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Dominic Lees On Outlanders



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'As a director you work for a producer who will play a very dominant creative role in it but in film, the very beautiful thing about it, you can make your own piece and have creative control and much more responsibility in that sense.'

But Outlanders sees him take on the independent film industry giving him more creative control than he has ever had. 'It's a film about two brothers, and the film is about brotherhood, the hero is the younger brother and he comes from his home town in Poland, he comes from Gdansk, to look for his brother who has gone missing in London.

'It's set against the background of the Eastern European influx into London over the last few years and it's a film about growing up and discovering that your older brother is a corrupt guy and how you respond to that, it's also about love and life in London.

But the issue of migrants and people from all over, and outside Europe, coming into London and the rest of the UK is a very social topic at present and it is an issue that Dominic faces head on. However he takes a different perspective showing the city of London through outsiders eyes as opposed to the people of London watching outsiders coming into their city.

'Well I think there is two think first it's a universal story about love between siblings and so that's a timeless story but it's set against a very current theme of the million, million and a half Polish people that have come to London in the last five years, as well as loads of people from other countries as well, and the kind of life that they are living.

'Now what I wanted to do in this film I wanted to see London through these outsiders, outlanders they are called in the film, so it's one of the first films that is actually seeing our place from the point of view of the newcomers so I wanted to make quite an original film.

'I did research here, around London, and around Europe as I'm a filmmaker so I have worked in Germany and France and Poland and wanted to really understand this phenomenon from all perspectives so there is a lot of key social research about what life is like.

There are specific things in this film about how the new countries in Eastern Europe that are part of the European union, like Poland and the Czech Republic, how migrants from those countries experience London and is it any different from how someone from outside the European Union experiences it, if you are from the Ukraine or Russia you are going to work here illegally you are going to be in the whole black economy so your whole experience of the city is quite different. So the research was really about trying to find out the differences and how they relate.'

But Dominic had a strong view on what angle this movie should be

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'What we did was discuss the issues together and develop the story. Now for us it was all about our experiences of being brothers, I'm the youngest of three and he's the oldest of four, so we have got completely different experiences of being brothers but wanted to investigate that sense of loyalty and love that we have for our siblings.

'What we would do was I would go and write one draft of the script then we would talk about it and he would go away and write another draft and slowly it would evolve and develop through that process, so it was quite a long organic progress of dialogue.'

But the British film industry is not the most well funded and facing Dominic was a string of problems to get the film off the ground as he wanted to cast foreign actors in an English movie but he would find help from the very communities that he was writing about who came out in force to get the film off the ground.

'Well it was difficult film to make because I was casting foreign actors in a British film, so in the first place it's difficult to get finance support to make a film without known stars of British cinema, so that was problem number one that I had set myself.

'But then when we found the means to do it there was a huge enthusiasm from the migrant people in London for this script, we kind of put a call out for help and people who might want to play extras in the film or small role and we got a tremendous response and a warm response from all of those new London communities of Eastern Europeans.

'Casting the film was fascinating because I get a guy, there was this one Romanian guy who walked from his building site where he was working to the casting session and he said ' I'm working as a builder in London but I'm a trained actor from Romania and I've read your script, this is my story and I want to be in your film' so it was quite an inspiring process.'

But as with so many British films recently like Breaking and Entering and Eastern Promises Dominic uses the city of London as a character in the film showing off some aspects of well known areas that many people might not have realised were there as well as showing the constant development of our capital city.

'The kind of areas we were shooting in were very familiar to me as a Londoner, we were shooting in White Chapel and areas of London that had a sequence of immigrant communities moving through them from the Jewish community arriving at the beginning of the twentieth century to the south Asian communities that arrived after the war and now East European are almost like the next generation of immigrant communities into the city. For me they are just really exciting parts of London they are where London are really changing and becoming exciting.

'For me I am a Londoner and for me London is almost a character in the film, it's about how London is a changing place and the look of the city really important to the film, but the look of the city that I wanted was through the eyes of an outsider so the camera man that I chose was actually a Danish guy because I wanted the look of an outsider to be there on the screen, because I think it really makes a difference we look at our city in one way and that may be completely different from how a newcomer sees it and that has given it a richness I hope.'

And although Outlanders is very much a fictional story about brotherhood and surviving in a country that is not your own Dominic did want to leave audiences with something to think about.

'It's a very emotional film, what I do at the end of the film I open it out and ask a lot of questions because the climax of the film is a dilemma of do you betray the brother that you know to be a murderer, how to choose between the woman that you love and the brother that you also love.

'And the hero has to make a choice, and any choice was a bad



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choice, and what it does to the audience it says 'what would you do?' Think about it for yourself.

'So it has an ending that really involved the audience so that's the kind of feeling that I wanted to leave the audience with that they have been questioned and they have got something that's going to churn over in their mind that they are going to think about when they leave the cinema.'

And although Outlanders is due out this week Dominic is already working on other projects, staying in movies, exploring further this idea of leaving home behind for a new world.

'I'm working on a couple of scripts, one which I am writing and one which I am collaborating with another writer, the one that I am writing is almost a reverse of Outlanders, Outlanders is a film about two guys who come from far away to London, and the next script that I am writing is about two people from London who go far away, it's set on an island in the Mediterranean. Again it's about people not being in their home town and going abroad that whole big adventure of discovery but from another perspective.'

Outlanders is released 24th October

FemaleFirst Helen Earnshaw

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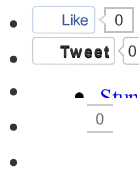
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