

'Respite' key creatives interviews

Contents:

1. Interview with Director Joe Stringer
2. Interview with Director of Photography Cristian Ionuț Necula
3. Interview with Editor Adam Hovell
4. Interview with Producer Susannah Creasy

Joe interview

What was your favourite part of making *Respite*?

I enjoy each part of the process for what it is. I think, when you're writing and directing you can kind of enjoy each element of it separately for what they are and then move onto the next one. So, I always feel - moving from writing into pre-production, into production, into cutting - I'm always ready to move onto the next one when I'm getting to the end of the last one, and I can enjoy each one when I'm in it for what they are.

What was your favourite moment on set?

My favourite moment on set, I think was the first scene that we shot on the first day. It was quite an emotional scene to start with. It's when our main character Charlotte puts on an old CD that reminds her of her and her husband. I think bringing Kathryn, our actress, into the space and cueing up this quite emotional scene - I remember the first rehearsal we did and Kathryn's responding to this music, and I think I suddenly saw the character in front of me and it was quite overwhelming in a way. Taking it from a very personal origin and creating it on the page and in my mind, and then suddenly seeing it in front of me for the first time... I found it very emotional.

What was the most challenging moment for you?

It was a scene involving a live bird and Kathryn, where she finds it outside. There were a lot of variables, a lot of real-world factors that came into play. It was also something that I had conceived in one way and that we realised on the day wasn't going to be possible. So, we had to rethink and re-evaluate what's going to be safe for the bird and ensuring the bird doesn't get hurt, but also making the scene make sense, making Kathryn's performance believable, and making sure that the edit cuts together, that was a real challenge. I think we got there, but it wasn't easy.

What was it like working with Kathryn [Pogson] and Richard [Laing]?

Richard and Kathryn were both very rewarding to work with. I think from my first conversation with both of them, I quickly realised that they were respectively bringing a lot of emotional truth and memory to their performances. They were both drawing a lot from their real emotions and family lives in order to bring truth and authenticity to what they were doing. I felt confident from that stage that they were going to be bringing something honest and I wouldn't have to sculpt too much.

Richard, I was really happy with. His chemistry with Kathryn as his mother... I think he gave us a really believable son. The fun, the vulnerability, the care, the playfulness of a mother and son relationship. I think he really brought a huge amount to the table with that. He was brilliant, and he's just a lovely guy.

Kathryn was an incredibly nuanced performer, and she brings to the table a huge amount of experience from the stage and screen. I remember being really bowled over a lot of times by the way she brought the character to life, but especially the scenes of her by herself where it just requires her to perform and story tell with her face. I think she was amazing when it came to that kind of setting.

What is your standout moment in the film?

I think the section as we build towards the end is the area I'm most happy with. While we've been quite gentle throughout, the pace and everything is sort of increasing and starting to speed up, and everything is starting to come undone. I think the pacing, the use of music, the use of visuals, and the performances make that section really powerful. There are two scenes back-to-back towards the end of the film, just before they leave the house, in which they both give incredibly emotional payoffs to their characters. I think I'm pretty happy with that.

Cristian interview

What was your favourite moment of the shoot?

I think my favourite moment of the shoot was towards the end. It was actually the very last scene we were shooting. All the film is so drawn into this realistic way of shooting, and so I shot a lot of it handheld. Obviously, carrying the camera on my shoulder wasn't the most comfortable thing, but by that point it was our last scene of the whole shoot, and the final scene of the film, the adrenaline had built up so much, that I just went for like 10 takes or however long we did it for, like 15 or 20 minutes just the camera on my shoulder running up and down the corridor with Kathryn and it was all just so exciting and the adrenaline just kept me going. It was really, really rewarding getting that in the can.

What was the most challenging part of the shoot for you?

I think the most difficult part for me was something that I knew from the beginning that was going to be a challenge, and that was the car rig shots. It was something that I hadn't done before, and I knew we'd had some issues with it on our test shoot. I thought that we could deal with it, but on the day our stabilisation system didn't work out and we had to kind of scrap our ideas and just shoot our shots with Kathryn, and then do pickups later on. By the time we got to our pickups it was actually quite rewarding because I had researched more into it and when we actually got to do it, we had a remote-control gimbal that allowed me to do camera movements like pans and tilts. What was initially the most challenging part of the shoot actually turned into a really nice moment when Joe and I were sat in the back of the car for like 15 minutes running this take for ages. I did this camera movement and it just landed in the right spot and we just looked at each other and were like "yeah, that's the shot, we got it".

Can you talk a bit about how you developed the look of the film in pre-production, and how you eventually carried that out?

