

# THE BALLAD OF BILLY McCRAE



## PRESS PACK

a CYMRU FILMS / STERLING PICTURES production

## TAGLINE

They Were Glad To See Him Die.

## SHORT SYNOPSIS

CHRIS BLYTHE returns to his home town in Wales after losing a fortune in Canada.

Billy's daughter ELEN is a volatile and charismatic woman. She meets Chris and they fall in love.

Billy is a dangerous man. His daughter Elen is a damaged and dangerous woman.

And Chris finds himself torn between love and hate...

## LONG SYNOPSIS

CHRIS BLYTHE returns to his home town in Wales after losing a fortune in Canada. Once he was a millionaire, a big shot; now he is reduced to working as a labourer in a local quarry where his boss, BILLY McCRAE, is a brutal and much feared man.

Chris falls in love with Billy's daughter, ELEN. And meanwhile, Billy takes a shine to him and promotes him.

Chris discovers that Billy is being cheated by one of his suppliers, MCKINLEY; and Billy brutal beats him to ensure obedience. This is the measure of the man. But Chris is confident he can handle Billy.

He is wrong. Billy dupes Chris over a business deal. And that same day, Chris returns to Elen and finds she has been beaten up by her father. Chris realises there is only one way to resolve this; and he murders Billy McCrae.

On his wedding day, however, Chris discovers he has been duped by Elen. Billy never beat him; most of her stories about him were lies. She has duped Chris into killing her father; and now she is a rich orphan.

Chris is appalled and tries to leave her, saying he hates her. Elen chases after him – she cannot bear to lose him – and in a crazy rage she hits him with a rock.

On the day of his own wedding, in sight of his father and mother, Chris Blythe falls to the ground and dies.

Murdered by the daughter of Billy McCrae.

## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

'The Ballad Of Billy McCrae' is a film about damage and dysfunction, a film about flawed people, emotionally stunted people, people who can't see far beyond their own desires, dreams and greed:

Billy is a tough old bastard, he fled an abusive and hard upbringing in Port Glasgow to forge a small Empire from the stone in Wales, but despite his escape he's carried that baggage, that inability to express emotion or feeling or moral judgment with him and in turn he damages his daughter with his own human failings.

Over the years Elen has been shaped and distorted by Billy's dysfunction. Elen lies and manipulates in order to escape the oppression of her father, but in Elen's mind her lies are true, such is the sociopathic world she has forged since childhood. Elen longs for a new life, a life free of her Father and she may do anything to achieve it.

Chris has come back home, a successful business in Canada is now nothing more than a painful memory, his Empire is dust. Dead and gone. But a grifter is always a grifter and Chris sees potential and success in Billy. Chris may not be all he seems however - there's violence and criminality lingering in the dark cloud that he's desperately trying to leave behind him on the other side of the world.

The three are a terrible combination, a combination of sociopathic people who are doomed to hurt each other, a combination that will prove as destructive as it is desperate and dysfunctional.

The film is set in Port Talbot, a small Welsh steel town that is located in the beautiful liminal, costal landscape of South West Wales. But there is nothing beautiful about this town, the steel works spew dangerous clouds of carcinogenic poison ever upwards, day and night, year in year out. And then somebody decided to pipe the M4 through the centre of town. It's a town crippled by austerity and uncertainty. A once proud jewel of industry fallen on hard times.

For me the film is part thriller, part melodrama, part tragedy and part Western, but is very much a film about real people and the ugly and cruel trappings of the human condition. I aimed to craft a fly on the wall Jacobean tragedy for a post-brexit Tory Britain; there's a cruelty to this world, a selfishness, and we watch people infected by all this unravel and turn on each other to gain something that will never be as fulfilling as they imagine.

I chose a gritty hand-held style but we also shot with degraded 70's prime lenses, they add a beauty to the footage, natural flares and light leaks. And visually I wanted to replicate our world where there's dirt and noise in the grain and in the shadows.

The film is a slow burn disintegration of our three central characters, they begin to choke, to fall apart as their personal needs and desires become ever more pronounced, ever more needy.

- Chris Crow

## LEAD ACTOR'S STATEMENT

I think this has potential to be a little classic.

I play the wicked king, who reigns over his kingdom with a rod of iron. And he's banished his queen to the wilderness and he's left with his princess daughter whom he loves dearly but he can't in any way begin to show it because he was abused as a child by the old king who was a real bastard. And then suddenly, into the frame comes a beautiful handsome prince, who sweeps the princess off her feet and they fall in love. So the king thinks: "okay, I think he's a potential future king". So he begins to train him up and see if he's good enough to be the king. And he tests him. He tests him at every point to see if he's got the same mettle as he has. But unbeknownst to him, his daughter, the wicked princess, is telling lies to the handsome prince about me, about the fact that I beat her, that I've changed her life, that I've trashed everything about her. So he decides to kill me. And he does. When the prince finds out that the princess has been lying he's seriously angry, so she has to kill him as well. It's a Jacobean Tragedy. It's a melodrama. And it's absolutely wonderful.

