

A STARZ LIMITED SERIES

# THE MISSING



## PRODUCTION NOTES

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A riveting and haunting character-driven drama, “The Missing” centers on a desperate eight-year search to find a young boy who suddenly disappears while on holiday in France with his loving parents. While the overarching premise is the actual search for a missing child, the story’s compelling narrative examines the intense psychological and emotional toll that one tragic event can have on a family, a community and even law enforcement, whose professional entanglement takes a very personal turn as they seek answers and justice. The gripping, eight-episode STARZ Limited Series also deals with the raw emotions associated with such terrible loss and explores how obsession, excruciating guilt and the chance to redeem one’s self can cause a person to lose everything and everyone that they’ve ever cared for.



It’s the summer of 2006 and the Hughes family, Tony, Emily and five-year-old Oliver, are left stranded in the quaint and beautiful town of Châlons Du Bois when their car fails unexpectedly. But Tony (played by Irish actor James Nesbitt) and Emily (played by Australian actress Frances O’Connor) choose to embrace the moment and check into a family-run hotel while they wait for repairs to be completed. The town is abuzz with World Cup frenzy and Tony takes Oliver – nicknamed “Olly” – to a local bar where enthusiastic spectators are engrossed in TV screens broadcasting the quarter final match between France and Brazil. Tony and Olly make their way through the exuberant crowd, and as a goal is scored cheers fill the air... and in that moment, Tony realizes his son is gone. Vanished, without a trace.



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The Hughes' lives are turned upside down. Emily is inconsolable; Tony is stricken by a sense of helplessness and yet they must grapple with Olly's disappearance while navigating a country and language that are foreign to them in every sense of the word. A media frenzy ensues, adding to the chaos, as new suspects in the disappearance emerge at every corner.

Executive producer Willow Grylls says, "In the briefest of moments, an environment that felt happy for the Hughes family becomes nightmarish as they attempt to find their son in a country where they neither understand the language nor the rules."

The psychological fallout and exhaustive manhunt unfolds over two different time frames, 2006 and 2014. Viewers are presented with clues from both the past and the present that could lead the family and police to uncover what has happened to young Olly.

Grylls continues: "It is a story that takes place in a world that's familiar which quickly becomes unfamiliar.

That dynamic drives tension through the whole piece. Director Tom Shankland says that he "wanted it to be fundamentally quite authentic and naturalistic so the audience would see the world through the eyes of the characters."



## THE INSPIRATION AND THE ENSEMBLE

"The Missing" was ambitiously written and executive produced by a creative team of two brothers, Harry and Jack Williams, sons of British novelist Nigel Williams. Although best known for their work in comedy, the Williams brothers were inspired to write the thriller after becoming fascinated with a real-life French detective (who worked with their father), who followed one of France's headline-making serial killer cases. Jack Williams explains: "He was a definite inspiration for us, and the way he pursued the case for such a long time and so obsessively sparked the idea of something playing out over two timelines that would impact and inform one another through the series."

"Harry and Jack Williams have built in hooks all the way through so at the end of every episode you are desperate to find out what happens next," explains Willow Grylls.

Tom Shankland recalls: "I just thought the stories were so incredibly compelling... literally the best script reading experience I've ever had." He adds: "And I think the thing that just absolutely hooked me in on the first read, was the structure."

Grylls explains: "'The Missing' is a fascinating puzzle - the whole story unfolds over two timelines, eight years apart. The story switches between past and present throughout - tantalizing us with clues in one time period and then cutting to the other just as we are about to find another clue."



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And in a rare occurrence in series television, all eight episodes were directed by Tom Shankland.

“It’s so rare to have just one set of scripts all the way through from the beginning of the job and then just one director. So you have this fantastic kind of sense of continuity, and you don’t ever have to get used to a new person who wants to tell the story their way,” Frances O’Connor reveals about her experience in working with Shankland at the helm from start to finish. “Tom’s brilliant, too. He’s just got such a handle on this story and I think he’s a real actor’s director.”

The story’s unexpected narrative allows the audience to witness a broad range of perspectives - from a grief-stricken father who won’t lose hope to a heartbroken mother whose

hopelessness puts her on a path to a new life, to a determined detective whose obsession with this crime gives him a life worth living. In “The Missing,” everyone’s futures are forever altered by Olly’s demise. In each case, these characters must deal with close relationships that disintegrate over time because of bad choices, or others that are strengthened in the wake of such an unthinkable tragedy.

