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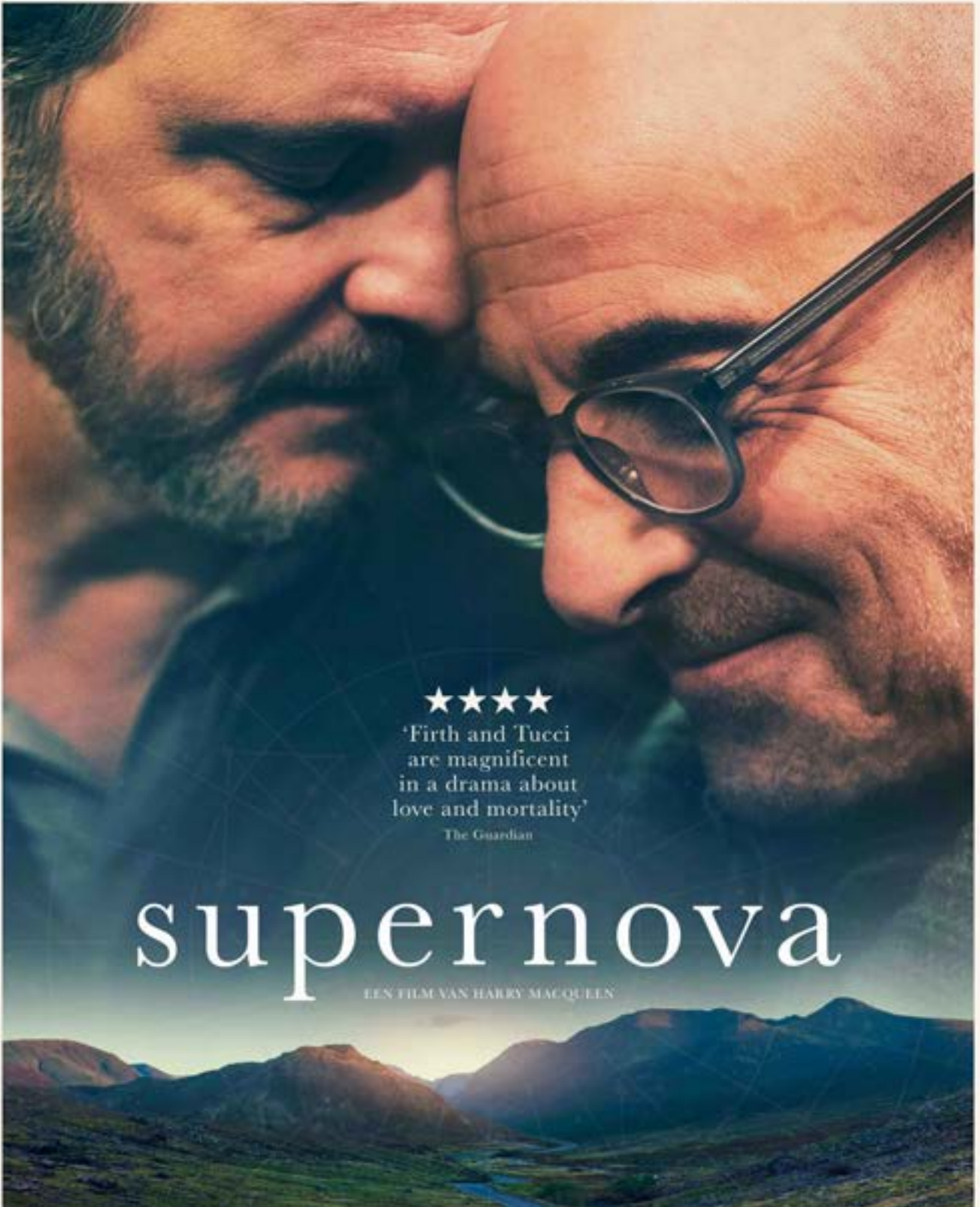
OSCAR® WINNAAR  
COLIN FIRTH

OSCAR® GENOMINEERD  
STANLEY TUCCI

★★★★★  
'Firth and Tucci  
are magnificent  
in a drama about  
love and mortality'  
*The Guardian*

# supernova

EEN FILM VAN HARRY MACQUEEN



COLIN FIRTH

STANLEY TUCCI

# SUPERNOVA

UN FILM DE HARRY MACQUEEN

## SYNOPSIS

Sam et Tusker sont en couple depuis 20 ans. Ils décident d'entreprendre un voyage en camping car dans l'Angleterre rurale pour rendre visite à leurs proches et retourner sur les lieux de leur passé. Depuis que Tusker est atteint de syndrome démentiel, le temps qu'ils passent ensemble est la chose la plus importante qu'ils aient.



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# DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

– one that still rages to this day in many countries around the world.

Supernova is the result of a lengthy and immersive research process. Over a three-year period, I worked closely with the UK's leading dementia specialists at UCL and The Wellcome Trust and collaborated with many individuals and families affected by the condition. I have spent time with people who have since died both from dementia and suicide – in secret and in public - and seen the fallout from that first-hand.

It has been one of the most profound and important experiences of my life. The characters and themes in Supernova reflect my attempt to do these people and their stories justice in a truthful and original manner – to place a selfless, loving relationship in the context of an immediate future that hangs in the balance. From the outset my desire was to make an empowering, powerful, challenging and timely film about what we are willing to do for the people that we love.

Supernova is a romantic, original, modern love-story. It is an intimate, self-contained tale that investigates some of the biggest human questions of all: how we live and love and laugh, even as we near the end of our time.

– Harry Macqueen



In 2015, two events happened around me almost simultaneously: in February a colleague, who had become distant and increasingly bad at her job, was fired from our place of work – in six months she would be dead. A few days later a close friend was forced to put her father in a care home – he had just turned 60.

A short time after this I saw a documentary that moved me like nothing had before. It followed a 65-year-old British man to the Dignitas clinic in Switzerland where, in the company of his wife of 40 years, he legally took his own life.

The man in the documentary, my colleague, and my friend's father all had versions of young-onset Dementia that had played out in very different ways. These experiences made me want to find out more about this disorder specifically, as well as the vital debate around end of life choices

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## SUPERNOVA



# Developing the Script

It was a chance meeting with an old colleague that set writer/director Harry Macqueen on the path to what would become *Supernova*. She had been an outgoing, gregarious personality when they first met, but over the year they worked together, she had become withdrawn, angry and difficult to be around. She was dismissed from her job, and Macqueen thought little more of it until he met her again in the high street, being pushed in a wheelchair by her husband. "I found out subsequently she had young-onset dementia," Macqueen recalls. "I realised I had been watching her life unravel because of this condition for the best part of a year, although I didn't know what it was."

Around the same time, Macqueen had been counselling a friend whose father had just entered a care home before his 60th birthday, also diagnosed with young-onset dementia. "As a human rather than a filmmaker, both of those experiences made me want to learn a lot more about how it affects people," Macqueen says. "I was deeply moved by those experiences, and I was also very interested in end-of-life choices and what rights are afforded to us at the end of our lives. It was the meshing of those two things that really was the seed from which *Supernova* grew."

Producer Emily Morgan had first met Macqueen when she was working in-house at Soda Pictures, the distributor that

had released Macqueen's debut directorial feature *Hinterland*. Their relationship remained close, and one day she received a two-page idea for *Supernova* through Macqueen's agent. "It resonated with me," Morgan recalls, "Just Harry's vision for it, and the subject matter."

Knowing much of the film's success would be down to the actors cast as Sam and Tusker, Morgan brought it to producer Tristan Goligher, a well-established producer with *The Bureau* with whom she had collaborated over the years, and whose experience working with directors such as Andrew Haigh seemed to lend itself naturally to the environment she wanted to create for Macqueen.

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“The film simply couldn’t have happened without Emily and Tristan,” Macqueen says. “It’s their film as much as mine, and we worked really well together as a team. The level of trust and openness about the project was key to making it what it was. Their knowledge of how to navigate everything – from development to funding to organising the shoot itself – is the single reason the film exists at all.”

As they started to think about how to turn Macqueen’s two-pager into a viable draft, Morgan and Macqueen received some initial funding from the Wellcome Trust. “They were a big support to write a first draft of the script,” Morgan notes. Further funding was provided when Morgan won the BFI Vision Award and was afforded the opportunity to launch her own production company, Quiddity Films, and develop a slate of productions.

The Wellcome Trust, a charity dedicated to supporting science and research in the fields of biomedical research and medical humanities, offered Macqueen guidance as he learned more about the effect of a young-onset dementia diagnosis. For several years the organisation has invested money and knowledge into developing film and television projects, and the doors it opened up proved extremely fruitful as the story took shape.

Through the Wellcome Trust, Macqueen visited the Dementia Research Centre at University College London and worked with Dr. Sebastian Crutch and his team

to learn about the medical and biological intricacies of the many kinds of dementia. He was also afforded an opportunity to spend time with people dealing with dementia, as well as those who had lost loved ones to the condition. “It became one of the most inspiring and life-changing experiences I’ve ever had,” Macqueen says.

He was especially surprised to learn just how widespread dementia is, and how many people were willing to share their experiences of living with it. “Dementia is a very broad, umbrella term for a lot of different conditions,” Macqueen explains. “It kills more people in this country than anything else; that’s the first thing. But also, we know so little about it. And especially when it comes to young-onset dementias, there’s a lot we don’t know. We are learning new things about these conditions on a monthly basis.”

He also came to understand that the perception of dementia, as being a condition characterised solely by memory loss, was inaccurate. “Ultimately, if you have any type of dementia, at any age, it will eventually end up with Alzheimer’s, which involves total memory loss, but actually a lot of the different types of dementia have nothing to do with memory for a long time.”

