



**NEW RELEASES**

# **CODA**

Oscar winner Marlee Matlin stars as Jackie and Troy Kotsur is her mischievous husband Frank, parents who have created a close knit family unit and have grown to depend on their hearing daughter. Their beautifully nuanced performances (alongside stand-out Emilia Jones as Ruby) allow both Deaf and hearing audiences to understand their challenges. Crisp firecracker exchanges, full of raw humour and moments of tenderness reveal a family on the cusp of change. Their energy is infectious; their anxiety heartfelt.

Siân Heder's multi-award winning drama (taking Grand Jury Prize and Audience Award at Sundance 2021) is first and foremost a story of community. The soul classic 'You're All I Need to Get By' that links various characters isn't just a love song. Set in a fishing town on the Massachusetts coast, we see how unfair practice threatens the livelihood of generations. Everyone feels vulnerable, but especially the Rossi's, with their outsider status.

Beautifully shot, foregrounding the importance of visual and tactile worlds, and with a music driven soundscape that goes to the heart of the drama, this a film to laugh and cry with – many times over.

**Maggi Hurt, BFI Advance Programme Co-ordinator**

From the beginning, the filmmakers of *CODA* understood the responsibility they bore to accurately depict Deaf culture and American Sign Language. Many people born Deaf or hard of hearing view their Deafness as a difference, not a disability. For many in the community, being Deaf is a cultural identity, but one doesn't need to be Deaf to participate in and contribute to Deaf culture. Deaf culture includes hearing people who are CODAs and interpreters, and people who are hard of hearing who identify as Deaf. (It's also important to note that, just as is the case with hearing culture, there isn't a single homogenous Deaf culture, but rather many Deaf cultures.)

The use of sign language is a cornerstone of Deaf cultural identity – there are more than 200 sign languages in the world. ASL also has dialects, such as BASL/BSV (Black American Sign Language/Black Sign Variation) and, within the world of hip hop, ASL interpreters have carved out their own cultural and professional niche. Of late, it's become more common to see ASL interpreters on-screen in the media and on-stage at concerts, and the hearing public has started to appreciate the physical skill and elegant aesthetics of signing, even if they don't understand the language itself.

ASL and its variants are vibrant, creative and fluid languages that are more than just versions of American English. It can be a challenge to directly

translate between ASL and English, partly because ASL is such an embodied language but also because not all words and signs have direct translations.

Practically speaking, that meant that director Siân Heder had to find a way to translate the dialogue she'd written for her characters from the page into ASL. 'I'm someone who imagines being every character as I'm writing, and I'm hearing all the words in my head,' Heder says. 'Part of my process is usually having a few actor friends do me a favour and read the script out loud so I can judge the dialogue. I did a reading of *CODA* this way in the middle of a rewrite. As I was listening to it, I realised that this was a completely bizarre way to judge the scenes because I'm never going to hear these lines. These lines will be something I watch.'

Heder brought on Deaf actress, dancer, director and educator Alexandria Wailes to serve as the film's Director of ASL (DASL) to work with her on all the translations that were required. Wailes and Heder sat down together in the spring of 2019, months before the shoot began, to dissect the screenplay. 'Scene by scene, we went through the script,' Heder says. 'She would read a line and sign it for me.' In certain cases, the sign for what Heder had written didn't necessarily convey her intentions, so she'd modify the dialogue as needed.

It's important to note the differences between Wailes' role and that of an interpreter. Also known as an ASL master, the DASL is usually an individual with an extensive theatre background and understanding of Deaf culture and history. The DASL essentially functions as a creative collaborator akin to a dramaturg or a choreographer. Depending upon the project, the DASL will identify period-specific, regional and gender sign choices to share and teach those who are performing, then make decisions about which signs best fit the world being envisioned. The DASL also educates the production on how to effectively communicate in a bilingual environment, particularly when it comes to the use of ASL interpreters and empowering Deaf talent.

'Siân and I went through the script and discussed the possibilities of how this family functions,' Wailes explains. 'The dynamics and relationships between characters became clearer and informed us of how the characters would likely communicate. We agreed that as tight-knit as this familial unit was, the father and daughter had an incredible bond.' Because this family lives in a small fishing town in New England, this also meant some ASL research on specific types of fish and the regional accent.

