



NEW RELEASES

Wildhood

Two-spirit Mi'kmaw teenager Link (Lewitski) is just discovering – and asserting – his sexuality when his already volatile home life goes off the rails. His abusive father explodes after the cops bust Link and his half-brother Travis. Sparks fly in a chance encounter with a teen drifter, who shares Link's Indigenous roots and offers to help find his supposedly dead mother. Riffing on the road-movie genre, director Hannam charts Link's growing self-awareness, which is deeply connected to the (re)discovery of his heritage. *Wildhood* is an accomplished film driven by Hannam's direction and some amazing young performers – and its equation of the road with the possibility of freedom couldn't have come at a better time.

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A note from the director on the word *Pjila'si*: 'this word guides the heart of *Wildhood*. It's used in modern times to mean welcome. Dig deeper and the root of the meaning that's behind it is there – 'come and take your place'. Language speakers and Elders say this phrase was used when someone came visiting and could be applied when entering a dwelling, or coming to the community itself. It implies belonging, that there is a place for each of us where we fit, and it is always there, waiting.'

When watching Bretten Hannam's *Wildhood*, take note that there are two parallel stories playing out concurrently.

On the surface, *Wildhood* opens at the point of no return for Link, the teenage son of Arvin, his white father and Sarah, his late Indigenous mother. His childhood, rough and troubled. The pressures of youth have created mounting frustration and anger that he aims inwards and outwards. When he discovers a collection of birthday cards from his mother that his father has hidden from him, he realises his mother might still be alive.

He knows nothing about her or her Mi'kmaw people. For him, this unknown is a path he hasn't walked, and he senses that it might be the key to finding his place. Burning all the bridges behind him, he and his young half-brother Travis head out. On this level, *Wildhood* is a road trip film, a buddy film, a coming-of-age film and a coming out film.

Look deeper and the Indigenous perspective comes into focus, noted writer/director Bretten Hannam, 'There's nothing for Link in the trailer park where he has lived his whole life. So he moves forward and "forward" is the woods, the forest, the back roads, the rivers, the lakes. Stepping into that world, he opens himself up to a connection that's always been there, but now, because he's made space, he allows those things to come alive and that relationship with the land to exist. Walking the land is a healing process in itself. Out of that newly opened space, he meets this oddball, handsome, charming, funny guy, Pasmay, who seems like he's got it together. Pasmay knows the Mi'kmaw language, and he recognises something in this other teenager and so offers to help because Pasmay's looking for a family of his own. And so the three, Link, Travis and Pasmay, begin to travel together.

'In traveling to find Link's mother, there is a sharing of hardships and triumphs which in turn creates bonds, something Link had never experienced before with anyone other than Travis,' continues Hannam. 'Along this journey, all the

people Link encounters, from the youngest to the oldest, have something to impart, but not in the Western notion of, “Here’s a lesson.” Gradually, Link learns something more profound: to observe, to experience and to listen. He hears many things about his mother that paints an incomplete picture that’s often at odds with itself. When things are discordant like that, there must be a truth buried somewhere.

‘A key piece of wisdom one Elder shares is that it’s hard to do things alone, and that’s what the journey all comes down to. Pasmay and Link are from different worlds. What they are trying to do, they can’t do alone. It’s hard to do things alone. Together is how communities do things, how families do things,’ Hannam explains. ‘In Mi’kmaw language, there’s a conjugation that reflects two people doing activities together. This would have been more common pre-contact because everywhere you went, into the woods, fishing, hunting, there would be at least two people.’

