Presents

BLUE JEAN

A film by Georgia Oakley
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Distribution

Mongrel Media Inc
1213C Bathurst Street
Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M5R 3H3
Tel: 416-516-9775 Fax: 416-516-0651
E-mail: info@mongrelmedia.com
www.mongrelmedia.com

@MongrelMedia

Publicity

Bonne Smith
Star PR
Tel: 416-488-4436
Twitter: @starpr2
E-mail: starpr@sympatico.ca

/MongrelMedia

SYNOPSIS

In Georgia Oakley's stunning directorial debut BLUE JEAN, it's 1988 England and Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government is about to pass a law stigmatizing gays and lesbians, forcing Jean (Rosy McEwen, in a powerhouse performance), a gym teacher, to live a double life. As pressure mounts from all sides, the arrival of a new student catalyzes a crisis that will challenge Jean to her core. The BAFTA-nominated film won the Venice Film Festival's People's Choice Award, as well as four British Independent Film Awards.

FILM NOTES by Hannah McGill

For many in the UK, the story of Section 28 and its eventual repeal is a triumphant memory of unity and activism. Resistance to the Conservative government's attempt to prohibit the "promotion" of homosexuality as "a pretended family relationship" was the catalyst for an assertion of gay pride that ultimately helped to sweep away historic prejudices. So blatant was the attack and so widespread the reaction against it that the bill might be said to have ultimately achieved the opposite of its original aim. That took time, however, and tremendous sacrifice. Behind the political wrangling, the public demonstrations and the celebrity opposition were thousands of ordinary people whose private lives were suddenly deemed a danger, particularly to children. Said Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher at the time: "Children who need to be taught to respect traditional moral values are being taught that they have an inalienable right to be gay. All of those children are being cheated of a sound start in life."

What if you were a teacher, devoted above all else to providing kids with "a sound start in life", who also happened to be gay?

This is the starting point for Georgia Oakley's assured and stirring debut feature – not the activist community who immediately and loudly confronted this attack on their basic right to be who they were, but a woman who has worked hard to compartmentalise her life, keeping her girlfriend decisively separate from her family and her personal story a mystery to her workmates and pupils. Jean, portrayed with quiet power by Rosy McEwen, is a gym teacher: she coaches the netball team, itself a riot of burgeoning teen emotion and conflict. As news stories proliferate about the impact of Section 28 – Tory ministers pontificating on moral decay, activists storming the House of Lords – Jean is hyper-aware of every glance and murmur in her direction. Her relationship with girlfriend Viv, meanwhile, presents the opposite challenge, for Viv is an out and proud lesbian with a crew of similarly assertive friends. To them, the secrecy still practiced by the woman they call "Baby Jean" acts to extend the oppression they have – at considerable cost – thrown off.

Something has to give, and McEwen embodies with exquisite insight the mounting strain upon a woman who has sought to keep hidden what now burns for some release or resolution. The catalyst for change is the arrival at Jean's school of a new pupil, Lois (Lucy Halliday) – raw, vulnerable, and instinctively connected to Jean as soon as they meet. When Lois begins to frequent the lesbian bar that is Jean's refuge, the boundaries between Jean's worlds collapse, and she finds herself dangerously desperate to rebuild them.

Drawing on meticulous research among lesbians who experienced the impact of Section 28, Georgia Oakley has constructed a drama at once confronting and intimate, which renders palpably real the dilemma of a fictional woman whilst pulsing with the hidden pain of countless real lives. Rosy McEwen - acclaimed by fans of TNT's THE

ALIENIST for her performance as Libby Hatch, a *Screen International* Star of Tomorrow 2022, and one of *Variety*'s 2022 Top 10 Actors to Watch - shows herself to be a leading actor of phenomenal presence and subtlety in her very first lead role. Kerrie Hayes as Viv is a further revelation, giving us a woman devoted to her community and torn between love and principle. As Lois, newcomer Lucy Halliday embodies with thrilling immediacy all the volatility, defensiveness and disruptive energy of adolescence.

Through these deeply-felt performances, the economy and elegance of Oakley's writing, and a dreamlike evocation of the sights and sounds of 80s England, BLUE JEAN allows us to experience just how personal the political can become.