Through this process, Macqueen zeroed in on the exact condition Tusker would be experiencing, and where we would meet him on his journey. “He has what’s called Posterior Cortical Atrophy, or PCA,” Macqueen says. “That’s

a young-onset type of dementia where people experience a progressive decline in vision and/or literacy skills, but often preserve their memory in early stages. Outwardly, Tusker’s life seems pretty normal most of the time, but inwardly he’s being slowly and absolutely unravelled by his condition.”

This level of specificity was one felt urgently by Macqueen as he came to know more people living with dementia. “When you’re dealing with something so deeply felt, and with a condition that changes so many people’s lives in the way dementia does, it’s a moral imperative to do it right,” he insists. “I promised myself that I would honour the people that had given me their time by making, hopefully, the most authentic story I could.”

Goligher believes Macqueen captured Sam and Tusker’s fight with dementia from the first draft onwards. “There was a real emotional intelligence and subtlety to the script,” he recalls. “It was dealing with a really pertinent issue in a way that was full of the passion with which Harry came to understand these subjects.”

For Morgan, the project took on added personal resonance when her mother – a GP who she had consulted in the earliest days of development for her experience with dementia patients – was herself diagnosed with brain cancer. “She was giving advice at the beginning of the project and then she developed similar symptoms herself,” Morgan relates.

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"It became very emotional at points because I was experiencing it first-hand, and there were times when I was feeding back to Harry with things I was drawing directly from what I'd experienced the day before, as I was spending time with my mum during her final year."

She adds: "It was hard, but it is also so amazing to have made this film as a testament to her. The intensity of the feeling between Sam and Tusker embodied the spirit of our relationship too, where you're closer and you're laughing together more than you've ever laughed and feeling more love for each other. There's a majesty in that, but at the same time the bigger picture is completely tragic and the worst thing you've ever gone through. I think that's why the film means so much to me. It captures that exactly."

Sam and Tusker, the characters at the heart of *Supernova*, emerged from the knowledge Macqueen gained through research, and they were informed by the people he met, but he was keen not to directly base their journey on any of the stories he heard. "Subliminally, you're always drawing from your own experiences, but I really try hard not to write characters based on anyone that I know, because I think if you do that the characters have the ability to exist on their own, as unique, fully-formed entities," he explains.

The notion of following a gay couple struck Macqueen early on, and once the decision arrived,

it became undeniable. Indeed, dementia does not discriminate, and though cinema has a long and rich history of gay storytelling that directly examines sexuality, Macqueen saw an opportunity with *Supernova* to reflect a shared experience through the lens of a committed, long-term relationship between two men. "This is a story about the universality of love," he reflects. "To frame the experience that the characters are going through in the context of a same-sex relationship, and for that sexuality to be ultimately irrelevant to the story they were facing, did feel like an important thing to do. I wanted to normalize what is, of course, a very natural and normal thing, because I don't think it's done enough in cinema." Adds Stanley Tucci, who would be cast to play Tusker in the film: "It's about two people who love each other, and they happen to be gay. You could easily swap it out for a heterosexual couple, and it wouldn't matter. But equally, the fact it's a gay couple adds a whole other element to it that I think is really important for audiences to see.

Tucci continues: "This whole notion that homosexuality is other, I don't know who came up with that, but it's certainly lasted a long time, that idea. How could we ever think that love between two gay people is different than love between two straight people? Love is love. That's it. There's nothing more to discuss."

Ultimately, what Macqueen came to realise was that the specific and universal could collide in ways that

would make *Supernova*'s journey applicable not just to any of us that has ever felt any kind of love – be it romantic or familial – but to any of us that has experienced any kind of loss. The juxtaposition between these grand, existential themes and the small, intimate relationship at the film's heart was always central to the filmmaker's mission.

"Dementia is a specific focus for the film, but what we're also dealing with is the universal experience," Macqueen says. "I think ultimately what I wanted to talk about is how with love, trust and compassion, it's possible to make this difficult stage of life empowering and life-affirming, not only for the person that's dying, but for the people around them."

"The older I get, the more I feel that the specific and the universal are connected," notes Colin Firth, who would be cast as Sam. "Looking at big themes as big themes just always feels like it gets you nowhere, if that's all you're doing. Equally, everyday realities, if you're attempting to detach them from anything wider, then it's a dead end as well. But I think if you're trying to make something that has a universal resonance, the way in is through the very personal and the very specific, and this film is a study in that."

Tucci recalls a line from one of his favourite movies, Bertrand Tavernier's 1984 film *A Sunday in the Country*, in which a voiceover says, "All sorrows are alike." "I always thought about that line, and it's true," he says. Tucci accompanied his first wife during



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her battle with breast cancer and he related to the pain of losing someone you love so dearly. "The loss of my wife, the stuff that Colin has gone through, it's all the same in a way. It means so much when you love somebody, and really this is a movie that's about love and loss and how we deal with it."

Indeed, the intertwined nature of these two aspects is reflected in the film's title, *Supernova*, which refers directly to Tusker's interest in the night sky, but also to the context of this intimate story in the vast space of the universe.

"A supernova is the massive explosive event at the end of the evolution of a star," says Macqueen. "For me this has always been representative of Tusker himself – a man who shines bright in all he does, brings light and laughter to almost every situation and is, of course, dying. It's quite literal in that regard, really; he knows his final chapter is just around the corner."

He adds: "Cinematically, I am interested in the micro versus the macro. Just as the van is a small travelling dot in this enormous Lake District landscape, so their relationship is a tiny part of the fabric of this unfathomably huge universe. It is of course an intimate, microcosmic, human story told at ground level, but the scope of its emotional core and the questions it is asking us about living, dying and loving, transcend this I think."

Sending Sam and Tusker on a road trip through the Lake District struck Macqueen not only as a cinematically interesting way to tell this story, but as an engine to present a journey, both literal and metaphorical. "They're on a big, emotional journey, and it seemed appropriate, then, to mirror that with a literal journey," he explains. "I was really interested in road movies anyway, and in slightly perverting that genre. But it felt interesting to tell what is, essentially, a domestic drama in slightly more unique way."

He continues: "We don't see them at home. We don't really know much about their lives at all. There's a kind of propulsion that being on the road gives you; a mechanism, with cogs turning. As a way of framing the film, it seemed like an effortless way to take these characters from A to B, and through it, you're afforded the possibility to bring in all of this incredible scenery and the beautiful natural world, which is very important when you're talking about the big questions of life."

Macqueen worked tirelessly to build a life for Sam and Tusker – the details of their relationship, their history together, their world at home – knowing that his film would ultimately cover a very fractional part of their lives and stop short of delving into this added detail. "If you want to present characters with a history that is lived, you have to take a lot of time to develop that history when you're in the process of creation," he says.

In fact, it took him two years during the development process to understand the history of Sam and Tusker's relationship before the events of the film. But as a consequence of this diligence, he found the two characters came readily to life as he told the story of their time on the road. "We didn't want to show too much of the backstory, and their history as a couple can really only be reflected through the live emotional connection that the actors have on screen," Macqueen says. "Certainly, with a project like this, which by definition is very intimate and exists purely on the fragility of the two men and the relationship at its heart, you can then sit these characters somewhere and simply let stuff happen. It's a very freeing process when you get it right, and it certainly felt, as we were making the film, like we were."

"That balance is something you're always working towards," notes Goligher of the film's sparing approach to details about Sam and Tusker's history together. "I don't think it was something that was ever explicitly discussed, but you always want to believe that the characters you're watching existed before the first frame of the story you're watching. I think if you do all the kind of work that ensures a sense of a life lived, it makes the characters very accessible and relatable because they feel real."

While the idea of sending the characters on a road trip was there from the earliest stages of development, the notion of that journey leading Sam and Tusker to a concert performance by Sam

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at the film's climax was a "beautiful revelation" of Macqueen's, Morgan remembers. "It suddenly gave a great structure and an aim to this journey so that they weren't just going on a holiday," she says. "The momentum towards the concert, and the added layer of that, I remember feeling like the draft took a ginormous leap forward."

In addition to the scenes Sam and Tusker share together, which form the majority of the piece, Macqueen also wanted to explore private moments for each of the men that would examine the toll Tusker's diagnosis was having on each of them. Tusker frequently feels like a burden to his beloved Sam, who is simultaneously

determined not to let it show. "The film is, in many ways, about secrets and the unsaid," Macqueen reflects. "One of the things we worked very hard to do was to choose the right moments to allow the audience into the mechanisms of each of the characters specifically. One of cinema's trump cards is that it can really focus on the unsaid, and that's something we wanted to lean on right from the start."

Macqueen was also keen to explore end-of-life decisions frequently faced by people coping with a potentially ruinous and terminal diagnosis. With a topic so shrouded in controversy, he was determined to use a light touch,

while still acknowledging the reality many face when confronted with a condition that threatens to rob an individual of their autonomy.

"I'm not interested in making films that overtly tell you what to think. I think that's up to an audience to decide," Macqueen insists. "But really, the idea was to set up the fact that these are two people on a precipice, and this is the thing that's pulling them apart. There are no ends tied up in the film, and it doesn't become one thing or another. But hopefully we allow people to think more about how we treat one another, and how difficult it is to be put in this position."



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# Casting Supernova

Finding the right actors to play Sam and Tusker would be amongst the greatest challenges in the development of *Supernova*. Over two years of development with Morgan and Goligher, Macqueen worked to hone the script in order that it might appeal to actors of a suitably high calibre to engage with its big themes and nuanced details. Macqueen was not only aware that it would require actors with the innate ability to telegraph a living, breathing relationship for which much of the detail is left in these characters' pasts before the events of the film, but there was a sense very early on that it would be ideal to find actors with a pre-existing friendship.