Everyone lies in this. It's about secrets and lies. It's about dysfunctional human beings, and do we ever tell the truth to one another?

When I read the script I thought this a real challenge, from a personal perspective of playing Billy. He goes through changes, from being potentially really evil, to being funny, charming. Those challenges are really difficult to pull off. You have to have integrity. And that's what I found the most challenging about it. But I knew it was a cracking part. My challenge was to find little chunks of humanity to let out. There is no person who is 100% evil. Nelson Mandela said: "No child is born to hate". They're born to love. Therefore they have to be taught to hate. Who taught Billy to hate? Where do his demons come from? Where was his life twisted in the past to make him the brutal man he is today?

- David Hayman (Billy McCrae)

## WRITER'S STATEMENT

This is a story about three extraordinary and highly imperfect human beings. It is about greed, and love, and hope, and hopes horribly crushed.

The Ballad of Billy McCrae is set in the grotty, smoky, wonderful South Wales harbour town where I was born. And it was created out of a passion for a certain kind of film. Movies like *Body Heat* and *Double Indemnity*, *The Killers* and *Build My Gallows High*. These are thrillers that are all about people, tormented souls, with consciences that are sullied and betrayed. They do what movies do best; they put a spotlight on characters in crisis to create a suspenseful and toxic brew of emotion.

One of the greatest films in this tradition is Visconti's *Ossessione*, based (without permission) on James M. Cain's noir novel *The Postman Always Rings Twice*. *Ossessione* is the perfect film noir, in that it doesn't try to be a film noir. It simply is what it is: a dark story about real people, which lingers on landscapes and celebrates the quirky richness of the characters in its world. I love the fact that there are no good guys in Visconti's movie – just flawed people doing terrible things and regretting it.

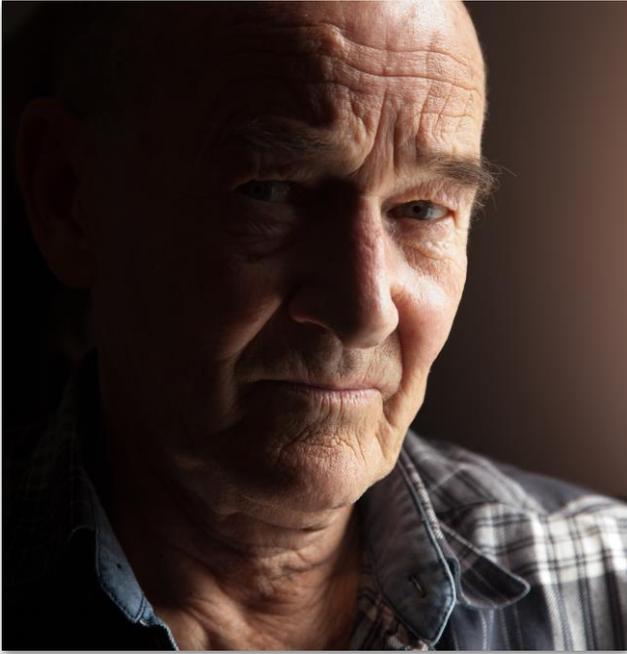
The Ballad of Billy McCrae is all about flawed people doing terrible things and regretting them. Even Billy himself, that 'controlling bastard' of a man, hides bitter regrets about the way he has raised his family. And although Chris sees himself as a hero – is he, really?

We all wanted this film to be the kind of thriller that is not a police procedural, and doesn't have 'tropes'. It's about murder as it really happens: messy, angry, tragic.

It's also a murder ballad – inspired by songs like 'Stagger Lee' (which we feature in the film in the classic version originally sung by blues singer Mississippi John Hurt), Johnny Cash's '*Folsom Prison Blues*', Dixie Chicks' '*Goodbye Earl*' and Nick Cave's '*Henry Lee*'. These songs are folk art. Tales of murder and brutality with a catchy melody - and a heart of ice.

- Philip Palmer

## CAST BIOGS



DAVID HAYMAN “Billy McCrae”

One of the UK’s best known faces, David is a Scottish actor and director known for his diverse film and television appearances including in over 100 movies. Hayman's break came when he was cast as convict-turned-sculptor Jimmy Boyle in the biopic *A Sense Of Freedom*. He is best recognised for his roles as Pavel in **The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas** and as Malcolm in *Sid and Nancy*. His other major credits include recent roles in *Fishermen’s Friends*, *Blinded By The Light* and *Finding Your Feet*. Other major credits include *The Taylor of Panama*, *My Name is Joe*, *Rob Roy*, *Ordinary Decent Criminal*, *The Jackal* and *Hope*

and *Glory*. He is also known for his recurring role as DCS Mike Walker in the TV drama *Trial & Retribution*. He won the OCIC Award at the 1990 Berlin International Film Festival for his work directing the film *Silent Scream*.



