



**WOMAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA  
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# Wildfire

+ Q&A with director Cathy Brady

Born within a year of each other, Lauren (Nora-Jane Noone) and Kelly (Nika McGuigan) are 'Irish twins'. You'd never see one without the other, but over the years the mystery of their mother's death has torn them apart. Kelly, keen to escape their insular town, drifted away and disappeared a year ago. Lauren's life has been on hold since reporting her sister missing.

Kelly's unexpected return, sees a surge of every raw emotion between the sisters. Lauren doesn't know whether to kiss her or hit her. But as they begin to relive memories of their mother, the sisters become inseparable. Their bond is stronger than ever and Kelly's desire for the truth is dangerously reignited. As Kelly digs deeper, not everyone is ready. In this border town secrets are meant to stay buried and Lauren has been keeping the biggest one of all.

As the truth about their mother begins to surface, Kelly's mood darkens. But Lauren is blinded; around Kelly she feels alive again, her marriage and job pale in comparison. The town is starting to notice, rumours about the girls strange behaviour spread like wildfire. Lauren must decide to confront their mother's past with Kelly or risk losing her for good. Time is running out and no one can be trusted. The sisters must escape and face the truth or be consumed by the town and its lies.

## Director's Statement

*Wildfire* is about two sisters, one of whom has been missing for the last two years and returns home. She begins to unearth the family secrets, which starts to unsettle her and her sister and threatens to unravel the wider family. It's set in borderland Ireland, and deals with the aftermath of the Troubles and how that has an impact on the family and the community at large. There is a relevancy to *Wildfire*; it's set in the present day, at a time where Brexit is happening and we're not quite sure what is happening with the border.

I set the film in an insular border town in Northern Ireland not too dissimilar to Newry where I grew up. A landscape enclosed by mountains, constantly looking in on itself, both staggeringly beautiful and strangely oppressive. A landscape hiding unmarked bodies, rich in folklore, superstition and lies. This is a place struggling with its own sense of identity post 'Troubles'. Growing up here, I've been acutely aware of how your relationship to a place and community can inform and, in some cases, override your sense of identity.

The initial idea for *Wildfire* came from working with Nora-Jane Noone and Nika McGuigan separately. There was something about their energy that was remarkably fierce and fearless; ultimately I had a gut instinct of wanting these two actors to work together. Five years ago, we all met for a pint of Guinness, I was blown away by their chemistry and they agreed to come on board before there was even an idea of what this story could be.

Carlo Cresto-Dina and Charles Steel were the first producers to come on board the project, and what was remarkable about working with them was that they completely embraced the process of developing the story with the cast already attached. The confidence they had in me and their willingness to get behind this process is the reason this film has been made.

We shared ideas back and forth for a few weeks, which is when the real story of the Erickson twin sisters came to mind. I first came across these sisters in the

BBC1 documentary *Madness in the Fastlane*. The documentary opens with footage of twin sisters Sabina and Ursula Erickson repeatedly and deliberately rushing headlong into speeding traffic on the M6 motorway in England. Miraculously, they survive. Then, with unbelievable strength and fury they turn against the officers who are trying to help them. The Erickson twins' behaviour has never officially been explained by the medical or psychiatric community, apart from speculation that they suffered from a rare self-induced delusional disorder or shared psychosis, which caused them to experience temporary insanity.

This act of two sisters deliberately throwing themselves into oncoming traffic became our springboard. Working with Nika, Nora Jane and a researcher we explored our own fictional world and characters that might explain why two sisters could behave in such an extreme and desperate way. It was a couple of years of research, trying to understand what a shared psychosis was – which is what the Swedish twins had. From that, we began to build our own story – watching documentaries and speaking to people who had undergone psychosis started to feed their way in our fiction.

I was interested in exploring the idea of transgenerational trauma; that is, whatever is overwhelming and unnameable being passed on to the next generation. I wanted to look at this within the family dynamic but also the wider community. How might the effects of this second-hand trauma manifest itself, specifically in Northern Ireland. Is the trauma of the Troubles still reverberating and being passed on to younger generations even in peace times? It is particularly relevant as Northern Ireland now has one of the highest rates of anti-depressant prescription levels in the world and suicide rates are soaring amongst 'Ceasefire Babies'. How can those too young to remember the worst be so acutely affected by the past?

My hope for *Wildfire* is that audiences can understand and identify with characters who have been driven to extreme behaviour and realise how fragile our perception of reality can be. These characters are bigger than their story and they have the power to open the minds and hearts of the audience and deal with the complexities around mental health issues. The sisters are not merely seen as 'diagnoses' of their illnesses, but instead as complex individuals. I hope audiences engage and question their own ideas about sanity and madness and can open up a dialogue about our attitudes towards mental health and vulnerable individuals.

We cannot move on from the past until it is faced and accepted. With the sisters learning to accept their mother's past, thus breaking the cycle and silence, the ending is a cathartic release, but it also has the power to leave the audience questioning: do we know how to look after our most vulnerable? I want to encourage the audience to realise that as the sisters walk towards help, their future and wellbeing is also in our hands.

### **Production notes**

During post-production of *Wildfire*, Nika McGuigan lost her brief but brave battle with cancer.

