

INDEPENDENTS' DAY

STUDIO-FREE MOVIE-MAKING

THE GATHERERS

Director..... IAN D FLEMING
Distributor..... NO DISTRIBUTOR YET
Starring..... JOHN HALL
ANDREW FULLARD
PAULA WRIGHT
Running Time..... 25 MINS

Did you know that 82 per cent of first-time directors include at least five murders and two shoot-outs in their debut features? Okay, so we're lying. But fast-forward through the current glut of heist-inspired low-budget flicks on our desk and it rings true. Which makes it all the rarer when a couple of self-confessed "cocky bastards" from Cumbria make something like *The Gatherers*.

This sensitive tale explores the friendship between deaf and dumb teenager Davy (Fullard) and enigmatic artist Mani (Hall). But when a woman photographer (Wright) arrives to research her next exhibition, she ends up stealing Mani's work and threatening his relationship with Davy.

Citing influences from Ken Loach to Peter Weir, Ian D Fleming (Bond-loving parents, wouldn't you know) and partner Darren Mapletoft are happy to be regarded as hippies. "We're into world cinema," says Mapletoft, "a more gentle approach to storytelling. We might eventually turn something out with more of a violent edge, but it's not really our passion." Fleming is more emphatic: "Hollywood holds no attraction for me. I couldn't give a sod about it."

BARROW OF LAUGHS

Set against the desolate background of Barrow-In-Furness (go to the Sellafield nuclear plant, turn left), *The Gatherers* was inspired by an Arts In The Community project run by the pair's production company Cumbrian Independents. "The original effort was a good one," explains writer/director Fleming, "but I wanted to remake it as a proper film, so I developed and pitched it."

The superior photography belies the budget of just £40,000 – only £27,000 of which was spent making the movie. "The rest went on film workshops," says Mapletoft, the film's producer. "We arrived in Barrow and gave training courses to the community three weeks before we started out. That's something we specialise in." It's also part of the



John Hall and Andrew Fullard as friends Mani and Davy.



John Hall (Mani) takes in the magical location scenery between takes.



Contact Cumbria Film Independents on 01228 592955 or e-mail: filmindie@aol.com

reason the duo managed to charm £25,000 of their budget from A4E, the arts arm of the National Lottery. "It certainly helped that we were into community participation – ensuring people got something out of it."

The remainder of the budget came from the Northern Production Fund (NPF), a Northern Arts spin-off. Paul Moody – the man who said yes – was also impressed that Fleming and Mapletoft were already award-winning film-makers, scooping top honours in a Sony-sponsored competition for their graduation films. Even so, they didn't receive funding straight away as the script wasn't developed enough. It was rewritten several times on Moody's advice before the NPF finally gave the project the greenlight and released the money.

READY FOR ACTION

The pair brought in a core team of professionals and then used the good people of Barrow in every other job from actor to key grip. After advertising an open audition, casting took two days, with all three leads going to locals who had never acted before.

Finding the locations proved easy. "Barrow's quite magical," enthuses Mapletoft. "We'd both done community projects there before and spent time wandering off taking pictures of possible locations. The scenery is haunting."

Shooting the film may sound like the glamorous part, but Mapletoft's keen to dispel such illusions. "You've got to have a screw loose to be a film-maker. It completely takes over your life. In the three or four weeks before shooting *The Gatherers* we were working 12 to 16-hour days. During the shoot week, we worked six 18-hour days. You can't force people to work those hours, but everybody on the shoot wanted it to work."

Good fortune also played its part. "Sticking to the budget was difficult," concedes Mapletoft, "so we called in a lot of favours. It helped that we have a good relationship with Sony Broadcast And Professional UK. Its head honcho Joe Dorfman gave us a camera for the duration of the shoot which would have cost us more than £2,000."

"We also saved money by shooting on digital video rather than film. Film impresses people, but it does increase



The Gatherers crew set up a tracking shot.



