



POND LIFE

A film by Bill Buckhurst

Written by Richard Cameron



For all publicity enquiries please contact:

keeley@emfoundation.com

Certificate: tbc /Running time: 85 minutes

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Summertime, 1994, a quiet ex-mining village just outside Doncaster. A rumour stirs about the legend of a giant carp in the nearby decoy ponds. Trevor takes watch one night at the water's edge. The following night, he decides to lead a brigade of young friends and neighbours on a fishing expedition. In a world of broken families, cassette tapes and rumbling political fever, these friends, each with their own struggles to bear, share a night they will never forget.

SYNOPSIS

It's summer in Edlington.

Trevor sits at Decoy Ponds, patiently awaiting the appearance of Nessie, the carp of legend.

Pogo wanders around town with a cassette recorder, taping broken fragments, and trying to make sense of it all. The local children taunt her.

Cassie and Maurice canoodle in the reeds...They're in love.

Malcolm is also in love, with Cassie that is, but she doesn't want to hear it and Maurice has just thrown him in a nettle bush. He takes comfort in video games at the local arcade, and tries to astral project himself into her bedroom.

Best friends Shane and David cause mischief around the town; stealing chocolate bars and every opportunity they can to a glimpse a pair of boobs. Shane takes it one step further and spies on a canoodling couple in the reeds.

'This is the best summer of my life' says Pogo, and for each of them the sun, the bittersweet intensity of their relationships, and their fishing quest make the moment exceptionally vivid. But change is also in the air - there is no room for Trevor at home, the truth about Maurice's family has to emerge, and their community has to move on.

DIRECTORS STATEMENT

When I first read Richard's script I was blown away by the authenticity of the young voices in his story. He loves these characters and manages to capture perfectly the highs and the lows of this disparate group of young people, as they try to find their way in a complicated world.

What moved me was that although the backdrop is the fractured mining community where life has forever changed since the pit closures, this isn't the prime focus of the storytelling; its presence is felt in the snatched moments we see of the adults, but this is above all a story about the kids. Despite all the pain, both personal and communal, that envelops them all, they still just want to be kids...looking for laughs, distraction, adventures and excitement in their summer holidays.

Richard handles big themes with a really delicate touch and "Nessy", the carp that obsesses them all, becomes an emblem not only for Pogo's independence but also for the hopes and dreams of all the kids in the community.

In the months leading up to the shoot I spent many days walking around the area of South Yorkshire where the story is set, meeting lots of people, looking for locations and trying to get familiar with the landscape that the characters inhabit. I got a real understanding of the tight-knit communities in the pit villages around Doncaster.

I was equally struck by the huge scale of the surrounding landscape - a short walk from the main village green and you could find yourself in miles and miles of rolling countryside, forests, ponds, medieval abbeys... this epic landscape is where the kids' lives are played out. I wanted to capture a sense of the rich, proud history of the area, and the expansiveness of the world beyond their immediate community.

Bill Buckhurst

WRITERS STATEMENT

Back when I was a Drama teacher at a Comprehensive School, I was trying to come up with play ideas that had some connection to the lives of my students, fed up with the Dracula Spectacular kind of fare. The idea for POND LIFE came from the summer I ran an 'Activities Summer School' for special needs teenagers. It was exhausting. To relax I'd go fishing – sometimes back to the pond near where I grew up in Doncaster, next to an ex-pit village. I started to think about a young girl with special needs being looked after by a young man on the dole, taking her fishing.

Often stories get told of monster carp in these ponds – always the one that got away – so I decided I needed the legend of a monster carp and an all-night fishing expedition, with a gang of youngsters. These kids make their own magic, in a place where life is tough, where the life and soul of the community – the pit – has gone.

The play eventually found its way to The Bush Theatre in London. Dominic Dromgoole was Artistic Director there then. The thing I most remember about the production was the pond. A REAL pond appeared in the second half. Structural engineers had been brought in to make sure the ceiling took the weight (the theatre was upstairs from the pub.) On press night someone came upstairs from the bar and walked straight into the pond.