Produced by Hélène Sifre for Kleio Films, executive produced by Eva Yates for BBC Film and Jim Reeve for Great Point Media and financed by BBC Film and the British Film Institute in association with Great Point Media, BLUE JEAN celebrates its World Premiere at Giornate Degli Autori. BLUE JEAN was developed through iFeatures 5 (2018) and Inside Out Finance Forum (2019) and with the support of BBC Film.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT by Georgia Oakley

"In 1988, enraged by Thatcher's proposed law Section 28, a group of lesbians abseiled from the gallery of the House of Lords onto the floor, demanding protection of the rights of lesbian and gay people in the UK. The culture of silence propagated by this law, which prohibited schools and local governments from 'promoting' homosexuality, had devastating effects on my generation.

My motivation for telling Jean's story stems from a personal understanding of internalised homophobia, as well as a desire to give voice to those forgotten teachers who battled stigma and defamation under Section 28.

I'm fed up with everyone saying how far we've come, when insidious, homophobic laws like this still exist across the globe. I have a six-year-old stepdaughter, and all I ever hear at her school is the same old narrative - it's all 'mummies and daddies'. There's very little education for kids about different types of families. The legacy of Section 28 is alive and well, and it's just one example of horrific institutionalised homophobia that LGBTQ+ communities have to deal with on a day-to-day basis.

We tried to dig into all of this with Jean's narrative. To explore how 'coming out' isn't just a singular moment in time; it's a day-in, day-out battle. The choice whether to correct the taxi driver who has just assumed your girlfriend is your sister. The choice of words when your kid's friend from school has just asked which one of you is the 'mummy'. The choice whether to wear your queerness boldly, in the way you dress or cut your hair, or to disguise it, in favour of an easier ride.

It was always the plan to make a portrait piece about one woman grappling with her identity, as opposed to a big political drama about the law itself. As a storyteller, I want to hold a microscope up to the small things that keep Jean awake at night, in an attempt to reframe the discussion on bigger issues such as homophobia, patriarchy and class that plagued the UK in the 80s, as they do now.

We always intended to shoot BLUE JEAN on 16mm, and with a slightly heightened aesthetic. We wanted to create a visual language inspired by classics from the time, rather than an 80s throwback. Inspired by filmmakers such as Kelly Reichardt and Chantal Akerman, I seek to present a protagonist without glamorisation or misrepresentation. Jean is no hero - and that's precisely why I've loved digging into her story these past four years."

Q&A with writer-director GEORGIA OAKLEY and producer HÉLÈNE SIFRE

How did BLUE JEAN initially come together as a project?

HS: Georgia and I met about five years ago over coffee, having been introduced by a mutual friend. It was incredible to see how much our taste aligned. We spent the whole meeting chatting about all our favourite films, and our shared ambitions as filmmakers: to tell diverse, female stories about issues that mattered, but in an elevated way. We didn't know what we wanted to make but we knew we wanted to make our debut feature together.

GO: Hélène and I started developing the story in 2018. I was just sort of blindly looking for interesting things on the internet, and I came across a newspaper article about the women who had abseiled from the House of Lords gallery debate on Section 28. So that was a pretty amazing image, them jumping over the balcony - I was kind of fascinated by that. But I was *more* interested in the fact that I didn't know what Section 28 was. So I started looking into that. I had no idea that it had been a law. When I found that it was, and realised that I had been in school while it was in effect, things started to make sense. Why there were no role models, and none of my teachers were out, and not a single pupil in my school was out. It was a discovery session! And I knew that if I didn't know what it was, most people who were at school when I was didn't know. We were just that little bit too young to properly engage.

Then I was in a meeting at the BBC, and they were asking about things that I was working on. At the very end of the meeting, our executive producer Eva Yates said, "Have you got anything else?" And I said, "Not really, but look... there could be a story about a teacher working during Section 28." Eva said, "I think that's your story. Go make that into something." I don't know why she felt that it was something I needed to do! But it was. That was the beginning of it. I think it was two weeks we had to put together an outline, in time for the iFeatures deadline. And during that time we found firsthand

accounts - interviews that had been conducted in the 90s with women who had lived Jean's experience in the late 80s and early 90s.

