



FILMMAKERS

ISSUE 3 | SUMMER 2015 | BFI.ORG.UK

NEVER SURRENDER!

ABI MORGAN, FAYE WARD AND SARAH GAVRON TALK SUFFRAGETTE

- + A SYRIAN LOVE STORY
- SPACESHIP
- IONA
- HIGH-RISE
- THE LOBSTER
- ETHEL & ERNEST
- BFI FLARE
- SHORTS TO FEATURES

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Image: Three Brothers (dir. Aleem Khan) - BAFTA nomination

BFI FILMMAKERS

ISSUE 3 | SUMMER 2015

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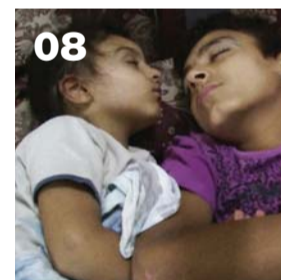
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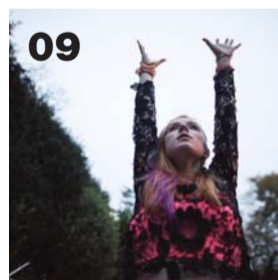
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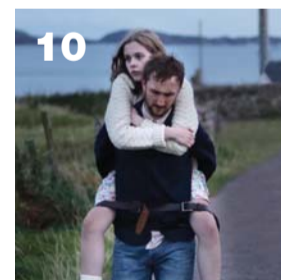
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Cover photo of ABI MORGAN, FAYE WARD AND SARAH GAVRON by PAUL MARC MITCHELL, London, June 2015

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Managing Director & Publisher NICK LEESE
Editor DIANA LODDERHOSE
Co-editor TINA McFARLING
Creative Director PAUL MARC MITCHELL
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Carey Mulligan on the set of *Suffragette*

WELCOME...

Thanks for picking up this Summer 2015 issue of BFI FILMMAKERS, which we hope you'll enjoy reading on the beach, or at least use as a fan.

All of the films featured have been made with the creative and financial support of our Film Fund team at the BFI, using funds from the National Lottery 'good cause' money that allows us to get behind ambitious, risky, creative filmmaking across the UK and beyond.

And there's certainly an abundance of ambition in this issue.

Our cover features the team behind this autumn's *Suffragette*, an impressive undertaking for director Sarah Gavron who is making only her second feature film here (after 2007's *Brick Lane*). *Suffragette*'s ambition lies not just in the scale of the production (which was the first film ever to shoot inside the House of Commons), but at the very heart of its story about the heroic campaign to forever change the rights of women in Britain.

You can also read about the ambitions of Ben Wheatley and Amy Jump, who have turned Jeremy Thomas's decades-long dream of adapting J G Ballard's impossible *High-Rise* into a towering reality. Then there's documentary filmmaker Sean McAllister, who spent many years defying the odds (and facing

imprisonment) to bring his award-winning *A Syrian Love Story* to the screen.

Plus Yorgos Lanthimos discusses the crossover to his first English-language feature with the Cannes prize-winning *The Lobster*.

We've talked to a number of new and emerging filmmakers about their career plans, including those who are currently moving from making shorts to their first features, and the five emerging LGBT writers and directors who took part in an immersive mentor programme run by BFI Flare to deepen their understanding of the film industry, allowing them to develop their storytelling voices with extra confidence.

On the subject of new and emerging filmmakers, for those of you who are making your own short films or embarking on a writing career, you should visit our recently launched BFI NET. WORK platform, where we've gathered information on the available funding resources around the UK. You can also upload examples of your early work for us look at in our search to discover original and talented new voices. More information on this is available on the inside front cover of this issue.

Looking back on the first half of 2015, there's been continued success for British filmmaking both in the UK and internationally.



Andrew Haigh and Charlotte Rampling making *45 Years*

The cover of our last issue featured Andrew Haigh, whose *45 Years* has since premiered to great acclaim and won Silver Bears in Berlin for Charlotte Rampling and Tom Courtenay in addition to the Michael Powell Award in Edinburgh for Best British Film. We also talked to producers Finola Dwyer and Amanda Posey in the last issue about John Crowley and Nick Hornby's adaptation of Colm Tobin's *Brooklyn*, which premiered at Sundance and sold to Fox Searchlight in one of the biggest deals in Sundance history.

And the future is bright. In addition to the many films featured in these pages, we're behind a number of exciting projects that have been in production over the last few months.

Andrea Arnold has finished shooting *American Honey* with Shia LeBoeuf in the US (and is there any greater ambition than that?), and *The Guard* and *Calvary* filmmaker John Michael McDonagh, has wrapped his comic *War on Everyone*, starring Alexander Skarsgaard and Michael Pena, shot mostly in New Mexico.

Ben Wheatley hasn't had to travel so far to shoot his 1970s Boston-set shoot-em-up *Free Fire*, which as I write is shooting behind an Argos on the edge of Brighton with Armie Hammer, Brie Larson, Sharlto Copley and Cillian Murphy.

Meanwhile in the Lake District, acclaimed television director Phillipa Lowthorpe is shooting not only her first feature but the first-ever feature adaptation of the children's classic *Swallows and Amazons* - a labour of love for producer Nick Barton and writer Andrea Gibb.

On the back cover we've planted a first look at a project that's about as ambitious as you can get for a truly independent UK film: 12-year-old newcomer Sennia Nanua stars in Colm McCarthy's forthcoming feature debut, *She Who Brings Gifts*, which shot over two months in and around Birmingham. Colm is another of our great TV directors, best known for his work on *Peaky Blinders* and *Sherlock*, who worked with a screenplay adapted by writer Mike Carey from his own novel.

A VFX-heavy sci-fi thriller with a touch of existential sadness; a first-time feature director; a first screenplay from its writer; emerging producers Camille Gatin (*Shadow Dancer*) and Angus Lamont ('71) helming the shoot; a cast including Gemma Arterton, Paddy Considine and Glenn Close alongside and a young newcomer who appears in almost every scene...And of course as they've only just wrapped they've still got a long way to go.

More next year.



Saoirse Ronan in *Brooklyn*



BR

BEN ROBERTS Director of the BFI Film Fund

(Left to right) Scout Stuart, Aleem Khan, Islay Bell-Webb, Rachelle Constant, Claire Kurylowski (Photo: Tim Francis)

FIVE EMERGING LGBT FILMMAKERS TAKE PART IN A NEW PROGRAMME DESIGNED TO DEVELOP THEIR INDUSTRY KNOWLEDGE

BFI FLARE

BFI Flare showcases the best queer cinema from around the world and earlier this year London's LGBT festival extended its reach with the launch of the BFI Flare Pilot Mentorship scheme in partnership with Creative Skillset.

The initiative gives five emerging LGBT filmmakers the opportunity to be mentored by a senior figure from the film industry in order to develop their knowledge of the business, forge professional relationships and enhance their passion for cinema.

Here, we meet the filmmakers who took part.

Scout Stuart, writer

I am a working class girl from Manchester, a bit on the shy side and I've always had an interest in observing human behaviour. Up until her death last year, I'd gone to the cinema with my Nana every week. In my late teens, after watching *Shadows* by John Cassavetes, I saved up for a camera and made several experimental short films with willing friends.

Doing this gave me the confidence to enrol at Manchester School of Art to study Film and Video (2008). Since graduating, I've been developing a slate of work as a screenwriter, whilst directing the occasional music video and art film (*Thus spoke the wolf, Deus ex*). In 2013, the Cornerhouse (now HOME) commissioned my short animated screenplay *Skrimsli*.

In 2014, my debut feature treatment *Mud* was selected for iFeatures and I wrote the short *The Pig Child* through Creative England's iShorts, which was selected for the Edinburgh International Film Festival, Palm Springs and Encounters amongst others. *Sliding*, my latest short film as screenwriter, has been greenlit by Creative England and will shoot this autumn with director Lucy Campbell. I am currently writing *Existence Doubtful* (working title), a short film set in Manchester that I will direct and Anna Seifert-Speck will executive produce.

My mentor is Hong Khaou, who was immediately warm and open with me. He's been very honest about his own personal journey - his struggles and vulnerabilities as well as successes - and therefore he is

more like a friend than a mentor.

Mentor: Hong Khaou, director of BAFTA-nominated *Litling*

Islay Bell-Webb, writer

I have an Elvish tattoo and it quotes Arwen's last line in her first scene in *Lord of the Rings: Fellowship of the Ring*: 'Noro lim, Asfaloth, noro lim!' Noro lim is Sindarin for 'ride hard'. Arwen is encouraging her horse, Asfaloth, as they carry Frodo back to Rivendell, pursued by a hoard of angry ring wraiths.

As a 12-year-old girl witnessing it for the first time in the cinema, I loved this moment. Arwen is the first woman to really speak in the entire trilogy. But when I began looking for the sorts of films that would star Arwen rather than Frodo, I couldn't find them. So I became determined to write my own.

Whether one day I get to write the *Batwoman* film (*Batwoman* is the first lesbian superhero with her own comic book), or get one of my current sci-fi scripts off the ground, it is to these high-concept stories that I am pulled to as a writer. I want women and queer characters leading the films that I enjoy the most - action films, superhero adaptations and fantasy epics. Because ultimately until we're there, at the heart of these cultural signifiers, we're going to remain these marginalised figures in cinema, and I want to do better than that, for myself, and for queer little 12-year-old girls everywhere.

Mentor: Russell T. Davies OBE (*Doctor Who, Cucumber, Banana and Tofu*)

Aleem Khan, writer and director

I grew up in a large English-Pakistani family with four sisters and a brother, so there's always been plenty of family drama to draw inspiration from. It was my father I have to thank for igniting my initial interest in filmmaking. He always had a camcorder in his hand, filming us kids at parties, schools plays, really whenever he could. His passion for documenting our lives found its way into me and has influenced the kind of filmmaker I've grown up to be.

When I saw *East is East*, aged 14, with my family in the living room, I first experienced the unifying power of cinema.

I was captivated by the film, the story, its characters and their struggle growing up within two cultures. I remember feeling incredibly awkward because we all knew something was being revealed to us, about us, through this film.

After studying film directing at the University of Westminster, I made my first film, *Diana*, which premiered in 2009 at what was then the BFI London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival. It played at more than 30 festivals internationally and travelling with it on the festival circuit was a great learning experience.

