



PREVIEW

Emily

+ introduction with director Frances O'Connor and actor Emma Mackey

In her directorial debut from her own original screenplay, Frances O'Connor paints a stunningly beautiful and playful portrait exploring the life and relationships that inspired *Wuthering Heights*. Here, Emily Brontë is a rebel and misfit, known as 'the strange one' in her local village. She attempts to escape into wild imaginary worlds with her sisters Charlotte and Anne, though they are starting to feel too old for her games and stories. While her maverick brother Branwell encourages her creativity, Emily's father engages a French tutor in an attempt to focus this free spirit. As Emily, Emma Mackey (*Sex Education*) delivers an incredible performance, cementing her status as one of the most exciting actors on the rise.

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The Vision for 'Emily'

'No coward soul is mine...'

Without Emily Brontë there would be no Cathy or Heathcliff; those iconic, emotional scenes on the windswept Yorkshire moors seared into literary history, forever a part of popular culture (not to mention a stone-cold Kate Bush classic). While much has been written about the Brontë family, relatively little has been recorded about Emily, and the life she must have experienced to have written *Wuthering Heights* and to have become such a respected poet in her short lifetime.

'Emily Brontë is fierce, rebellious, sensitive, creative and magical,' begins *Emily* writer-director Frances O'Connor, who's been evolving this project for the past decade. 'I think she's the most neglected sister. There's a core group of hardcore fans who just love Emily because she's a bit of a rebel and a misfit and she'd probably be a goth or something these days, I think.'

Bringing Emily Brontë to life on screen is Emma Mackey (*Sex Education*, *Death on the Nile*) who notes that, 'Emily was intuitive, inquisitive, observant, imaginative, bold, creative, and quietly intelligent'. The second youngest of the Brontë children, Emily was born in 1818, and lived with her family at Haworth in Yorkshire, with the moors on their doorstep. The family suffered great tragedy with the death of Emily's mother in 1821, followed by the deaths of the two eldest Brontë siblings, Maria and Elizabeth in 1825, who both died from tuberculosis after becoming ill while away at boarding school in Wakefield. Maria lived to just 11 years-old and Elizabeth was 10 years-old when she died.

Charlotte and brother Branwell, along with Anne (the youngest in the family) would all join Emily as writers, having all created stories practically as soon as they learned to read. The surviving three Brontë sisters would all publish their first novels in the same year, 1847; Charlotte with *Jane Eyre*, Emily with *Wuthering Heights*, and Anne with *Agnes Grey*.

In writing the script for *Emily*, O'Connor has blended historical accuracy about the Brontë's lives with Emily Brontë's imagined world. 'What struck me about this script', notes producer Piers Tempest, 'Is that it really imagined and captured the spirit and the essence of how Emily could've been, because it was such a surprise that a book of such intensity and passion (*Wuthering Heights*) was written by her.' Tempest read the script for *Emily* in September 2019 on the plane home from the Toronto Film Festival and was instantly impressed with the world Frances O'Connor had created. 'Emily is such an interesting character, there must have been so much going on in her mind and I think Frances has brilliantly and expertly woven the facts that we know about Emily and the Brontë's, with her imagined process and inspirations for writing the book.'

'More broadly *Emily* is about a woman, a coming-of-age story', says Alexandra Dowling who plays Charlotte Brontë. 'It's about a woman finding herself and her authentic voice and power in the world.' The way the film humanises the Brontës so well and shows their faults was a strong draw for Fionn Whitehead, who plays Branwell Brontë. 'It's unflinching in their portrayals and it's based in fact, but also partly fiction and that gives it a lot of room to play with different things and craft these engaging stories about these people's lives,' he suggests.

'Often, these tellings of Emily Brontë and the sisters' lives are just about the books that they've written,' says Amelia Gething, who plays Anne Brontë. 'This film is showing their actual, day to day lives and obviously it's an imagined life, because we don't know exactly what they went through and what they did, but it covers their life at the parsonage and what they did on the moors – it shows that they can just be fun and silly too, instead of only being seen as serious writers.'

Blending the real and the imagined of Emily Brontë's life has precedent; when she died, her sister Charlotte famously retold Emily's life as seen through her own perspective.

