



Sunset Song

Director: Terence Davies

©: Sunset Song Ltd, Iris Productions,
British Film Institute

Production Companies: Hurricane Films,
Iris Productions, SellOutPictures,
National Lottery through Creative Scotland,
Film Fund Luxembourg, BBC

In association with: Iris, Hurricane Films,
SellOutPictures, BFI's Film Fund

For: Christopher Collins

International Sales: Fortissimo Film Sales

Executive Producers: Bob Last, Alice de Sousa
Produced by: Roy Boulter, Solon Papadopoulos,
Nicolas Steil

Line Producer: Victoria Dabbs

For Iris Productions: Deputy Managing Directors:
Pascal Guerrin, Julie Braham

For BFI: Director of Lottery Film Fund: Ben Roberts;
Senior Development and Production Executive:
Lizzie Francke; *Heads of Production:* Fiona
Morham, Ian Kirk; *Director of Business Affairs:*
Will Evans

For Creative Scotland: Production Executive: Leslie
Finlay; *Business Affairs:* Mark Wilson; *Director of*
Screen: Natalie Usher

For BBC Scotland: Executive Producers:
Ewan Angus, Suzanne Elrick; *Business Affairs:*
Katharine Otway

Production Manager: Solveig Harper

Production Co-ordinators: Anna Purkis,
Alexandra Schumann

Production Accountants: Neil Cairns, Rose Assa
Unit Managers: Brian Mackie, Gordon Fawcett

Location Managers: Ashton Radcliffe,
Miglet Crichton, Christophe Vincent, Clayton Tikao
Post-production Supervisors: Richard Lloyd,
Verity Wislocki

1st Assistant Director: Daniel Texter

2nd Assistant Director: Laurence Rexter-Baker

Script Supervisors: Susanna Lenton,
Monsie Knight

Casting: John Hubbard, Ros Hubbard,

Casting Associate: Martin Ware

Adapted by: Terence Davies

Based on the novel by: Lewis Grassie Gibbon *

Director of Photography: Michael McDonough
B Camera Operator: Sam Renton

Gaffer: Helder Loureiro

Key Grip: Pascal Charlier

Stills Photographer: Ricardo Vaz Palma

Visual Effects by: NAKOfx

Additional Visual Effects: Tim Walton

Special Effects Supervisor: Ken Fitzke

SFX by: AX-7, Artem Limited

Edited by: David Charap

1st Assistant Editor: Paul Maas, Liam J. Hayter

Production Designer: Andy Harris

Art Directors: Mags Horspool,

Diana Van De Vossenbergh, Ken Turner

Assistant Art Director: Stephen Mason

Set Decorator: Sylvia Kasel

Props Buyers: Anne-Marie Coulter, Josie Meachen

Costume Designer: Uli Simon

Assistant Costume Designer: Natasha Francotte

Make-up Designer: Katja Reinert

Make-up Artists: Graham Johnston,

Jacqui Mallett, Richard Muller

Key Hair Dresser: Catherine Caraes

Main and End Titles by: The Morrison Studio

Digital Intermediate Colourist: John Claude

Composer: Gast Waltzing

Music Supervisor: Ian Neil

Love, Sex, Religion, Death: The Complete Films of Terence Davies

Sunset Song

Terence Davies on 'Sunset Song'

Sunset Song, Davies's adaptation of Lewis Grassie Gibbon's classic Scottish novel, is partly a paean to a landscape and the changing seasons within it, and Davies and his director of photography Michael McDonough have created a lush, fulsome film, shot using 65mm, which is a joy to the eye. The story concerns a farming family living in the north-east of Scotland, consisting of harsh disciplinarian father John Guthrie (Peter Mullan), loyal mother Jean (Daniela Nardini), and their two grown-up children: the scholarly Chris (Agness Deyn), who gives up her academic studies to work on the land, and her beloved brother Will (Jack Greenlees), who bitterly resents the treatment that's meted out to him by his father and soon leaves. Later on it deals with the love between Chris and local boy Ewan (Kevin Guthrie) as the shadow of World War I creeps closer. It's a tale of brooding terror, bottled-up emotions and stoic patience that finds room for blossoming romance, and burgeoning tragedy.