CFI Internet:-

www.artcumbria.org/filmindie.htm

Info page : Website in development.



the pressure. You can't do multiple takes with films, because every time you're burning money."

Shooting on location can prove expensive; fortunately for *The Gatherers*, none of the property owners charged a fee. Says Mapletoft: "Everything including the gallery sequence, which was filmed in Carlisle, was paid for in kind. We made donations for the electricity we used and we bought a bottle of gas for the old boy who lives in the hut on the beach, but that was about it."

Weighing in at a hefty 25 minutes, *The Gatherers* is 10 minutes longer than the standard short film, making it too long to enter for competition yet too short to sell as a feature. But there was a method in the madness. "We wanted to make it for a broadcast," says Mapletoft, "and we managed to do that. It was shown on Border Television last year." Now the movie is doing the rounds of the international festival circuit and has been submitted to the Edinburgh Film Festival.

"*The Gatherers* is a stepping stone for us towards doing a feature," says Fleming. The pair are already on the final draft of their next feature, *Frogger* – a story set during, but not about, the miner's strike. They're looking for funding of about £4 million.

"Yes, it's a big leap, but it's all down to getting a good team together," Fleming says. "Story-wise it's *Romeo And Juliet* for kids. Without the

"It takes over your life. During the shoot week we worked 18-hour days"



Director Fleming: Coens-inspired.

sex. Since *Brassed Off* and *The Full Monty*, people are looking for this type of thing which is great for us. I want to make classic British films that people will still care about in decades to come. Me and Darren are going to be the next Coen brothers." ■

Catherine Hanly

The Lottery-funded A4E scheme has now finished, but regional arts boards are currently replacing the national scheme with local ones.

THE MONEY MAN

In the area that stretches from the Scottish Borders down to Yorkshire and Lancashire, Paul Moody is a key figure in film funding. During the next three years the Northern Production Fund Advisory Committee (an initiative of Northern Arts) will be giving away £13 million to deserving applicants.

Grants of £1,500 to £50,000 are given for anything from training, script development and production, to helping a budding film company develop more than one project at a time.

Coming from a background of 17 years in film – he was an assistant director on *Schindler's List* – Moody's the first to admit he's a harsh critic when it comes to scripts. "The structure is usually the key element most young writers get wrong. Getting the weight of scenes right takes a lot of work. I know, I'm a screenwriter myself.

"If you're applying for funding, get the forms and the guidelines. Read them properly and put a draft application in writing before you meet. If you have a short videotape, supply that. Be open and professional. Most of all, take pride in your work. Look at every possible and impossible form of funding. Get on every mailing list, read the press and list the funding deadlines for the next 12 to 18 months. That way you know what you're working towards."

The Northern Production Fund can be contacted on 01912816334.

INFORMATION

British Film Institute 0171 255 1444

An excellent first-stop for film and actor information. It's also the world's largest collection of movie and TV info, from books and scripts to press cuttings. If you have a request that can't be dealt with by a phone call, visit the BFI Library, 21 Stephen Street, London W1P 2LN. It's £6 for a day pass.

TALKING PAGES 0800 600 900

SCOOT 0800 192 192

Both these free services provide local screening information.

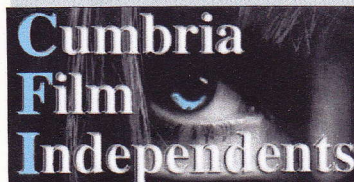
FILM FINDER <http://www.yell.co.uk>

Type in your town and this Net version of the *Yellow Pages* will provide listings of films currently screening in your area.

CONTACTS

These services give contact numbers for movie talent. Be aware that you'll be put in touch with agencies, so if you want the home numbers of Leo DiCaprio or Neve Campbell, forget it. Similarly, don't ask for autographs or expect to tell stars that "you really liked their last film".

The best chance of getting a response is to ask for the agency fax number and the name of the person within the firm who represents your enquiry. Fax your questions on typed sheets and include a return address or fax number.



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Fullard plays a deaf and dumb teenager.