“It allows us to deliver a much more thrilling ride for the audience than just following events in a linear way. It also provides us with an opportunity to explore what happened to all these characters during this eight year gap. How has the time changed people?” adds Grylls.

“Once you get half way through the series you realize that this show just isn’t going to go to places you expect - it wrong foots you, the world opens wider and wider, and the eighth and final episode takes us to a place that is mythic, arresting, and painfully human.”

Although Tony and Emily Hughes are the core protagonists of this engrossing tale, “The Missing” features a talented and internationally renowned ensemble cast (British, French, Irish, Australian, Moroccan, and Belgian) whose characters continue to reveal themselves through each of the hour-long installments.

“The writers, Harry and Jack Williams, lay little stories throughout for all our characters. So it’s not just about what happened to Oliver, but it’s also a layered puzzle about character and humanity,” says Grylls.



Mark Walsh, played by Jason Flemyng, is the British police officer on the Oliver Hughes case, who eventually falls in love with Emily. Julien Baptiste, portrayed by Tchéky Karyo, is the lead French investigator who cannot let the case go even after his retirement.

Laurence Relaud, played by Émilie Dequenne, is a local police officer who offers support and kindness to Tony, while Khalid Ziane, played by Saïd Taghmaoui, is a fellow officer who harbors a dark and secretive past. Malik Suri, who is played by Arsher Ali, is a ruthless journalist who will put ethics aside in order to break a story first. Ian Garrett, portrayed by Ken Stott, is a wealthy property developer who unexpectedly offers reward money to aid the search for Oliver, which suggests that he has questionable motives for helping the Hughes family, whom he’s



never met prior to the case. Then there is Vincent Bourg, played by Titus De Voogdt, a young loner who finds himself inextricably bound up in Oliver’s disappearance.

And “The Missing” also brings together a seasoned and talented production team. Executive producers are: Willow Grylls, Charlie Pattinson, and Elaine Pyke for New Pictures, John Yorke for Company Pictures (part of the all3media group), Harry and Jack Williams for Two Brothers Pictures, Colin Callender for Playground Entertainment, Eurydice Gysel for Czar TV and Jan Vrints. “The Missing” is produced by New Pictures and Company Pictures in association with Two Brothers Pictures and Playground Entertainment and will air on BBC One in the UK in the fall of 2014. all3media international retains all US rights not obtained by Starz.



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### TOGGLING TIME AND CREATING A SENSE OF PLACE

One of the greatest challenges with bringing “The Missing” to life was shifting seamlessly between the events set during the summer of 2006 and those that took place in the winter of 2014.

With the lapse of time, came the opportunity to create a steady sense of dread and intrigue, laying the groundwork for a very distinct style of storytelling. Harry and Jack were able to add depth to their characters by exploring what has happened to them in the years between Oliver’s disappearance and the present day. As a result, viewers are exposed to the many layers of emotion that the characters experience over the passage of time. It has been said that “time heals all wounds” but this is a case of a missing child and whether these two

protagonists choose to keep their vigil in quiet solitude or in the public eye, the hole in their hearts is inevitable and their desire for closure is evident in each and every scene.

The Williams brothers set the story of Oliver’s original abduction in 2006 with the World Cup as a backdrop, so that they could contrast a single, personal tragedy against the excitement of a nation coming together to watch a monumental sporting event. Although these two events are used to contextualize the time period, they also illustrate the extreme highs and lows that make up the human experience. Harry Williams said: “As we moved back and forth between 2006 and 2014, we had to ask the right questions and keep things interesting without confusing viewers. We wanted to make sure there was a real reason to leave each time period - you leave it just when you don’t want to, but not so often that you fail to invest.”

For the production team, creating the juxtaposition between past and present was an interesting challenge. With only eight years separating the incident from present day, changes in makeup or wardrobe wouldn’t be significant enough to exist on their own. Producers couldn’t treat a show set in 2006 as a period piece so the team collaborated on how to create atmospherics that would reference the differences between 2006 and 2014 without being too heavy-handed.