HS: I think one of the things that made us great partners for this project is that we both connected very deeply to the story on a personal level. At the time, I was at a similar stage as Jean - having recently come out, trying to grapple with this new identity, and seeing how all of a sudden everyone seemed to think it defined me. Georgia had gone through the same experience a few years before, and we both struggled on a day-to-day basis with those subtle yet painful microaggressions the film tries to highlight. I think it's this deep connection we both had that allowed us to connect emotionally with the teachers we met during the research process, and get them to open up, which informed the story hugely.

GO: I had already decided that it had to be a PE teacher or a drama teacher – a teacher who wasn't just standing in front of a class. I was interested in the kind of physicality of it, how it would be different for a teacher whose job is concerned with bodies, how that might bring extra pressures. By looking into that online, I found these amazing women who we went on to meet - we drove all over the country and interviewed them ourselves. Through that, and through delving into our own lives and our own anecdotes around internalised homophobia, we strung something together in time for the deadline, which was two weeks after that first meeting. And the story hasn't really changed that much since then. It was always about one teacher: putting their life under a microscope, instead of focusing on the law itself and the bigger political aspect of it. I always want to interrogate one person's life and decisions.

So while historical narratives focus on activists, Jean represents the people who were not able or willing to raise their voices in protest?

GO: Yes. It wasn't just teachers that we met - we met hundreds of people, journalists, activists, the people who abseiled into the House. And it was a very different experience speaking to them than it was speaking to the teachers. These teachers could not get involved in all of this amazing activism that was happening as a result of this law that was brought in. Most of the people we spoke to said, "Section 28 was an awful thing, but as a result of it, we all got together, and this happened and that happened..." So I wanted to find a way to tell the story that at least alluded to some of what was going on, and that would leave audiences with some understanding that there was hope. That's where the women who frequent the bar and live in the Co-op originated from. I wanted to show that someone like Jean might *want* to be involved in that side of things, but because of the public facing aspect of her job, she wasn't able to. All the teachers we spoke to said the same thing. You know, "This thing was ruining my life, but I couldn't march against it because I couldn't risk being seen by TV cameras and being outed at school."

Do you think lesbians were regarded as particularly troubling or subversive?

GO: Totally. And yet sexless, at the same time. I would say there was that tendency then and still is now. When we started, I didn't have the Viv character. As we were developing the story, I felt it would be interesting to show a lesbian relationship that was in full flow, and not dissimilar to any other loving relationship, but for it to then be derailed by various things. I feel like that isn't something that I've seen much of. We see a lot of girl meets girl romances, and stories about wanting and hurting and not being able to have something, but I don't feel like you really ever see the other side: a functioning relationship. There is an extra level of silence around gay women.

How did you find Rosy McEwen, who gives such a remarkable performance as Jean?

HS: Our wonderful casting director Shaheen Baig sent us some tapes for the role of Jean. When it came to discussing them, Georgia and I both said there was only one possible option, but didn't dare to say the name! Eventually, we both said it at the same time: Rosy. Her tape moved me to tears. It confirmed to me that there was something really special about the script, and also that she was the right and only person to bring it to life.

GO: Yeah, Rosy was just it. The casting process was pretty simple for her: she sent in a tape and I just knew that she was Jean. She had this amazing stillness, and was able to channel everything that I'd written - all this stuff going under the surface. She was able to keep very still, and do so much with so little.

HS: There was a sense of mystery in Rosy's performance that we couldn't find anywhere else - a stern exterior, a great 'poker face' but also an incredible warmth. Rosy could bring us into her world and make a very internal script accessible to audiences. And that's exactly what we wanted.

How important was her dynamic with Kerrie Hayes, as Jean's partner Viv?

GO: That was what I was most nervous about. I felt confident that I would find my Jean, and I felt confident that I would find my Viv - but you never know what you're going to get when it comes to chemistry. We had cast Rosy about a year before we actually shot the film, because then there was the second UK lockdown, so had we had a long break, and Kerrie was not cast for quite a long time. But the Viv onscreen is exactly the Viv I wrote. I always saw her as hard on the outside, but soft in the middle. And Kerrie's just hysterically funny, and soft and warm, and all the things I imagined Viv to be. Her tattoos and everything might suggest someone much harder, but I always imagined she'd be warm and lovely and everyone would love her.