My latest short, *Three Brothers*, was commissioned through Film London and premiered at the BFI London Film Festival before it received a BAFTA nomination. I'm currently developing and writing two feature projects, *After Love* and *Medusa*.

I am delighted to have someone like Ben Roberts as my mentor. He has a wealth of knowledge and experience and he's been incredibly open and generous with me.

Mentor: Ben Roberts, Director, BFI Lottery Film Fund

Claire Kurylowski, director

In the past two years I have lived in London, my work has been influenced by the hindsight of the three years I spent living in Berlin. The idea of queer diasporas, intersecting identities as well as finding ways to present feminist perspectives guide my work. I felt there was a disconnect between what I had read and seen and what I had experienced so I became determined to show these stories of voices I had not yet seen represented on screen. Collaborating with artists and sharing stories with friends in London and therefore humanising the perspective of these experiences became a transformative journey for finding new forms of expression.

Since BFI Flare, I've been developing a short film, which intertwines a personal story with wider discourses, exploring the intersections of feminine performativity within its half-Chinese, lesbian identified protagonist. The short will also be a way to explore and later promote the ideas of a feature film we're developing which is aligned with the mentorship scheme.

My mentor Ester Martin Bergsmark whose film *Something Must Break* screened at the LFF and Flare, has been an influential force in the development for this trajectory. Being able to exchange thoughts on both the process and story has been both affirming and enriching. Ester immediately understood what I'm trying to say with the film, so it's really helped crystallise my ideas. To have this dialogue from the very beginning has made for a strong start.

Mentor: Ester Martin Bergsmark (*Maggie in Wonderland, She Male Snails*)

Rachelle Constant, producer

"I just don't believe that you can't make anything happen. I think if something's good and you believe in it, and you care about it, and you give it love and nurture it, it's going to happen."

I read this quote in an interview with Jerry Weintraub when at University. I always wanted to be a producer and was confident that I too could make things happen. I got a First Class Honours degree in Media Arts at Royal Holloway, University of London.

Now, after nearly 10 years in TV development with experience ranging from ITV's *Agatha Christie's Miss Marple* and *Poirot* to the popular BBC *Continuing Dramas* shows, I decided to step sideways and produce a short film project that, quite literally, landed on my lap. Through Film London's London Calling Plus scheme, I produced *Two Dosas*, which premiered at the BFI London Film Festival and won numerous awards, including Best Comedy Short Film at the London Short Film Festival and Academy Award-qualifying festival Aspen ShortFest.

I'm passionate about emerging, diverse talent and currently developing a number of projects, including an ambitious short film set in China and a feature film based on a true story. I'm always on the lookout for ideas that are bold, compelling and original.

Mentors: Mike Goodridge, CEO of Protagonist Pictures, former editor Screen International, and BAFTA-nominated producer Gavin Humphries and Film Partnership Manager at Creative Skillset

FROM SHORTS

FILMMAKERS MICHAEL LENNOX, RACHEL TUNNARD AND ALEEM KHAN
TALK ABOUT TAKING THE PLUNGE ON THEIR FIRST FEATURES



Riley Hamilton, Aaron Lynch, Charlene McKenna and Martin McCann in *Boogaloo and Graham*, Belfast

The beauty of a short film is that anything is possible, as Northern Irish filmmaker Michael Lennox will testify.

“You can make a film about chickens with your friends in Belfast, and nine months later you find yourself being nominated for an Oscar,” says the National Film and Television School graduate, who received the call to say his short *Boogaloo and Graham* made the Oscar® shortlist on the eve of shooting his first feature.

Six months later, and with the edit on his darkly comic psychological thriller *A Patch Of Fog* nearly complete, the director describes shooting his debut as “a baptism of fire”.

“Short films and features are

dramatically different ways of telling stories,” Lennox says, who had six shorts under his belt, including the European Film Award and Locarno-nominated *Back Of Beyond*, before producer Robert Jones took a punt on him to direct *A Patch Of Fog*.

Backed by Northern Ireland Screen (who also funded Lennox’s first year at the NFTS) and the BFI, the Belfast-set feature stars Stephen Graham as a lonely security guard who blackmails a celebrated novelist.

For Lennox, managing the sheer volume of scenes involved in shooting his first feature was the biggest challenge. “In a short you can keep it all in your head because it’s only a few days, but with a feature you are shooting for five weeks, trying to balance 140 scenes, all of which

are out of sequence, so it’s about working out how it all fits together.”

BFI senior production and development executive Lizzie Francke, who has worked with a plethora of new and emerging filmmakers throughout her career, notes, “it’s one thing being able to engage audiences in a 15 minute short, but it’s a big challenge being able to tell a story in long form.”

Still, she says the short film is an essential stepping stone in the career of any filmmaker wanting to make the leap into features, not only in terms of personal development, but as a way of demonstrating a filmmakers’ potential to risk-averse investors.

“As a funder, you’re looking for the DNA of a filmmaker and shorts can show someone’s ability to deal with pathos, or

humour or horror. When you look into the CVs of most filmmakers, you usually find a short film somewhere in there whether it’s Stephen Frears, Ridley Scott or Rachel Tunnard.”

Sheffield-based Tunnard, who is currently in post-production on her first feature *How To Live Yours*, starring Jodie Whittaker, worked as an editor for 10 years before taking the plunge into directing.

“I learnt so much from cutting other people’s films over the years, and I was lucky to assist some brilliant editors who taught me not only about editing, but storytelling,” says Tunnard, whose breakthrough moment came when she was working as an editor on Scott Graham’s BFI-backed debut *Shell*. “It was the best film school ever.”



Yousuf Hussain, Zain Muhammad Zafar and Muhammad Mujahid-Ali Shahzad in *Three Brothers*, Medway Towns, Kent

TO FEATURES

On set, Tunnard had turned the cutting room into “a mess of graphs and cartoons and drawings of men and women bickering” and she says “when Chris Collins [former BFI production and development executive] came on set, he looked at the walls and said, you should write about it.”

His words encouraged her and she then went on to take part in Creative England’s iFeatures scheme, supported by BFI, the BBC and Creative Skillset, on the back of her feature draft.

But with no short films under her belt, Tunnard’s project didn’t make the cut and Collins advised her to make a pilot for her feature to attempt to grab the attention of the industry.

The pilot, *Emotional Fusebox*, was funded through the BFI NET.WORK and resulted in production funding from Creative England for the feature version, *How To Live Yours*, about a 29-year old woman who moves into her mother’s shed after the death of her twin brother.

“The pilot was a massive thing in terms of bringing on the distributors and other finance, because it was a tool that

directly related to the feature – they could see what they were buying in to,” explains Tunnard.

Emotional Fusebox went on to secure BAFTA and BIFA nominations, an incredible feat for the first-time director.

“Awards give you validation and the sense that people are responding well to your material,” says London-based upcoming filmmaker Aleem Khan, whose first short, *Diana*, was named Best UK Short at the Iris Prize Festival. He was also recently nominated for a BAFTA for his latest short *Three Brothers*.

“I was having meetings before but what a BAFTA nomination does is make people take you more seriously when you’re in those meetings,” says Khan, who is currently fine-tuning the script for his first feature, *After Love*, about a British Muslim convert who discovers after her husband’s death that he was leading a double life.

Developed through The Bureau’s SOS writing scheme, the feature is produced by Matthieu De Braconier, who also produced *Three Brothers* through Film London’s London Calling Plus scheme,

a shorts scheme funded through the BFI NET.WORK and aimed at emerging black, Asian and minority ethnic filmmakers.

“It can be a really lonely existence when you’re writing at home, so these schemes are a great networking opportunity in an industry based so much on relationships,” says Khan, who studied directing at the University of Westminster.

He is also taking part in the BFI NET.WORK’s Flare Mentorship scheme, which sees LGBT filmmakers paired with industry mentors – in Khan’s case Ben Roberts, director of the BFI’s Lottery Film Fund.

While Khan doesn’t believe it’s been any harder for him than any other filmmaker to make the break into features, he does see schemes like Flare and London Calling Plus as “crucial for helping to increase visibility and representation for minority filmmakers.”

“It’s about removing as many barriers as possible for filmmakers,” says Matimba Kabalika, talent co-ordinator and content editor of the UK-wide talent development programme BFI NET.WORK, which launched in 2013, backed by BFI funding of £3m. BFI NET.WORK is aimed at helping new and emerging filmmakers reach their full potential through targeted development programmes, administered through different film agencies across the UK. The NET.WORK’S website includes a space called The Post Room, where filmmakers from anywhere across the UK will be able to upload their shorts, which will then be seen by NET.WORK executives.

Kabalika says the transition for shorts to features is the hardest jump to make successfully, which means targeted schemes are vital in providing filmmakers with the “right tools to give them the best chance, from understanding audiences, to working out who you’re up against, to how to finance your film.”

Tunnard calls for more schemes targeted at helping emerging female filmmakers.

“There is clearly a problem because there are so many brilliant women who have brilliant stories to tell and yet there just aren’t that many women directors,” she says, adding that she would like to devise her own scheme, which would be “less *X-Factor* style and more about creating an environment where women feel safe enough to learn and gain confidence.”

And while participating in a scheme offers up a sound support network for upcoming directors, Lennox admits that it’s still daunting stepping out onto a feature set for the first time.

“The reality is, when you make your first feature, you’re probably one of the most inexperienced people on the crew, which is quite strange,” he says. Lennox made sure he surrounded himself with a hugely experienced and supportive crew, on the set of *A Patch Of Fog*, many of whom he’d previously worked with on his shorts.

“As a first-time director there is a

lot of pressure to make choices you don’t necessarily agree with when it comes to things like cast,” adds Tunnard, who has two further projects in development.

“I’ve seen people make a short film with their mates and then they’ve gone on to cast actors in their feature film and it’s been rubbish.”

Khan, who is currently developing *After Love*, says, “You need to have the courage of your convictions, because people are looking for original stories.”

Lennox, who is already looking ahead to next project which is most likely a feature version of short *Back of Beyond*, says a director has to remain hungry and determined.

“Apparently around 80% of people don’t get to make their second film but I want to be in the 20% who do.”