'A hearing child born into a family of Deaf people would be exposed to ASL before spoken English,' Wailes continues. 'I presented Siân with a template of sign choices for Ruby with a heads up that these choices may evolve once we brought the actors all together and discovered their natural rhythms.'

Because ASL is not a written language, Wailes would write notes for herself in ASL gloss (also known as notation), and she also recorded videos for the cast members for additional reference. 'It can get very technical and will vary from

person to person,’ Wailes says of the way various signs are written down. ‘For the actors who came into the project without any pre-existing knowledge of ASL, I worked from my gloss, teaching and modifying if necessary, then giving the actor suggestions on how to notate for their own memorisation. Some folks draw pictures. Some circle or underline words, adding info on the margins. Some video record themselves, and there are others who have incredible muscle memory and keep it in their head and body.’

At the same time, Heder was also working with her behind-the-scenes team on the look of the film in preparation for the shoot. *CODA* was shot on location in and around Gloucester, Massachusetts, in the fall of 2019, visiting the city’s wharves, Cape Pond Ice and the Cape Ann Seafood Exchange, as well as Henry’s Market in Beverly.

Heder relied on two previous collaborators, cinematographer Paula Huidobro and production designer Diane Lederman – with whom she had worked on both her feature film debut *Tallulah* and the series *Little America* – to help her execute her vision for *CODA*.

Both Huidobro and Lederman took aesthetic cues from Gloucester itself and the greater North Shore area to help create the look and feel of Ruby’s world. ‘The colour palette for the film came from the ocean and the fishing town,’ Huidobro says. ‘A big part of the movie is the community, the fishing and the boats.’ Lederman adds, ‘I spent a lot of my prep time with Siân looking at Gloucester and getting a feel for the natural landscape and environment. We wanted to really capture the fishing environment here, so we went to several fish processing plants – there are only a few left because the sad story of Gloucester is that the fishing industry has really been hit hard.’

Amid the movie’s somewhat neutral landscape are bright pops of colour – blues, reds, yellows and oranges. ‘Fishing involves a lot of plastic and bright colours, which I usually don’t use,’ Lederman explains. ‘The fishermen all wear their bright yellow and orange Grundens. All the tie lines are these bright colours, and there are these big plastic blue bins everywhere. You couldn’t fight it, so we embraced it. We really wanted to capture the spirit of this environment, this town, the people. We strived to make it as natural and realistic as possible. This movie is a very visual film because of the places we’re shooting but also because we’re trying to capture what it feels like to be young, to fall in love for the first time and to discover your passion and your path,’ adds Huidobro. ‘We also wanted to capture what it feels like to be in a tight-knit family and the way that Deaf people perceive things differently and have to be a lot more aware of their surroundings.’

## **Production notes**

CODA

*Directed by:* Siân Heder  
*©:* Vendôme Pictures LLC, Pathé Films  
*Production Company:* Vendome Pictures  
*In association with:* Pathé  
*Presented by:* Apple Original Films  
*With the participation of the:*  
Canadian Film or Video Production Services Tax Credit  
*International Sales:* Pathé International  
*Executive Producers:* Ardavan Safaee, Sarah Borch-Jacobsen  
*Produced by:* Philippe Rousselet, Fabrice Gianfermi, Patrick Wachsberger, Jérôme Seydoux  
*Unit Production Manager:* Ged Dickersin  
*Production Supervisor:* Jill Sacco  
*Production Co-ordinator:* Feifei Ling  
*Production Accountant:* Sabrina Joseph  
*Location Manager:* Tim Gorman  
*Post-production Supervisor:* Guy Langlois  
*1st Assistant Director:* David Mendoza  
*2nd Assistant Director:* Pete Waterman  
*Script Supervisor:* Jillian Roache  
*Casting by:* Deborah Aquila, Tricia Wood, Lisa Zagoria  
*Screenplay by:* Siân Heder  
*Based on the original motion picture*  
La Famille Bélier *a film by:* Eric Lartigau  
*Based on the original motion picture* La Famille Bélier *written by:* Victoria Bedos, Stanislas Carré de Malberg, Eric Lartigau, Thomas Bidegain  
*Director of Photography:* Paula Huidobro  
*A Camera Operator/Steadicam Operator:* Alec Jarnagin  
*B Camera Operator:* Scott Lebeda  
*Gaffer:* Ben Heald  
*Key Grip:* Frank Montesanto  
*Special Effects Co-ordinator:* Michael Ricci  
*Editor:* Geraud Brisson  
*Production Designer:* Diane Lederman  
*Art Director:* Paul Richards  
*Set Designer:* Chantal Birdsong  
*Set Decorator:* Vanessa Knoll  
*Property Master:* Kent Lanigan  
*Construction Co-ordinator:* Peter Wilcox  
*Costume Designer:* Brenda Abbandandolo  
*Costume Supervisor:* Courtney Stephens  
*Make-up Department Head:* Juliet Loveland  
*Hair Department Head:* Michelle Connolly  
*Composer:* Marius De Vries  
*Music Supervisor:* Alexandra Patsavas

