



Announcement

“First ever movie featuring leading actor who died before filming began”

**World premiere 13th Raindance Film Festival,
London**

Cineworld, Shaftesbury Avenue (UGC Trocadero)
Wednesday October 5 2005, 5.30pm

Molehill Productions have just completed **Sam Jackson's Secret Video Diary**, a unique British movie that has been four years in the making.

The film takes the form of a television broadcast documentary about the search for a missing person, Sam Jackson. After her disappearance, videotapes were discovered for a reality TV project that clearly went wrong. Will they lead to the truth as to what really happened?

The film is fiction, but with a remarkable true story behind it - one where art and life entwine. It stands as a permanent tribute to a remarkable person that inspired the impossible.

Posy Miller, a struggling but extremely talented actress who played the eponymous Sam Jackson, filmed some entries for a fake TV video diary in the spring and summer of 2002 - promotional material never intended for broadcast. *"Although we'd only met her at the audition in April, we all felt we'd known her for years",* writer / director Guy Rowland reflected later. *"Posy threw herself into our bizarre experiment, making this flawed character really endearing. And it worked because, I suppose, ultimately Posy was so endearing. And fiercely intelligent. And sexy... she was just one of those people that had this massive positive impact on everyone she knew".*

In the story, Sam Jackson has become frustrated with her unfulfilling lot in life. She decides to put a lonely-hearts ad in a newspaper and, telling no-one, keep a speculative video diary of her experiences for TV. As the weeks go by however, her laughs and high jinks segue into darker territories. The diary becomes a look at the seductive qualities of reality TV, and what it can do to those who are looking for more out of life but are vulnerable under the surface. *"It seemed relevant back in 2002, but three years down the line a lot of people are asking the same questions we were. Big Brother's become this monster now. Where does it end? There is finally a feeling that, for broadcasters, claiming enthusiasm on the part of the participants is not enough."*

Hoping to get a commission to make the series and have people believe it might be real, Molehill edited together snapshots of the entire story featuring Posy, who had signed a non-disclosure agreement. By the end of 2002, their promotional

tape was gathering a lot of interest from the industry - *"where did you find her?!"* was so often said of the unknown actress.

In mid-December 2002, 5 months pregnant with her first child, Posy Miller suddenly fell ill. Barely a week later, on Christmas Eve, she died of acute leukaemia, aged 31. *"We were all totally, completely devastated"*, Guy Rowland explained. *"It was unbelievable that she'd just gone - I didn't know cancer could act so quickly. It sounds a cliché, but she really was so full of life, and love. You know... why her?"*

Rowland and associate producers Deborah Garrett and Chris Healey attended the funeral, knowing virtually no-one. It was a day made more surreal by the knowledge that, mirroring fiction, her closest friends and parents had no idea what Posy had spent much of the past few months working towards. Inevitably, watching her tape subsequently was an emotional experience for them all, including for her closest friend and fellow-actor, Jonathan Clarkson.

"When it got to the stage that I could look at it in terms of her performance - and I can't honestly remember when that happened - I think pretty much the only thought that struck me was that it was by far the best screen work she had ever done", Clarkson revealed later. But the hard truth was that Sam Jackson had died with Posy - although much had been filmed, it certainly wasn't a complete story. Primarily a stage actress, no-one would ever see her best surviving work.

Eventually, writer / director Guy Rowland hit upon a idea - use the tapes as the centrepiece of a new film about the search for a missing person. *"It was one of those eureka moments"*, said Rowland, *"on platform 2 of Charing Cross station as I remember. It all just fell into place, bang bang bang... how we could use the tapes, fill the story gaps, how it could now be an end in itself and even be a metaphor... you know, the search for a missing person versus our disparate search I suppose, the search for what really happens after death, if anything. All these thoughts came at once, somehow."*

With the enthusiastic backing of Posy's family and friends, the script developed throughout 2003. With the lead actor having already died, this was a huge challenge, breaking all the rules of how to write stories. *"We were always driven by the idea that it had to not be just sentiment - this had to stand on its own two feet"*, Rowland continued. *"It was worse than pointless making a terrible film that didn't hang together - what kind of a tribute would that be? And we really tied ourselves up in knots reconciling these old bits of funny, sexy or dramatic tapes with this totally new story thread... this sort of thing is never supposed to work and collectively we nearly went mad doing it. It was like reverse engineering a gigantic puzzle, but I always believed that if we worked for long enough, we'd find the solution - the missing person angle just seemed so right."*

"It was incredibly rewarding, real hairs-on-the-back-of-the-neck-stuff sometimes, giving us far more than fiction. We had this one story hole we simply couldn't write ourselves out of and I thought 'this is it, we're totally stuffed, we need this bit of Sam, we never filmed it and we can't write ourselves out of it. Oh well,

that's that'. And then one day I remembered Posy's incredible audition tape... I ran home, my hands were shaking as I rifled through my old tapes, and there it was - exactly what we needed, one of her absolute best performances too. A bit spooky, really."

Eventually the script was ready, and filming began in 2004 with an experienced documentary crew, giving the movie an authentic feel which also contrasts with Posy's rough camcorder footage. Some of Posy's actor friends that she especially admired took leading roles in the film, including Jonathan Clarkson. *"We were all there because of one person and that person was gone", he says of the experience, "the one link between us all had been taken away before I'd even met these people - what would she have made of all this?"*

In a remarkable display of good faith, many organisations waived their fees for the small production, including the police, the BBC, MOTO and Ealing council. Even BBC TV's bad boys of Children's TV, Dick and Dom, played themselves in cameo appearances - their feature film debut. And the highlight was the involvement of the National Missing Person's Helpline, who treated Sam as a real case, mocking up posters and providing interviews.

After reshoots and post-production, the film was finally completed in 2005 - probably the first ever feature film whose leading actor died before principal photography began. *"I'm incredibly proud of it, and everyone who put so much into it", says Guy Rowland. "It's been a unique experience with a unique set of challenges, but we've had some amazing anecdotal reaction from people who have seen it. And in the end, I've got the letters from Posy's family, saying what it means to them that we did this. It might sound trite, but that is genuinely worth more to me than anything - what can you say when you get a letter like that?"*

The 13th Raindance Film Festival in September 2005 will be the film's world premiere. *"Raindance feels the right place to launch the movie" says Rowland, also the film's producer. "It's British, and it champions that independent spirit we've embodied. Not many films have broken quite as many rules as we have in getting there! The performances are - I think - amazing. As ever, Posy is our inspiration - she had absolute unshakeable faith in the project, and that was infectious. We want to show the world what it missed."*

-

CONTACT GUY ROWLAND:

guy@molehillproductions.co.uk
0775 384 0579

September 06, 2005, Molehill Productions