

YOUNG FILMS, BBC FILM, BFI, SCREEN SCOTLAND  
PRESENT



# SILENT ROAR

A FILM BY JOHNNY BARRINGTON

2023 – UK – COMEDY, DRAMA – 90'

**mk2**  
FILMS

## SYNOPSIS

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On the island of Lewis, Scotland, Dondo, a young surfer, refuses to accept the death of his fisherman dad, despite being missing at sea for over a year. Unlike quiet and dreamy Dondo, his clever classmate Sas, is never afraid of rubbing people up the wrong way. Dondo and Sas' unlikely bond will help them find their path in their rural community, through waves, beliefs, and hellfire.

## INTERVIEW WITH JOHNNY BARRINGTON

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### **What are the origins of this film?**

My dad's death was the main starting point for the film. In the years leading up to this death I had been watching him grow older and frailer, and make increasingly morbid jokes about his own demise, as a kind of humorous way to prepare his family for his departure. I thought it would be slow, but he had a heart attack eating a boiled egg, after cutting the grass.

It was so sudden that the grieving and the sadness took a while to catch up. At first I was full of gratitude and relief that it had at least been quick. The funeral and memorial service floated by in a big wide grin, and so much laughter that it left me wondering if maybe I was a sociopath.

Another origin was a surf trip to Machrihanish on the West coast of Scotland, where the light was surreal, and I realised how some activities are great at making you stop thinking about anything, other than the job at hand. I realised how important it is to do something that shuts up the brain chat and puts you in a flow state. Surfing is the best activity I've found for doing that.

There's also a whole host of other origins, that would be covered by that old triumvirate of sex, death and religion.

### **Can you tell us about the casting process, and your experience of working with young actors Louis McCartney and Ella Lily Hyland?**

The casting process was a dream. Casting director, Rosalie Clayton, has a great understanding of what I like in actors. Louis McCartney was the very first actor she showed me for Dondo. I could have gone with him on the spot and not seen another actor. Bang, - straight off he felt right. He brought a buoyancy and optimism that was essential to the part.

Finding Sas was harder because there were so many more audition tapes to look through, but the instant I saw Ella, again I felt like offering her the part straight away. I think it was a deep mischief in her eyes; something truly untameable, combined with utter believability.

The nerve wracking part was waiting to see if Louis and Ella would accept the roles. Once they did, casting other roles was great fun - Swiss Jesus, Kenny, Kirsty and the Cosmic Trio were all amazing. The only needle in a haystack was Paddy the priest. That took a long search through some incredible actors, many household names, but none of them had the mad, unhinged empathy I was looking for. I am so grateful we finally found Mark Lockyer - he grabbed the role and gobbled it up whole.

Working with Louis and Ella was an education for me - they are just unbelievably good actors. They took quite different approaches during the shoot with Louis delivering solid line and action consistency - he never fluffed a line the entire shoot - whilst Ella was spontaneous, and

playful within very considered parameters. In between takes I could see her brain ticking over, I'll try this in this take and that in the next! It was exhilarating trying to keep up with her.

Watching them bring their energies together to create the driving force of the entire film was awe inspiring for me. I got such joy watching them interact, and realising that my script was giving them the right fuel to fire their supersonic jet burners. I am honoured to have directed them in their first feature film and can't wait to see where they go and what they do next in their careers.

**The film has a strong sense of place. Can you talk us through how you wanted to capture island life visually and in story terms? How did you approach the look of the film with your DoP?**

My desire was to portray a heightened, dramatised version of Highlands and Islands life – that comes from many stories and childhood experiences. I kind of wanted to mythologise the fishing and the farming, so Dondo's family is fishing whilst Sas's is sheep farming.

Although I'm not from Lewis, I was able to relate to the place because it was similar in many ways to where I grew up on Skye. The sea, the land and the light. The language and culture were subtle variations on one I had grown up in. The presence of sheep farming and fishing / fish-farming as crucial sources of employment is waning a bit compared to tourism, but still strong in my imagination and memory as I grew up in a time where the tourists came only in the summer and Skye was quiet all winter.

The Isle of Lewis had always existed as a mythical place in my imagination since I got told at school that Stornoway was the toughest, meanest place you could ever go - like you'd get punched in the face just walking down the street, if they found out you were from Skye. This irrational fear accumulated over the years until I set foot in Stornoway and found it disappointingly friendly and nobody tried to beat me up. I suppose I should wait until the film has had a screening at An Lanntair (in Stornoway) before saying that...!

I think the strong sense of place comes from shooting in a strong community in one of the most beautiful parts of the world, and keeping all locations within a tiny radius. If we'd had a bigger budget, plus more time we may have used more far flung locations, and now I think about it, that could have easily dissipated the sense of place.

The particular part of Lewis we shot in is unique, and looks and feels a bit more like Harris than Lewis to me. The village of Kneep / Valtos where Dondo and Sas live is like no other village I've ever seen. The geology has a perky charm - with sheep dotting the hills and rocks poking out the fields - it's Postman Pat on Mars - and then you turn 180 degrees, look out to sea and see Atlantic swells pounding the cliffs and carving out sea caves the size of cathedrals.

