



S.O.U.L. FEST PREVIEW

The Silent Twins

+ Q&A with actors *Tamara Lawrance and Letitia Wright*

June and Jennifer Gibbons were not always silent. Born in 1963, their early childhood involved following wherever the RAF work of their father took them, before the family settled in Haverfordwest, a town in Pembrokeshire, Wales. School life was not easy for the only West Indian kids in the area; the twins suffered much bullying for looking and acting differently to those around them. At home the pair had always been somewhat withdrawn from their siblings and parents, but increasingly these behaviours became more extreme and isolating.

The girls were unpredictable. They would attend class by walking in synchronisation, mirroring each other's steps, coming to a silent stop with no explanation. They could crumple to the floor if questioned, again in perfect unison. They were effectively mute at school, but not always quiet. Intense bursts of physical fighting could erupt between June and Jennifer seemingly with little warning. By the age of eight, the twins had stopped communicating with the outside world.

But cocooned in the relative safety of their bedroom, June and Jennifer invited the creative world in. They made their own dolls and stuffed toys, which became characters in elaborate plays that they wrote together. They broadcast a radio show to themselves, which they called *Radio Gibbons: The Living Facts of Life*. They developed what was originally taken to be a secret language, later revealed to be a mix of Barbadian slang and fast-spoken English, and when they did speak there was a lisp, a speech impediment. Their parents could hear the chatter through the door yet were never given access to witness such imaginative play.

The twins behaved in this way for years, confounding their family and the Welsh education system, which led to their referral to a child psychologist, Tim Thomas. Dedicated therapy followed, along with a short-lived attempt to separate the twins at two different schools. Nothing appeared to be working, much to the frustration and desperation of their family. The girls remained silent and uncommunicative in public, their strange behaviours unbreakable. Yet behind their bedroom door a parallel, very different life continued to blossom. After completing a writing course by post, their creative skills were now being developed through more intricate plays and written stories.

In 1979 the twins turned 16 and left school. Formal education had nothing left to try to teach them. Obsessed with American pop culture yet lacking any income, they became fixated on white expat American brothers who settled in a neighboring town. The Kennedy boys were the gateway drug for June and Jennifer to experience a social life entirely missing from their lives previously. They were silent no more. With sex, drugs and rock'n'roll on display in the Welsh suburbs, the Gibbons' twins voraciously tried it all. Drinking moonshine and sniffing glue became a regular activity. Friction carried them home where

the twins became increasingly jealous towards each other, competing for the boys' attention, while separately striving to become the better writer. It wasn't long before shoplifting and a petty crime spree followed. Jailed for setting a building on fire, the pair's societal freedom ended abruptly when they were found guilty of 16 counts of burglary, theft and arson.

Institutionalised as 19 year-olds, familiar patterns emerged as June and Jennifer went quiet once more. The mirrored behaviors returned, as did the outbursts of violence towards each other and anyone who tried to curb them. The twins began serving an indefinite sentence inside Broadmoor high-security psychiatric hospital, a place normally reserved for serial killers and violent offenders. They were among the youngest patients ever admitted.

Journalist Marjorie Wallace had followed the twins' court case and was shocked when they had been taken to Broadmoor. She sought contact with them, eventually gaining their trust and conducting a series of interviews while they were hospitalised. Those interviews formed the basis of Wallace's book, *The Silent Twins*. The girls lost their twenties to Broadmoor, where they were sometimes together, often apart; sometimes well, often struggling. Secretly, June and Jennifer made a pact to rescue each other and break free. This film tells their story, from their point of view for the first time.

Statement from Director Agnieszka Smoczyńska

Andrea Seigel's script shook me to the core. It is a story that is unlike any other. While reading, I was amused at times – in disbelief that those two teenagers can be so extraordinary and yet completely ordinary, just like any other 'real' girls their age that we can recognise ourselves in.

The hardships June and Jennifer Gibbons experienced in their childhood led to their withdrawal from the outside world, set them on a path of experimentation and ultimately pushed them to test boundaries of society at the time. They were bullied, misunderstood, misdiagnosed and eventually imprisoned. The harsh punishment vastly outweighed their crimes.

June and Jennifer were victims of each other and of their environment. Building upon the juxtapositions of brutality and innocence, imagination and boredom; growing up and disillusionment, Andrea managed to create a unique tone and told a beautiful and emotional story.

Their sisterhood was unique and paradoxical. They couldn't live separately but wanted to kill each other at the same time. Seigel touched the deep truth about human condition: the inability to be alone, without a relationship with another and with the outside world; combined with the desire to remain individualistic.

Their story is a sensational one but this film aims to reach deeper. In addition to exploring themes of racism and exclusion, it was important to us to get into the heads of these amazing girls; into their unstoppable imagination and sensitivity. We wanted to tell their story through their eyes, enter their worlds, and get to feel their romantic teenage awe about the world.