Dominic always thought it would make a film and shortly after the Bush production I wrote a film script. We had ourselves a director, lead actor, locations and ALMOST the money needed to make it, but not quite, so the project came to nothing. Fast-forward twenty years and I get a call from Dominic, 'Do you still have that script?' I didn't, but after some weeks a tatty first draft with illegible notes in the margins was found buried in an archive somewhere. I convinced Dominic that I should start again. Writing the story for film gave me the chance to open it up and show the landscape – the contrast between the glorious countryside and the down at heel terraces- and more of the community. How people were coping, or not, in the aftermath of the pit closure, I added through glimpses of the parents: their lives seen against the created world of the youngsters. How they look after one another – in particular how Trev looks after Pogo – is central to the film. I recall in trying to get the finances together the first time around, one of the companies came back to me with, 'Can you make Trevor more of a golden boy?' I said no – in this community they don't have aspirations. It is enough for me that someone with no future, with nothing going for them other than fishing, takes on looking after a young girl with special needs. He is my hero for that.

Richard Cameron

CAST

TOM VAREY (Trevor)

Tom is a young British actor. Before he graduated from RADA Tom landed the role of 'Bert Middleton' in BBC period drama THE VILLAGE. Since then he has been a consistent presence on British screens and is best known for his role of PC Stuart O'Connell in Channel 4 Comedy NO OFFENCE and as Will Simpson in Channel 4 drama ACKLEY BRIDGE. In addition to these he has also had roles on HBO's GAME OF THRONES and TV mini-series DARK ANGEL

ESMÈ CREED-MILES (Pogo)

Esmé is an actress best known for her role in DARK RIVER alongside Ruth Wilson and Sean Bean. She first appeared on screen as a child in independent feature MISTER LONELY where she played the role of Shirley Temple. Esmé also took the part of Sister Stevie in Open Palm Films' UNDERCLIFFE. She will play the title role of Hanna in the upcoming Amazon Studios original TV series.

ANGUS IMRIE (Malcolm)

Angus is a young British actor. In 2014 he won Spotlight's Most Promising Actor Award at The Sunday Times National Student Drama Festival. He is well known for playing the character of Josh Archer, in BBC Radio 4 drama serial THE ARCHERS. He will appear as Young Merlin in the upcoming Joe Cornish feature The KID WHO WOULD BE KING.

DAISY EDGAR-JONES (Cassie)

Daisy is an actress best known for her role as Olivia on ITV comedy-drama COLD FEET. She has also appeared in BBC comedy OUTNUMBERED and crime-drama SILENT WITNESS. Stage credits include THE RELUCTANT FUNDAMENTALIST at The Yard.

ABRAHAM LEWIS (Maurice)

Abraham emerged as an actor to watch when picked out of a production of A-LEVEL PLAYING FIELD at the Jermyn Street theatre and his next role was as Vic in John Cameron Mitchell's feature HOW TO TALK TO GIRLS AT PARTIES. Following this he took the role of Ronnie Pence/ Fredrich in Sky Atlantic miniseries GUERRILLA.

SIÂN BROOKE (Rachel)

Siân Brooke is a British actress, best known for portraying Eurus Holmes in SHERLOCK. She appeared with Sheridan Smith and Gemma Whelan in the recent BBC miniseries THE MOORSIDE. More recently she appeared in Stephen Poliakoff's MY CITY and Neil LaBute's REASONS TO BE PRETTY at the Almeida Theatre as well as playing Ophelia opposite Benedict Cumberbatch in HAMLET at the Barbican.

SHAUN DOOLEY (Russ)

Shaun is an actor best known for his many and varied television roles, appearing as Steve Richards in DCI: BANKS, Ricky Gillsepie in BROADCHURCH and DCI Jim Fenchurch in THE GAME. He has also held roles in MISFITS, GREAT EXPECTATION'S, THIS IS ENGLAND '90, GUNPOWDER, JAMESTOWN and will play Jeremiah Rawson in the upcoming GENTLEMAN JACK. Shaun has had an extensive career in radio and on stage he notably played Robert Frost in THE DARK EARTH AND THE LIGHT SKY at the Almeida theatre.