WORDS BY SARAH COOPER

BOOGALOO AND GRAHAM

DIRECTOR Michael Lennox

PRODUCER Brian J. Falconer

WRITER Ronan Blaney

CAST Martin McCann, Charlene McKenna, Riley Hamilton, Aaron Lynch

LOCATION Tower St, East Belfast

FORMAT HD Digital

PRODUCTION COMPANY Out of Orbit

PRODUCTION PARTNERS Northern Ireland Screen, BFI NET.WORK

SALES COMPANY Network Ireland

Television (IE)

EMOTIONAL FUSEBOX

DIRECTOR Rachel Tunnard

PRODUCER Michael Berliner

WRITER Rachel Tunnard

CAST Jodie Whittaker, Lorraine Ashbourne, Marcia Warren, Rachael Deering, Edward Hogg

LOCATION Peak District, Derbyshire

FORMAT ARRI Alexa

PRODUCTION COMPANY Pico Pictures

PRODUCTION PARTNERS Creative England, BFI NET.WORK

SALES COMPANY Pico Pictures

THREE BROTHERS

DIRECTOR Aleem Khan

PRODUCERS Matthieu de Braconier, Stephanie Paeplow

WRITER Aleem Khan

CAST Kulvinder Ghir, Zain Muhammad Zafar, Yousuf Hussain, Muhammad Mujahid-Ali Shahzad

LOCATION Medway Towns, Kent

FORMAT Panavision Genesis

PRODUCTION COMPANIES The Bureau Film Company

PRODUCTION PARTNERS Film London, BFI NET.WORK



Jodie Whittaker in *Emotional Fusebox*, Peak District, Derbyshire (Photo: Toby Merritt)

A SYRIAN LOVE STORY

DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKER SEAN MCALLISTER ON HIS AWARD-WINNING *A SYRIAN LOVE STORY* AND THE CHALLENGES OF SHOOTING IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Sean McAllister is a master of unearthing fascinating stories in countries engulfed in civil revolutions.

His award-winning documentaries have taken him to a slew of countries in the Middle East during turbulent times, including Iraq and Yemen, but it's his latest turn behind the lens for *A Syrian Love Story* that offered up one of the director's gravest challenges to date.

Filed across five years, the revolutionary documentary (which snapped up the prestigious Grand Jury prize at Sheffield DocFest in June) is a potent portrait of a family as they flee Syria during the ongoing civil war while chronicling their ability to cope with the pressures of leaving their native and beloved land for their own safety.

"I was really struggling to get this film commissioned," recalls McAllister. "But I wanted to explore secular Syria."

McAllister says that had the documentary been commissioned at any point, it would be an entirely different film.

"It would have been a film about that year and the Arab Spring," he says. "Ironically the film is better for audiences because it wasn't commissioned. For the first time in my life, I have a collection of material from over five years."

McAllister first met his subjects for *A Syrian Love Story*, which he also co-produces with Elhum Shakerifar, in 2010. He was shooting the documentary *The Reluctant Revolutionary* in Yemen for the

BBC and at the time, Syria was on the cusp of an uprising.

"I went to Damascus and I was driven to film Amer, and there were people sniffing at the commission, wanting more newsy shots," McAllister recalls. "I delivered the story on Yemen but they [the BBC] weren't interested in another Arab story so they passed on a story on Syria."

But McAllister was fascinated by Amer and his wife, Ragda. The couple first met when they were locked up in a Syrian jail for daring to speak out against an oppressive regime. To McAllister, Amer and Ragda were a modern day John Cassavetes and Gena Rowlands in *Love Streams*, and it is their relationship, as much as the wider political context, that inspired him to document their lives.

He embedded himself for years, working undercover with a tourist visa and filming the couple and their four sons firstly in the Syrian capital of Damascus, Tartous and then Yarmouk, the Palestinian camp on the outskirts of Damascus. Subsequently he travelled to Lebanon and then France, where the family relocated. During these trips, he began to map out a bigger-picture film on Amer and Ragda and their plight.

But the journey wasn't a straightforward one. In October 2011, McAllister was arrested in a Damascus café, blindfolded and imprisoned for a week.

He lost much of the footage that he had captured and while being interrogated in prison the risks of documentary



Bob in *A Syrian Love Story*

"We were constantly debating how aware the government was to our presence"

filmmaking in the Middle East were made rapidly apparent. "I felt like my life was in the hands of the gods," he says. "I did think at some points, 'Why did I do this? What about my family?' And I also thought 'Why Syria?'"

Being in a country ripped apart by civil war and hostile towards the West meant that McAllister had to think of ways to protect the footage and get it back to the UK.

"I used a £300 camera from Damascus that I bought in the Sony Centre. I would download footage onto my laptop and then move it into the trash and would leave the camera in the city. If anyone did a comprehensive search they could have found it.

"I also left two different hard drives with two different people. We were constantly debating how aware the government was to our presence, but more than anything they want you to feel like you are being constantly watched, even if you aren't."

And whilst this film may not have been as dangerous as docs he made in Iraq (*The Liberace of Baghdad*) and Yemen (*The Reluctant Revolutionary*) – "there were bullets flying and people dying in the streets for those" – *A Syrian Love Story* has caused him to reflect on the danger of the work he does: "When you edit a film, it always looks a lot more dangerous than it was at the time. I want to make more films in Britain now."

WORDS BY JOSEPH WALSH



Sean McAllister and Bob in *A Syrian Love Story*

A SYRIAN LOVE STORY

DIRECTOR Sean McAllister

PRODUCERS Sean McAllister, Elhum Shakerifar

LOCATION Syria, Lebanon, France

FORMAT HD

PRODUCTION COMPANY 10ft Films

PRODUCTION PARTNERS BFI, BBC Storyville, Danish Broadcasting Corporation, Sveriges Television AB, Worldview

Tallulah Haddon on the set of *Spaceship* (photo: Phil Miller)

SPACESHIP

DIRECTOR Alex Taylor

PRODUCERS Nicola Bowen, Olivier Kaempfer

WRITER Alex Taylor

CAST Antti Reini, Alexa Davies, Lara Peake, Lucian Charles Collier, Tallulah Haddon, Kristof Gerega, Jack Winthrop, Steve Elder, Harry Jarvis

LOCATION Aldershot, Farnborough, Guildford

FORMAT Alexa Amira

PRODUCTION COMPANIES Belly Productions, Parkville Pictures

PRODUCTION PARTNERS iFeatures, Creative England, BFI, BBC Films

ALEX TAYLOR TAKES AN ORGANIC APPROACH TO FILMMAKING FOR HIS FIRST FEATURE

SPACESHIP

There aren't many upcoming filmmakers who win international accolades with their first short film but Surrey-born Alex Taylor did just that in 2010 with *Kids Might Fly*.

The offbeat portrait of youth living in East London blew global audiences away winning a slew of awards including the Special Jury Prize at SXSW.

"I have always been fascinated with teenagers' strength to build their own world and live in them without any regard for adult society," says musician-turned-director Taylor, who has an innate ability for encouraging strong and natural performances out of younger, first-time actors.

Building on this allure and skill, it seemed obvious that the premise for his debut feature is inspired by teens from his unconventional shorts.

Spaceship, which he writes and directs, is a teen drama about disaffected kids trying to understand the world in which they don't fit. When 17-year-old Lucidia disappears in an apparent alien abduction, it forces her reclusive father to enter the strange fantasy world she and her peers occupy. It stars Antti Reini (*The Man Without A Past*), Alexa Davies (*X+Y*), Lara Peake (*Bypass*), Lucian Charles Collier (*The Only One Who Knows You're Afraid*) and Tallulah Haddon.

"I love to build a whole world in a film and allow it to grow and breathe by itself and have its own life," says Taylor. "So once I had the idea of a girl faking her own alien abduction, it was just a case of populating the world around it and having it react to the girl's disappearance."

Spaceship was one of three selected out of more than 400 applications for the esteemed iFeatures programme, Creative England's low-budget filmmaking initiative supported by the BFI, the BBC and Creative Skillsset. When Taylor discovered he had made the initial stages of the programme (which was whittled down to 16 and

subsequently eight and finally, following an intensive nine-month development process, three were awarded £350,000 to make their film, Taylor was in one of the most hard-to-reach places on the planet: the Galapagos Islands where he was assistant editor on David Attenborough's *Galapagos 3D*. It took him three flights back to make the interview.

"It wasn't easy but it was clear for me as I always wanted to make films," he says. "I know a lot of people who have been trying to make features for a long time and I was lucky to get that break so I wasn't going to mess it up."

"I love to build a whole world in a film and allow it to grow and breathe by itself"

He teamed up with first-time feature producer Nicola Bowen, who previously worked in business development at Screen Yorkshire, and Parkville Pictures/Microwave senior production exec Olivier Kaempfer, who has a raft of experience delivering micro-budget features to audiences.

"One of the things that was so appealing about the film was that it sounded like nothing you'd ever seen or heard of before," recalls Bowen. "The initial pitch seemed to really make people sit up and pay attention, though they usually (wrongly) assumed it was a sci-fi project, even though it isn't at all."

Spaceship endured a lengthy development process, given this was Taylor's first script-writing experience and it was, he says, "quite a journey to get the script as tight as it could be."

Taylor, by his own admission, prefers to take a much more improvisational



Lara Peake in *Spaceship* (photo: Phil Miller)

approach to his directing style. With a background in music (he spent eight years as a saxophonist), he points to US indie directors such as Larry Clarke (*Kids*) and Harmony Korine (*Gummo*) as his influences.

"I tried to take a more organic approach to the film," he says. "I wanted themes to play and develop like they do in music. I really believe that characters in a film should be allowed the respect to live and reveal to us their lives, their humanity and their thoughts without a narrative being imposed on top of them."

On the first and second days of shooting *Spaceship*, Taylor felt compelled to return to his improvisational style, shooting some takes that lasted up to 25 minutes. Executives were, understandably, he says, concerned but fortunately they loved the rushes and allowed him to continue with what he was doing.

"It was so empowering," recalls Taylor. "I felt like they had given me a vote of confidence, which enabled me to go further and show my voice. You have to feel free in expressing yourself. If you want to make a good film, you have to feel free to express your own voice. There's no point pretending to be someone else. I can only really say things the way I see them and I can only allow actors to do things that I think are interesting and then film them."


Taylor says that using this improvisational approach gives him the ability to tease out these beautiful and natural performances from his actors. "I can give them pointers," he says. "But when they are going deep into some interesting territory, I don't see the harm to allow them to keep going. These people are fascinating and get the film and the story so when I gave them the chance to improvise, they brought their own texture to the film."

Kaempfer notes that Taylor is a director who works on instinct.