I was interested not just in Jean exploring her own identity, but also being the newbie in this group of women. I had been that person, in the group of lesbians that I would hang out with. I felt that it was a very specific experience: that whatever the outside world makes of you, in that world, you're not quite gay enough! You're too new; you're too late! I always wanted that to be the dynamic, and I felt that a lot of people could relate to that. With Kerrie and Rosy, there is an age difference between them; and as people they just had the chemistry and the connection that I was after. It was obvious.

Just after rehearsals, I took them in costume to a gay bar in Newcastle. Some girl started looking at Rosy, and Kerrie got suddenly puffed up. Her posture changed: she was all protective of her Jean. It was completely natural; it just came to the two of them. They *became* those two characters, and really, they didn't shake it off the whole time that we were filming. So now, when I see both of them, I'm kind of surprised they're not Jean and Viv anymore!

HS: Where the casting surprised us, not so much in pre-production but once we were shooting, is with the level of chemistry between Rosy and Kerrie. The characters were initially written as being on a more rocky path, but the chemistry between Rosy and Kerrie was so undeniable that their love story almost stole the show! Obviously it is what's partly at stake in the story, and what one of our PE teacher consultants confessed Section 28 had the biggest impact on: her love life. But we had to manage this in the edit to maintain a balance between the fate of Jean's relationship with Viv, and the impact her choices have on Lois's fate - the other big stake in the film. But Kerrie and the rest of the gang also bring a lot of comedy and warmth to this world, showing us a side that we've rarely seen in LGBT films, which are often focused on repressed characters who evolve solely in a straight world.

In Lucy Halliday, who plays the troubled schoolgirl Lois, you have a complete newcomer, who makes a huge impression onscreen.

GO: Lucy did have some theatre experience, but yes, she was a very young person who hadn't been away from home before; it was a really new experience for her. That was kind of perfect, although it wasn't planned - I just thought she was brilliant. She had this essence, this fire that she could light, and she'd suddenly be burning so brightly. The difficult thing with Lois is this balance of vulnerability, and bravado. She's got this tough guy attitude, but seriously fragile vulnerability beneath that. That was quite hard to communicate, so in casting her, that was the thing I was most aware of. And I was just completely won over by Lucy in her audition; I knew she was perfect.

HS: Lucy totally blew us away in her audition. She was the only young actor who managed to challenge Rosy, and almost make her feel uncomfortable, which is what we wanted. She's a real natural, and she navigated the toughness and sensitivity of Lois wonderfully. It was very emotional to see her being mentored as a young actor by her older peers. I hope great things happen to her; she's a real diamond.

Were the regional and class origins of the characters significant to the story, as well as their sexuality?

GO: The women who we interviewed came from all over the country. By and large, there was a big North/South divide; and also a town/country divide. We focused more on the women we met who worked in state schools in the North, because there were such clear parallels in their stories - the

idea that you might run into your student in the local bar, because there are only a handful of bars... It just makes the experience so much more heightened.

I wanted Jean to be someone quite neutral. She's quite middle class. She's still in touch with her family. Most of the women that we spoke to in our research had been ostracised by their families. A lot of them had fled whatever city they grew up in and created a whole new life for themselves. I wanted to try and tell the story of someone who was who hadn't done that - who didn't want to stray too far away from what she knew, who didn't want her life to be political. Neutralising some of these other things around her helped me delve into her story - to place her side by side with women who've had different experiences, and to show that she in many ways is really lucky.

Was it ever an issue during development that Jean does not always behave in a morally exemplary fashion?