JULIE HESMONDHALGH (Muriel)

Julie is an actress best known for her role as Hayley Cropper in CORONATION STREET. She held the beloved role for almost two decades and garnered a National Television Award and British Soap Award for best actress. Her screen credits include the television series' CUCUMBER, INSIDE NO.9, BROADCHURCH and the lauded HAPPY VALLEY. She has recently won a The Stage Award for her role in Ian Kershaw's The GREATEST PLAY IN THE WORLD at the Traverse Theatre.

SIOBHAN FINNERAN (Kath)

Siobhan is an actress, easily recognisable as Janice Garvey in longstanding ITV comedy BENIDORM, as Sarah O'Brien in Downton Abbey and Clare in the multiple BAFTA Award winning HAPPY VALLEY, where she was also nominated for a BAFTA. Her film career has featured many strong roles with her credits including: RITA, SUE AND BOB TOO, THE SELFISH GIANT and the lead in the critically acclaimed, APOSTASY.

FILMMAKERS

BILL BUCKHURST (Director)

Bill is an actor and director. He trained as an actor at Webber Douglas, but after directing work on the Fringe Bill realised that his passion lay on the other side of the process. His production of Sweeney Todd, which began in a Pie and Mash shop in Tooting, transferred to the West End, and has now played for almost two years off-Broadway. He recently directed The Selfish Giant at the Vaudeville theatre. Some of his previous stage credits include a stage version of Derek Walcott's Omeros at the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse. Further works directed at Shakespeare's Globe include: King Lear, Hamlet, The Merchant of Venice, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Macbeth and Romeo and Juliet. Other directing includes: Barbarians and Tinderbox (Tooting Arts Club). Pond Life is Bill's feature debut.

RICHARD CAMERON (Writer)

Richard Cameron writes for theatre, television and radio, and won the inaugural Dennis Potter Award in 1997 for his television play Stone, Scissors, Paper.

Richard has written a number of critically acclaimed stage plays, including Can't Stand Up For Falling Down, which won a Fringe First and The Independent Theatre Award, and The Glee Club for The Bush Theatre, which transferred to the West End before a national tour and was adapted as a radio play for Radio 4. He has also won The Sunday Times Playwriting Award three times and was the Thames Television Writer in Residence at The West Yorkshire Playhouse.

Most of Richard's work is set in South Yorkshire, where he lives, but now and again he ventures out. Great Balls of Fire, the story of Jerry Lee Lewis, was produced for Belgrade Theatre, Coventry, and transferred to the West End.

DOMINIC DROMGOOLE (Producer)

Dominic Dromgoole has worked extensively in theatre around the world and was artistic director of The Globe from 2006-2016. In that time, he mounted over a hundred productions including thirty new plays, and redefined the theatre as a centre of radical scope and ambition. Dominic and his team created a national touring circuit, and an unprecedented international network, which brought productions from 40 different countries to the Globe, and from the Globe to every country in the world. He also planned and built the Globe's new indoor theatre, the Wanamaker Playhouse. It was at the Globe that he gained his first taste for film production after developing a video-on-demand platform for Globe productions, and making and showing 37 short films, celebrating Shakespeare's plays in their real settings.

Previous to The Globe Dominic worked as Artistic Director at The Bush from 1990-96. He was in charge of new plays with Sir Peter Hall's company at the Old Vic in 1997, and ran the Oxford Stage Company from 1999 to 2005. He has written many essays for the Sunday Times, The Guardian and the Telegraph; has worked as a columnist for the New Statesman and the Guardian, and has written three books, The Full Room, Will & Me and Hamlet: Globe to Globe.

Since leaving the Globe, Dominic's theatre company Classic Spring has produced the critically acclaimed Oscar Wilde Season at the Vaudeville theatre in 2017/18.

In 2016 Dominic set up Open Palm Films with the remit of creating small budget chamber epics. So far he has produced five films for the company: Making Noise Quietly, which he also directed, Pond Life, Undercliffe, Tides and Benjamin. Further directing and producing projects are underway.