My home village of Ardvassar on Skye is on a steep hill looking over the sea, with houses stacked on each other all higgledy piggledy so it resonated extremely strongly as a location for me.

The interior locations in the film are character led. Dondo is virtually a seal, the amount of time he spends in the sea, likewise his missing father, whilst his mum is a calm, humorous potter so very in touch with the earth, and more pagan, witchy practices.

In contrast, Sas's family are living in a quasi-presbyterian / catholic household, and have a disjointed, off kilter energy, rooted in livestock and religion and led by the hysteria of Sas's mum.

The look of the film was dictated by a passion to shoot on 16mm film. Film is living and you can touch it - it's a chemical, organic process where light has been genuinely captured and held in time. If that sounds sentimental - strike me down! Call me Mister Whimsy - I could bask in nostalgia all day.

With certain elements of the film being about faith, and I know this might sound weird, but I have a faith in film and how it feels. After two years of lockdown staring at digital content on a flat screen, I was desperate to breathe in the unpredictability of film, and the way it softens skin tones. For that one thing alone I would say film is worth it - soft skin tones. Who on God's earth wants to see an actor's nose pores or cheek sweat!

The main films that I discussed with Ruben the cinematographer as reference points: Tacita Dean's film, *The Green Ray*; Alicia Rohrwacher's feature, *Happy as Lazzaro*.

I also just rewatched *Point Break* with my son and realised it was a huge influence, and a friend remarked recently that *Silent Roar* is a cross between *Breaking the Waves* and *Napoleon Dynamite*. I'll happily take that.

Dirt, steam, salt, mist, spit, grease, sand and RAIN. A multitude of rain. I welcome these elements in front of the lens, coming between the film and the action to create a soft gauze. I don't think Ruben and the focus puller welcomed them onto the lens, but they knew what I meant.

**Can you tell us about how you approached the surf sequences with your DoP, logistically and creatively? Did you have any cinematic reference points for these sequences?**

The first step was to work with a DoP who was comfortable shooting at sea and in the sea. As it happened Ruben is also a good surfer and possibly the only DoP who could ever have shot this film. He's so incredibly calm and strong, and made extremely difficult moves / tough camera positions / lighting conditions look so effortless. I'd often take for granted the scale of what he was doing.

Going back through the stills photographs of the shoot you really see the strain on my face whilst we were shooting - the stress, the confusion and the outright fear of failure, the lack

of all-bran in my porridge. Whilst Ruben's just a serene Buddha, gliding through set ups, whipping on a wetsuit for one shot, then hopping into a dry suit for another, AND he went surfing after most shooting days, just to unwind (and get his back into its normal shape again...). He had a camera the weight of a sack of winkles on his shoulder the entire shoot and made it look like as easy as holding an iPhone.

The surfing and underwater shots were by Jon Frank, a truly great surf cinematographer. I couldn't believe he was up for it, but he loved the script and travelled a long way to come and shoot. The cinematic reference point I gave Jon and Ruben was George Greenough's films. Greenough pioneered surf shooting techniques and getting these mind blowing shots of the inside of barrels.

But really, I had to just let Jon go away and do his thing and see what he came back with. I haven't a clue how he gets what he gets - more like hiring a very friendly chilled, magician than a cinematographer.

## JOHNNY BARRINGTON

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Johnny grew up on the Isle of Skye and worked as a ship's photographer for two years in the Pacific and Caribbean, before studying Photography at The Glasgow School of Art.

Two of his short films, *Trout* (2007) and *Tumult* (2012), premiered at Sundance Film Festival and were both BAFTA nominated. After directing his first feature film, *Silent Roar* (2022) in the Western Isles, he is now writing a new feature screenplay.

## CAST

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Louis McCartney

Ella Lily Hyland

Mark Lockyer

Victoria Balnaves

Fiona Bell

Pablo Raybould

Leah Balmforth

Derek Horsham

Barbara Probst

Barton Williams

Anders Hayward

Sukh Ojla

Gary Lamont

Chinenye Ezeudu

John Cooke

Tip Cullen

Dondo

Sas

Paddy

Veronica

Norma

Norman

Kirsty

Bonko

Swiss Girl

Vayton

Kenny

Miss MacAskill

Mr. Brian

Swiss Jesus

Swimming Instructor

Willy



## CREW

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Director	Johnny Barrington
Screenplay	Johnny Barrington
Producer	Christopher Young
Executive Producers	Eva Yates, Kristin Irving, Kieran Hannigan, Jonathan Berger
Line Producer	Shona Mackenzie
Director of Photography	Ruben Woodin Dechamps
Editor	Adelina Bichiş BFE
Production Design	Elmi Badenhorst
Music	Hannah Peel
Sound Design	Angel Perez Grandi
Production Sound Mixer	Cameron Mercer
Costume Design	Taff Williamson
Hair & Make-Up Design	Beth O'Donnell
Casting Director	Rosalie Clayton

## CONTACTS

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