"It was always going to be the case that, if possible, we'd find two actors that knew each other, because it's a very intimate film and it's pretty much just the two of them for most of it," notes Macqueen. "You almost can't buy that chemistry sometimes." Macqueen didn't write the film with actors in mind. "It really was an open book as to who played these parts," he says. With casting director Shaheen Baig, the director talked about a number of potential actors.

"One of the things that is so brilliant about Shaheen is that, not only does she have this extraordinary knowledge of actors, both well-known and lesser-

known, but she also has a very interesting take on what they may bring to the screen, and will think out of the box," notes Goligher. "Now when you see the film, it seems very obvious that Colin Firth and Stanley Tucci should play these roles, but actually I don't think it is the most obvious casting. It was that conversation with Shaheen and Harry, and just conjuring in your mind what the film would be with different actors, that led us to our initial approach to Stanley."

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Indeed, the initial spark that led to Tucci was when Macqueen, Baig and the producers discussed the notion of making one of the couple American, and what that might do to the dynamic of their relationship. "The fact that one of them was American became a strategic way of not making the project feel too British. We liked the idea of coming at it slightly from left field, so that there was an edge and originality to the pairing." Notes Morgan. It was Baig who first came up with the notion of approaching Tucci. "He has that edge of being American, but at the same time he's so embedded in the UK," adds Morgan. "He was an ideal choice."

For his part, Tucci was floored by the script he received.

**"I thought it was so beautifully written..."**

he recalls. "It was at once real and poetic and there was no fat on it. It was incredibly pure. You felt that these were two people who had been together a very long time, and there was no imposition of exposition in that; it just sort of unfolds and you figure it out. But the key thing is the connection between the two characters, because if that feels real, you'll go anywhere with them. And it was truly a character-driven piece."

The actor then watched Macqueen's previous film, *Hinterland*, in which Macqueen also starred. "He made it for something like £10,000 on an iPhone or whatever," Tucci jokes. "But it was so beautiful; just beautiful. I thought, Here's a really wonderful filmmaker."

Tucci, an independent filmmaker himself with a number of highly regarded directorial projects under his belt, recognised the potential for a deep collaboration with Macqueen, as well as with the actor opposite him. "Projects like this are very hard to find, where you want to invest yourself in them and help bring them to fruition," he says. "And if they thought attaching me would help them do that, then all right."

He responded especially to the economy of detail with which Macqueen drew Sam and Tusker's history. "Even though all of the details of the relationship aren't on the page, you don't need them," says Tucci. "I didn't need them as an actor, because they are there even if they're not there. They're between the lines. I was with my first wife for 18 years before she passed away. She struggled with cancer for four years, and then she passed. And when you're with someone for that long, and you know them so well, and then someone writes something like this, you don't need to know anything else."

Indeed, he adds, "If all the details were in there, I wouldn't have done the film – or I would have made Harry cut them."

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It was during Tucci's first meeting with Macqueen that the subject of who would play the other side of the relationship was first broached. "We got on famously," Macqueen remembers, "and during my meeting with him, he said, 'Can we talk about who plays opposite me? Have you thought about Colin Firth? Because I could get the script to him.' Of course, I said, 'That would be amazing, thanks very much.' And Stanley said, 'Good, because I gave it to him yesterday, and he read it and loves it and he wants to meet you.'"

"I always wanted to do something again with Colin," says Tucci. "I'd asked him to do some of my movies, and he always turned me down, but I always wanted to work with him again. When I read this, I just thought, Oh, I know the perfect person..."

Firth confirms Macqueen's version of events, and the illicit way in which the script first arrived from Tucci. "He slipped it to me in a brown envelope," Firth laughs. "And it just had Stanley all over it as I was reading it. It didn't come through an intermediary. It didn't come through an agent. It didn't have details of the production company, or any kind of proposal attached. A friend shared it with me, and there was never a time in which it wasn't associated with Stanley for me."

As he read the script, he found himself having the same emotional reaction as Tucci. "I was completely enthralled by this relationship, and I fell in love with both of these characters as

individuals and as a couple," Firth notes. "But I was also sceptical as to whether anybody other than Stanley would be interested in me for it. The next step was to meet Harry, and fortunately, Harry put on a perfectly good show of saying, 'Yes, you are welcome to join.'"

Firth and Tucci have known one another for 20 years, and their friendship dates back to a shared filming experience in London on the 2001 movie *Conspiracy*. "It's obvious from the moment you spend time with them that they have a deep affection for one another," says Macqueen. "They're trusting and generous with one another, and that's what we needed the characters to be."

He continues: "Their relationship outside of the film is what makes the film, I think. They are the best of mates, and they love each other deeply. That kind of intimacy, and the beautiful chemistry at the heart of the film, was really the most important thing, and it was the only thing we didn't have to work on."

"We've been friends a really long time," confirms Tucci. "It's just one of those friendships where, even if you go for a while without seeing each other, the next time you do, it feels like no time has passed at all."

"If you've known someone for 20 years, you will have seen each other through all sorts of ups and downs," agrees Firth. "It had an added texture to it, and I suppose a personal element, because I knew Stanley so well. This interesting, microcosmic world in which we

find these two people had even more resonance and appeal than it might have done otherwise."

Indeed, both actors found that their shared history led to depth in Sam and Tusker's relationship that would have been much harder to fake. "You can be comfortable with one another," Tucci reflects of working alongside Firth. "You can improvise with one another; you can make jokes. There's no getting-to-know-you before you have to know the person really well on screen. He's my best friend, and we know everything about each other. If you just take that history and place it in front of the camera, that's half the job. When you add a beautiful script, it's like you don't have to do anything at all."

Firth also notes how excited he was to find the collaboration with Macqueen from the moment of their first meeting. "I was taken with his sincerity, his passion," Firth says. "He was so invested in it, so thoughtful about the story he wanted to tell and why. It had a personal resonance for me in all sorts of ways, but I think Harry's seriousness about it all was just another reason to want to be involved."

Before Firth was cast as Sam, and Tucci as Tusker, the actors debated which of the two roles each of them should play. Indeed, in the original configuration, Tucci was to play Sam to Firth's Tusker. "They read for both, which is quite extraordinary," remembers Macqueen. "We swapped and changed the script over a day together, and then came to a

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conclusion about the way to go. You don't usually get that level of trust and input from people at so early a stage."

"I didn't know when I first read the script who was intended to play whom," Firth explains. "Stanley told me he had the impression he had been asked to play Sam, and it became clear, meeting Harry, that was the intention. I didn't question it to begin with, because I was just smitten with both characters."

As he read and re-read the script, however, Firth began to wonder, and it was his suggestion, initially, that they should try flipping the roles. Though it turned out Tucci had been having similar thoughts. "We each read each role for Harry, and we knew instantly that this was how it was supposed to be," Tucci says. "I don't know why; it just sat better this way."

Jokes Firth: "When I saw Stanley read for Tusker, I thought he was so right for that role and no one could play it better. The trouble is, that's what I thought when he played Sam as well. I thought maybe I should just go home."

He agrees there's no exact science to explain why the final configuration is the one that stuck. "You're challenged with the task of doing justice to a character, and it may sound a little highfalutin, but I feel there's something quite sacred about that. In the end, I suppose it just found itself. There was a particular reading where I could feel the room saying, 'This is the right way around.'"

In contrast to his co-star's desire to trim as much of the detail of Sam and Tusker's relationship from the storytelling of the film, Firth admits he was concerned about being too spare with the details. "There were definitely questions about how much of their past we needed to bring into the story," he recalls. "But when something is structured this carefully, it's rather like the construction of a crystal and you can corrupt it very, very easily. I think what we found is that any time we prodded at something and said, 'Maybe we should bring this into it,' it seemed to intrude. It seemed to spoil the ecosystem somehow."

It speaks, too, to the contrast in approaches between Firth and Tucci, which in its own way reflects on the differences between Sam and Tusker. "Stanley is far more of a man who takes the leap than I am," Firth laughs. "I'm more of a questioner. He had his questions too, but they were often different from mine. And it's a mark of how well Harry handled that balance that, as I watched the film for the first time, a rather magical feeling came very early on, that the film had heart and that the tone was alive and authentic. It felt like everything was in its place."

Both actors were heavily involved in the preparation process. With casting set, Macqueen tweaked the script to better suit the final configuration, adding elements of Tucci's American background, and Firth and Tucci both accompanied Macqueen on his visits to Dr. Crutch at UCL. "We visited the people I collaborated with, and we

had a big lecture with Sebastian Crutch and his team speaking to both Stanley and Colin about not only how this particular kind of dementia would affect Tusker physically and mentally, but also how it affects the home, and how it affects love and relationships. And how you deal with that on a very basic, day-to-day level."

Firth quotes a passage from Christine Bryden, whose books have focussed on her own fight with dementia. "She described it as a journey away from the complex cognitive outer layer that once defined them, through the jumble and tangle of emotions created through their life experiences, to the centre of their being," he says. "That really resonated with the way the film portrays the relationship with the condition and with each other. It's now just the two of them trying to reach each other and wrestle with the questions of cognition and choice, because that's one of the harshest things about this, is feeling choice has been taken away."

Tucci finds it challenging to detail the steps he took to understand Tusker's condition, so subtle are the outward signs of the particular kind of dementia Tusker is faced with. "I watched a lot of documentaries about people with this condition, and it's very hard to watch," he says. "You feel so badly for them and their families, and also you fear something like this happening to you. But once you see the behaviour, you know what you have to do. I don't know how to describe it, but when you watch the people in these documentaries,

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one minute they're there and the next they're not there."