The Silent Twins is a story of sisters' love, which could be beautiful, powerful and toxic. From the beginning, the uniqueness of their relationship competes

with the connection to the outside world. They fear that if they begin to connect with others more outside their relationship, they will lose each other.

They refuse to communicate with the world, keeping each other in check, until they experience their first moment of teenage infatuation. June and Jennifer, like other teenagers, experience their first crush, first cigarette, first drink, first disappointment.

June and Jennifer's tale is also a story of exclusion. The story of the 'other,' of the outsider, the one who is not accepted by their society and rejected by the system. The Gibbons family are newcomers, outsiders; a 'normal' family with the exception of being the only Black family in the area, not far from one of the whitest and most racist cities in Wales.

Lastly, *The Silent Twins* is a story of art and creativity. This film is a portrayal of the artist: misunderstood and desperate to communicate with the world through his/her art.

Production notes

THE SILENT TWINS

Director: Agnieszka Smoczyńska
Executive Producers: Katie Anderson, Jake Carter, Trevor Groth, Beata Rzeźniczek, Charlie Morrison, Tamara Lawrance, Andrea Seigel, Marjorie Wallace, Michaelxx Reuter, Sebastian Barker
Produced by: Klaudia Śmieja-Rostworowska, Joshua Horsfield, Ben Pugh, Ewa Puszczynska, Anita Gou, Alicia van Couvering, Letitia Wright
Co-producer: Adam Gudell
Line Producer: Bogna Szewczyk
Line Producer (Additional Photography UK): Oli Falcon
Production Manager: Marek Skupień
UK Financial Controller: Geraint Jones
Location Managers: Anna Blachnia, Malgorzata Majer, Hanna Król
Post-production Supervisor: Siobhan Boyes
Artistic Consultant: Denijal Hasanovic
2nd Unit Director: Magnus von Horn
1st Assistant Director: Adam Santura
Script Continuity: Beata Krekiewicz
Casting Director: Kharmel Cochrane
Screenplay by: Andrea Seigel
Additional Script Work: Justyna Stasio
Based upon the book The Silent Twins by: Marjorie Wallace
Cinematographer: Kuba Kijowski
2nd Unit Director of Photography: Michal Dymek
Camera Operator: Sebastian Weber
Visual Effects by: Automatik VFX
Special Effects: SFXPRO
Animation: Barbara Rupik
Editor: Agnieszka Glinska
Assistant Editor: Jason Merle
Consulting Editors: Sylvie Landra, Lesley Walker
Production Designer: Jagna Dobesz
Art Director: Anna Mocny
Costume Designer: Katarzyna Lewinska
Co-costume Designer: Cobbie Yates
Hair & Make-up Designer: Dumebi Anozie
Associate Hair & Make-up Designer: Zuzanna Stefańska
Special Effects Make-up: Eliza Bergchauen
Music by/Original Music & Songs by: Marcin Macuk, Zuzanna Wrońska
Additional Music by: djLenar
*Piano/Synths/Strings/Voice/Drums/Percussion/
Bass [Performed by]:* Marcin Macuk
Piano/Vocals [Performed by]: Zuzanna Wrońska
Music Supervisors: Pawel Juzwuk, Marcin Macuk
Music Producer: Marcin Macuk
Choreographer & Movement Coach: Kaya Kołodziejczyk
Supervising Sound Designer: Lenarczyk
Sound Recordist: Mariusz Bielecki
Production Sound Mixer: Maria Chilarecka
Re-recording Mixer: Matthias Schwab

Dialogue & ADR Editor: Adele Fletcher
Stunt Co-ordinator: Jaroslaw Golec
Dialect Coach: Hazel Holder
Music Supervisors: Pawel Juzwuk, Marcin Macuk
Music Producer: Marcin Macuk
Choreographer & Movement Coach: Kaya Kołodziejczyk
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Cast

Letitia Wright (*June Gibbons*)
Tamara Lawrance (*Jennifer Gibbons*)
Nadine Marshall (*Gloria*)
Leah Mondesir-Simmonds (*young June*)
Eva-Arianna Baxter (*young Jennifer*)
Treva Etienne (*Aubrey*)
Michael Smiley (*Tim Thomas*)
Jodhi May (*Marjorie Wallace*)
Jack Bandeira (*Wayne Kennedy*)
Kinga Preis (*Sister Nowak*)
Amarah-Jae St. Aubyn (*Greta*)
Hubert Sylla (*David aged 14*)
Lara Nieradzik-Vasconcelos (*baby aged 2*)
Tony Richardson (*Doctor John Rees*)
Mikołaj Gałkiewicz (*Haverfordwest school boy 1*)
David Bujoczek (*Haverfordwest school boy 2*)
Yan Polovnikov (*Haverfordwest school boy 3*)
Agnieszka Binek (*Haverfordwest school girl*)

Poland-UK-USA 2022
113 mins

Courtesy of Focus Features

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