SIANAD GREGORY “Elen McCrae”

Born and raised in South Wales, Sianad studied dance and musical theatre and worked for some of the biggest names in the dance world and for recording artists such as Kylie Minogue, Nicole Scherzinger and Olly Murs. Landing acting roles in *Lesbian Vampire Killers* and the box office hit *StreetDance 3D*, she has continued to find success in her acting career with numerous roles in TV and film including the Netflix drama *The Angel of Darkness* and the BBC3 comedy *In My Skin*. Sianad

roles in

also took to the London stage for the first time in 2019, earning rave reviews for I Know My Husband Loves Me.



### IAN VIRGO “Chris Blythe”

Acting from the age of eight, Ian’s big break came with Ridley Scott’s Black Hawk Down. He has recently finished filming Just Noise with Oscar nominated director Davide Ferrario. His many credits include The Raven, Spooks, Caught In The Act, Clubbed, and Rise of the Footsoldier. Ian is the youngest person to have been accepted to The Royal Academy of Music and in 2018.

## BIOGRAPHIES

### Director - CHRIS CROW

Chris Crow is a BAFTA nominated Welsh writer/director who has directed five feature films to date; Devil's Bridge, Panic Button, The Darkest Day and, prior to The Ballad of Billy McCrae, The Lighthouse. Chris completed his debut feature film Devil's Bridge – a stark, brutal thriller in 2010, it has been dubbed 'A British Deliverance' by critics. Chris then directed the thriller Panic Button in late 2010 which was premiered at Film 4 Frightfest in 2011 and was described by Sky Movies as 'British horror at its bloody best'. In 2012 Chris directed Viking: The Darkest Day – a brutal tale set against the first Viking attack on Lindisfarne in 793 A.D. In late 2015 Chris directed the period thriller The Lighthouse, based on the notorious Smalls Island incident of 1801. The film was released in Summer 2016 and has recently been nominated for 5 BAFTA Cymru awards: Director – Chris Crow, Actor – Mark Lewis Jones, Editing – John Gillanders, Photography and Lighting – Alex Metcalfe, and Dogs Of Annwn – Special and Visual Effects, Titles and Graphic Identity. Chris is currently in post for the neo-noir thriller The Ballad Of Billy McCrae. Written by Philip Palmer and Produced by Michael Riley. Chris has developed an reputation as an exciting director delivering rich character-driven storytelling with a highly visual style.

### Writer - PHILIP PALMER

Philip is a screenwriter, radio dramatist and science fiction and fantasy novelist. His previous film credits include Guantanamo (2007), directed by Vicente Peñarrocha; and The Many Lives of Albert Walker (2002), directed by Harry Hook and starring John Gordon Sinclair, a BBC/Alliance Atlantis production, which was shortlisted for the Gemini Awards of 2003. His numerous radio credits include Invasion (shortlisted for the BBC Audio Drama award), The Faerie Queene, starring Simon Russell Beale, The King's Coiner starring Ian McDiarmid and Keeping the Wolf Out, a Hungarian Cold war thriller currently on its fourth series. His SFF novels include Debatable Space, Version 43, Morpho and Hell on Earth.

### Producer - MICHAEL RILEY

Multi award-winning producer Michael Riley has produced more than twenty-five feature films since establishing Sterling Pictures in 1995 as well as being one of the youngest ever producers of a major BBC serial, the highly acclaimed family saga In A Land Of Plenty. His feature films include rites-of-passage drama Boston Kickout (Andrew Lincoln, John Simm); romcom Loop (Andy Serkis, Susannah York); thrillers Out Of Depth (Rita Tushingham, Isla Fisher) and Sugarhouse (Ashley Walters); black comedy Lava (Leslie Grantham, Tom Bell); horror film Vampire Diary (Winner: Best Film Milan International Film Festival), Outlanders (Winner: Best Film Braga Cine IFF and CinePobre IFF); war drama Chosen (Harvey Keitel) and controversial horror/thriller film The Seasoning House (winner Critics' Prize 2013 Fantasporto). His critically acclaimed 2018 sailing drama Crowhurst was distributed by StudioCanal and his 17th century gothic horror Heretiks (Michael Ironside, Clare Higgins) was in UK cinemas in 2019. He also produced the documentary China's Wild West (Sundance) and the Turner Prize nominated Waiting. Alongside The Ballad Of Billy McCrae, he is also busy completing the comedy Sideshow, set for international release in 2020 and has numerous new feature films in the pipeline. Michael has worked with most major UK distributors and international sales agents.