How did you discover the book?

I actually discovered it as a serial on BBC1 on a Sunday night [in 1971] and I watched it each week because you couldn't record anything then and had to wait a week for the next one, so I ran out to buy the book. It's quite hard to read because it's in Doric [north-east Scots] dialect. I just loved the serialisation. I was training as a bookkeeper then, so it was just something I wanted to read. Not having gone to university, I wanted to read all the time. Then, years later, when I started to make films, it was always at the back of my mind.

Can you elaborate on the quality of the writing in the original?

Like most things, it was about the story. It's epic. At the time I didn't see that, I just saw it as a rich drama. It's terribly badly written, but it's a great story. I was just interested in the drama and Vivien Heilbron's wonderful performance [as Chris Guthrie]. That's what stayed with me. When I decided I wanted to adapt it I went back to the novel because I couldn't see the BBC version – and I'm glad I couldn't, as it would restrict me. Over six or seven episodes you can do so much more than in a two-hour film. [In film] you have to be so much more ruthless with the text. We worked on it from 2000 until 2003, when we got the final draft, and it went to the UK Film Council who, after six months, said it hadn't got legs.

When you were writing your version, how fully formed was it from scene to scene?

It's much more haphazard than that. I write everything shot for shot – and if it needs some music then that goes in... other ideas you write on scraps of paper, and over a year those notes accrete and you have a vague idea of what the structure is. And then I write it out. I always write longhand. Then I have a break and come back to it. And you're reading the novel all the time. You think, 'This is weak, how can I make it feel cinematic, how do I show this succinctly without the characters telling it to you?' That's always the interesting bit. The power of cinema, when it's good, is that it catches the fleeting moment, the tiny things that have enormous power. I wrote the end first – the end is so moving. No matter how many times I read it, I am still in tears, because it's so full of humanity. You get it down for the first draft and you think, 'No, this needs a lot more work, here and there. What do I need there?' I only do three drafts and a polish, and that's the shooting script.

This is a chamber drama, so the casting is absolutely crucial. How did you and Peter Mullan get along, because there's a few echoes of the stern father of your autobiographical films.

We were doing the casting through [veteran agents] the Hubbards. I knew Peter Mullan had made a very violent film, *Tyrannosaur* [2010], and I said, 'I won't watch it.' They said, 'If we found you a bit that wasn't violent, would you watch it?' And I

Sound Recordist: Marc Thill
Additional Sound Recordist: Tony Johnson
Boom Operator: Alain Goniva
Re-recording Mixer: Loïc Collignon
Dialogue Editor: Nick Lowe
Developed with the assistance of: Ginnie Atkinson
Visual Effects Consultant: Tim Field,
 Creative Scotland Location Service
Dialogue Coaches: Jo Cameron Brown,
 Julia Wilson Dixon
Horse Masters: Haydn Webb, Wayne McCormack
Animal Wrangler: Dave Steart
Production Publicity: DDA Public Relations
Horses Provided by: Equine Films
Digital Intermediate by: Dirty Looks
Special Thanks to: Paul Brett,
 Florian Hoffmeister, Richard Moxon
Cast:
 Agyness Deyn (*Chris Guthrie*)
 Peter Mullan (*John Guthrie*)
 Kevin Guthrie (*Ewan Tavendale*)
 Ken Blackburn (*Galt*)
 Mark Bonnar (*Reverend Gibbon*)
 Stewart Bowman (*Alec Mutch*)
 Emily-Jane Boyle (*Christine*)
 Ewan Comes, Maely Comes
 (*newborn Guthrie twins*)
 Ann Comfort (*Mrs Hemans*)
 Callum Davies (*Alec Guthrie*)
 Ron Donachie (*Uncle Tam*)
 Tom Duncan (*Mclvor*)
 David Ganly (*Tink*)
 Niall Greig Fulton (*John Brigson*)
 Caelan Fyfe (*toddler Ewan*)
 Jack Greenlees (*Will Guthrie*)
 Gav Guilfoyle (*2nd government man*)
 Linda Duncan McLaughlin (*Auntie Janet*)
 Louise Haggerty (*Marget Strachan*)
 Luca Humphries (*Dod Guthrie*)
 Claire Johnston (*lady passenger*)
 Gilbert Johnston (*James, chauffeur*)
 Bridget McCann (*female guest*)
 Jamie Michie (*Mr Kinloch*)
 John Molloy (*1st government man*)
 Daniela Nardini (*Jena Guthrie*)
 Julian Nest (*Mr Semple*)
 Indigo Paul (*Mollie Douglas*)
 Ian Pirie (*Chae Strachan*)
 Douglas Rankine (*Long Rob*)
 Hugo Ross (*inspector*)
 Antony Strachan (*Munro*)
 Jim Sweeney (*preacher*)
 Simon Tait (*Doctor Meldrum*)
 UK-Luxembourg 2015©
 136 mins
 Digital