"Alex doesn't have a traditionally structured way of working as some other directors and writers may have, and this benefits for him," says Kaempfer. "I see him very much as an auteur director and when you work with exciting talent like this, you have to believe in them and take a leap of faith. And I'm glad we did because what at times on set may have seemed like it was off-the-cuff, has become integral to Alex's overall vision, and makes it the special film that I feel it is."

Taylor adds: "I felt so encouraged by the BFI and their team. They were really brave in choosing the projects they did and to have faith in these new projects and new directors."

WORDS BY DIANA LODDERHOSE



SCOTT GRAHAM TALKS FIRST FEATURE LESSONS AND THE CHALLENGES OF SHOOTING HIS FOLLOW-UP ON A REMOTE INNER HEBRIDES ISLAND

IONA

When Scottish filmmaker Scott Graham first travelled to Iona, the inner Hebrides island that provides both the setting and title for his second feature film, it evoked an unforgettable feeling inside of him, even as a young child.

"I visited the island when I was 10 years old, with my mum and sister," he says. "It definitely made an impression on me. I remember arriving by boat and sleeping on the beach and boiling potatoes in seawater."

Graham recalls being told that the island, which is not even three and a half square miles, was "somewhere where people went to feel close to God."

It was this notion that sparked the narrative for his latest project: "Somehow that translated into someone returning there who didn't feel close to God. I was interested in how raw that would make you feel and the conflict that would give you."

So began the journey of *Iona*, Graham's second feature that he both writes and directs, following his acclaimed 2012 debut *Shell*.

A place of spiritual contemplation and worship since the formation of Iona Abbey in the sixth century, Iona serves as a place of escape in the film, which begins on mainland Scotland before a sudden act of violence turns Iona, played by Ruth Negga, and her teenage son Bull (Ben

Gallagher) into fugitives. The pair flee to the island where she was brought up and which she was named after, reconnecting Iona with the devout way of life she once turned her back on.

It's a story that began for Graham soon after he completed *Shell* and prior to its UK release, which was pushed back by six months.

"I'm not a particularly patient person and I thought maybe the best thing to do was to focus on something else for a while, so I began the script," he says, finishing some 30 pages of *Iona* when *Shell* hit theatres.

Like *Shell*, the story of a teenage girl living with her taciturn father at a remote Highlands petrol station, *Iona* also foregrounds a parent-child relationship, exploring the point in adolescence when a child begins to face up to decisions and desires of his or her own.

"I'm interested in how the past informs the present, particularly the parent's past and how that defines them as adults," says Graham.

But unlike his first feature, *Iona* thrusts audiences into the story with a dramatic opening, giving the film a different current from the offset.

And its unusual blend of genre elements set against the backdrop of a religious community are inspired, says Graham, by the 1985 Peter Weir thriller *Witness*.

"For a little while there I thought I was writing a thriller," he says. "*Iona* starts with an 'exciting incident', which is what you're 'supposed' to start your script

“I’m also a cinema-goer, and I know how rewarding it can be to feel like you’re on a journey with a character”

with – but which *Shell* didn't really have. So I felt I was on new ground with *Iona* because it had momentum from the start."

He adds: "As well as being a filmmaker, I'm also a cinema-goer, and I know how rewarding it can be to feel like you're on a journey with a character. That's something I couldn't have with *Shell* because the point was that everyone else was on a journey but they [the characters] weren't."

Iona sees Graham reteam with established producer Margaret Matheson, who says she was conscious that Graham's second film had to be a more expansive production than his debut.

"Scott's working in a clear artistic space, which is not mainstream genre cinema," she says. "It's slightly more continental-European in feel. So the challenge was to allow him to adhere to his artistic instincts, yet to produce something that might appeal to and reach a broader audience than *Shell*."

As with most second-time feature filmmakers, there were, of course, lessons that Graham learned from his directorial



Ruth Negga in *Iona*



Scott Graham and Ben Gallagher on the set of *Iona*

IONA

DIRECTOR Scott Graham
PRODUCER Margaret Matheson
CO-PRODUCER Gunter Hanfgarn
WRITER Scott Graham
CAST Ruth Negga, Ben Gallagher, Douglas Henshall, Tom Brooke, Michelle Duncan, Sorcha Groundsell
LOCATION Glasgow, Oban, Mull, Iona
FORMAT Digital
PRODUCTION COMPANIES Bard Entertainments, Boudica Silver, Hanfgarn & Ufer
PRODUCTION PARTNERS BFI, Creative Scotland, ZDF, Arte
UK DISTRIBUTOR Verve Pictures



Sorcha Groundsell in *Iona*

debut that he was able to apply when approaching his next project.

"I went through a period of mourning after I'd made *Shell*, as the writer of it," recalls Graham. "Directing my own script, I should have been more loyal to it and protective of it. But the time pressures got to me a bit and I let certain things slip through my fingers. I'm learning that that always happens and you have to adapt. You can't go into each day or each scene rigid."

With a propensity for penning lean scripts, void of over-description, he admits that he separated his director role perhaps too far from his writer role in his first film.

"When I was cutting *Shell*, I realised we didn't have certain things," he says. "I was annoyed at myself

because they were there in the script for a reason and we needed them."

With *Iona*, Graham made a note to himself to go on set as the writer and to trust his script more.

Given his sparseness in screenplays, Graham remarks it was a concern as to how he and Matheson would persuade financiers to back the film.

"I wasn't sure how they were going to receive the script, it's a tricky subject matter – issues around faith. I felt there were a lot of dramas around the harm religion has done, or that take a critical view of faith.

"I wanted to write about faith in a way that wasn't overtly negative, and it was quite surreal to be having conversations with people about God, and them opening up about their own

experiences of religion. It's not something that we talk about very much. I found an openness to the fact that I was trying to be open."

Graham and his crew decamped to Iona for two weeks in September 2014 where they set up base in a school hall and got around on foot or by bike.

"We were spread across two hotels and many B&Bs and rented houses, which put us in direct touch with the community," recalls Matheson. "You don't want to be isolated from the community you're depicting. We borrowed bikes to speed around the island because we weren't able to take many vehicles across."

There was the issue of daily tourists descending upon the island, which created challenges for a crew filming on such a small island with only two roads. Fortunately, the weather was kind to them, bringing a dazzling glow to the cinematography by Yoliswa von Dallwitz, a returning collaborator from *Shell*.

"There's something nostalgic about

her lighting," says Graham. "It reminds me of life as I remember it as a teenager."

In this secluded setting, Negga is joined by Douglas Henshall playing the father of her friend who is played by Michelle Duncan, and Sorcha Groundsell who plays Duncan's daughter.

Speaking of Ethiopian-born Negga, who plays Iona and who has been seen recently in *Jimi: All Is by My Side*, the director says: "There's a toughness there, and a childlike quality too, which is important for Iona because so much of what happens when she goes back to the island is about a regression to when she was 15 or 16."

Graham found Iona's son, after a casting call out. "Ben is studying acting at drama college in Glasgow, so he does want to be an actor, but you're still working with someone who is very raw," he says. "I liked him straight away. He had an innocence and sincerity that was there in the character. I'll generally try to cast actors who are already as close to the character as possible."

And while Graham's second directorial effort has resulted in a bracing spiritual drama that marks a step up in both ambition and accomplishment from his debut, he is loathe to rest on his laurels just yet: "You rely on the audience to help you complete the film. It's not complete until it's seen by people in a room together. It's a communal experience."

WORDS BY SAMUEL WIGLEY

"For a little while there, I thought I was writing a thriller"

SUFFRAGETTE

SUFFRAGETTE

DIRECTOR Sarah Gavron

PRODUCERS Faye Ward, Alison Owen

WRITER Abi Morgan

CAST Carey Mulligan, Helena Bonham Carter, Meryl Streep, Brendan Gleeson, Anne-Marie Duff, Ben Whishaw, Romola Garai, Samuel West

SHOOT DURATION 45 days

LOCATION London, Windsor, Chatham, Harpenden

FORMAT 16mm & Alexa

PRODUCTION COMPANIES Ruby Films, Redgill Productions

PRODUCTION PARTNERS Pathé, Film4, BFI, Canal+, Cine-Cinema

SALES COMPANY Pathé International

UK DISTRIBUTOR Pathé



SARAH GAVRON'S HUGELY AMBITIOUS SECOND FEATURE PUTS AN INTIMATE FOCUS ON THE EPIC STRUGGLES OF THE SUFFRAGETTES

Cast a glance at Sarah Gavron's credits and one thing becomes instantly clear: she relishes a challenge.

Unafraid to tackle sensitive subject matter ranging from the BAFTA-winning BBC drama *This Little Life*, which centres on a couple dealing with the premature birth of their son, to an adaptation of Monica Ali's best-selling book *Brick Lane*, focused on a Bangladeshi woman's struggle in a loveless marriage in a place far from home, the British director is nothing if not intrepid.

But it's Gavron's latest turn behind the lens that reveals her biggest challenge and perhaps most important accomplishment to date. *Suffragette*, starring Carey Mulligan, Helena Bonham Carter, Anne-Marie Duff and Meryl Streep, is a careful portrayal of the foot soldiers of the early feminist movement in London 1912 and how they embarked on a campaign of militancy in order to fight against gender inequality.

The subject matter alone is one that begs to be handled with care but add this to enormous set pieces, riot scenes with 300 extras, a load of visual effects, stunts, accidents, horses, scenes in the Houses of Parliament all for a budget of £10 million, and the term "ambitious" takes on a whole new meaning.

"The material needed scale and scope," says Gavron. "We had to step up to that and create a film on a big canvas and give it a big sweep to do justice to this story. Not only was this second feature stress for me, but it's a strong message. We were ready for the challenge."

Backed by Pathé, Film4 and the

BFI, *Suffragette* reunites Gavron with producers Faye Ward and Alison Owen and writer Abi Morgan (the four women worked on *Brick Lane* together in 2007). "It was one of those stories that when we researched it, we uncovered all of these other elements of this story and it then became ever-more vital and relevant to make this film," says Gavron. "It felt like it was in the zeitgeist and it was in the time to make the film."

Police archives unveiled accounts of brutality ranging from hunger strikes to force-feeding and it became, she says, near impossible to ignore the parallels between the lengths these women went to and the plight that faces women's rights and politics in parts of the world, such as the Middle East, today.

"The more we researched, the more we felt compelled to tell the story," says Ward, who notes it was a year and a half before pen was put to paper. "The more we read, the more we realised we needed to consume it all before we could get into the angle of the film."