As a result, “The Missing” took advantage of the seasons: 2006 was shot during the hot, steamy summer months and was defined by harsher light, while 2014 was filmed during the cold and dreary winter season creating an entirely different visual palette.



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Shankland said: “We were very fortunate that we could shoot in the appropriate seasons. Our great director of photography, Ole Bratt Birkeland, employed a few very subtle tricks to enhance the differences – we shot 2006 with slightly older, warmer lenses to enhance colors and skin tones.” Bratt Birkeland elaborates on shooting the present day: “For 2014, we decided to use only HMIs which are daylight balanced and much more modern lenses which are a bit sharper and generally cooler. That naturally means everything will have a slightly colder feel and then you combine it with shooting in wintertime. Even if the sun came out, it felt like a cold winter sun rather than a sunny summer day.” Shankland adds: “These are things that we wanted the audience to feel rather than notice.”

Second, in order to achieve the desired effect, production needed to film the scenes out of sequential order, like reading the last page of a novel first.

Tchéky Karyo explains what it was like to film his role of detective Julien Baptiste alongside James Nesbitt who plays Tony Hughes, out of chronological order: “When we meet the first time on screen, after having shot for weeks together bonding and finding our rhythm, I have to look at him [in scenes set in 2006] like I don’t know him. Investigators want to try every possibility in a case; they need to check if the parents are not involved in the abduction. I question him, poke him and try things to see if he will stay steady and watch how he is reacting to my questions. It’s interesting to forget all of the past we built over two months of shooting.”

Because “The Missing” is set for the most part in France, subtitles are used selectively throughout the series intentionally - sometimes they are provided - but at times they are not. The use of French within the English-speaking drama allows the audience to truly experience Emily and Tony’s confusion and frustration in trying to find answers about their son’s disappearance.

Producers also relied on wardrobe, hair and make-up, to play an important role in setting the scenes and differentiating between past and present.

For some characters, time has been unkind. For others, there is a more deliberate change of image, driven by what events have transpired.

Tom Shankland says, “When developing each look for the characters, the first thing I did was ask who these people were at each of these periods in their life. Did they want more or less attention? Did they care what they looked like anymore? What would they wear? Characters who are desperately trying to leave the person they were behind might have a different haircut and those who want to hang onto their former selves might become a slightly more degraded, deconstructed version over time.”

“Tony walks a little more upright in 2006. He is clearly more of a wreck in 2014. It is often quite subtle,” Shankland adds. But for Emily, the change is more obvious. “The loss of Oliver changes her in every way. She looks and acts radically different in each of the two time periods.”

Frances O’Connor recalls that “it was great fun to play Emily in 2006 - she’s a lot more open, free, vulnerable and more reactive. But when we are reintroduced to Emily in 2014, she’s a lot more closed down, reserved and appears distant. Towards the end she does start to engage more. We’ve made her look different too, with different hairstyles and wardrobe, which really helped to express that.”

Production designer Paul Cripps explains, “We wanted some really obvious signs that you’re in one period and not the other. But we also wanted to create moments when you could feel slightly confused as to what period you were in, then suddenly



you realize it’s one particular time period because of a prop or because of what’s happening in the scene. That’s quite a nice thing to play with.”

And since the locations were essentially another character in the series, the casting extended to choosing a city that could provide the perfect backdrop for the storytelling. Producers of “The Missing” chose Brussels, Belgium for primary filming where they could recreate the beauty of rural Northern France. Willow Grylls believes that choosing Belgium as key filming location was crucial to creating the visual thread that ultimately defines the series and makes it a visceral experience for viewers.





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Although filming in southern Belgium had various creative benefits, there were some significant obstacles that the production team had to overcome. For instance, road signs, and shop fronts had to be adjusted and designers had to adjust to buying props from local dealers or shops, since prop rental houses are non-existent in Belgium. Many of the exteriors and some interior scenes were shot in the small municipality of Huy, primarily at the Hotel L'Eden. Shankland was determined to shoot in authentic locations wherever feasible. In fact, over the five months of shooting, only two weeks of production actually took place on a soundstage.

He explains: "Although 'The Missing' is a thriller, I wanted the worst things to happen in daylight, in very familiar spaces - it is about the horrors lurking in everyday life. You get more tension out of keeping a sense of the ordinary. The more the look and feel resembled a commonly experienced holiday, the more chilling the piece would feel."