*Wildfire* was developed and written for Nika and her co-star Nora-Jane Noone. We collaborated over many years becoming close friends. This was Nika's first leading feature role and showcases her tremendous talent and undeniable screen presence.

It has been incredibly difficult to finish this film without Nika, but it was such a privilege to know her and be known by her. This film is dedicated to our beautiful Nika.

**Cathy Brady, Director**

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## WILDFIRE

*Directed by:* Cathy Brady  
©: British Film Institute, Channel Four Television Corporation, WF JVC Ltd  
*a* Tempesta Film UK, Cowboy Films *and* Samson Films *production*  
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*and made in Northern Ireland with funding from:* Northern Ireland Screen  
*Developed with the assistance of:* Fís Éireann/Screen Ireland  
*Made with support of the:* BFI's Film Fund  
*Presented by:* BFI, Screen Ireland, Film4, Northern Ireland Screen  
*In association with:* Great Point Media, Sulcata Productions Limited, Wellcome  
*Post-production Services by:* Outer Limits  
*Worldwide Sales by:* Film Constellation  
*Executive Producers:* Lizzie Francke, Celine Haddad, Daniel Battsek, Lauren Dark, Emma Duffy, Robert Halmi, Jim Reeve  
*Produced by:* Carlo Cresto-Dina, Charles Steel, David Collins  
*Co-producers:* Katy Jackson, Brendan Mullin  
*Archive Producers:* Zosia Alchimowicz, Sam Dwyer  
*Associate Producer:* David Harwood  
*Production Manager:* Louise Sinclair  
*Production Co-ordinator:* Gina Casey  
*Production Accountant:* Joan Lambe  
*Unit Manager:* Lorcan Berney  
*Location Manager:* Grant Bobbett  
*Post-production Supervisor:* Ciara Walsh  
*Researcher:* Lucia Yandoli  
*Archive Researcher:* Eugene Finn  
*1st Assistant Directors:* Adam Philpott, David Mack  
*2nd Assistant Director:* Nick Starr  
*3rd Assistant Director:* Elle Hesnan  
*Crowd Co-ordinator:* PJ Hart  
*Script Supervisor:* Marie Clare Cushinan  
*Casting Director:* Shaheen Baig  
*Written by:* Cathy Brady  
*Script Development by:* Cathy Brady, Nika McGuigan, Nora Jane Noone  
*Director of Photography:* Crystel Fournier  
*Steadicam Operators:* Ray Carlin, Adam Peddar, Howard Smith  
*Stills Photography:* Aidan Monaghan  
*Special Effects Supervisor:* Ryan McNeill  
*Editor:* Matteo Bini  
*Production Designer:* John Leslie  
*Art Director:* Til Frohlich  
*Set Decorator:* Emma Lowney  
*Prop Master:* James Barr  
*Costume Designer:* Angela Billows

*Make-up Designer:* Jennifer Hegarty  
*Hair Designer:* Catherine Argue  
*Colourist:* Eugene McCrystal  
*Original Music by:* Gareth Averill, Matthew James Kelly  
*Music Supervisor:* Carmen Montanez-Callan  
*Choreography:* Jessica Kennedy, Megan Kennedy  
*Sound Designer:* Nikola Medic  
*Sound Mixer:* Ronan Hill, Daniel Crowley  
*Re-recording Mixer:* Michelle Cuniffe  
*Supervising Sound Editor:* Nikola Medic  
*Stunt Co-ordinator:* Donal O'Farrell  
*Publicity:* Premier  
*In Memoriam:* Nika McGuigan

## Cast

Nika McGuigan (*Kelly*)  
Nora-Jane Noone (*Lauren*)  
Martin McCann (*Sean*)  
Kate Dickie (*Veronica*)  
Etienne Nelson (*hardened foreign man*)  
Olga Wehrly (*mother*)  
Steve Blount (*male customs officer*)  
Maura Foley (*female customs officer*)  
Uriel Emil (*Christopher*)  
Noni Stapleton (*Hawk Eyes*)  
Helen Behan (*Joanne*)  
Aiste Gramantaite (*Ania*)  
Amanda Hurwitz (*Mary*)  
Kathryn Fay (*girl 8*)  
Amelia Torley (*girl 10*)  
Daniel Willis (*boy 6*)  
Paul Kennington (*van driver*)  
Scott McHugh (*teenager 1*)  
Paddy Walker (*teenager 2*)  
Kwasie Boyce (*security guard*)  
Paul McGee (*bar man*)  
David Pearse (*Gerry*)  
Peter Ballance (*Colm*)  
Lucia Keane (*young Kelly*)  
Toni O'Rourke (*HR officer*)  
Joanne Crawford (*Bridget*)  
Damien Hannaway (*Marty*)  
Rozlyn Sheridan (*mum*)  
Catriona Loughlin (*traumatised woman*)  
Sarah Cranston (*young Lauren*)

UK/Ireland 2020  
85 mins

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Programme notes and credits compiled by the BFI Documentation Unit

Notes may be edited or abridged. Questions/comments? Email [prognotes@bfi.org.uk](mailto:prognotes@bfi.org.uk)

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