Suffragette, it feels, is more than just a film. It is not only a cinematic portrayal of women's rights and politics in the early 1900s but is cleverly associated with present day issues. The film is set to open the BFI London Film Festival in October in advance of its UK release at a time when the world is seeing a resurgence of feminism and appetite for women's stories.

"Despite the significant change and advancement of women in recent years, the demands of social economic, religious and cultural equality of the Suffragette movement are as important and as relevant as they have ever been to orchestrate global change," says Morgan.

"In a world where women are still regularly abused and denied the same equal rights as men, the message of this film still applies."

The team decided early on not to take the biopic route which, says Gavron, felt like a safer way to go, and built the story around Maud, who is drawn from many sources and unpublished accounts of women at the time.

"Historical biopics are always difficult," notes Morgan, who has written screenplays on subjects such as Margaret Thatcher (*The Iron Lady*) and Charles Dickens (*The Invisible Woman*). "But this was liberating to take on a movement that drew on the testimonials of real women of the time."

"There were lots of ordinary women who took part in this movement," Gavron adds. "By taking this route, we would be able to bring together women of all classes and it felt like the exciting way to go."

Owen agrees: "We wanted the film to feel visceral and resonant. These women were the guerillas of their time. They are not polite, upper-class 'sister Suffragettes.' They are warriors."

However, distilling this story of the foot soldiers of the movement through a huge swathe of material was not without its challenges. "We were always trying to serve the historical through the fictional and do justice to the heads of the movement namely [Emmeline] Pankhurst [leader of the Suffragette movement] whilst witnessing the drama through the eyes of ordinary, if militant, suffragettes," says Morgan.

Conscious of how the Suffragettes had been portrayed throughout history – "stuffy, posh, slightly acerbic," says Ward



“The material needed scale and scope and we had to step up to that”

Carey Mulligan on the set of *Suffragette*, House of Commons, Westminster, London

Back row (L-R): Sarah Gavron (director), Helen Pankhurst (great-granddaughter of Emmeline Pankhurst), Laura Pankhurst (great-great-granddaughter of Emmeline Pankhurst), Alison Owen (producer); Front row (L-R): Abi Morgan (screenwriter), Anne-Marie Duff (actor), Meryl Streep (actor), Carey Mulligan (actor), Helena Bonham Carter (actor), Faye Ward (producer)



Sarah Gavron on set with Steadicam operator Peter Robertson

– breaking these portrayals as much as possible became a guiding principle for the film. Gavron was also keen to create a raw world that immersed the audience: “We didn’t want to prettify it,” she says.

Ward says that while the development process was a long one, the team could not have rushed the story. “Had we been quicker, would this film have been made three or five years ago? I don’t think so,” she says. “So, in that sense, I do think there is a certain element of fate in making the film when we made it. It feels like the right time for this story to be told.”

Casting the project was, say the women, “like casting a love story.”

They had their eye on Mulligan for the role of Maud from very early on. Morgan had worked with her on Steve McQueen’s *Shame*, and they talked about her extensively for six months during writing before offering her the part. Mulligan read the script and then two days later committed to the project. “She was so on board and so believed in it from day one,” says Gavron.

Keen to get the right alchemy, Bonham Carter (who, ironically, is the great granddaughter of former Prime Minister Herbert Henry Asquith, a key target for the Suffragettes at the time) embraced the dynamic role of Edith.

“It was quite intriguing because we knew this fact when we sent her the script,” says Ward. “But we weren’t sure if she would want to get involved due to the fact that her family were obviously present in this historical moment.” But Bonham Carter embraced the opportunity and gave the team insight into the Asquith family.

Streep’s iconic status made her the perfect fit for the very brief but key role of Pankhurst.

“It was important to have an icon play an icon,” says Ward. “Because she’s only in one scene, you immediately understand how powerful and important this woman is.”

And while the film’s core reflects the plight of women at the time, the team was conscious to handle the male characters with care.

“It was important for us not to portray men as bad people,” says Ward. “The challenge was to convey this story and have empathy for men but still very much make it a story about women.”

Ben Whishaw, who plays Maud’s husband who objects to her actions due to the effects it has on their family, brings a subtlety and empathy to his role while Brendan Gleeson, who plays a plain-clothes policeman spearheading a pioneering operation of going undercover and surveying women using cameras, also plays a complex, three-dimensional character.

“Men weren’t straightforward and they weren’t villains,” Gavron notes. “They were complex characters with their own agendas and they were products of their time.”

The shoot was a determined one. Ward pushed the team to do huge amounts of early prep and location

scouting so that it when it came to shooting, they could maximise their time. They even set up a website with the crew so everyone could communicate and connect about the research.

Filmed mostly around London, save for one scene in Windsor, Gavron was able to make the most of the shoot by always keeping two cameras rolling, sometimes even three or four.

“It had a visceral feel to it,” Gavron says. “I think we allowed it to be quite loose, which gave an energy that kept everyone on their toes and then we didn’t have those long, dead periods you often get in film when the energy drops, which was great because we had to move fast.”

Crucially, *Suffragette* is the first film that the Houses of Parliament has ever opened its doors to.

“I remember thinking it was quite thrilling,” recalls Gavron. “There was this wonderful irony of this place that had barred women and there we were, this predominately female cast and crew, staging a riot that was anti-government there. It was so empowering.”

Suffragette is one of many BFI films shepherded by the late production executive Chris Collins and Ward, who first worked with him on *Brick Lane*, points to his generosity and faith as a key driver for films they worked on together.

“He and Alison [Owen] were so generous with allowing newcomers to push forward and ever since then, both Chris and Alison have really nurtured our careers and been so supportive of us.”

Gavron notes that Collins, even though he was ill, had a lot of input in *Suffragette*, particularly in the edit. “He saw a number of cuts and made some key comments that fed into the final cut,” she says. “He was also able to come to Parliament and I think he was really proud of us.”

Owen says that although the film is set in the early 1900s, its message will undoubtedly still resonate with audiences today. “I’m terrified when young women, even my own daughters, don’t grasp how fragile our advantages are, and how recently attained,” she says. “When we have shown the film to young audiences, that is gratifyingly their biggest reaction – they cannot believe how different things were for women only a few generations ago. Showing how hard won our rights have been will hopefully be a wake up call to complacency.”

Gavron couldn’t agree more: “These women lost their families and jobs to leave a legacy that we are all now benefiting from generations later. We wouldn’t be doing these amazing jobs if it wasn’t for these amazing women.”

Ward concludes: “*Suffragette* is about women and the political revolution of the time. But it is also about the voiceless gaining a voice. All human beings deserve to have a place in society and feel that they are worth something. Their voices should be heard and this is, unfortunately, very much a contemporary issue.”

WORDS BY DIANA LODDERHOSE





Sarah Gavron on the set of *Suffragette*, House of Commons, Westminster, London

HIGH-RISE

DIRECTOR Ben Wheatley

PRODUCER Jeremy Thomas

WRITER Amy Jump, from the novel by JG Ballard

CAST Tom Hiddleston, Jeremy Irons, Sienna Miller, Luke Evans, Elisabeth Moss

SHOOT DURATION Seven weeks

LOCATION Belfast

FORMAT Digital

PRODUCTION COMPANY Recorded Picture Company

PRODUCTION PARTNERS BFI and Film4 in association with Northern Ireland Screen, Ingenious Media, Scope

Invest Producteurs and S Films

SALES COMPANY HanWay Films

UK DISTRIBUTOR StudioCanal

Tom Hiddleston on the set of *High-Rise*, Belfast



HIGH-RISE

BEN WHEATLEY AND WRITING PARTNER AMY JUMP FINALLY CRACK A BIG SCREEN ADAPTATION OF J G BALLARD'S CLASSIC NOVEL

Opening with the line, "Later, as he sat on his balcony eating the dog...", J.G. Ballard's justly celebrated 1975 novel was never going to be the easiest work to adapt for the screen. The tale of a modern tower block with amenities enough to allow it to exist in relative isolation, the block is structured according to the bank balances of its inhabitants. The cocktail party loving wealthy frolic in the penthouse suites above; the less privileged look enviously up at the endless hedonism from the floors below. It's a pressure cauldron situation and all too soon, as witnessed by young doctor Robert Laing, society slips into a violent reverse and an extreme survival of the fittest mentality takes hold.

Arguably the ultimate Dystopian tale from an author who regularly peered behind the façade of respectable social behaviour, *High-Rise* was once a project developed by producer Jeremy Thomas with Nicolas Roeg scheduled to direct. It never came to fruition, but Thomas kept the flame alive through numerous other incarnations and now British director Ben Wheatley, whose previous work has explored themes of primal urges, secret sects and the sense of civilisation teetering precariously on collapse,

delivers a startling and audacious take on fragmentation, tribalism and class injustice.

Adapted by Amy Jump and with a cast including Tom Hiddleston (as Dr Robert Laing), Jeremy Irons as the god-like architect Anthony Royal, Sienna Miller as Charlotte Melville, Luke Evans as Richard Wilder, a producer of television documentaries with a nose for uncovering uncomfortable truths and Elisabeth Moss as Helen Wilder, Wheatley's film captures the source material's alarming psychological insights whilst also emphasising the profoundly disturbing connections between technology and the human condition. Beautifully evoking the Seventies, the minimalist electronic score fuses Clint Mansell with Portishead's astonishing take on Abba's SOS.

Jason Wood: *High-Rise* has long been destined for the screen with various directors, including Nicolas Roeg at one point almost bringing it to the screen. What was your own attraction to the novel and what were the main challenges you knew you would face in bringing it to the screen?

Ben Wheatley: It had been a book I had read as a teenager and loved it and there were rites of passage of reading that included *Naked Lunch* and other books by Burroughs and Ballard. We got to the stage a year or so when we started

looking at licensing books to film and sat on the sofa and looked at my shelf of books and saw *High-Rise* and thought, well why has nobody done it? I didn't know the back story of Roeg and Jeremy Thomas and so contacted my agent and asked who had it and was told that Jeremy Thomas did. Within three days I was at The Recorded Picture Company and talking to Jeremy. Luckily, Jeremy had recently seen *Sightseers* and so it all came together quite well.

JW: The timing of the film is incredibly prescient. It really feels like you are taking the pulse of the nation. Though the book was written in 1975 did you feel it was important that the film should have real social and political resonance in an era in which the divide between the rich and the poor is becoming increasingly clear?