Quite early on Joe and I had a couple of films that we wanted to use as inspiration, both story-wise and visually. I think always having that in the back of my mind even when I was on set really helped me shoot the film the way I had imagined it. Part of that was the way I lit it. For the most part, the lighting was just using the available lighting that was coming in through the windows, but obviously I wanted to add to it with our own lighting, just to add that creative touch to it. Because we were shooting in such a constrained space, I often found that my lighting plans were just over the top and we actually ended up taking away some of the lights and using less than I had imagined. Working with Ryan [Wilson] as a gaffer was really great as well because I had someone that I could rely on while I was talking to Joe about our next shot, and while Jojo [Bossman] was building the camera. So, I had a great camera team that I knew could do their jobs while I was focusing on what was coming up next.

Does anything come to mind that was an issue or problem on set, and how did you manage to solve it?

I think a couple of interesting things that we had to shoot was when we were shooting day for night. At the time we were shooting, the days were quite long, and we had a couple of evening scenes, so we had to block out the windows and make it seem like it was evening. We had this scene in the bedroom, which was a very small space and we had to cheat around the beds and push them to the other side of the room, and just sort of reframe everything around it. I think at that point Joe and I were slightly conflicted about what the shot was going to be, but I feel like we both got to a good compromise, and we were both happy with what we achieved.

The other evening scene we had was the dinner scene. When I first looked at the space I was like "how am I going to light this? It's such a small space, where am I going to put the lights?". Because they're sat at the dinner table, I imagined there might be a ceiling light above them, so I light it from above. We had this interesting rig where a light was going across and above the table and I wanted to have a tablecloth to bounce the light back onto their faces. We got some really nice falloff, and I was really happy with it in the end.

Adam interview

What was your favourite moment of the production?

It was probably going into the edit. The first day, when I sat down and looked at all the rushes, where I was like, wow we did a great job.

What was the most challenging part for you?

The most challenging part for me was probably when I was actually editing. Kathryn and Richard did such a great job, it was actually difficult finding the perfect shot for each scene. Because every take was so great, it was hard to find the perfect one that suits the scene and suits the shot. The was probably the hardest yet most rewarding bit for me.

What was it like script supervising for the first time?

It was good, it's the first time I've done it, it was a real challenge, but I learned a lot. I learned the note-taking that goes into script supervising, and doing that on set, saved me so many hours in the edit room, from my amazing notetaking.

Doing that, while also DITing was good to be able to look over the footage on set, take it all in, make sure we've got all the shots that we needed so that we didn't have to do any pointless reshoots. I knew what was there and it really helped me when I went into the edit room and started editing.

What was it like editing with Joe?

Joe was amazing. It was nice going from me just editing by myself to then editing with Joe. He knows exactly what he wants, which made my job a lot easier.

I think we've done some great work, and I hope that it shows when people watch it.

Susannah interview

What was your favourite moment of the shoot?

My favourite moment... can I say the whole thing? Genuinely, for me, the most enjoyable thing was being with such a lovely group of people and seeing everybody do their jobs and work together as a team. My job is mainly putting everything together, and so to see that all come together in such an effective way was really great. It was such a lovely group of people, that for four days it just felt like we were a little family.

Were there any particularly challenging parts of the shoot?

The bird. The bird was quite a big challenge, but I think it was also quite exciting. At one point in the shoot, we had a bird scene, which was outside. The bird was pretty panicky, and a decision was made that we couldn't show it on its own without it being in somebody's hands. It somewhat compromised the scene, but I think in the end we made a sensible decision that could still work for the film. At the end of the day, it's a health and safety thing, but it still works for the film.

How did COVID-19 affect the planning and preparation for *Respite* in pre-production?

Dealing with COVID-19 as part of the shoot was really interesting actually. This is the biggest, in terms of the number of people, project that I've produced and so having to deal with the pandemic on top of that was definitely an extra challenge.

It put a lot of uncertainty on the table and for a long time actually we weren't sure whether we'd actually be able to make the film. Everyone was tested before the shoot, and most of those tests were happening in the couple days leading up to the shoot, so if any of our key crew members tested positive it would have meant calling off the whole thing, which was quite scary. So, the day before the shoot, having Joe, Cristian, Kathryn, and Richard all test negative was quite a big relief! We did everything properly, and everything safely and nobody got Covid, so that's good.

How did you find the process of casting and working with a casting director?

It was great. James [Reilly], who was our casting director was great. It freed up a lot of my time and meant that I could step back from that and let him deal with all the groundwork for it. He worked really well with Joe too. The two of them knew what they were looking for and basically just went out and got it, which gave me a chance to focus on other parts of production.

He also had a great eye for what we needed in our actors for the characters they were playing and ended up finding us two amazing leads who suit our characters perfectly.

Could you talk a bit about the process of finding the main location?

I think we got really lucky with our location. Our host was lovely, and it meant that we were able to shoot there for three days, and even have it as a base for our fourth day when we had two unit moves to three separate locations. All of our locations were in probably about a ten-minute radius of each other, which just made the whole thing a lot easier.