Tucci, Macqueen says, brings an openness and a gregariousness to Tusker that was essential to offering some levity from the heavy subject matter. "Here you've got a dying man who is still keenly aware of the fun of life," the director reflects. "Stan just does that so naturally that we knew that was going to be a fun aspect of him playing the part. But he also has the ability to commit to the darker, tougher and more serious stuff. It's the kind of material he does so well, and with an incredible level of detail. His ability to do both of these things made him an incredibly exciting choice for the role of Tusker."

"It was crucial," to inject those moments of levity into the film, Tucci notes. "I almost wanted there to be more of them, but that's probably just because so much is uncomfortable. We played around with that stuff, Colin and I."

He laughs: "I had no problem just destroying Harry's script and making things up!"

"Stanley's not only versatile in terms of roles, but versatile in terms of style and genre," Firth notes of his friend. "He exudes intelligence and thoughtfulness, and he has a fragility about him. I think that had a particularly powerful effect on me as we were playing this. What struck me is that he wasn't playing Tusker's problems. I think that's always the right choice for an actor. You play the solutions that you're trying

to find. Stanley is playing a man that wants to be well; a man who wants to be in control. He's not playing a man in despair; in pain. There's no element of self-pity in his performance."

Indeed, Firth sees Sam as the self-pitying character of the piece. "It's ironic, because it's not happening to Sam," he continues. "Sam has to be relieved of his self-pity by Tusker, the man who's truly having to deal with this. I think that plays as part of the dynamic. It was a very interesting question to ask: who's the carer? Who's caring for whom?"

For Macqueen, Colin Firth's emotional clarity and depth is what made him the right choice to play Sam. "Every role he inhabits, Colin is so steeped in compassion and empathy," says the director. "What Sam really is, is that. He's a person being asked to make a huge sacrifice for the person he loves, and I think there's so much humanity in Colin's work, no matter what he's playing, and a

deep, raw truth, that it felt like a perfect setup for this character."

"Working with Colin is such a joy," Tucci says. "First of all, he's my dear friend. But second of all, I'm a huge admirer of his and it's nice to work with someone whose acting you love to watch. He has a subtlety that a lot of actors don't have. He doesn't play into things, he plays against things, and he has it all there in his eyes and in his face. He has all that, plus he has a great sense of humour, and you can't be a good actor if you don't have a sense of humour."

"To have these two men play these two roles will probably forever be one of the most humbling experiences I'll have as a director," Macqueen reflects of his collaboration with Firth and Tucci. "From the first morning we turned over on the film, it was very obvious to everyone that we'd made the right choice, and that these guys were going to take my script and run with it. It was a unique experience, working with them."





## CASTING SUPERNOVA





# Shooting in the Lake District

The entire company was based on location for the duration of Supernova's shoot, in and around the town of Keswick in the Lake District, and Tucci notes the added camaraderie he found from the shared experience. "I'd never been up to the Lake District before, and I have to say I was in awe," he marvels. "We all stayed in these holiday homes on this little river, and even though it rained every day and kept getting colder and colder, to the point that it started to snow towards the end, I didn't mind it because I loved being there."

"There's a particular vibe to the Lake District that we all felt," Firth adds. "We were all tuned to the

same frequency. We saw nobody but each other for six weeks. Stan and I were joined at the hip."

Firth and Tucci stayed in lodges adjacent to one another and would frequently socialise after a day's shooting. "Stan is a brilliant and enthusiastic cook," Firth notes. "I am quite an enthusiastic but much less brilliant cook. It was dinner at his place pretty much every night. We would debrief and then reconvene in the morning. I really do think it had an effect, because I think when you're away on location, that's your family for a period of time. We all felt we were working towards the same thing. It didn't feel like a day at the office."

When it comes to cinematic photography of Britain's varied beauty, there can be few cinematographers more adept at their craft than Dick Pope, a two-time Academy Award nominee who brings to Supernova some five decades of craft. As it turned out, Pope and Macqueen had worked together once before, when Macqueen was cast as an actor in Richard Linklater's film, *Me and Orson Welles*, which Pope shot.

## SHOOTING IN THE LAKE DISTRICT

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## SHOOTING IN THE LAKE DISTRICT



## SHOOTING IN THE LAKE DISTRICT

"Working with Dick was just an incredible honour," Macqueen says. "Not only is Dick the most phenomenal cinematographer in a technical sense, but he is also just one of the most intuitive people emotionally. His ability to capture a performance in its truest and most uninhabited form, is something that he has demonstrated for decades, not least with his work with Mike Leigh. It was incredible to have that level of experience and level of genius on board."

Pope responded instantly to Macqueen's script, always the first test of whether he wants to sign onto a project. "Unless I'm working with someone like Mike Leigh and there is no script," Pope laughs. "With *Supernova*, I reckon I only read about a third of it before I decided that I really wanted to do the film. It was utterly compelling and just such a great read. You're just looking for that spark, and this script had it. It lit up on the page."

Pope says Macqueen's intimacy and command of the dialogue between Sam and Tusker compares with the kind of storytelling that has kept him collaborating with Leigh for so many years. "A lot of Mike's films are like that, where they cut through everything else and get straight to the essence of a relationship," he explains. "I loved the idea of these two trapped with each other in the intimacy of the van, and I thought it would be a fabulous challenge to convey Harry's script with my experience of shooting in that kind of intimate setting."

After signing up, Pope met with Macqueen and production designer Sarah Finlay to take a look at the camper van Finlay had found. With a viewfinder handy, Pope and Macqueen discussed angles and an approach to shooting the film. They next took a road trip of their own in Pope's car, travelling through the Lake District to look at locations and discuss how they wanted to collaborate. "We didn't stop talking for four hours," Pope recalls with a chuckle. "It was a really long journey, and I got so distracted on the motorway that I sped a bit and got points on my license. By the end of the day we were in a pub restaurant having a meal together, and we'd been talking the entire afternoon."

It was on this journey that, says Macqueen, his ideas for the film crystallised. "He really made me realise what the film could be," the director recalls of his conversations with Pope. "Not only in terms of how we would shoot it, but how important our collaboration together was going to be."

For his part, Pope says seeking a deep collaboration with a director is his only interest in coming to work. "I liked working with Harry so much, and we really hit it off, so if he was ever to ask me to do another film with him, I'd jump at it. I'd do anything to work with him again, because it was such a wonderful experience for me."

Pope calls his lighting choices for the film "heightened realism. You're using the light in a stylised way, playing them to get the best

light on the actors' faces, whether it's a day shot or a night shot."

After a brief discussion about whether to shoot *Supernova* on Super 16 film cameras, Pope and Macqueen eventually made the decision to shoot digitally, with the ALEXA Mini system Pope has extensive experience working with.

Pope made the decision, too, to shoot the film with the same vintage Cooke Speed Panchro lenses from the 1950s with which he had shot Mike Leigh's *Mr. Turner* and Edward Norton's *Motherless Brooklyn*, as a way, he says, of "fighting" the modern, digital aesthetic. "They're flawed lenses with focus aberrations, and they fall off to the side," Pope explains. "They vignette and they're not clean and modern-looking. But they suited these actors' faces, and they suited the intimacy and the close distance in which we shot."

Macqueen felt that Pope's choice of these lenses added a classical sense that eschewed any notion that the film was shot digitally. "It added a slightly timeless, filmic aesthetic," he says.

"We knew right from the off that despite these beautiful landscapes, ultimately the film was going to be around portraiture, and about capturing skin tones as naturally as possible; framing these two human faces in the right way. Our choices in how to shoot the film were always bound up with this intimacy in mind."

## SHOOTING IN THE LAKE DISTRICT

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# SHOOTING IN THE LAKE DISTRICT

"I'm really glad we went digital in the end," Pope says, noting that the new digital systems offer much broader flexibility particularly when it comes to low-light shooting. "There were various scenes we shot outside, or in moonlight, where it helped to have the ALEXA. I think how you go about it is what makes it cinematic, and I think I've found a way that works to eliminate that digital feel."

"It's a classic way of filmmaking," notes Tucci. "There aren't huge amounts of words at times, and Harry uses images and faces to tell the story. It's very Bergmanesque at times. There's a depth; a gravitas to how it's shot, and the story doesn't pull any punches."

As much as Macqueen, Pope and the crew battled the elements, determined as best they could to shoot the film chronologically in order to afford the actors further latitude to dig into the journey of their characters' relationship, the director says the shoot was a pleasant experience. "It was quite incredible given some of the conditions we were working in, but everyone was on great form," he says. "Shooting a road movie is difficult to begin with, in terms of the access you have, where you can put a camera, where you can't, and how you deal with public roads."

Indeed, the production had little control over the elements throughout production. "We had very nice weather the first day we were up there," notes Pope. "Then on the second morning it rained, and it rained non-stop for six

weeks. I'd never seen rain like it." "It was an almighty nightmare filming in the Lake District," laughs Goligher. "I actually found it surprisingly difficult at times, given the terrain and the size of the roads. British country roads do not lend themselves to moving a film unit around, and though we were relatively small, we weren't that small. We had vehicles sliding off roads and getting stuck in mud, and we had to build special track to get the equipment out to some of the locations."

The unit stayed nimble, ready to emerge from cover set any time there was a break in the weather, in order to achieve the shots Macqueen and the crew were seeking. For Pope, one of the most significant moments he wanted

to capture during a high point in the weather was a sequence by a lake, on the first night of their journey. The production pored over weather forecasts, waiting for an opportunity and rearranged the schedule when they found one.