BW: I think that the issue that people had with the book in terms of adapting it was that they thought it was futuristic and that it was projecting into the future. But the future Ballard was projecting was forward of '75 and we have lived into that future. We were making a futuristic film about a projected past and because we have seen what happened, and Ballard also saw it coming down the pipe, we decided to have the end quote from Thatcher about State capitalism. Amy Jump and I were born in 1972 so we

were the same age as the children in the tower. In many ways the children in the tower were our parents and we have seen how their lives have turned out. The film is a look at the book, from the perspective of the people that survived it. We are in a perpetual 70s/80/90s. Boom followed by bust, then boom followed by bust again.

JW: I was impressed by the balance between computer generated effects and actual locations. It gives the film, and the high-rise especially, a much needed sense of authenticity. Were you keen that this sense of equilibrium be achieved? As a spectator, it is essential I feel that one can believe in the world and the society you depict.

BW: It was really important that the building felt real. It was a little bit bigger than the flats that were built but not massively so. The flats in the film are not actually that big, except of course for Royal's. We looked at a lot of brutalist buildings but we were also looking at an alternative 1970s. We didn't want a greatest hits of the 1970s with circular televisions and kipper ties. We wanted to be a time out of time.

JW: Your work has always had an interest in sects and tribalism and the idea of a society teetering on the brink of a return to primitive behaviour.

BW: It's essentially a contradiction of our time. We all drive cars but don't

Jeremy Thomas, Ben Wheatley and Jeremy Irons on the set of *High-Rise*



really care where the petrol comes from. Countries that produce oil are bombed but we are removed in our empathy because we want to continue to be able to drive our cars around. That was one of the most heart-breaking things about New Labour. There were more wars under Blair than there were under Thatcher. As people that live in a country with an army that is out in active service we are part of that. That's the ugliness of our society and we can't pretend that we are not responsible. This is certainly what *Kill List* is about. They bring the war home. People's memories tend to be short. When we look back at the tribes that have lived in England they have done all sorts of terrible things. And will continue to.

JW: The combination of observation and humour is an overlooked facet of Ballard's work I feel. Your work is perhaps more noted for its black humour.

BW: Ballard's work is very funny I think but it is very hard to translate. Because the humour is in the turn of phrase. The humour in Ballard's *High-Rise* revolves around how he describes people and what they do and it's difficult to do that as a straight translation. I honestly think that Amy Jump has done a fantastic job with it.

JW: It's incredibly visceral. I am thinking especially of Laing dissecting the severed head.

BW: It's a statement of intent. It's a film that is very much about the stripping away of social masks and showing what is literally beneath the surface. For me that was a really interesting image,

JW: It's a risky role for Tom Hiddleston as young doctor with a faint whiff of conscience. He's the most sympathetic character in the film but that really isn't saying very much.

BW: I've watched Hiddleston in the films of Joanna Hogg and the Marvel films pictures he has made and enjoyed him in both. He's a very smart guy and knows how to play complexity. As an actor he's also incredibly committed.

JW: He destroys Jeremy Irons on the squash court.

BW: I have to say, Irons was pretty tough too...

JW: You work with a number of your regular cast (Reece Shearsmith, Julia Deakin, Peter Ferdinando) but also work for the first time with actors such as Keeley Hawes...

BW: I wanted to work with James Purefoy for years. Keeley Hawes was terrific. There isn't a weak cast member. It sounds gushy but it was genuinely a treat to go on set.

JW: There is also a continuation in terms of your work with writer Amy Jump

and cinematographer Laurie Rose. Do you enjoy the fact that each of your films retains an aesthetic and thematic dialogue with your previous works?

BW: It's the team that we've had from the beginning. Rob Entwistle in the sound department and script supervisor Anita Christy are really important. I like that my films feel like supercharged versions of *Down Terrace*.

JW: The minimalist score is terrific. Can you just say something about working with Clint Mansell and having Portishead cover Abba?

BW: I was watching Portishead at Glastonbury and then I realised that Geoff Barrow was following me on Twitter and that he was a fan of *A Field in England*. I followed him back and we eventually met. And I just said, 'Are you interested in doing this?' I had to write a permission letter to Benny Andersson - thankfully he said 'Yes'. The process of working with Portishead is one of the treats of filmmaking, as is working with Clint Mansell. I had heard that Clint was keen to work on *High-Rise* and so I quite simply contacted him. The process was a little different on this film because the process was less montage driven and more propelled by an underscore. This was much more of a suite of sounds. It presented a different challenge.

JW: This is, to be fair, quite a high-risk film given the admiration for Ballard and for this book particularly. Are you wary or excited concerning its reception?

BW: To be honest I haven't thought about it. It's about making the best film you can make and hoping that people like it. You really can't spend time worrying about it. If you worried about it, you make it differently and then end up chasing a mystical audience that exists only in your head. I make films that I want to see and hope that I am in tune enough with an audience that other people are going to want to see it as well. I don't want my choices compromised. We wrestled with the book, which was difficult to adapt, and tried to be as true to the book as we could. The translation of a book to a film can't please everyone. It just can't. The ethos of *Down Terrace* was that a group of people got together to make a film and didn't worry about asking permission. This comes from a very similar attitude.

JASON WOOD IS THE RECENTLY APPOINTED ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF FILM AT HOME, MANCHESTER. A VISITING PROFESSOR OF FILM AT MANCHESTER SCHOOL OF ART, WOOD IS ALSO THE AUTHOR OF 10 PUBLISHED WORKS ON CINEMA. WWW.HOMEMCR.ORG

PRODUCER JEREMY THOMAS AND HIS LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIP WITH *HIGH-RISE*

Jason Wood: You are no stranger to tackling 'difficult' books. What was your attraction to *High-Rise* and what particular challenges did adapting it present given the content of the book?

Jeremy Thomas: I've done so many of them. The 'difficult' books. *Crash* with David Cronenberg of course being one of them. I love Ballard's novels and his films are ripe for adaptation but they are undeniably very difficult to adapt. With *Crash* we were fortunate that Ballard was alive at the time and he completely understood that you are adapting it. You can't make the spirit of the novel and this involved adding and subtracting things from it. We did that with *Crash* and we did it again with *High-Rise*. Both took a long time, *High-Rise* took a bit longer and went through various guises. I initially didn't think I would be able to find all the resources in the UK and then Ben Wheatley and Amy Jump became involved and it went back to the roots of the book.

JW: Ben has said that his approach was to not worry about the reception of the film and to get on with the film he wanted to make. It's a brave but sensible choice. As a producer who was both worked with the likes of Roeg, Bertolucci and Cronenberg how did you come to the work of Ben Wheatley? You have always been a very active supporter of new and emerging talent.

JT: I totally inhabit cinema in terms of seeing movies and I had seen *Sightseers*. Alainée Kent who works with me had seen his other films, starting with *Down Terrace*, and I got to know very well Ben's work. The situation was the similar to the one when I received the script for *Sexy Beast*. I went out and immersed myself in Jonathan Glazer's work. I, of course, keep up to speed with the British film industry and like to know what's bubbling. Ben, of course, by this time already had become a very established director with following and then I received call from my son Jack who is an agent at Independent telling me that Ben had researched the fact that I had the rights to *High-Rise*. The idea of working with Ben on the project immediately became a very attractive idea. It felt like when Cronenberg told me that he wanted to make *Naked Lunch*. The two elements just clicked and went together. I felt immediately that this could be something. Amy Jump wrote a very good script and once the script went through the process that all scripts go through we arrived at *High-Rise*.

JW: The book was published in 1975 but the film feels absolutely right for now. It has incredible resonance.

JT: Given the spirit of the Government today it couldn't have been timed better. It really captures

the spirit of the moment. People being allowed to thrive, whilst others are being just cut off and cast adrift. It's capitalism at any cost, including the cost of any reasonable social existence. We have seen it during the recent riots in London and these rampages of destruction. *High-Rise* really isn't so far from what life is anyway. It's chilling.

JW: The film achieves the really difficult task of capturing both the source material's darkness and its humour.

JT: There are certainly humorous moments. It is, after all, a satire and offers quite a darkly comic commentary.

JW: Tom Hiddleston captures Robert Laing well. In a world of repellent people he's the least dislikeable. He has the glimmer of a conscience.

JT: It was important with Laing to suggest that there was something better deep inside him, a conscience and a consciousness. On the opposite spectrum Wilder has completely lost it. I think your comment is a credit also to Hiddleston's performance. I worked with Tom with Jim Jarmusch on *Only Lovers Left Alive* and he's very committed. He stayed with us for a very long time whilst we were putting the film together. He very much wanted to work with Ben.

JW: Ben works with a lot of his regular crew but you have also introduced him to a lot of new people.

JT: I think a lot of people did some incredible work on this film. Mark Tildesley's production design is really something. Odile Dicks-Mireaux did fantastic work with the costumes and we also had Wakana Yoshihara's make-up. They and Ben's regular crew all made a terrific contribution to the film.

JW: The film has a realistic sensibility.

JT: It's not too CGI heavy. In terms of production it's a relatively modest film. We were able to use the CGI sparingly but everything was so meticulously thought out in the design and production process. I also think that the building with its idea of luxury is pretty accurate in terms of what is being done in terms of property development. This is actually a side of the film that I am really pleased with.

JW: There is a huge sense of anticipation for the film.

JT: To be honest it exists on every film. You enter a maelstrom of opinion. It was obviously particular true of *Crash* and I think *High-Rise* will certainly have a similar interest point. When you make films that are unusual you have to launch them in a very specific way. The expectation for this film is two-fold: Ben and Ballard. And of course, we have an incredible cast.





Colin Farrell and Rachel Weisz on the set of *The Lobster*, Dromore Woods, Coillte Teoranta, Ireland

THE LOBSTER

DIRECTOR Yorgos Lanthimos

PRODUCERS Ed Guiney, Lee Magiday, Ceci Dempsey, Yorgos Lanthimos

WRITERS Yorgos Lanthimos, Efthimis Filippou

CAST Colin Farrell, Rachel Weisz, Jessica Barden, Olivia Colman, Ashley Jensen, Ariane Labed, Angeliki Papoulia, John C. Reilly, Léa Seydoux, Michael Smiley, Ben Whishaw

LOCATIONS Parknasilla Hotel and Resort, Sneem, County Kerry, Dromore Woods, Coillte Teoranta

FORMAT HD

PRODUCTION COMPANIES Element Pictures, Scarlet Films, Faliro House Productions SA, Haut et Court, Lemming Film, Limp, Lisp Films Limited

PRODUCTION PARTNERS Film4, Bord Scannán na hÉireann/Irish Film Board, Eurimages, BFI, Netherlands Film Fund, Greek Film Centre, CANAL+, CINE+ and Aide aux Cinémas du Monde, Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères et du Développement International, Institut Français, MEDIA Programme of the European Union, Cofiloisirs

SALES COMPANY Protagonist Pictures

UK/IRELAND DISTRIBUTOR Picturehouse Entertainment, Element Pictures Distribution

THE LOBSTER

GREEK DIRECTOR YORGOS LANTHIMOS TALKS ABOUT DIRECTING HIS FIRST ENGLISH-LANGUAGE FEATURE AND ASKING AUDIENCES TO STEP OUTSIDE THE BOX

It's been four years since acclaimed Greek director Yorgos Lanthimos moved to London.