* Uncredited

With thanks to

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 Sophie Smith, Edge Hill University

The Terence Davies Estate



said, 'Yes, but if it is violent, I'll just switch it off.' There's a tiny scene when someone goes to put a tie on him and it was just sublime, because it wasn't acting. He's a lovely man. Very funny. And, like me, a real republican. We got on very well. What he did was bring a lot of warmth to that character. And his voice is very melodic, very caressing. He uses mostly the lower register, which is very rich. When he does turn [nasty], it's even more shocking, because it's not expected.

How did Agyness Deyn impress you?

The Hubbards had said, 'These are the people we'd like to come in.' And someone said, 'Agyness Deyn is a model.' I have no idea about that kind of popular culture, about who the top model is. Anyway, I came up the stairs and she was outside the door, and she looked about 11 years old. And she did the most wonderful audition.

Tell me about the idea of using 65mm. I saw the film in Toronto on the IMAX screen and it was just the most enveloping experience. How was that decision presented to you?

It was an idea Florian [Hoffmeister] had given me: 'Do the exteriors on 65mm, and do all the interiors digital.' And that will be the last time that camera will ever be used and those lenses, because no one is going to make film anymore – digital has taken over. They transformed it down to 4K on the digital and it still looks pretty good. When we were shooting I would have said it was 50/50 between film and digital. Now digital is much more responsive to light than film.

We haven't really talked about the Scottishness of Sunset Song. What was your approach to that?

You have to make it understandable. Americans were saying they'd never be able to understand it and it'll have to have subtitles. Well, I'm not going to put subtitles on it. They either understand it or they don't. But we had to do something, because there was a man in one scene who it was impossible to understand – and I wrote the dialogue! So make it a general Scottish accent. And if you use a lot of the poetry of the interior monologue it's very poetic and very beautiful. Gibbon wrote that in received English. I created about 10 per cent of the dialogue. I've got a good imitative ear.

You're very particular about the music you bring in.

It's important. When the music is there to tell you something, it shouldn't be there. It should underline and imply something. When I was 18 and I started to listen to classical music properly, there used to be a man called Alan Keith on the Home Service as it was called then, called Your Hundred Best Tunes and it was all popular classics likes 'The Jewels of the Madonna' and he played 'All in the April Evening' by the Glasgow Phoenix Choir, which was an amateur choir started by a Glaswegian undertaker. I never forgot it. And when I was writing I thought, 'That's got to go in.'

What was the thorniest thing to deal with?

The constant pressure of not having enough money. Because we all took a risk. That was a constant strain, of having to drop scenes or rewrite them. I'll never do that again. It was very unpleasant, but necessary. There was also the physical discomfort of being in Scotland in the cold and the mud. I had to have four Luxembourg actors [to meet funding stipulations] and the cast we had was all Irish. This lad came in who looked exactly like Toulouse-Lautrec. And I said, 'The problem is he's supposed to be Scottish,' and he said, 'Well, my accent isn't very good,' and I said, 'I got that.' They said, 'Well, you've got to have one more actor from Luxembourg that has a line.' The only person left was this lovely gentleman called Hercule, who was playing the undertaker, and I suggested he could say, 'That's all folks!' and that went down like a lead balloon.

Terence Davies interviewed by Nick James, *Sight and Sound*, January 2016