"It was the triumph of the film in a way," Pope marvels at the shots they were able to get when the forecast proved to be accurate. "It had been raining so hard and so constantly, and yet this one morning – and we were up there really early to capture it – the weather was glorious, absolutely glorious. I'd never seen the fuss about the Lake District until the revelation of seeing this camper going down to the lakeside on this joyous autumnal morning."



## SUPERNOVA



# Detailing the World

“People often talk about the triangle of DP, director and production designer, and it really is crucial to get that right,” says Harry Macqueen by way of introduction to production designer Sarah Finlay. “We worked incredibly hard, the three of us, as a team to get the look of the film right.”

Finlay responded instantly to Macqueen’s script. “There were quite a few tears,” she chuckles. “I cried, I think, on every reading. It’s beautifully understated, but very powerful. I think everyone will have some sort of connection with it in one way or another.”

She was led to the project by Goligher, with whom she’d

collaborated on films for director Andrew Haigh. And as she read the script, she says, she knew right away what it would look like. “So much is set outside, and everything is echoed within the script. The scenes under the night sky, gazing at stars, echo the insignificance of the human race in the greater scheme of things, but you’ve also got these intimate moments between two characters. Expanses and small, intimate spaces.”

For all the beauty of the Lake District setting of *Supernova*, really the bulk of the story takes place in an old camper van that belongs to Sam and Tusker. It is the warm cocoon from which are afforded a look into the world of this relationship, and despite its

dusty corners, it might be more inviting to an audience than the beautiful scenery of the lakes.

“The van is the only literal, physical window we give to the audience into the characters’ lives, out of the framework of the story itself,” says Macqueen. “It was really important to make the van effortlessly evocative of their world as a couple, and Sarah achieved this quite extraordinary feat of doing that. The van itself, along with all the other locations, are so detailed, textured and layered with history, and therefore with meaning. But the van especially – every inch of it – was drenched in these characters’ pasts.”



# DETAILING THE WORLD

Tucci was particularly enamoured with the way Supernova contrasts the stark beauty of the Lake District with the idiosyncratic warmth inside the van. "You have this magnificent visual scope, and then you're reduced down to this tiny little box of a thing," he notes. "Each aspect makes the other more important."

"When the brief for a film calls for it to be mainly set in a camper van, you're a bit limited as to what that means," laughs Finlay. "Harry and I went and looked at a lot of camper vans, and then I looked at a lot more, but they're pretty formulaic in their layout. Finding one with the space that was open enough to get a camera in led things more than anything else, really, because we also didn't want it to be enormous; it had to be able to get down those smaller lanes and not be prohibited by its size. How it worked practically was the most important thing."

Finlay and Macqueen settled on a Fiat Autotrail Cheyenne, which the production designer set about personalising to Sam and Tusker's lives. "It was important it reflected them, but wasn't over the top, because you didn't want to turn them into hoarders," she says. "It was going to be clean and reflect them, but not be overtly dressed."

For practical reasons, and so that Macqueen could accomplish shots of the actors in different spaces within the van, the need for a van with no partitions was paramount. So too the need for the front seats to swivel, so that they could be spun around for interior dialogue

scenes. Finlay laid vinyl panels to make the woodwork darker, and changed all of the upholstery, removing certain sections to open the space up.

She collaborated with Dick Pope and his team too, building in lighting that would work for the different moods the film traverses. "We had intimate areas with intimate lighting," Pope notes. "Not just practical lights, but small unit lamps; the tiniest lamps and a variety of small fixtures."

Finlay and her set decorator, Cathy Featherstone, then set about finding items of decoration that could give a sense of the lives of its occupants. "We tried to find things that were old enough that they'd have a life of their own," Finlay explains. "Every item that went into the camper van had a story behind it, and a feeling that it had been used and was important. Everything was in the small details."

These details gave the actors all they needed to know. "It was lived in," Tucci says. "I liked that it was older and kind of crappy and loud. Colin and I, we came of age in the late 70s, and I loved that the van had this slightly retro, hippie aesthetic about it."

"Sarah's sets created an atmosphere which I think gave a coherence to it all," says Firth. "With good production design, you walk into a room and know, 'This is the tone. This is the world we're in.' You don't need an awful lot of talk after that; you can feel it."

Due to the agile nature of the production, which moved location frequently and was shot largely chronologically, there was no avenue to dismantle the van in order to offer increased options for camera placement. Frequently, Firth, Tucci and a small camera unit would be the only inhabitants of the van as scenes were shot. "We were limited to those confines, but that really enhanced the naturalistic element of being inside that van," Macqueen relates. "It's a key character in the film, filled with memories and visual markers, but also dents and scrapes and mud, and evidence of their use of it."

The production was based in a disused pencil factory in Keswick, Cumbria, and it was Pope's idea to turn the warehouse space there into a makeshift soundstage, onto which the camper van could be driven to accomplish interior scenes in a consistent environment. As the rain continued to fall during an especially wet Lake District autumn, it proved a wise decision, allowing the production ample weather coverage, and giving the actors a comfortable environment in which to work.

It was a tight squeeze just to get the van through the doors. "We had to let the air out of the tyres, and we wheeled it in with just about a quarter-inch of clearance," Pope recalls. "But on the stage, I was able to install lighting units all over the place, and we always had it for when we got rained out. Lights would be there, pre-set, and we could crack on with our interior scenes."

“Every item that went into the camper van had a story behind it, and a feeling that it had been used and was important. Everything was in the small details.”

– Sarah Finlay

## DETAILING THE WORLD

The consistency also meant that more complicated shots could be accomplished without the need to dismantle the van. "We could be looking down from the skylight in the roof, straight down onto them in the bed," notes Pope. "I was able to get all these angles without cutting the camper van in two, but we could pop the windows off to stick the camera in and find all these extra angles to create the feel we were going for."

Shooting the van interior in the studio also meant the production could take a breath, allowing scenes to come together at a pace that would be conducive to giving the actors the opportunity to dig into their moments together. "It was brilliant that, for some of the more emotional scenes, we could drive the van into the studio and not have everybody stuck out in the woods at the mercy of the weather," notes Morgan.

At around the film's midway point, Sam and Tusker visit Sam's childhood home, now inhabited by his sister Lilly and her husband. "It's a joyous section of the film, where everyone has come together," Finlay notes. "We did quite a lot in the house to try and make everything inside feel like a big, warm hug. A safe space before the real darkness of the story unfolds. So, it's a place of respite for them; a place of comfort and familiarity."

The location they chose was a holiday home in the Lake District, and Finlay and her team transformed the interior, painting walls, laying carpet, and bringing

in every detail to make it lived in. "You'd be amazed at the amount of stuff you have to bring into a room to get that feeling," she says. "You walk into anybody's house and just the piles of random stuff are extraordinary. On a film, you have to collect it all, or it won't read right. They're the things most people wouldn't even consider to be part of a set, but it's all detail you'd miss if it wasn't there."

There was a similar transformation for the cottage at Supernova's climax, though it was contrasted against Sam's family home by, in Finlay's words, a "cold and clinical" sensibility. "We haven't quite gone to extreme degrees, but it's not as personable, and the colour has been sucked out of it. It's as quiet as the environment in which it's set, and it was about toning it down as best we could, making it calmer and more reflective."

For Pope, the weather once again proved a reliable collaborator when they shot these scenes. Not because the sun was shining and the ground was dry, but specifically because it wasn't. "We wanted it to be foreboding and dramatic and brutal and that's

exactly what it was," he laughs. "We were in shrouded, cloudy conditions and that was exactly what we needed."

Both of the actors felt the weight of the world Finlay had constructed in this cottage, noting the Bergman-like starkness of the isolated house. "It felt incredibly appropriate for what we were shooting," Tucci says. "I loved the way Harry shot the scene in which we arrive at the house, after I go in with the real estate agent, and Colin's at the window as I play the piano to see whether it's in tune. Harry said, 'I'm going to shoot it in one shot,' and as he described it, I said, 'Well, nothing makes me happier than that.' It's unrelenting. So little is said. It's a perfect, perfect scene. You could go in for all the little coverage, but sometimes that robs all the tension. I'm a huge believer in master shots, and a huge believer in single takes, where appropriate."


He jokes: "I love that. One, because it's interesting, but two, because you don't have to do any coverage, so you get to go home early. I said, 'Perfect, Harry, we'll be done at 4, cocktails at 4:30.'"



## DETAILING THE WORLD



## SUPERNOVA



# Finishing Touches

Macqueen says that the old adage that a film is rewritten three times – on the page, on set and in the edit – is true, but he would add that he felt himself finding the film every day of the process. “You’re making it constantly,” he reflects. “Every time you watch it, every time you listen to it, it’s slightly reinventing itself in your mind. Or at least it should be, I think.”

The director collaborated with noted editor Chris Wyatt, whose credits include *God’s Own Country* and *This is England*, to bring the film home. “Chris is quite simply at the pinnacle of hard work and skill and dedication,” Macqueen says. “Chris found the heart of the film, and that’s really difficult to do. The edit gives you

an enormous amount of freedom to experiment in a different way than you’re afforded freedom in other parts of the process, and it’s deeply rewarding to work with someone like Chris, because he’s so open to that experimentation.”

Wyatt “immersed himself in the material” for a long while before the editing process began, Macqueen says. And pulling the film together was ultimately about refining rather than reshaping. “There weren’t any big structural changes in the edit,” says Morgan. “It came down to nuance and finding the balance of all the different elements within this A-to-B structure. Calibrating each scene to find the perfect emotional punch.”

With the limited timeframe of the journey, and the narrative beats along the way, the key to finding the film’s emotional core was precision, notes Goligher. “The arc of their journey has to be very precise and you have to walk that line very carefully. You don’t want to be too cold; you don’t want to be too maudlin. And every version of the film took a very significant step forward as Harry and Chris found the film.”