As the actor playing Charlotte Brontë, Alexandra Dowling says she was intrigued by 'the idea of Charlotte being controlling; she (Charlotte) definitely re-edited a lot of Emily's letters after she died. There's still a lot of mystery around the relationship but I think Frances's script really held the complexity of that sibling rivalry and mistrust but also the deep love, adoration and affection they had, too.'

'I really respect Frances,' says Fionn Whitehead. 'I think she's a brilliant director and amazing writer and she's just really lovely as well. She's got the three things I think you need: she's super patient, open to collaboration and to hearing your ideas, and just really enthusiastic.' Oliver Jackson-Cohen, who plays fictional character William Weightman in the film, concurs; 'Frances is an incredible actor, when you work with a director who knows acting so well, there's an immediate trust. This idea has been in Frances' head for the past ten years, so she knows every single scene inside out, there's no fat on the script. Frances would explain it to you and she was so clear and concise. It's been a really interesting working relationship, because she's got so much knowledge and she feels so much about how it's been written.'

Legendary character actress Gemma Jones, who plays Aunt Branwell, already had a close working relationship with Frances O’Connor that she was happy to take further. ‘It’s been lovely working with Frances,’ says Jones. ‘We knew each other from the theatre, she played Maggie the cat in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and I played Big Mama. That was a lovely experience and we got to know each other very well. So, when she called me about this, I thought “oh that will be lovely to be a part of this adventure for her!” because it’s a big challenge that she wrote this beautiful script and is also directing, so it’s been very pleasurable to be part of that.’

As for the logistics of filming amidst Coronavirus, producer Piers Tempest says the whole cast and crew found their way. ‘The pandemic of 2020 / 2021 has affected all films, it’s changed the way we work and the systems in place, and it’s really had an impact on the creative process. Luckily with *Emily*, a lot of the film takes place outside, which is good and we were filming in quite remote locations, so that takes the risk down a little bit when shooting during Coronavirus. This is actually my fourth film that I’ve made during the pandemic, so we know what we’re doing now in terms of our testing processes. It’s really about trying to give as much creative freedom to the director as possible, whilst keeping everyone safe and following the guidelines.’

Production notes

EMILY

Directed by: Frances O’Connor
Production Companies: Tempo Productions Limited, Popara Films
In association with: Arenamedia
Presented by: Ingenious Media
Producers: Piers Tempest, David Barron
Screenplay: Frances O’Connor
Director of Photography: Nanu Segal
Editor: Sam Sneade
Production Designer: Steve Summersgill
Costume Designer: Michael O’Connor
Make-up & Hair Designer: Lucy Cain
Music: Abel Korzeniowski

Cast

Emma Mackey (*Emily Brontë*)
Alexandra Dowling (*Charlotte Brontë*)
Amelia Gething (*Anne Brontë*)
Oliver Jackson-Cohen (*William Weightman*)
Fionn Whitehead (*Branwell Brontë*)
Adrian Dunbar (*Patrick Brontë*)
Gemma Jones (*Aunt Branwell*)

UK/USA 2022
130 mins

Courtesy of Warner Bros.

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Mark Kermode Live in 3D at the BFI
Mon 17 Oct 18:30; Mon 7 Nov 18:30
Gary Oldman in Conversation
Thu 20 Oct 18:00
Global Premiere: Straight 8 2022
Sat 22 Oct 18:00
TV Preview: SAS Rogue Heroes + panel and Q&A with writer Steven Knight and guests (TBA)
Mon 24 Oct 18:15
Doctor Who: The Time Meddler
Sat 29 Oct 12:00

Hellraiser: 35th Anniversary + intro by actors Nicholas Vince and Simon Bamford, with Phil Stokes, BFI Governor/Curator of the Clive Barker Archive
Sun 30 Oct 18:30
Preview: A Bunch of Amateurs + Q&A with Director Kim Hopkins and Special Guests (TBA)
Wed 2 Nov 18:15
Preview: Living + Q&A with director Oliver Hermanus, producer Stephen Woolley and further guests TBA
Mon 7 Nov 20:40
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Fri 11 Nov 20:20

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