*Executive Music Producer:* Marius De Vries  
*Music Produced by:* Nick Baxter  
*Music Editor:* Delphine Measroch  
*Songs Mixed by:* Nick Baxter  
*Sound Design:* Paul Col  
*Production Sound Mixer:* Jared Detsikas  
*Re-recording Mixers:* Alexandra Fehrman, Stéphane Bergeron  
*Supervising Sound Editor:* Martin Pinsonnault  
*Sound Effects Editor:* David Tremblay  
*Stunt Co-ordinator:* Mark Pettograsso  
*American Sign Language Masters:* Anne Tomasetti, Alexandria Wailes

Cast

Emilia Jones *(Ruby Rossi)*  
Eugenio Derbez *(Bernardo Villalobos)*  
Troy Kotsur *(Frank Rossi)*  
Ferdia Walsh-Peel*o (Miles)*  
Daniel Durant *(Leo Rossi)*  
Amy Forsyth *(Gertie)*  
Kevin Chapman *(Brady)*  
Marlee Matlin *(Jackie Rossi)*  
John Fiore *(Tony Salgado)*  
Lonnie Farmer *(Arthur)*  
Courtland Jones *(Ms Simon)*  
Molly Beth Thomas *(Audra)*  
Ayana Brown *(guidance counsellor)*  
Jason Pugatch *(doctor)*  
Kyana Fanene *(riff girl)*  
Anilee List *(Adele girl)*  
Stone Martin *(Harry Potter boy)*  
Maeve Chapman *(shaker girl)*  
Stephen Caliskan *(tall boy)*  
Amanda Bradshaw *(shy girl)*

USA 2020  
111 mins

Certificate 12A

An Apple Original Films release

Presented with subtitles for the D/deaf and those experiencing hearing loss.

Audio description available.

NEW RELEASES & RE-RELEASES

Limbo

Continues from Jul

The Most Beautiful Boy in the World

Continues from Jul

Now, Voyager

From Fri 6 Aug

The Sparks Brothers

From Fri 6 Aug

The Story of a Three Day Pass

From Sat 7 Aug

CODA

From Fri 13 Aug

Censor

From Fri 20 Aug

Souad

From Fri 27 Aug

REGULAR PROGRAMME

Silent Cinema: The Wit and Wisdom of A.A. Milne

+ intro by Bryony Dixon, BFI Curator

Sun 15 Aug 12:40

DVD Launch: Great Noises That Fill the Air: Music, Poetry and Performance on Film

Mon 16 Aug 17:50

S.O.U.L. Fest 2021

Fri 20-Sun 22 Aug

Experimenta: Thundercrack!

+ intro by Jane Giles, author of ‘Scala Cinema 1987-1993

Sat 21 Aug 17:00

Relaxed Screening: Stand Clear of the Closing Doors

Tue 24 Aug 18:00

Woman with a Movie Camera Preview:

Souad + pre-recorded Q&A with director Ayten Amin

Tue 24 Aug 18:00

Terror Vision: Dr Terror’s House of Horrors

Thu 26 Aug 20:40

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