Fresh off of the back of the critical success of *Alps*, which picked up the Osella for Best Screenplay at the Venice Film Festival, the filmmaker was keen to break from his native language and start making films in English.

"It was a very deliberate move," says the director, whose macabre films such as *Dogtooth* (winner of Un Certain Regard in Cannes 2009), *Alps* and *Kinetta* have established a cult following across the globe. "I was intent on my next film being in the English language."

And while for some directors the step up from local-language independent to the big leagues is sometimes too big of a hurdle to jump, Lanthimos, a master of Greek surrealism, handles the transition almost seamlessly with his English-language debut *The Lobster*. Boasting a stellar cast including Colin Farrell, Rachel Weisz and John C. Reilly, the dystopian love story set in the near future examines a world where single people are obliged to find a partner in 45 days or they are transformed into animals and released into the woods.

The film marks the third collaboration between Lanthimos and Greek screenwriter Efthimis Filippou (*Dogtooth*, *Alps*) and has already been lauded on the international festival circuit: It debuted in competition at the Cannes Film Festival earlier this year, where it picked up the Jury Prize and left the Croisette with a plethora of top notch reviews.

"It's about exposing aspects of human life and situations and thoughts that you have," explains Lanthimos of *The Lobster*. "Hopefully people watching will start thinking themselves about those things and come up with their own answers. Whatever we have observed in our behaviour and the way we have constructed this world, we want to make people wonder whether all of those things are true."

Producers Lee Magiday and Ed Guiney of Dublin and London-based Element Pictures and London-based Scarlet Films' Ceci Dempsey were working with Lanthimos on another project when he and Filippou presented them with the idea for *The Lobster*.

"We wanted to do something about a relationship and couples and the way people view them," says Lanthimos, noting that the concept evolved over a long process of observations and discussions between himself and Filippou. "It wasn't one particular thing that inspired us."

The duo wrote a treatment and offered it to Element and Scarlet and they immediately came on board. "It was a



Léa Seydoux in *The Lobster*

"I always expect people to be torn when they see one of my films"

very interesting look at how we are as people," says Magiday. "Being single, being alone or being involved with someone and the fears and constraints society puts on that. It was a truly original love story."

Element were able to offer up funding from their MEDIA slate financing for the duo to write a script. "We wanted to support Yorgos and Efthimis to write the screenplay in their own unique way," Magiday says. "The MEDIA funding helped us as producers to do that right away rather than going through a more lengthy process to engage development funding."

She says it was Lanthimos' voice and unique way of looking at the world that was the key driver for Element and Scarlet's interest in his vision. "We were interested in him and the fact that he was driven by the human condition and the way in which he looks at the world, keen to provoke reactions rather than offer up answers."

Financing the project, however, became a challenge, recalls Lanthimos. "For some reason I guess people wanted me to prove myself in English-language films," he suggests.

Magiday says they were keen to create a process where the budget was in a range whereby he could keep creative control. "We wanted to drive the financing out of the European marketplace, where his previous films had been so critically

successful," she says. They took the project to Rotterdam to present it to the market in a "very low-key" way, before any cast were attached.

"We didn't want to put too much pressure on the project as a film that was driven by cast, we wanted to drive it very much as a Yorgos Lanthimos project. And we wanted to protect him as a filmmaker first and foremost," says Magiday.

The Lobster became an Irish-UK-Greek-French-Dutch co-production; physical production was done in Ireland; editing in the UK; picture and sound post in Holland; and VFX in France.

"We worked hard with our co-producers on this co-production structure," says Magiday, "to enable Yorgos the freedom to work creatively."

Lanthimos admits that the film may not be the most straight-forward and commercial film but despite this, casting the film, he says, was relatively easy. He decided very early on that he wanted to work with Farrell and Weisz. "I was very lucky that many of these actors were aware of my work and read the script and were genuinely interested in it," he says. "Literally I got all of the actors I wanted to work with for this film. The language didn't matter at this point as the film takes part in this world, this contemporary world we had created."

The cast is certainly reflective of a contemporary world, with a diverse range of actors from the UK (Weisz, Olivia Colman, Ashley Jensen and Ben Whishaw), Ireland (Farrell), France (Léa Seydoux and Ariane Labeled), the US (Reilly) and Greece (Angeliki Papoulia) all composing Lanthimos' world.

"Casting became the simplest part of the equation," says Lanthimos. "Most of them I didn't know and we didn't have the time or money to bring everyone in for rehearsals beforehand but I was extremely

lucky as they were all wonderful. They all got the film and were very supportive and helpful."

The Lobster was shot in County Kerry in southwest Ireland over 35 days and while the project scales up from anything Lanthimos had done before and represents his first English-language film there was, says Magiday, no doubt that he would deliver what he intended with the film.

"Yorgos works incredibly hard and there was no doubt that he would make the film particular to his own voice" she says. "There has never been a question about his transition to English for us. His dialogue is so particular and he has a very specific ear for how he hears language," adding that Filippou was on set for most of the shoot. "They would talk constantly about how things sounded and how the dialogue worked."

Magiday says that they totally believed in the world Lanthimos was creating. "The real challenge for Yorgos was filming in a different location with crew he didn't know and working on a film of a different scale."

"My previous films were so small," says Lanthimos, noting that in the past he had had just a few friends on board a project making it for the love of film with little money and a lot of flexibility. "It was very different working in an environment where there are rules and structures," he admits. "And sometimes it's hard to go around them but in the end, it worked."

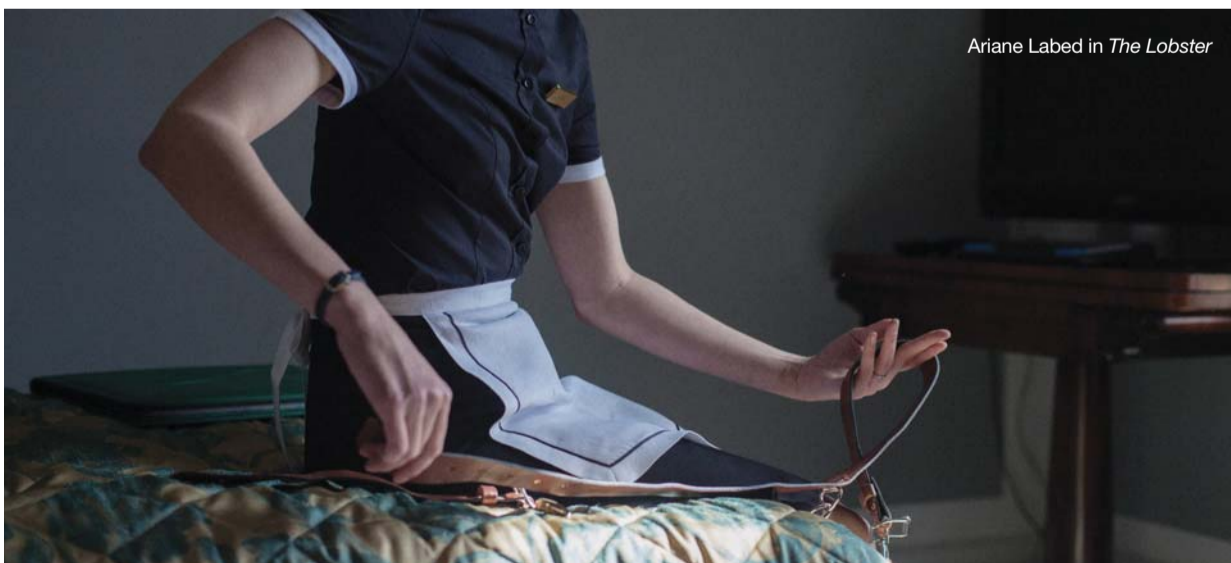
And while the film stepped up in terms of scale and ambition, the international film circuit crystallised his effort when Cannes selected the film to feature in the main Competition in May. While Lanthimos is no stranger to the festival (*Dogtooth* won Un Certain Regard in 2009), *The Lobster* represented the first time one of his films was selected for this prestigious section of the festival.

When the illustrious Cannes jury, which this year featured the likes of the Coen Brothers, Jake Gyllenhaal and Guillermo del Toro, awarded *The Lobster* with the Jury prize, Lanthimos' position as an international director was cemented.

"I always expect people to be torn when they see one of my films and divided in some way," says Lanthimos. "And I'm sure that there are people who really like what we do and others who don't. But it was great to meet people who appreciate what we are doing on some levels and get recognised for it."

He adds: "I wouldn't be making films if I just wanted to express some specific ideas, then I would be writing essays or something. I just think it's interesting to start a dialogue."

WORDS BY DIANA LODDERHOSE



Ariane Labeled in *The Lobster*

ETHEL & ERNEST

DIRECTOR Roger Mainwood

PRODUCERS Camilla Deakin, Ruth Fielding, Stephan Roelants

WRITER Raymond Briggs

VOICE CAST Brenda Blethyn, Jim Broadbent, Luke Treadaway, Virginia McKenna, June Brown, Pam Ferris, Simon Day, Roger Allam, Harry Collet

FORMAT Animation

PRODUCTION COMPANIES Lupus Films, Ethel & Ernest Productions, Melusine Productions, Cloth Cat Animation

PRODUCTION PARTNERS BFI, BBC, Universal Pictures, the Luxembourg Film Fund and Ffilm Cymru Wales

SALES COMPANY Little Film Company

UK DISTRIBUTOR Universal Pictures



Hollywood may continue to rule the international animation sector but the UK film industry is ramping up its efforts to make a mark in this space.

Recently, companies like Aardman Studios have made their imprint in the market with their stop-motion features such as *Shaun the Sheep*. Hand-drawn animated features, however, tend to be few and far between but London-based Lupus Films is looking to address this with a full-length feature of Raymond Briggs' graphic novel *Ethel & Ernest*.