GO: We were really lucky: our lead exec Eva Yates felt the same way we do about 'likable' women, and did not at any point try to force us to tell a story about somebody who did all the right things. We all embraced the fact that she was a bit of an antihero. After all, we watch films about male characters who do terrible things all the time, or who make bad decisions, and we don't question that! That's not to say that there haven't been people that have read it who have questioned Jean's morals and what she does. But that was exactly what was interesting to me. One of the PE teachers who helped us along the way told us a story about a girl who had sought her out in school, and sheepishly said that she thought that she might be gay. And the teacher just told her: "no, you're not. You're not gay, and even if you are, don't be," and then just left this kid. Thirty years later, this woman is still haunted by her actions at that time. She said that not a day goes by that she doesn't think about this girl, and what happened to her. And this was not just specific to her. All the women we spoke to had similar stories. Because they just didn't really understand what was happening to them at the time. We have so much language now to talk about internalised homophobia, and microaggressions - all that stuff is in the collective consciousness now - but at the time, they just *didn't know*. Gay people often kind of grow up hating themselves, even if they're not aware of it.

We were talking with another of the teachers at one point, over coffee, and we asked, "What do you think, was the emotional cost for you?" And I'll never forget it – she's such a poised, smart, cool, collected woman, and she just burst into tears, in this café at 9am. It took her a while to recover. And then she told us that it was her relationships: she would find somebody, fall in love, think she had found the right person, and then for reasons that she just did not understand, the relationship would break down. For her, that was the thing. She said, "I've had thirty years of therapy, and I'm beginning to understand why, and to look back on things through a different lens." She was beginning to understand what had happened to her. But at the time, none of these women knew what was happening, really - they weren't aware. So that was what interested me with Jean. She makes bad decisions; but she's so unaware. What happens over ninety minutes in our story, the evolution we see her go through, might have happened over the course of ten years for the women that we spoke to. I'm always interested in why people do the things that they do. Those are always the stories that I'm drawn to – where there's no "And then, everything was fine!"

The film has a soundtrack that feels evocative and fresh at the same time, and a beautiful score by Chris Roe. How did you decide on its sound?

GO: A lot of music was in the script from the beginning. In 2018, when I wrote the first draft, I put together a playlist on Spotify. I chose tracks that evoked a sort of atmosphere. It's not a documentary, so I didn't do lots of research into the top ten pop songs of the moment. You can't necessarily play each one of those tracks and have somebody tell you exactly when it came out, apart from the New Order – it's just all music that I love. And that ties into our whole treatment of the period. The idea was to try and make the film look and feel more like it *was* from its time, than like a self-aware throwback to the 80s. We have all these things that have really perfected that look, like STRANGER THINGS and IT'S A SIN which are brilliant - but actually when you see documentary photographs of the time, or if you watch films of the time, it isn't necessarily all bright colours and denim jackets. So for the music, the costumes, and the general style and aesthetic, we took inspiration from classic movies of the time, lots of them European, some American. It's not really my way to make a kitchen sink drama - I think my sensibility's a bit more European anyway. We worked with a French DoP. And with the score, I worked closely with Chris Roe (AFTER LOVE), who is brilliant, on something that would be very present – not intrusive, but very much there throughout as an indicator of Jean's state of mind.

HS: Georgia is very drawn to European cinema, and as a French producer (although based in London), I share a lot of references with her, from a cinematic point of view. It was a no-brainer to attach a French DoP, for instance. And I hope that my natural understanding of Georgia's vision helped her achieve it on screen, trying to break free from a perhaps more traditional British kitchen sink approach to portrait or social dramas.

GO: We're trying to take something and elevate it in a way. It's not supposed to feel wholly real. We wanted to evoke a feeling.

How do you feel about premiering your debut feature at the Venice Film Festival?

GO: I mean, it's really surprising! It's beyond anyone's wildest dreams. But at the same time, when we were filming, it felt to all of us like we were doing something special. A lot of people, not just the actors, came up to me in the course of production and said really lovely things, about how they've never felt more proud of something that they've worked on. The more people believe in something, the more they want to make it the best that they possibly can. So although it mainly just feels quite surreal, it's also a huge relief that we weren't going mad. And Rosy's performance - to now be able to share that with everyone - I can't wait. That's the thing I'm most excited about: for people to see her performance.

HS: We made it to Venice, and we are eligible for the Lion of the Future, which is just incredible. The cherry on the cake is to be able to premiere the film in front of one of our heroes, Céline Sciamma. I don't know how she will respond to this film, but just for her to be there at the world premiere is a huge honour (and definitely intimidating!). But to be honest, to me the best thing about premiering on such a big world stage is the impact it will have for the story and characters it represents. We want this part of history, and the relevance it has with some behaviours today, to take the spotlight. Premiering at Venice is the best way to shine a light on this, so it feels like a huge achievement already.