## FINISHING TOUCHES

With the film assembled, discussion turned to finding a composer who could deliver on the *Supernova's* themes musically. Many names were kicked around, but when music supervisor Sarah Bridge suggested Keaton Henson, the noted musician whose work deals directly with mental health and mortality, it was a lightbulb moment.

"I've been a big fan of Keaton for years, and his work had kind of orbited around me for a long time," Macqueen says. Not only had a film Macqueen acted in used one of Henson's tracks for a key sequence, but Henson's music had helped hone an assembly edit of Macqueen's first directorial feature, *Hinterland*, even though there wasn't the budget to preserve it for the final cut. "When Sarah suggested him, I instantly had a spine-tingling moment and thought, 'Okay, if Keaton is up for it, this is going to be a really interesting collaboration.'"

Henson's music is renowned for its deeply autobiographical sensibility, and its exploration of the kind of themes central to *Supernova*. "The emotional weight of his music is so utterly, totally authentic," Macqueen notes. "He lives and breathes the emotional weight of what he's creating, and he really got on board with the themes we were exploring from the outset."

For his part, Henson related to the way Macqueen was telling the story. "I was drawn to the simple humanity, and in how it talked about something so existential

and huge in such an intimate and humble way," Henson says. "I liked the idea of talking about death and loss through the very simple, human days surrounding it."

Henson explains that his conversations with Macqueen were about "mirroring the film's duality of existential themes and humble realities with instrumentation." The score takes a lead in three key moments of transition: the journey to the lake, to Lilly's house, and to the cottage, and each transitional scene takes us from one emotional state to another. "I hope that they each describe the outer landscapes that we see during these scenes, as well as the more complex internal ones within the two characters."

With the exception of two pieces of piano music, the score was recorded by a 10-piece string ensemble specifically chosen by Henson. "The plan was always to have hopefully profound and emotionally large themes and pieces played by a small ensemble, recorded close and intimately with no additional instrumentation or sound," Henson notes. He worked with Fiona Cruikshank at The Church recording studio in London to lay out how the microphones and players would be arranged to lend to the sound he was seeking, which was then set for the recording of the whole score.

"The idea was to exist within these limitations, and have something that sounded intimate and familiar," Henson continues.

**"I like that while the story plays out, and grand vistas roll past us on screen, the string players breath and fingers and seat shuffles are present, hopefully making it sound human. Like friends with their arms around you."**

Macqueen reflects on the music Henson contributed to the film: "What he's managed to create within the confines of the film is so beautiful and so painful. It's awe-inspiring and it's life-affirming. It's also intimate and romantic. It was incredible he could channel all these different elements into our score, and we were very privileged to have him do that."

It was Henson's first experience of scoring a motion picture, and one he says made him very aware of serving someone other than himself. "When I write my own work, I'm looking for the chords or words that resonate within me, and in cases like this I am trying to find those that resonate with the story and add another dimension to a character's feeling." He jokes: "I basically have to rein in my own rampant self-loathing and introspection and think about how someone else might feel."

## FINISHING TOUCHES

Goligher says there was no better composer for the task, despite Henson's limited experience of writing music for film. "We could have gone with a film composer with a long track record who, on paper, was 'safer'" he notes. "But with Keaton, his music has such a deep well of emotion to it, and we thought he would bring something truly distinctive to the film. I think his work for the film is absolutely remarkable, and it feels rich and complex. It's absolutely perfect for reflecting what the couple is going through in the days we're with them."

Henson did see in the film a sense of optimism to what is, essentially, a tragic journey. "If death does one thing well, it's to shine a stark spotlight on life, and the love we feel for one another, or even just the beauty of the hills and fields around us," Henson concludes. "So, in the same way I hope that the music explores the depth of sadness, in a way that isn't hard to look at, and there is an undertone of life carrying on around us."

Macqueen agrees, and hopes that for all the darkness and challenge these two characters face in the film, *Supernova* is an uplifting experience for audiences. "When I look at the work I do, I try to ask

myself what kind of gesture the work represents for the world," he says. "We tried to present a really honest representation of a situation that many people find themselves in. It's a very difficult place for people to be, but sometimes when you're on the precipice of something, you find that love is even more beautiful and transcendent than you ever imagined it to be." He concludes: "I think if the gesture of the film is anything at all, it's that. It's about how we can overcome the greatest hurdles by being compassionate and being truthful with one another. I think that's optimistic. I think that's deeply romantic."



# SUPERNOVA



## About the Cast

Academy Award-winning actor COLIN FIRTH (Sam) is a veteran of film, television and theatre with a body of work spanning over three decades. He has appeared in three films that have won the Academy Award for Best Picture: *The King's Speech*, *Shakespeare In Love* and *The English Patient*. Firth's performance as King George VI in *The King's Speech* garnered him an Academy Award as well as a Golden Globe Award, Screen Actors Guild Award, British Independent Film Award, Critics' Choice Award and his second consecutive BAFTA Award in 2011. Colin also won the BAFTA Award in 2010 and the Volpi Cup for Best Actor at the 2009 Venice Film Festival for his performance in Tom Ford's *A Single Man*.

In 2008, Firth starred in Universal Pictures' global smash hit *Mamma Mia!* The film has grossed over half a billion dollars around the world. He also starred in the Universal Pictures/Working Title Films hit film series *Bridget Jones* and in the Universal hit *Love, Actually*, written and directed by Richard Curtis. At the time of its release, *Love, Actually* broke box-office records as the highest grossing British romantic-comedy opening of all time in the U.K. and Ireland and was the largest opening in the history of Working Title Films.

In 2012, Firth was seen in Tomas Alfredson's *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*, opposite Gary Oldman and Tom Hardy. The thriller is based on John le Carré's Cold War spy

novel. The film garnered three Academy Award nominations, including Best Writing, and won the 2012 BAFTA Awards for Outstanding British Film and Best Adapted Screenplay.

In 2013, Firth appeared in *The Railway Man*, directed by Jonathan Teplitzky and which also stars Nicole Kidman and Jeremy Irvine. The film is based on the true story of Eric Lomax, played by Firth, who sets out to find those responsible for his torture during his time as a prisoner in World War II.

In 2014 he starred in *Kingsman: The Secret Service* as a secret agent who recruits and trains an unrefined, but promising, street kid into the agency's competitive



## ABOUT THE CAST



training program. The film was directed by Matthew Vaughn and is based on the acclaimed comic book of the same name. The cast includes Samuel L. Jackson, Michael Caine and Taron Egerton.

In 2016, Firth appeared in *Genius*, a chronicle of Max Perkins' time as the book editor at Scribner, where he oversaw works by Thomas Wolfe, Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald. The film premiered at the Berlin International Film Festival in 2016 and starred Nicole Kidman, Jude Law, Guy Pearce and Vanessa Kirby. In the same year, Firth also reprised his role of Mark Darcy in *Bridget Jones's Baby*.

*Eye in the Sky* was released in April 2016 and is Firth's first film produced and distributed by his production company, Raindog Films, with partner Ged Doherty. Raindog Films also produced the British-American feature *Loving*, a true-life drama about a couple who were sentenced to prison because of their interracial marriage. The film, directed and written by Jeff Nichols, starred Joel Edgerton, Ruth Negga, Michael Shannon and Nick Kroll. The film was released in November 2016 and was nominated in both Best Actress and Best Actor categories at the 2017 Golden Globe Awards. The film was also selected to compete for the Palme d'Or at the 2016 Cannes Film Festival.

In September 2017, Firth reprised his role of Harry Hart in *Kingsman: The Golden Circle*, the sequel to *Kingsman: The Secret Service*. Directed by Matthew Vaughn, the film also starred Taron Egerton, Julianne Moore and Mark Strong. The film grossed \$39 million in its opening weekend and won the Best Thriller category at the 2018 Empire Awards. In February 2018, Firth starred alongside Rachel Weisz and David Thewlis in the drama *The Mercy*. Firth played Donald Crowhurst, a yachtsman who attempts to win the 1968 Golden Globe Race but ends up creating an outrageous account of traveling the world alone by sea.

## ABOUT THE CAST

Also in 2018, Firth appeared in *The Happy Prince*, a film written and directed by Rupert Everett, depicting the final years of Oscar Wilde. The film was released at the 2019 Sundance Film Festival and was well received to many four-and five-star reviews. Firth also executive produced the film, which sees Rupert Everett, Emily Watson, Colin Morgan and Anna Chancellor amongst its cast.

In summer 2018, Firth returned to the role of Harry in the iconic musical sequel *Mamma Mia! Here We Go Again*. Firth was joined by Meryl Streep, Amanda Seyfried, Lily James, Jeremy Irvine and many more in the highly successful musical comedy.

In December 2018, Firth starred as William Weatherall Wilkins in Disney's highly anticipated *Mary Poppins Returns*. The box-office hit was written by Oscar nominee David Magee and based on "The Mary Poppins Stories" by P.L. Travers. Directed by Rob Marshall, the feature film also starred Emily Blunt, Meryl Streep and Lin-Manuel Miranda.

In August 2020, Firth starred in the latest adaptation of the 1911 children's book *The Secret Garden*. Firth was cast as Archibald Craven alongside Julie Walters as Mrs. Medlock. The film is directed by BAFTA-winning Marc Munden and written by Jack Thorne.