RICHARD HAWLEY (Composer)

Richard is a BRIT and two-time Mercury Prize nominated musician. He found success with his bands Longlegs and Pulp as well as a solo musician. Richard has released seven studio albums and has collaborated with many greats in the industry including Lisa Marie Presley, Arctic Monkeys, Manic Street Preachers, Elbow and Paul Weller. Previous to Pond Life Richard has composed music of television and film with his credits including the documentaries: Run For Me, Love Is All: Boy, Girl, Love and the recent feature Funny Cow, starring Maxine Peake and Paddy Considine. He is a hugely influential figure in British music.

ALEXANDRA BREEDE (Producer)

Alexandra Breede is a Canadian/German producer working in the United Kingdom. She has produced four films with Open Palm Films, Making Noise Quietly, Undercliffe, Pond Life and Benjamin.

Prior to joining Open Palm, Alexandra worked at the Globe Theatre where she associate produced the Complete Walk short film project.

Alexandra graduated from the National Film and Television school where she produced a number of short films, including Group B, which was nominated for a Student Academy Award and won the RTS Award for Graduate Fiction. Further credits include Fulfilament and Pioneers. Collectively these shorts have screened in over 60 festivals worldwide including AFI, TIFF and KIDS. Alexandra is currently developing her own slate of films.

RIENKJE ATTOH (Producer)

Rienkje is an independent Producer with a wealth of experience having started her professional career as a Broadcast Journalist in news and entertainment, having worked for the BBC, ITN and Euronews. She has worked on long and short form content across documentary, fiction and animation, which have screened at some of the worlds most notable national and international film festivals, including Sundance, London Film Festival and LA Film Festival. Her first feature A Moving Image had a theatrical release in the UK and screened internationally. In 2016 her production company So & So Productions was awarded a BFI Vision Award to develop her slate of fiction, TV and documentary projects. She's currently co-producing the adaptation of Noughts and Crosses with Mammoth Screen for the BBC.

Rienkje is a graduate of the National Film and TV School and one of the three recipients of the inaugural Prince William Scholarships in Film, Television and Games, supported by BAFTA and Warner Bros.

OPEN PALM FILMS

Hamlet's advice is sharp. He warns not to overstep 'the *modesty* of nature'. Nature is not bombastic, or sensational, or majestic, nature is itself, and modestly so.

There is an old myth about the word sincerity. Old sculptors used to adulterate the materials they used with wax, and thus a pure piece of sculpture would be stamped 'sine cera', without wax. Truthful work is without wax, it is sincere.

Open Palm Films aim to be modest and sincere, to be light and funny, and to celebrate the tender power of truth.

Open Palm Films have made six films thus far, Pond Life was the third.

WRITTEN by
Richard Cameron

Based on the play
'Pond Life' by Richard Cameron

DIRECTED by
Bill Buckhurst

CAST

Tom Varey as TREVOR
Esme Creed-Miles as POGO
Angus Imrie as MALCOLM
Daisy Edgar-Jones as CASSIE
Abraham Lewis as MAURICE
Siân Brooke as RACHEL STRICKLAND

Shaun Dooley as RUSS BUCKFIELD
Gianluca Galluci as Shane
Steve Garti as KENNY 'LITTLE GUY' YATES
Julie Hesmondhalgh as MURIEL PANKS
Faye McKeever as TRACEY COLLETT
Siobhan Finneran as KATH EDLINGTON
Adrian Hood as BILLY 'BIG DADDY' GOMERSAL
Sally Lindsay as IRENE BUCKFIELD
Paul Rider as QUIZMASTER
Ethan Wilkie as DAVE
Jacob Rotherforth as DEAN COLLETT

PRODUCERS

Dominic Dromgoole
Alexandra Breede
Rienkje Attoh

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

Mark Coombs

ORIGINAL MUSIC by
Richard Hawley

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Nick Cooke

EDITOR

Christopher Watson

PRODUCTION DESIGNER

Anthony Lamble

COSTUME DESIGNER

Jonathan Fensom

MAKE-UP AND HAIR DESIGNER

Bethany Swan

CASTING DIRECTOR

Matilda James

ART DIRECTORS

Alison Gartshore

Scott Thompson

GENERAL MANAGER

Rosie Townshend

EXECUTIVE COORDINATOR

Alice Schweitzer

DIGITAL ASSISTANT

Pasha Tong