Q&A with ROSY MCEWEN ("Jean")

What appealed to you about the script for BLUE JEAN?

RM: Georgia's writing is just so fully formed, in the way that she creates worlds and people. She writes in such a way that you understand who someone is by reading about three words! That was what spoke to me when I read the script. I just *got* it. It was so clear, and genuine. I think that's also what you see with the best acting: when you just know exactly what that person's thinking, but they're doing very little to get you to that point. So that was what drove me to script. And obviously, the story.

Were you familiar with the historical context?

RM: I didn't know *anything* about Section 28. And I was at school while it was in place - it wasn't abolished in England until 2003. I had no idea this was going on, or that these men and women were living these traumatic lives, continuously looking over their shoulders and never feeling like they could be themselves. Just the constant bombardment of macro- and microaggressions. It's so lovely to get a script about something that's real, and a story that needs to be told. And it's such a privilege to be part of that.

Your performance captures a woman who is quiet on the surface, but with so much going on inside. Was that a challenge to play?

RM: That's always the thing that excites me as an actor: when you have to portray one thing, but what's going on underneath is something different. That contrast of emotion is always very exciting, as is going from one extreme to another very, very quickly. It's a wonderful headspace to get into – exhausting, but really enticing. That feeling of pretending to be something when you're feeling a different way - it's probably something that we all feel in life, particularly as a woman. There are so many fronts that we have to put on. I'm really not trying to diminish Jean's experience as a lesbian during that time, because that is so much more nuanced and unique, and harder, but that's the way I can relate to it - just that desperate need to be free, which I feel just as a human wanting to be myself. That is a continuous chat I have with myself: "wait, what do I actually want in this moment?" - rather than constantly feeling like you have to please everyone else. Jean has that, but on a very extreme spectrum: her job is at risk, her family relationships are at risk, her romantic relationship is at risk. Everything that she's built in her life relies on the fact that she has to perform differently in every social situation. And that is exhausting.

Was it difficult to place yourself emotionally in a situation that occurred before you were born, attitudes around this issue having changed so much?

RM: Honestly, no, because it's written so well. And because of the research I did – looking at all the media messaging that was around during that time and that Jean would have witnessed. That stuff cuts so deep. My job as an actor is to understand another human, and so I surrounded myself with the images and newspaper articles and adverts that would have filtered into her psyche. The ideal woman as always very, very feminine. Protestors against Section 28 as "loony lesbians". When I was reading all that, it made me so sad. No wonder she felt hunted. Once you surround yourself in that world, enclose yourself in it, the other stuff comes naturally. Of course she was hiding who she was, trying to be someone different.

How did you work with Kerrie Hayes and develop the relationship between Jean and her partner Viv?

RM: Kerrie is just a wonderful actor, and so open and ready to play. It's so exciting when you meet someone you're playing opposite and you realise very quickly - I think we knew within the first day, or I definitely did! - that you can go somewhere together, because they're unafraid. That was so beautiful. And then with every filming experience, your relationships grow and change as you're filming. We would find nuances between Jean and Viv every single day. For Jean, this is the one piece of pure happiness in her life, and it's so sacred to her. The stakes for that relationship have to be so high, and so real, to raise the stakes of the rest of the film. Because if she can't be herself in her relationship, nothing else really matters. And what comes between them is *not their fault*. The

society that they have been born into gets in the way of this very pure relationship that they have, and it's neither of their fault. It's societal pressures that force them to fight politically.

Does the fact that they're not affluent people and not living in an especially glitzy or international urban centre also affect that?