In 2019, it was announced that Firth would star in John Madden's WWII drama *Operation Mincemeat*. Based on the Ben Macintyre book of the same name, Michelle Ashford has written the screenplay. The story takes place in 1943, as the Allies prepare to launch an all-out assault on Nazi-held Europe. They face a seemingly impossible task—to protect a massive invasion force from entrenched German firepower and avert a potential massacre. Two intelligence officers, Ewen Montagu and Charles Cholmondeley, dream up an inspired disinformation strategy, centred on the corpse of a dead man.

Other film credits include the Oscar-nominated *Girl with a Pearl Earring*; *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason*; *Devil's Knot*; *Arthur Newman*; *Then She Found Me*; *When Did You Last See Your Father?*; *Easy Virtue*; *Michael Winterbottom's Genova*; *A Christmas Carol*; *The Importance of Being Earnest*; *Atom Egoyan's Where the Truth Lies*; *Marc Evans' thriller Trauma*; *Nanny McPhee*; *What a Girl Wants*; *A Thousand Acres*, with Michelle Pfeiffer and Jessica Lange; *Apartment Zero*; *My Life So Far*; *Nick Hornby's Fever Pitch*; *Circle of Friends*; *Playmaker*; and the title role in *Milos Forman's Valmont*, opposite Annette Bening.

On the small screen, Firth is famous for his breakout role as Mr. Darcy in the BBC adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*, for which he received a BAFTA nomination for Best Actor and the National Television Award for Most Popular Actor.

In March 2004, Firth hosted NBC's *Saturday Night Live*. He was nominated for a Primetime Emmy Award in 2001 for Outstanding Supporting Actor in the critically acclaimed HBO film *Conspiracy* and received the Royal Television Society Best Actor Award and a BAFTA nomination for his performance in *Tumbledown*. His other television credits include BBC television movie *Born Equal*, *Donovan Quick*, *The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd*, *Deep Blue Sea*, *Hostages* and the mini-series *Nostromo*. His London stage debut was in the West End production of *Another Country* playing *Guy Bennett*. He was then chosen to play the character *Tommy Judd* in the 1984 film adaptation opposite *Rupert Everett*.

## ABOUT THE CAST

Academy Award nominee **STANLEY TUCCI** (Tusker) has appeared in over 90 films and countless television shows. He has performed in more than a dozen plays, on and off Broadway, and has been behind the camera working as a writer, director and producer.

Tucci reached his widest audience yet in the role of Caesar Flickerman in The Hunger Games franchise. A box office sensation and critical success, the fourth and final instalment of the series (Mockingjay) was released on November 20, 2015.

In February 2017, Tucci debuted Final Portrait at the Berlin International Film Festival. Based on the memoir A Giacometti Portrait, the film recounts the story of Swiss painter and sculptor Alberto Giacometti and stars Geoffrey Rush, Armie Hammer and Tony Shalhoub. The highly anticipated drama, which Tucci wrote and directed, released in the U.K. on August 18, 2017.

In 2017, Tucci also starred in Feud: Bette and Joan, for which he received an Outstanding Supporting Actor in a Mini-Series or Movie Emmy nomination for

his role as Jack L. Warner. He was also seen in The Children Act, opposite Emma Thompson and Fionn Whitehead; Beauty and the Beast, alongside Emma Watson, Ewan McGregor, Luke Evans, Dan Stevens, Emma Thompson and Ian McKellan; Submission from director Richard Levine; and Transformers: The Last Knight with Mark Wahlberg and Josh Duhamel.

In 2018, Tucci starred in Patient Zero, opposite Natalie Dormer; A Private War, with Rosamund Pike and Jamie Dornan; and Night Hunter, opposite Alexandra Daddario, Minka Kelly and Henry Cavill. He also lent his voice for Show Dogs, alongside Will Arnett and Natasha Lyonne.

He starred in the Netflix horror film The Silence in 2019, and in 2020 can be seen in Worth, opposite Michael Keaton, and The King's Man, with an all-star cast including Ralph Fiennes, Gemma Arterton, Rhys Ifans, Matthew Goode, Tom Hollander, Harris Dickinson, Daniel Brühl, Djimon Hounsou and Charles Dance.

Lauded for his work in all mediums, Tucci was nominated for an Academy Award, Golden Globe Award, BAFTA Award, SAG Award and received a Broadcast Critics nomination for his performance in Peter Jackson's The Lovely Bones. He also won an Emmy and a Golden Globe for his starring role as fast-talking Walter Winchell in the Paul Mazursky-directed TV movie Winchell. He received another Golden Globe for his brilliant



## ABOUT THE CAST

portrayal of Lt. Colonel Adolf Eichmann in HBO's *Conspiracy*.

Tucci is also a writer, director and producer. *Big Night*, Tucci's first effort as a co-director, co-screenwriter and actor on the same film, earned him numerous accolades, including the Waldo Salt Screenwriting Award at the 1996 Sundance Film Festival, Recognition of Excellence by the National Board of Review, an Independent Spirit Award, The Critic's Prize at the 1996 Deauville Film Festival, and honours from the New York Film Critics and the Boston Society of Film Critics.

His second project, *The Imposters*, was an Official Selection at the 1998 Cannes Film Festival. The film, which Tucci wrote, directed, co-produced and starred in was acquired by Fox Searchlight Films later that year. The 1930s farce starred Tucci and Oliver Platt as a pair of out-of-work actors who find themselves aboard a cruise ship. The cast also included Steve Buscemi, Alfred Molina, Lili Taylor and Hope Davis.

Next, he directed and co-starred as famed New Yorker staff writer Joseph Mitchell in Joe Gould's *Secret*, opposite Ian Holm in the title role; executive produced *Behind the Sun*, starring Rodrigo Santoro; co-wrote, directed and starred in *Blind Date*, a remake of the 1996 Theo van Gogh film; and produced the Ivan Kavanagh horror film, *The Canal*.

Tucci's additional film credits in front of the camera include *Spotlight*, *A Little Chaos*, *Transformers: Age of Extinction*, *Wild Card*, *Muppets Most Wanted*, *Mr. Peabody & Sherman*, *Some Velvet Morning*, *The Fifth Estate*, *Percy Jackson: Sea of Monsters*, *The Company You Keep*, *Jack the Giant Slayer*, *Captain America: The First Avenger*, *Margin Call*, *Burlesque*, *Easy A*, *Julie & Julia*, *The Tale of Despereaux*, *Kit Kittredge: An American Girl*, *Swing Vote*, *What Just Happened*, *The Devil Wears Prada*, *Shall We Dance*, *The Terminal*, *The Life and Death of Peter Sellers*, *Spin*, *Road to Perdition*, *America's Sweethearts*, *Sidewalks of New York*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Alarmist*, *Deconstructing Harry*, *The Daytrippers*, *Big Trouble*, *A Life Less Ordinary*, *Kiss of Death*, *Mrs. Parker and the Vicious Circle*, *It Could Happen to You*, *The Pelican Brief*, *Prelude to a Kiss*, *In the Soup*, *Billy Bathgate*, and *Slaves of New York*.

His work on television includes *Bojack Horseman*, *Metropolis*, *Fortitude*, *Bull*, *Equal Justice*, *Wiseguy*, *The Equalizer*, *thirtysomething*, and *The Street*. He also played Captain Hook in ITV's two-hour drama *Peter & Wendy*, alongside Laura Fraser and Paloma Faith. Tucci received Emmy nominations for his work in *Murder One* and *ER*, and an Emmy Award in the category of Outstanding Guest Actor in a Comedy Series for *Monk*.

Tucci's theater work includes *Frankie & Johnny* in the *Claire de Lune*, *Execution of Hope*, *The Iceman Cometh*, *Brighton Beach Memoirs* and *The Misanthrope*. He has also performed in a number of off-Broadway plays at Yale Repertory Theater and SUNY Purchase, where he first studied acting.

Tucci made his directorial debut on Broadway with a revival of Ken Ludwig's *Lend Me a Tenor* starring Tony Shalhoub. The production received a Tony Award nomination for Best Revival of a Play.

The *Tucci Cookbook*, released in October 2012, appeared on the *New York Times* Bestsellers List. His second cookbook, *The Tucci Table: Cooking with Family and Friends* was released on October 28, 2014. The family-focused cookbook includes recipes from Tucci's traditional Italian roots as well as those of his British wife, Felicity Blunt. Tucci currently resides in London, and he has served on the Board of Directors of The Food Banks for New York City.

SUPERNOVA

# About the Filmmakers

## HARRY MACQUEEN

(Director/Writer) trained as an actor at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, before turning to filmmaking in 2013.

His debut feature as a writer/director/producer, *Hinterland*, was theatrically released with Curzon Cinemas and Soda Pictures in 2015. The film was nominated for several awards including Best British Feature at the Raindance Film Festival and Best Debut Film at Beijing International Film Festival. It was also the UK's first fully carbon neutral feature film.

His acting credits include Richard Linklater's *Me and Orson Welles* and the hit British TV show *Eastenders*. In 2017 Harry won Best Supporting Actor at Madrid Film Festival for his performance in *Provenance*.

*Supernova* is his second feature film as a writer/director. He also has several other projects in development.



## ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

EMILY MORGAN (Producer) set up Quiddity Films to produce a unique and diverse slate of feature films with partners across the world. In 2018, Emily was awarded a BAFTA for Outstanding Debut for the company's first feature film production, *I Am Not A Witch*, written and directed by Rungano Nyoni. The film screened at Cannes, TIFF and Sundance, was nominated for an Independent Spirit Award and won three BIFAs.

Morgan's next release, *Make Up*, by Claire Oakley, was made through the iFeatures scheme and recently distributed by Curzon in the UK after critical

acclaim. Her next completed productions are *Supernova* by Harry Macqueen, starring Colin Firth and Stanley Tucci, and *Do Not Hesitate* by Sharriff Korver, through Lemming Film in the Netherlands.