Roger Mainwood, an animator on a raft of Briggs' film and TV adaptations including *The Snowman and the Snowdog* (2012) and Christmas classic *The Snowman* (1982), is set to direct the story, which chronicles the lives of Briggs' parents from their first meeting in 1928 to

their deaths in 1971.

"I think that knowing [Briggs] over the years has helped tremendously," says Mainwood. "We have built up a personal relationship with him and a level of trust."

It was the late producer John Coates (who produced a plethora of UK animation ranging from *Yellow Submarine* to *The Snowman*) who first got the ball rolling on *Ethel & Ernest*.

Before he died in 2012, he passed on the baton to producer Camilla Deakin and her business partner Ruth Fielding, who obtained the rights to the project and are currently in the throes of bringing the animated feature to the big screen through their production banner Lupus Films.

Lupus has a history with Briggs' content, having most recently produced *The Snowman and The Snowdog* (which is dedicated to Coates) and Deakin says

the company was overwhelmed by the level of coverage the TV special received.

"The general public had such an incredible reaction to *The Snowman and The Snowdog*, with so much positivity," she recalls. "Interestingly, with Raymond there has never been a book or a film that hasn't worked." She cites the last animated feature film based on Briggs' work – *When The Wind Blows* in 1986 – as a triumph in the international sector: "I am sure that back then it was a challenge to raise the money but I found the number of territories around the world that it sold to staggering."

Deakin says it's Briggs' breadth of work and his sense of nostalgia that endears him to the British public. "There is something timeless to his work but also reassuringly old-fashioned," she says. "In many ways *Ethel & Ernest* is a history of the twentieth century, seen through the eyes of an ordinary family."

But Briggs is also a social commentator, says Mainwood: "There are many aspects of this story that are very relevant to today's society. There are interesting political connections."

However, the challenges of bringing this body of work to the big screen were by no means small.

"Up until six months ago, the biggest challenge was putting the money together," says Deakin, who now believes the UK is finally coming around to the idea of investing in family movies. "If they are done right, they are the films that make the most at the box office," she says. "The trick is getting them right. You need really strong source material that will appeal to

people in the UK and outside of the UK, which isn't easy."

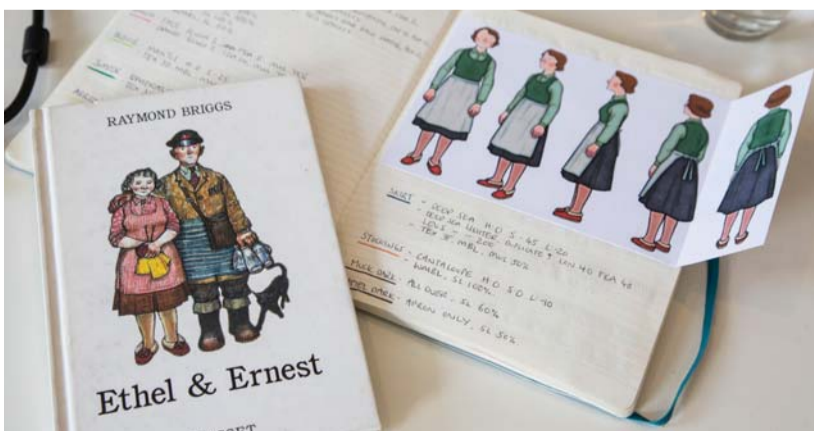
It also takes deep pockets to distribute animated feature films, particularly family animated features, since the target audience is traditionally expensive to reach, coupled with the high level of visibility that US studio animated feature films get in being backed by big budget merchandising and branding campaigns.

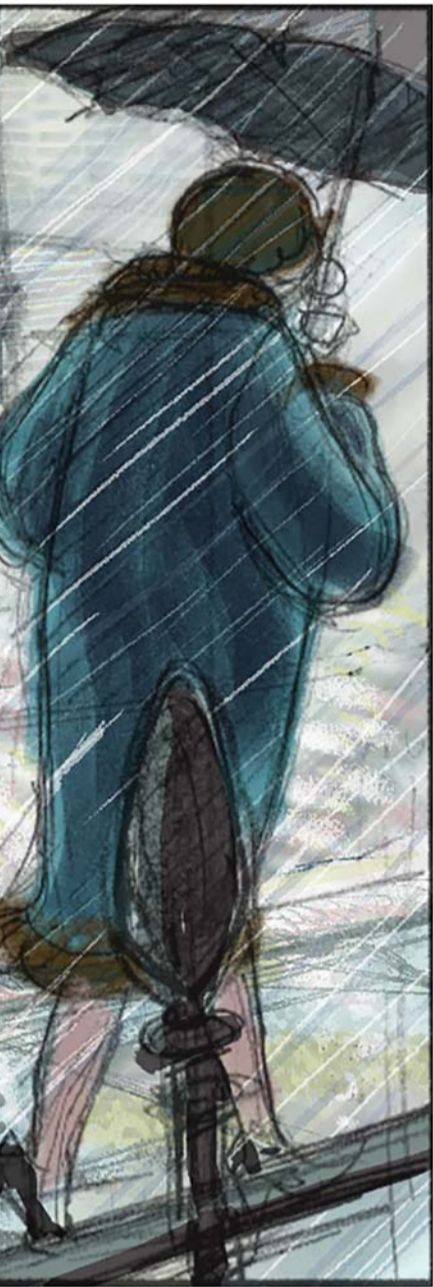
The UK film tax relief has always been open to feature films whether live action or animation but thanks to the new incentive for TV animation amounting to 25% of UK spend, the ability to get home-grown animated projects off the ground has become, says Deakin, a smaller mountain to climb.

Deakin, who previously served as Commissioning Editor for Animation at Channel 4, says that now the animation sector qualifies for TV animation under the tax credit system in addition to film, it makes "a huge difference" to the animation production sector.

"For years we were struggling to retain talent or intellectual property and we couldn't compete with the French, the Canadians or the Germans who all had a level of government support that we didn't have."

Mainwood says the film could not have happened without public funding: "The Welsh Government, Ffilm Cymru Wales, the BFI and the BBC in particular have put incredible amounts of money into this film and whilst we don't have a huge budget, their help is tremendously important."





The animation and production team at Lupus Films, London (Photo: Paul Marc Mitchell)

ETHEL & ERNEST

PRODUCER CAMILLA DEAKIN AND DIRECTOR ROGER MAINWOOD'S ADAPTATION OF RAYMOND BRIGGS' CLASSIC BOOK IS A HAND-DRAWN LABOUR OF LOVE



Lupus Films, London

Deakin says it's not only sourcing financing that makes putting together a project like this a struggle. She says the changes in the industry and shifts in market taste have posed a challenge. Additionally, she says it's difficult for UK producers and animators to compete with big studios such as Disney, Pixar and DreamWorks, meaning supporting home-grown animated films is somewhat alien to the UK.

"In Japan there is a strong tradition of hand-drawn animation with Studio Ghibli in particular and directors like Miyazaki," she says. "That tradition also exists in France and other European countries that have a much stronger tradition of supporting their own animated film industry compared to that which exists in the UK."

Mainwood points to a different culture in the States: "In the US, hand-drawn films have almost completely disappeared, especially in terms of feature

films, whereas in Japan and Europe it is a different story." The success of films such as *Song of the Sea*, *The Secret of Kells*, *Persepolis* and *Chico and Rita* prove there is an audience for hand-drawn animation, he says.

There is, of course, the other and somewhat obvious challenge of hand-drawing each scene, a unique and laborious obstacle that many feature filmmakers do not ever have to face.

"There is no getting away from the time that it takes to hand draw everything," says Mainwood. "Not to mention all of the life-drawing skills and illustration skills that are required for a film like this. It isn't a cartoony film so you need that talent and that time and it has to be a labour of love because technology can't do it for you or cut corners for you on a project like this."

Twenty lead animators and more than 20 assistant animators compiled the team for the project and Lupus was

fortunate with the talent they were able to attract for *Ethel & Ernest*, as Mainwood explains: "We have a very good network. A lot of the people who worked on *The Illusionist* are now working on *Ethel & Ernest*. In that sense, we have been very fortunate." Robin Shaw (Assistant Director on *The Snowman and the Snowdog*) came on board the project as art director and Peter Dodd (senior animator on *The Illusionist*) was hired as animation director. "Robin is an incredibly talented artist," says Mainwood. Shaw even cites Briggs as a major inspiration and influence in his own career. Mainwood recalls: "He even threatened to camp outside of my house until he came on board the film."

The team produced an incredible 12 drawings per second, which works out to approximately 64,800 animation drawings for the entire film. "That's not including all the storyboard panels, layout drawings and hand-painted backgrounds," notes Deakin.

Lupus uses an animation software package called TVPaint and animated on tablets called Cintiqs.

Briggs, keen to keep a hand in a project so dear to him, took an executive producer's credit on *Ethel & Ernest*, and was able to have a hands-on approach to the film.

Working on the script with Briggs, says Mainwood, was an eye-opening journey. "We tend to think of Raymond primarily as an illustrator and forget that he is actually a very accomplished writer with an incredible economy for language that is very finely tuned and easy to get wrong. I found out very early on that he liked exact phrases and words, which was quite a learning curve."

On the animation side, Shaw and Dodd spent large amounts of time with Briggs, in order to better understand the integral details of the film, such as how Ernest walked, how the couple aged and other particulars, which give the film its colour. "We see it as a good thing that Raymond is so involved and supportive," says Mainwood. "He has been very encouraging about everything we are doing here."

Having carefully fleshed out the script, the team put together a storyboard in the early stages of the project before setting out to do the voice recordings

Jim Broadbent was soon cast to voice Ernest while Brenda Blethyn was given the role of Ethel. Mainwood says that when Briggs came along to the first voice recordings, their performances had him "in floods of tears."

"He said it was like having his parents back in the room," recalls Deakin. "It made for an incredibly evocative moment."

Deakin stresses that projects like *Ethel & Ernest* are central to the future health of the UK film industry. "The UK is recognised for being good at animation, and hopefully with this film it is a perfect coming together of great animators and a beautiful book by a British author who is loved by the nation," she says.

"It is nice to be reviving a speciality that in this country we were very good at, but has waned in recent years. It is a great time to show off the craftspeople and the animators, who are at the top of their game."

WORDS BY JOSEPH WALSH

FIRST LOOK