Wildhood is Bretten Hannam’s second Two Spirit feature, with the character, Pasmay [Mi’kmaw for Benjamin and pronounced ‘Buzz-a-my’] exemplifying that role. ‘Two Spirit is a contemporary pan-Indigenous term that encompasses our Indigenous perspectives of gender and sexuality that interconnects with spirituality and cultural identity. It may include any of the terms such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer. Being Two Spirit also binds the historical collective experience into our identity as Two Spirit. It honours the duality of male/female, non-gendered, and non-conforming expressions of gender. The term can be an expression of one’s sexuality, or gender, or used interchangeably. It encompasses all of that. That is what being Two Spirited is.’ says John R. Sylliboy, Interim Executive Director, Wabanaki Two Spirit Alliance who played Mother Mary in the film. ‘The English term Two Spirit was shared by Myra Laramie in 1990 at the Annual Native American Gay and Lesbian Gathering (now referred to as International Two Spirit Gathering). The term acknowledges the pan-Indigenous LGBTQ identities and non-binary gender identities of Turtle Island (North America).’

All the characters are on a journey of self-discovery, especially Link. Hannam said, ‘Being Two Spirit means your very nature challenges mainstream ideas of gender and sexuality. When you don’t fit into a rigid perception of identity, there is a struggle to break free, shed your skin, and understand yourself. In *L’nuewey* [Mi’kmaw worldview], everything is part of a whole, they are interrelated. Pasmay is a 2S person and he knows this, while Link is someone who is moving into that space, but he doesn’t know the depth or meaning of it yet. He is beginning his journey without that connection and it can take many years. He feels fragmented and unbalanced.’

Recalling his own evolution, Hannam adds, ‘For me, I knew it was something, but I had no name for it. It was just a feeling that I did not fit what any of the labels or definitions said. So I see Link being at that stage. The common thing for all of the different characters’ paths is love – it is always there, but they aren’t ready to see it. Link moves through a fog, trying to find out who he is and where he belongs. Encountering culture, language, and the land help him to heal and rediscover his sense of self, his story. It brings him into that worldview and shows him that he is related to all of the things around him.’

Production notes

WILDHOOD

Directed by: Bretten Hannam
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A Rebel Road Films/Filmshow/Younger Daughter Films/Mazewalker Films production
Produced with the participation of: Téléfilm Canada, Canada Media Fund
Produced with the assistance of: The Government of Novia Scotia, Nova Scotia Film & Television Incentive Fund
Produced with the participation of: Shaw Rocket Fund, CBC Films, Ontario Creates, Rogers Telefund
Production Company: Canadian Film or Video Production Tax Credit Program
International Sales: Films Boutique
Executive Producer: Damon D’Oliveira
Produced by: Bretten Hannam, Gharrett Paon, Julie Baldassi
Post-production Supervisor: Julie Baldassi
Script Supervisor: Matt Little
Casting by: Stephanie Gorin
Written by: Bretten Hannam
Director of Photography: Guy Godfree
Stills Photography: Riley Smith
Visual Effects by: Ghost VFX
Special Effects Supervisor: Gary Coates
Editor: Shaun Rykiss
Production Designer: Michael Pierson
Costume Designer: Emlyn Murray

Key Make-up: Caitlyn Coo
Key Hair: Laurie Pace
Original Music by: Neil Haverty
Music Supervisor: Cody Partridge
Sound Recordist: Andrew Rillie
Re-recording Mixers: Bret Killoran, John Dykstra
Supervising Sound Editor: Bret Killoran
Stunt Co-ordinator: Rene Bishop
Publicist: Cynthia Amsden

Cast

Phillip Lewitski (Link)
Joshua Odjick (Pasmay)
Avery Winters-Anthony
Michael Greyeyes (Smokey)
Joel Thomas Hynes (Arvin)
John R Sylliboy
Savonna Spracklin
Steve Lund (Dale)
Desna Michael Thomas (Desna)

Canada 2021
108 mins

A Peccadillo Pictures Release

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Queen of Glory
From 26 Aug
Official Competition
From 26 Aug
Wildhood
From Fri 2 Sep
Eric Ravilious: Drawn To War
From Mon 5 Sep
Bodies Bodies Bodies
From Fri 9 Sep
In Front of Your Face
From Fri 23 Sep
Flux Gourmet
From Fri 30 Sep

RE-RELEASES

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Jackie Brown
From Fri 16 Sep

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