



Vincent & me

Awards and this is testament to our positive impact.

You have a network of young volunteers working with the festival.

Shaw: Cinemagic was a front runner in engaging with young people to have input to the festival content. A panel of young consultants offer their feedback on a selection of the proposed in-competition films and we value their thoughts as they are our target audience, and as well as that they input to the marketing and promotion of events so we are engaging in the best ways possible with our audiences. Dedicated volunteers help with everything from programmes distribution to front of house duties, tick-

eting and festival evaluations.

Can you share with us one particular event that you are particularly proud about?

Shaw: We were especially proud of all of our 30th Anniversary activities welcoming guests such as Saoirse Ronan and legendary actress Hayley Mills. The festival always has the audience at heart.

*** Coming up in March in Belfast is the Short Film Festival 'On the Pulse' (www.cinemagic.org.uk).
* The Belfast Festival is now open for submissions – submit your films [here](#)**

Richard Heap about THE RUNAWAYS

Turning donkeys into prima donna's

Angie and her younger siblings Polly and Ben live in a cabin by the sea. Their father hardly makes a living vending donkey-rides at the beach. For this family there is nothing like an evening of dark ale and folk singing in the pub to forget about life's hardships. But that night Uncle Blythe returns from prison, harbouring a grudge over a long-standing family debt. Not much later the kids find themselves riding two donkeys over the moors under the drizzling rain, trying to escape from Blythe. At the Film'on Festival we asked director Richard Heap about the exact locations of the film.

Richard Heap: THE RUNAWAYS is set in the North-East of England, on the farmland and in the small villages of the North York Moors National Park. There is a beautiful coastline with old towns like Whitby, where the story starts. When Dracula travelled to Britain, he landed in Whitby. Macy (*Shackleton*, playing *Polly*) is from Bradford, where they have the thickest of Yorkshire accents, while Rhys (*Connah*, playing *Ben*) is from Lancashire. But

people outside the North will classify both as Northern accents.

In this Northern landscape is a certain desolation. These godforsaken places fit perfectly to the story.

Heap: When the kids run off into the moors, things are getting dark and moody. The moors are often seen as a grim place, with villages that get snowed in in winter. That is where *Wuthering Heights* is set. But when we filmed in autumn – a season of change – the heather was in bloom and it looked more beautiful than desolate. At least to me.

Who are these people? This family doesn't fit into the social safety nets but still found a way to survive.

Heap: Even though the film touches on many social issues, I didn't want it to feel like a grim Mike-Leigh-alike social realist drama. I wanted the film to have a sort of timeless gentleness. So their existence living isolated up on the cliff tops is slightly otherworldly. Initially we went looking for trailer parks along that coast, where people

are living full time in static caravans. But we couldn't find that one unique location. So the production designers decided to build a shack on a cliff top that looked amazing, like a timeless fantasy, not distinctly rooted in a time and a place.

There is also something timeless about people coming together to sing in the pub.

Heap: While on recce we went to a pub in Whitby and they had a sing-song folk night. There was one song about goldmining, written by a guy from New-Zealand, and it was so moving to see the whole pub singing it in unison, it not only cemented my thoughts on having a sing-a-long in the film but also to use that song. It was like a brilliant gift and the folk night musicians joined in with the filming too. Molly (*Windsor, playing Angie*) had her ups and downs with the production. It was low budget and lots of people were under-resourced and stressed, which gave her a difficult time. But that day in the pub was thrilling. In the scene when she reconnects with her dad and puts her arms around him, she tears up. The atmosphere was so amazing that it just swept her along. As a filmmaker, you know it can't be like that on set every day, but every now and then you get lucky.

There is a sort of togetherness that drags these siblings through their quest. This tough journey they can only make as a family.

Heap: Some people find the film open-ended, but for me the story was coming back together as a unit. All that Angie, the eldest daughter, could see in her siblings was the burden of it. She is exhausted of being their mother. But pushing them into a more difficult situation finally makes them bond stronger. When Angie says "*I think we are going to be alright*", what she actually says is: I am going to be alright.

You found a way to visualise those group dynamics in the framing.

Heap: I was thinking in terms of pairs and singles. When they are falling out, like by the pond, everyone appears on their own in single shots. When teaming up again, the three of them are in one frame, sometimes singing together. I have two children myself, a boy and a girl, often very antagonistic towards each other, but every now and then I find them lying on the sofa, all wrapped up in one another. The scene that moves me most is them hugging after getting out of their mums house, a moment of togetherness and comfort. Rhys was a 13-year-old boy



hanging out with two girls he barely knew, so he would always be resistant to hugging. There is in fact a jump cut in that scene, cutting straight into the hug, because Molly actually had to pull Rhys into it. The scene in which Ben and Polly build a camp, make a fire and start to mother their older sister, wasn't in the script. I only came up with the idea one day before, as I always knew we needed a scene in which all the role reversal would crystallize in one little moment.

Working with the actors was a delicate task?

Heap: Even though I always seemed to be under time pressure, I never put any pressure upon the children. We were shooting during school time

and the young actors couldn't neglect their education, so sometimes they arrived on set not knowing any of their lines. It was frustrating but I tried to keep all the angst and stress inside, so that they could feel free, which kept their performance fresh and easy.

Those kids need to behave too responsible for their age.

Heap: Yes, and deep inside you can feel how Angie is longing for a normal family life, in which she can act her age and have fun. Molly Windsor conveyed it all very subtly, she is a great actress. Some people say there is not one good adult character in the film and it is all about responsibility, how adults refuse to take it on but Angie



does. The film has been described as Dickensian – with Blythe as a kind of contemporary Bill Sykes.

The backstory is a bit complex and I had problems understanding the details. What happened in the past that made Blythe a bad guy?

Heap: The two brothers used to run on a fishing boat. The day the boat sank, Blythe was drunk. As a consequence they obviously lost the family business and the testimony of the elder brother sent Blythe to prison. The other item of wealth in the family (other than the boat) was a necklace, which is really a MacGuffin (*an element that sets the plot in motion but*

that is not precisely defined). The story is not about wealth or necklaces or fishing, it is about sibling bonds.

And about donkeys!

Heap: They were fantastic! Animals are a big comforter and a good therapy on the set – whenever you're feeling down, you drift off and give the donkeys a cuddle. The only problem is they eat all the time. You shout 'action' and one of them starts eating so nothing happened. And you can't reverse a donkey, so for every new take, you had to walk them round in a big circle. Having them on the train was a turning point. The first weeks they were really well-behaved but after



Richard Heap

the train-ride they turned into prima donna's. They were like: we're not having any of this.

The film starts at the seaside, and from then on you can always feel the nearness of the sea.

Heap: I came to the story after I did a coast-to-coast bike ride, and seeing the sea again after this 4-day journey was striking. That whole Northern coastline has a faded glory. The fishing industry has been decimated, the steel and all other manufacturing industries are in decline. It is subtly mentioned throughout the story, without ramming it down people's necks.

Were there many people mistaking the film for a rockumentary about a bunch of metal chicks?

Heap: Google has. The title has not been particularly useful for Google exposure. There is indeed this film about Joan Jett and there is a Marvel Television crime series by the same title.

–
Gert Hermans

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