RM: During our research I spoke to two women who worked as PE teachers during the same period of time, Catherine and Sarah. Catherine was based in Liverpool, and Sarah's experience was in London. Obviously, their experiences were different, and both nuanced in their own way. But they both met *so* much discrimination. Whether one was maybe more extreme than the other doesn't really matter - you're still being told that who you are is wrong. And Section 28 was a law that was passed all over the country, so that messaging was going into everyone's ears. In a smaller town, I guess your scene was smaller; there were fewer of you, and maybe there was only one bar you could go to, which is what Jean has. Maybe there was more of a safety in numbers situation if you were in London. But the continuous discrimination was the same. And it's *still* really hard. What's happening in Florida is basically Section 28 all over again. Yes, we want to celebrate. But we can't just look through rose-tinted glasses and say, "It's all done and over and we're all happy!" There's more space, but there's still not *enough* space. To come out is still a hard thing to do, for a teenager or an adult. You still don't know if people are going to accept you or not.

How did it feel to go back – as Jean – to school?

RM: You're very exposed in that environment! Children aren't like adults, who have more developed social cues, so that if it's an awkward moment or something comes up that shouldn't have been said, they know to brush past it. With children, no-one knows what to do. And they can be mean - there's teasing, there's bullying. When we filmed Jean teaching in the sports hall, you've got a whole group of kids looking at you, and then you add a cameras to that as well... I remember feeling *so exposed*. One little slip-up, one little comment that I react badly to...! You just have to be so on guard. It's a tense environment to be in.

Jean's smoking also evokes tremendous tension...

RM: We talked so much about the smoking, because we were like, is she actually addicted? Or does she just feel like she needs something to do, which is such a common thing with smokers? It's a way to escape, going for a cigarette. She's a bird that needs to always be able to flee if she can, and it feels like smoking is just an excuse to do that.

Jean does things that viewers may dislike or judge her for. How did you feel about her moral character?

RM: I mean, I'm a sucker for an antihero. I just feel like it's such a refreshing thing to watch, because we all get it wrong. And she's only getting it wrong because she's *terrified,* and she has convinced herself that this is the only way to keep all her plates spinning in the air. And sometimes she will have to get it wrong to get it right in the end.

You've worked on large television productions. How did a low-budget British feature shoot compare?

RM: Oh, it's the best. The *best.* If I could make films like this for the rest of my career, I'd be very happy - just low budget, indie films about something that really matters. The process to actually get it on screen is so long and hard that by the time you get on set, everyone is so grateful to be there,

and everyone is so passionate about it. The creativity is so rife. No-one's looking at their watch, like, "can we just wrap this up?" With really big projects, you're playing your small part of a massive board game. Whereas with this, you're really part of the furniture, and your opinion matters. And this is the first time I've played a lead role, so I really felt like I could ask for what I needed, take up space, have discussions with Georgia. And that freedom as an actor is just the most exciting thing ever.

BIOGRAPHIES

Georgia Oakley - Director/ Writer

Georgia is a screenwriter and director with a particular fondness for convention defying, female-led narratives. Her award-winning shorts have screened at dozens of international festivals including SXSW, TriBeCa (where LITTLE BIRD was nominated for Best Narrative Short), New York Film Festival and Galway Film Fleadh. She was mentored by Desiree Akhavan on the BFI Flare scheme and was selected for Berlinale Talents and iFeatures with her debut feature, BLUE JEAN, starring Rosy McEwen, Kerrie Hayes, Lucy Halliday. Georgia is currently developing her second feature with BBC Film. Alongside this, she is co-adapting a novel by Anna Hope for June Films; the film will be directed by Clémence Poésy. BLUE JEAN will receive its World Premiere at the Venice Film Festival 2022.

Hélène Sifre - Producer

Following two-years working in development in Paris, Hélène joined the Producing MA at the NFTS. She has produced several short films that all competed in festivals worldwide, earning a nomination at the 44th Annie Awards for her short FISHWITCH and winning the 2017 RTS Award for Best Postgraduate Drama. She was selected for the Berlinale Talents Lab, Inside Out Finance Forum and Edinburgh Talent Lab.

Hélène worked as executive assistant / junior business & production executive at Filmwave before joining the start-up company Braintrust in 2018 as Development Executive. She was promoted to Head of Development and Producer in 2019. In this capacity, she helped them secure their first commission for a children's animated series entitled TWENDE, based on a pilot episode that was selected in competition at the Annecy International Animation Festival. Other projects include a live-action comedy series backed by Endeavor Content and a US-set debut feature backed by Altitude Film Sales.