# CREDITS

a CYMRU FILMS / STERLING PICTURES production

a CHRIS CROW film

DAVID HAYMAN

SIANAD GREGORY

ROSS O'HENNESSY

and IAN VIRGO

THE BALLAD OF BILLY McCRAE

casting director CAROLYN McLEOD

original music by MARK RUTHERFORD

costume designer JESSICA KNIGHT

hair and makeup designer CHARLOTTE POWLES

edited by CHRIS CROW

production designer OLLIE KELLY

director of photography ALEX METCALFE

line producer THEA CAMPBELL

co-producers PHILIP PALMER TAMSIN WILEY-SCOTT

executive producers JOE CADDELL MIKE GAHAN JACK MACLACHLAN KIERON WILKINSON

produced by MICHAEL RILEY

written by PHILIP PALMER

directed by CHRIS CROW

	CA ST	
	(in ord er of app ear anc e)	
Chris Blythe		IAN VIRGO
Mary Blythe		KERRY JOY STEWART
Jack Blythe		PHIL HOWE
Harry		GERALD TYLER
Tom Carpenter		ROSS O'HENNESSY
Billy McCrae		DAVID HAYMAN
Mike		DAVID CONSTANT
Elen McCrae		SIANAD GREGORY
Dorien		TIM DUTHRANE
Sharon		SOPHIE CARMEN-JONES
McKinley		CHRISTOPHER PATRICK NOLAN
Rhian		CARLI DE'LA HUGHES
1st Assistant Director		CHRISTIAAN FABERIJE DE JONGE
2nd Assistant Director / 1st AD (Daily)		JASMIN GREENLAND
3rd Assistant Director / 2nd AD (Daily)		JORDAN COOLBEAR
Associate Editor		ST JOHN O'RORKE GBFTE
Script Supervisor		LEANNE WALLACE
Assistant Production Co-ordinator		EDD WOOD

Production Assistants	ELLE FIRDOUZ
	JOE BUTLER
	CONNOR YOUNG
Locations Researcher	GEORGE CORNELIUS
Casting Assistant	MATT SHEPPARD
1st Assistant Camera	JAKE DUNCAN
2nd Assistant Camera	ISSY SOOLE
Camera Trainees	JAMES WILLMOT
	JAMES FIRTH
Drone Pilot	WILL DAVIES
Steadicam Operator	CHARLIE COWPER
Sound Mixer	NEIL SHERMAN
Boom Operator	ELLIOTT GREY
Art Director	TOMMIMA LLOYD-WINDER
Art Department Assistant /Graphic Designer	ROSIE CARMICHAEL
Costume Assistant	KATIE TAYLOR
Costume Assistant (Daily)	AIDAN GILLINGHAM
Hair & Makeup Assistant	CHLOE BOND
Fight Coordinator	GERALD TYLER
Gaffer	SERGEJS BOZOKS
Electricians	DAVID LINDLEY

		MATTHEW JOINER
	FA CIL ITI ES	
Camera & Grip Equipment		UPSIDEDOWN FILMS
Lighting Equipment		VISUAL IMPACT
Insurance		PAUL HILLIER
Communications		SOUND + MOTION
	VIS UA L EF FE CT S	
VFX Facility		DOGS OF ANNWYN FILMS
	AU DI O PO ST PR OD UC TION	
ADR & Mixing Studio		AUDIO UPROAR
Sound Supervisor		MATT COSTER
Dialogue Editor		BEN WOOD
Music Supervisor		TAMSIN WILEY-SCOTT
	PR OD UC TION SE	

	RVI CE S	
Insurance Services		INTEGRO
Banking Services		BARCLAYS BANK
Post Production Script		PS-POSTSCRIPT
	SP ECI AL TH AN KS	
Pat & Linda Flockhart		Ann Bostock
Bharat Poojara		Paul Bostock
David John		Nigel Burt
Pennywell Studios		Archie Tait
Solalights		Marc Darcy
Chris Hopes		Rob Butler
Fiona Francombe at The Bottle Yard		Dan Marbrook
Marc Jobst		Carlo Dusi
Carola Ash		Kwesi Dickson
Bristol Film Office		Freya Billington at UWE Film
	Ott o Kar hun en & Kyl e Sm ith at Tar ma c Tra din g Ltd at Dur	

	nford Quarry	
	Filmed on location in Port Talbot and Bristol	
	The story, all names, characters and incidents portrayed in this production are fictitious. No identification with actual persons	

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