For most of the cast, filming in Belgium meant being away from family and friends, but allowed them to fully immerse themselves in the intense and taut atmosphere necessary for the drama.

James Nesbitt, who plays Tony, says, "It's great to film in Europe and away from the UK because that really helps with the authenticity. It's difficult to be away from home but sometimes, when you want to immerse yourself in something like this, you have to be away from your family."

Overall, everyone agrees that such a vast international experience was a huge advantage creatively. As Arsher Ali

(who plays ambitious journalist Malik Suri) notes: "It was so interesting to see the different styles and idiosyncrasies that each of these international actors brought to their respective scenes. You forget sometimes that there are a thousand-and-one ways of doing something."

### THEMES EXPLORED IN "THE MISSING"

Every scene in "The Missing" is an examination of obsession according to Harry Williams: "Everybody in the show has a clear obsession. Tony is obsessed with finding his son, Malik is obsessed with forwarding his career, Julien has an obsession with this unsolved case and his collection of bees, the lead case officer Ziane is obsessed with hiding the secrets of his past, Mark has an obsession with Emily, and so on. Everyone's got something they're chasing and those things knock against each other." Tom Shankland notes that after eight long years, "Tony never gives up the quest to find out what has happened to Oliver, consumed by new leads and determined to find out the fate of his beloved son. When Julien and Tony are reunited in 2014, Julien's character seems equally obsessed as Tony by this one failure that he's been trying to live with for the last eight years."

The structure of the 'The Missing' plays out as a suspenseful, psychological thriller; however, the essence of the story lies within each character's emotional truth, which is revealed throughout the story and may transform drastically at times, depending on their experiences over the years.



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“There’s so many intriguing questions raised by why certain characters are the way they are in the present. What happened? How did they get there?” says Shankland.

The different time periods also provide a framework to explore the evolution of two completely different relationships: the marriage between Tony and Emily, and the relationship between Tony and lead detective Julien.

Tony is initially interrogated as a suspect in Oliver’s disappearance, thus clashing with Julien. However, eight years later when Tony discovers a new lead, the since retired Julien chooses to return to the investigation and their relationship evolves from suspicion and distrust, to a strong friendship grounded in mutual respect and admiration.

James Nesbitt says: “We don’t spend that much time together in 2006 and the time we do have is intense, aggressive, and confrontational...Often the shadow of suspicion first falls on the parents and you have to cope with that whilst going through the pain. Their relationship seems to be a strong mutual antagonism at the beginning, particularly from Tony directed towards Julien.”

He adds: “In 2014, that relationship starts off quite frostily when Tony comes back with a new clue and Julien becomes re-involved in the case. Their relationship then spills into what is hopefully a believable and beautiful admiration. It was interesting playing one relationship, with Emily, starting well and disintegrating and then another one, with Julien, starting terribly but then blossoming.”



While coping with the loss and mystery surrounding her only son, Emily also changes and adapts to moving on with her life. Jack Williams says: “She [Emily] is someone who is approached by people who have a perception of what she should be and what she should be feeling. People think you have to act a certain way or you should never leave your house or that you should dress in black. They think that if you’re not doing those things then you’re not grieving properly and you’re a terrible person.

That is Emily’s dilemma. She’s attempting to move on with life but only to the extent and capacity that she can, but the world won’t let her move on any more quickly than she’ll let herself.”

“I think she’s somebody who evolves during the story, and I think the person that she is at the end is somebody quite different from the beginning. I guess Emily at the start is someone who’s led quite a protected life and she’s quite a sensitive person. Her husband, Tony, has a very kind of protective role with her. As the story progresses because of what’s happened she gains a lot of strength,” Frances O’Connor reflects on portraying Emily.

Jack Williams said: “All the dark places in the show are mostly a series of decisions that seemed excusable in the moment. Everyone, even the villains, are fully rounded people that you believe and understand to a certain extent. Even if you don’t like what you see, they feel real and that’s a whole lot scarier... One of the big questions we ask in this show is - are people truly capable of change?

Without question, “The Missing” is much more than just a procedural, it explores the price one must pay for their past indiscretions, what’s at stake when secrets are held too close to the vest, and attempts to answer the age old question of whether or not we truly know anyone-most importantly, ourselves.