Hélène has just wrapped her debut feature, BLUE JEAN, financed by BBC Film and the BFI, which she produced through her own company, Kleio Films. BLUE JEAN will receive its World Premiere at the Venice Film Festival 2022.

Rosy McEwen - Jean

Rosy plays the female lead in BLUE JEAN, a lesbian gym teacher facing up to her own sexuality during a time (1980s Newcastle) when Section 28 – a law prohibiting the "promotion of homosexuality" by local authorities – was enacted.

When Rosy was 13, she made it to the final two for the role of Briony in Atonement, losing out to Saoirse Ronan who was later Oscar-nominated. While still at school, Rosy went on to appear in

episodes of *Cranford* and *Waking the Dead* before going to the University of Leeds to study History of Art and eventually graduating from Bristol Old Vic Theatre School.

Rosy's first role was on stage in *The Cherry Orchard* at Bristol Old Vic, followed by Manchester Royal Exchange, before director Michael Boyd took her to the Royal Shakespeare Company.

In 2018, Rosy starred as the villainous Libby in the second season of Netflix's *The Alienist*. She followed it with the Channel 4 thriller *Close to Me* and the dystopian sci-fi *Vesper,* playing a clone robot opposite Eddie Marsan.

Rosy has just wrapped on *Relic* director Natalie Erika James' 1960s horror-thriller *Apartment 7A* opposite Julia Garner. She starts *Othello* at the National Theatre in October.

BLUE JEAN will receive its World Premiere at the Venice Film Festival 2022.

Kerrie Hayes - Viv

Kerrie Hayes plays Viv, girlfriend to Rosy McEwen's Jean, in BLUE JEAN.

Kerrie received critical praise for her lead performance as Esther Price in Channel 4's THE MILL (2014) and for which she was BAFTA nominated for *Best Leading Actress*. Prior to this, Kerrie worked extensively on television, featuring in shows such as LILLIES (World Productions), SHAMELESS (Channel 4) and BLACK MIRROR: FIFTEEN MILLION MERITS (Channel 4).

Recent credits include the BAFTA award winning BBC drama, THREE GIRLS from writer Nicole Taylor (2017), LITTLE BOY BLUE for ITV (2017), directed by Paul Whittington; THE FRANKENSTEIN CHRONICLES for ITV (2017); THE ENGLISH GAME for Netflix (2020); TIN STAR for Kudos/Sky Atlantic (2020) and THE RESPONDER (2022) which has just aired on BBC ONE, starring Martin Freeman.

Kerrie can also be seen on the big screen, with notable film credits including: NOWHERE BOY directed by Sam Taylor-Johnson (2009), KICKS for Starstruck Films (2009) and BRIGHTON ROCK (2010) for BBC Films.

Lucy Halliday - Lois

Newcomer Lucy Halliday plays teenager Lois Jackson in BLUE JEAN. The role is Lucy's first professional job and marks her as a new revelation.

Eighteen-year-old Lucy grew up near Glasgow in Paisley, Scotland, and had recently started a medical degree when she sent her self-tape to Casting Director Shaheen Baig as a response to the open call for BLUE JEAN. She was immediately called back for a live audition and landed the role. Her prior drama experience involved being part of the PACE Theatre Company - a youth theatre company which includes renowned alumni James McAvoy, Richard Madden and James McArdle.

CREDITS

CAST:

ROSY MCEWEN – Jean

KERRIE HAYES – Viv

LUCY HALLIDAY – Lois

CREW:

WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY **GEORGIA OAKLEY**

PRODUCED BY **HÉLÈNE SIFRE**

CO-PRODUCER **MARIE-ELENA DYCHE**

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS **EVA YATES, LOUISE ORTEGA, JIM REEVE**

SUPERVISING SOUND DESIGNER **JAMES H. MATHER**

MUSIC SUPERVISOR **BRIDGET SAMUELS**

ORIGINAL MUSIC **CHRIS ROE**

HAIR & MAKE-UP DESIGNER **KAT MORGAN**

CASTING DIRECTOR **SHAHEEN BAIG**

EDITOR **IZABELLA CURRY**

PRODUCTION DESIGNER **SORAYA GILANNI VILJOEN**

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY **VICTOR SEGUIN**