Morgan is a graduate of the NFTS producing MA, a recipient of the BFI Vision Award and a member of ACE Producers.

TRISTAN GOLIGHER (Producer) is a partner at London based production company The Bureau. His credits include Andrew Haigh's *Weekend*, *Lean on Pete* and *45 Years* which won two Silver Bears at Berlinale 2015

and went on to receive a BAFTA nomination for Outstanding British Film, and garnered Charlotte Rampling an Oscar nomination for Best Actress.

He produced Harry Wootliff's debut *Only You*, for which Wootliff was BAFTA nominated in the Outstanding Debut category and is currently in production on Wootliff's second feature *True Things*. Goligher also produced Peter Mackie Burns' debut film *Daphne*, and second feature *Rialto*. His most recent production is Harry Macqueen's *Supernova*, starring Colin Firth and Stanley Tucci.



## ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

DICK POPE (Cinematographer) began his career as a documentary film cameraman. He worked for many companies including the BBC, travelling the world to remote and inaccessible areas including war zones. He specialized in shooting films about endangered indigenous tribes including *Disappearing World*; highly political films like *World in Action*; and also TV Arts programmes such as *The South Bank Show*.

From the late '70s through the early '80s Pope shot hundreds of concerts, many for *The Old Grey Whistle Test*, and music videos for bands and artists as diverse as Queen, Freddie Mercury, Tina Turner, *The Clash*, *The Specials*, *The Police*, Neil Young and AC/DC. In the mid '80s he moved into TV drama and feature films, photographing amongst others, *Porterhouse Blue* for which he was BAFTA nominated, and Philip Ridley's *Reflecting Skin*.

In 1990 Pope was asked by director Mike Leigh to photograph *Life is Sweet*, beginning a collaboration that has produced ten features including *Naked*, *Secrets and Lies*, *Topsy-Turvy*, *Vera Drake*, *Happy-Go-Lucky*, *Another Year* and *Mr. Turner*. Pope has twice won the top prize at Camerimage, the Festival of the Art of Cinematography, for *Vera Drake* and *Secrets & Lies*. And in 1999 Leigh and Pope were recognized there with a major award for their career collaboration. He also won the Silver Frog at the same festival for *The Illusionist* for which he

was also nominated for an Oscar and ASC and BSC Awards.

Amongst many wins and nominations for his work on *Mr. Turner* he was awarded the 2015 BSC Cinematography award, the Royal Photographic Society 2015 Lumiere award and the Prix Vulcaine for the Technical Artist at the 2014 Cannes Film Festival. For the same film he was also again nominated for an Oscar and BAFTA, ASC and British Independent Film Awards.

Pope's many other credits include films for leading US maverick directors such as Richard Linklater, Barry Levinson, John

Sayles, Christopher McQuarrie and Jill Sprecher. In recent years he photographed *Legend*, about the notorious Kray Brothers, written and directed by Brian Helgeland and in New York; and *Angelica* for Mitchell Lichtenstein, the son of painter Roy Lichtenstein. In 2017 Pope photographed *Peterloo*, a major new project for Mike Leigh, a period film set in the early 1800s. Pope flew to Malawi, Africa to shoot *The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind*, the directorial debut for actor Chiwetel Ejiofor, who also stars. Pope recently worked in New York, collaborating with Edward Norton on his 1950s set film *Motherless Brooklyn*.



## ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

**KEATON HENSON** (Composer) is an English folk rock musician, visual artist and poet whose work has explored a complex array of feelings and themes; from selfishness in love, to mental illness and his struggles with notoriety.

Henson's music career began by accident, when encouraged by a friend to put a collection of secret songs he had recorded online. They gained traction fast, soon being picked up by Radio 1's Zane Lowe, among others, forcing Henson out of his bedroom and into the spotlight. This collection of Songs became "Dear...", his first record, which was originally released in handmade packaging, each copy with a unique hand drawn cover and the recipient's name inserted into the album title. This led quickly to a major label re-release, followed by a small tour of tiny intimate shows in museums around the country, and eventually

the recording of its follow up, "Birthdays", in Los Angeles.

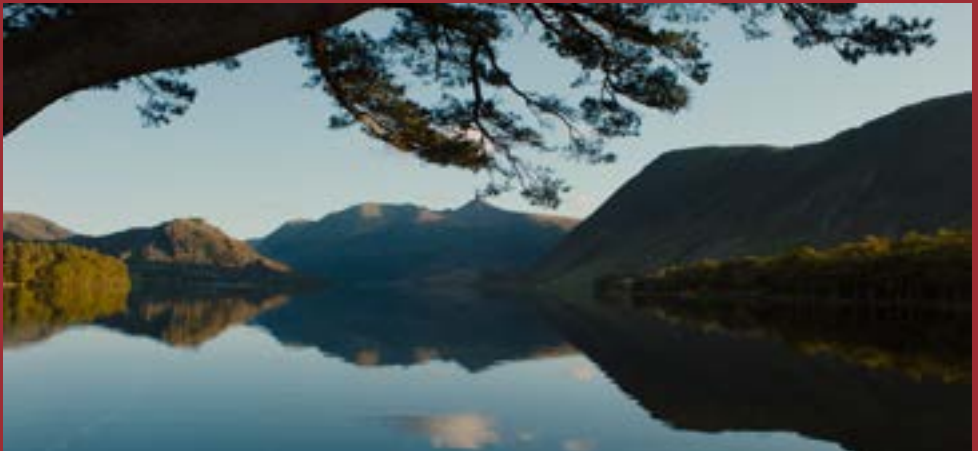
Since then, after fast becoming a cult hero, Henson's projects have varied wildly. From successful poetry books and art exhibitions, to out of the blue classical composition "Romantic Works" and brooding electronic side project "Behaving". Henson is an artist who rarely chooses to do the obvious thing but carries through every project a unique spirit of vulnerability and stark emotional honesty.

In 2016, at the height of an album campaign and following a sold-out show at the London Palladium, Henson abruptly released "Epilogue", an enigmatic song seeming to say goodbye to his career as a singer-songwriter. The circumstances that led to the release of "Epilogue" were explored in his following project, "Six Lethargies", which examines

mental illness from the inside out, intending to not only explain the feelings of anxiety and trauma but, in certain movements, to make the listener experience them. For its first performance at London's Barbican a section of the audience was hooked up to bio-monitors, their anxiety levels controlling the lighting rig.

Henson's most recent project is "Monument", an album about loss, and dealing with losing the ones we love, but told, in incredibly candid detail, through the aspects of our lives that surround the trauma itself, about love, ageing, recovery, life, seen through the prism of grief.

Henson's music has appeared in BBC Three zombie drama *In the Flesh*, Ricky Gervais's sitcom *Derek*, CBS procedural drama *Elementary*, and in the 2014 film *X+Y*. *Supernova* marks his first original score for a motion picture.





## ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

SARAH FINLAY (Production Designer) has been working in the film and television industry for over 15 years, across a range of projects. She worked her way up through the art department to the role of Production Designer. Her feature credits include Andrew Haigh's *Weekend* and *45 Years*; *The Levelling* with director Hope Dickson Leach; Sebastián Lelio's *Disobedience*; and *Juliet, Naked*, directed by Jesse Peretz.

CHRIS WYATT (Editor) has worked with an eclectic mix of acclaimed filmmakers from Peter Greenaway to Shane Meadows. Spanning a career of more than forty years, credits include *The Pillow Book*, *This is England*, *Dead Man's Shoes*, *71*, *Dreams of a Life* and *Calibre*. Before starting work on *Supernova*, Chris edited Francis Lee's *Ammonite* having collaborated on his debut feature film *God's Own Country*.

SHAHEEN BAIG (Casting Director) gained her first casting director credit on Alejandro Amenábar's *The Others* starring Nicole Kidman, and established her own company in 2001 after assisting some of the leading UK Casting Directors for several years. Since then, Shaheen Baig Casting has earned a reputation for finding and nurturing new and diverse acting talent, as well as supporting promising new filmmakers and established directors in film & television.



# CAST

Sam	COLIN FIRTH
Tusker	STANLEY TUCCI
Lilly	PIPPA HAYWOOD
Clive	PETER MACQUEEN
Charlotte	NINA MARLIN
Paul	IAN DRYSDALE
Sue	SARAH WOODWARD
Tim	JAMES DREYFUS
Lola	LORI CAMPBELL
Rachel	DANEKA CHARLOTTE ETCHELLS
Shop Assistant	HALEMA HUSSAIN
Waitress	JULIE HANNAN
Ruby	TRUFFLES
Party Guests	IMOGEN BARNFATHER RUTH CRANE TOBY GAFFNEY ADI JONES IAN MACKENZIE MILLIE MACQUEEN PAUL MARTIN ALEX MORRISON TINA LOUISE OWENS JOHN ALAN ROBERTS JOHN SEYMOUR LEWIS SOWERBY JUSTIN STOREY CHINTY TURNBULL

# CREDITS

Written and Directed by  
HARRY MACQUEEN

Produced by  
EMILY MORGAN  
TRISTAN GOLIGHER

Executive Producers  
MARY BURKE  
EVA YATES  
VINCENT GADELLE

Cinematographer  
DICK POPE

Editor  
CHRIS WYATT

Production Designer  
SARAH FINLAY

Costume Designer  
MATTHEW PRICE

Hair and Make Up Designer  
TAMSIN BARBOSA

Composer  
KEATON HENSON

Casting Director  
SHAHEEN BAIG

Line Producer  
JOANNA THAPA

Supervising Sound Editor  
JOAKIM SUNDSTRÖM

Music Supervisor  
SARAH BRIDGE