where David’s piano rendition of the folk ballad Silver Dagger sparks a magnetic connection. This song—steeped in the sorrow of star-crossed lovers—sets the tone for the film’s exploration of love, loss, and creative intimacy. According to Mescal, witnessing someone’s ardour is irresistibly attractive, and Lionel’s discovery of David performing a rare, niche folk song in a bar encapsulates this moment of profound attraction.

Based on Ben Shattuck’s story, the film transports viewers from Lionel’s rural Kentucky roots to the urban academic environment of Boston between 1910 and the mid-1920s. Lionel’s synesthesia is a key element, described through a voiceover by the elder version of his character (Chris Cooper), which enriches the sensory experience of sound throughout the film. This unique perception intensifies Lionel’s connection to the folk songs and to David, who comes from Newport, shaped by his upbringing in England and a mission to preserve these fading oral traditions. After enduring separation during World War I, where David battles unseen scars from combat, the pair embark on a heartfelt expedition into the remote Maine countryside to unearth and safeguard these folk ballads.

O’Connor reflects on David’s role not just as a fellow enthusiast but as a curator of their shared experience. Despite later revelations that David’s narrative is more complicated than it appears, his actions stem from pure love—both for Lionel and their collective artistic pursuit. This dimension of care and creation, O’Connor explains, is deeply moving and underscores the tenderness that anchors their relationship. The film does more than tell a love story; it honours the painstaking preservation of cultural memory at a time when oral traditions risk being lost.

Critics have lauded the film’s emotional depth and the nuanced performances by Mescal and O’Connor. The Washington Post highlights Mescal’s sensitive portrayal of Lionel, capturing the vulnerability of a man navigating both his synesthetic world and burgeoning love. The New Yorker praises the movie’s melancholic tone and its heightened exploration of desire through Lionel’s heightened sensory experience. Reviews from AwardsWatch and Time Out also commend the film for intertwining its historical context—World War I’s shadow—and the beauty of folk music’s enduring melancholy, reinforcing The History of Sound as both a tender romance and a culturally resonant period piece.

For Mescal and O’Connor, both well versed in queer love stories from their previous work, The History of Sound carries an added significance. Mescal reflects on the increasing difficulties in getting queer-themed projects made amidst polarized social climates but also acknowledges the privilege and responsibility of telling such stories. His recent collaboration with Andrew Scott in All of Us Strangers and O’Connor’s noted role in God’s Own Country mark a continued commitment to bringing nuanced queer narratives to screen. Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.out.com/film/paul-mescal-and-josh-o-connor-on-their-shared-turn-on-in-history-of-sound> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/movies/2025/05/23/paul-mescal-history-of-sound-cannes/> - An article from The Washington Post discusses Paul Mescal's performance in 'The History of Sound,' highlighting his portrayal of Lionel, a farm boy from Kentucky with synesthesia, who bonds with David (Josh O'Connor) over a shared love of folk music at the Boston Conservatory of Music. The piece emphasizes the film's exploration of their relationship and the significance of the folk song 'Silver Dagger' in their connection.
3. <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/the-current-cinema/the-muted-melancholy-synesthetics-of-the-history-of-sound> - The New Yorker provides a review of 'The History of Sound,' focusing on the romantic drama set during and after World War I. The article delves into the characters' shared passion for folk music, their bond over the song 'Silver Dagger,' and Lionel's synesthesia, which allows him to experience sound through all his senses. The review highlights the film's exploration of love, desire, and heightened perception.
4. <https://awardswatch.com/the-history-of-sound-review-paul-mescal-and-josh-oconnors-tender-romance-is-a-silver-dagger-to-the-heart-a-cannes/> - AwardsWatch offers a review of 'The History of Sound,' praising the tender romance between Paul Mescal's Lionel and Josh O'Connor's David. The article discusses their meeting over the folk song 'Silver Dagger' at the Boston Conservatory of Music, their shared love for music, and the film's exploration of their relationship amidst the backdrop of World War I.
5. <https://www.timeout.com/movies/the-history-of-sound-review-2025> - Time Out provides a review of 'The History of Sound,' directed by Oliver Hermanus. The article discusses the film's portrayal of Lionel and David's relationship, their shared love for folk music, and the significance of the song 'Silver Dagger.' It also touches upon the film's exploration of love, loss, and the impact of World War I on their lives.
6. <https://www.harpersbazaar.com/culture/film-tv/a66057694/paul-mescal-josh-oconnor-history-of-sound-interview-2025/> - Harper's Bazaar features an interview with Paul Mescal and Josh O'Connor about their roles in 'The History of Sound.' The actors discuss their characters' shared passion for folk music, the recording of songs like 'Cuckoo Song' and 'Silver Dagger,' and the importance of capturing the authenticity of these traditional songs in the film.