



Aidan O'Callaghan reveals if Lewis Butler will return to EastEnders after Ben Mitchell lets him live

Did Lewis think that Ben was going to pull the trigger?

It's really interesting, because when I was getting my head right with Lewis, I was constantly going back to this feeling of shame. Many people don't feel comfortable with the feeling of shame. It's a vulnerable position to be in, and Lewis doesn't want to feel shame. He's getting defensive, he's getting angry, he's trying to deflect these emotions onto Ben – pointing the finger at him.

He's pointing out Ben's flaws about being the Walford Attacker. Ultimately, Lewis allows the shame to embody him – what does that say about him as a human being, having caused this trauma to Ben?

It's wonderful to explore that in terms of what Ben does, as he's forcing Lewis at gunpoint to feel that shame, and to realise what he has done. That is an overwhelming feeling of emotions, of guilt, sadness, and regret.

He is panicking in his head, and drowning in his head – and that's a vulnerable position that he's not comfortable with.

As the episode moves forward, he pushes that back, going back to his defensiveness again, convincing himself that he is not in the wrong.

The showdown between Ben and Lewis is such a powerful one, as Lewis finally admits what he did. What were those scenes with Max like, and were they tough to actually film?

Me and Max had such great chemistry on set, so I did know we'd find those magic moments, because that's the joy of acting! You don't want to plan it too much – you want that magic to sparkle off. I felt that we had that. The director really gave us that space to reach that emotional state. It was difficult but also really rewarding.

Was Lewis surprised with the outcome – that Ben let him live?

Lewis goes through a massive journey, because in the previous episode he's withering at Phil and the embarrassment starts to come up. He's been vulnerable in front of everyone and the defensiveness is coming back, so there's an element of potential acceptance [of his fate] here – the gun is at his head.

There are moments where Lewis in his head thinks: "You know what? Ben is not going to shoot me." He can see the fear in Ben's eyes, and that just happened naturally as a reaction to the scene. But when he hears the bullet, he thinks that's it. There is a moment then with Ben and Lewis where Lewis then realises this is not the end.

The big question! Have seen the last of Lewis?

I mean, I haven't seen scripts! But I'm keeping my phone turned on, so we'll just have to wait and see if I get the call. Could this be potentially the last we've seen of Lewis? I think it would be fascinating to do the court case. Continue that awareness in terms of the emotions that actual survivors go through, and the difficult challenges there are with court cases around these situations. I'll just have to wait and see if my phone rings!

Do you hope Lewis gets his comeuppance and pays for what he's done?

Absolutely. For viewers, it must've been satisfying to see Lewis feel that shame, but it was only for a brief moment. I think the court case would allow Lewis to feel shame. The court case and a sentence would allow Lewis to reflect on what he's done and the trauma that he has caused.

This is such an important storyline to be a part of – are you glad that EastEnders is raising awareness and telling this story that needs to be told?

Absolutely. On day one – when the storyline was announced – I was like: "I need absolutely nail this part, and keep to myself". But I met regularly with Duncan from Survivors Manchester.

When I first spoke to him I was like: "I'm a bit nervous about getting involved, it's such a sensitive role, I should kind of pipe down". But he said to me: "People will refer back to this storyline for years, and you should be proud. Use every platform you can to get involved and raise awareness."

Already, the number of people reaching out for support is increasing. So, that was the reason why I helped raise money and did the 10k run. I went to a drop-in clinic as well to meet with survivors, and they were like: "Thank you so much!". I was like: "Oh my god, I'm the villain." They said that it's raising awareness and opening conversations around sexual consent.

It's telling their story. It's not my or Max's story, it's their story we're telling. It's raised awareness and I think everyone should be applauded for that.

Lewis was received really well by fans when he first debuted, but that was before the nature of the storyline was revealed. Did you know from the beginning that this is the direction the story would take?

Yes, I knew at the very first audition stages where this was going. I was reassured that support would be provided from the various organisations, and that BBC would provide it.

It was so rewarding to see that response to Lewis [at the beginning], if I could've stretched that longer, that would've been fantastic. You need people to buy into the character and the relationship with Ben in order for that dramatic journey. I would've loved it to have stretched a bit further, but the drama was looming.

What's next for you? Have you anything else you're working on?

I'm in Yorkshire filming a feature film called The Reckoning of Erin Morigan. It's

about a solider, so very different costume to Lewis! No earrings.

Magnetic earrings, Lewis wore. Those earrings falling out everywhere, because I don't actually have a piercing so they kept calling on the ground. So no earrings for this character! [laughs].