



PREVIEW

The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse

+ Q&A with directors Peter Baynton and Charlie Mackesy, and producer Cara Speller

When Charlie Mackesy published his book *The Boy, The Mole, The Fox and The Horse* in October 2019, he started a sensation. Inspired by drawings he'd first posted on Instagram, this fable-like tale of kindness and hope became an instant classic. It spent over 100 weeks on the *Sunday Times* Bestsellers List, becoming the biggest selling adult hardback since records began.

While the book's unique illustrations hinted it would be ideal to forge an animated film, Mackesy, modestly, couldn't envisage it. 'I'd hoped it would,' he confesses, 'but you don't imagine your little story will come to a film, do you? We all have pipedreams, but they don't necessarily come to reality.' And yet together with his close friend, Matthew Freud, he set out to make it happen.

Despite fielding 'a lot of offers' for the screen rights, Mackesy and Freud were determined to do it right. 'We wanted to do it ourselves really,' explains Mackesy. 'Keep the message as simple and as close to the book as possible.' Cara Speller, an Emmy award-winning, Academy Award-nominated producer, with a strong background in animation, felt the same. She read the book in November 2019 and immediately set up a meeting with Mackesy and Freud.

'I spoke very earnestly about how much I wanted to turn this into a film and how beautiful I thought it could be,' Speller reveals, 'and how I wanted to create an environment where Charlie was at the centre of everything, of all the decisions on the film, and the creative vision on the film. And I think that appealed to Matthew and Charlie.'

Mackesy was intrigued. After beginning his career as a cartoonist on *The Spectator* before exploring work in fine art and sculpture, his abilities as an artist were beyond question, but he had no experience in animation. Jumping into this world would mean not only adapting his book for the screen, but directing the animators, auditioning actors and much more. 'It was from nothing to full immersion, which is quite a shock,' he laughs. Thankfully, adds Speller: 'He's a very quick learner.'

Rapidly, the team came together, with Speller's NoneMore Productions joined by J.J. Abrams and Hannah Minghella of Bad Robot Productions. Minghella explains 'We started talking about the story and the approach to the film right after the world had shut down due to the pandemic. I think for all of us, escaping into Charlie's world was a source of great comfort. I found myself drawing strength and hope and inspiration from Charlie's words on a daily basis and our weekly meetings were truly a bright light in an otherwise dark time.' The film was also set to be executive produced by former Apple Chief

Design Officer Jony Ive and acclaimed Academy Award-winning actor Woody Harrelson.

Out of necessity, the team decided to bring an experienced director onto the project to work with Mackesy. Speller called Peter Baynton, who had previously been the animation director on the charming 2019 adaptation of Judith Kerr's book *The Tiger Who Came To Tea*. 'They felt that I would be a good person to just literally talk to Charlie about the process, and what that might be,' says Baynton. In October 2020, Baynton and Speller paid Mackesy a visit. 'We spent a day together in Charlie's garden, just talking about all sorts,' says Baynton. 'We listened to the audio book, which he'd just finished. And we talked about the characters and what the film could possibly be.'

One of the difficulties of adapting *The Boy, The Mole, The Fox and The Horse* is its lack of a traditional narrative. 'I would say it's journey, a story of a journey into a relationship,' says Mackesy. In it, a young boy befriends a cake-loving mole, a wary fox, and a wise horse. As they progress through a snow-covered landscape, they exchange words of wisdom; maxims like 'Being kind to yourself is one of the greatest kindnesses.'

It's touching sentiments like these that turned the book into a phenomenon, particularly at a time when the world was enduring a global pandemic. And yet necessarily, a film needs a more rigid structure. Working with writer Jon Croker, whose credits include the beloved family film *Paddington 2*, Mackesy began to shape the screenplay. 'I think the film has more of a narrative in it,' he says. 'It's more linear than the book. The film has a definite purpose which is to find the boy a home. He declares at the beginning that he's lost. In the book he doesn't. He just hangs out with them.' Minghella adds: 'We discussed many different ways to start the film, many different ways to frame it. But any time it started to feel like we were giving too much specificity to the circumstances of the story, the characters or the world, it worked against the magic of the book which allows every reader to see themselves in the Boy or the Mole or the Fox or the Horse.'

Production notes

Peter Baynton – Director

Peter is an award-winning director of animated films. He has been obsessed with drawing pictures that tell stories since he was a kid. After a brief foray into architecture, where he learnt his buildings would be neither safe nor tasteful, he decided to learn the craft of character animation instead, studying at Central St Martin's in London. His first film after graduating, *Over the Hill*, won The McLaren Award for Best British Animation, and he was selected by Screen International as a UK Star of Tomorrow. He has been directing animated shorts, music promos and commercials for 14 years since then, and has picked up over 30 awards at film festivals around the world along the way, including an Annecy Crystal in 2013 and a couple of British Animation Awards. After years of making shorts and commercials, in 2015 he decided to follow his heart and pursue longer form animation, working as a storyboard artist on the BAFTA winning CBeebies show *Sarah & Duck*, and then as 2D Animation Director for *Paddington 2*. In 2019 he was Animation Director for C4's Emmy award-winning *The Tiger Who Came to Tea*. In 2020 he started

working on a film of Charlie Mackesy's beloved book *The Boy, the Mole, the Fox, and the Horse* with NoneMore Productions, and directing this film with Charlie has been the greatest privilege of his professional life. He is now in the early stages of directing a feature film for Lupus Films Ltd, to be released in 2024.

Charlie Mackesy – Director and Writer

British artist, illustrator and author Charlie Mackesy began his career as a cartoonist for *The Spectator*, before becoming a book illustrator for Oxford University Press. His award-winning work has featured in books, private collections, galleries and public spaces around the world. His internationally bestselling book, *The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse*, was published in October 2019 and holds the record for the most consecutive weeks in the *Sunday Times* Non-Fiction Chart across all formats as well as being the longest running *Sunday Times* Non-Fiction Number One of all time. A number one *New York Times* best-seller, it is one of eight books since 2013 that has remained on the number one *New York Times* Bestseller and on the *New York Times* Advice, Misc. Best Seller list.

Charlie's beloved book is the first ever book to be awarded both the Waterstones Book of the Year and Barnes and Noble Book of the Year (2019) and has been translated into over 40 different languages and dialects. Charlie's words and illustrations have brought comfort to many and have been shared online around the world as well as on t-shirts for Comic Relief, magazine covers, street lamp posts, school classrooms, cafés, women's safe houses, prisons, hospital wards and as NHS hospital computer screensavers. Charlie worked with Richard Curtis on the set of *Love Actually* to create a set of drawings to be auctioned for Comic Relief, and with Nelson Mandela on a lithograph project, The Unity Series. Charlie's paintings have been exhibited widely, most recently in Sotheby's in London. His bronzes can be found in public spaces in London, including Highgate Cemetery and the Brompton Road. Away from art, Charlie co-runs Mama Buci, a honey social enterprise in Zambia that helps families of low and no income become beekeepers. He also partners with many charities, including Comic Relief and the NHS. He lives between Brixton and Suffolk with his dog Barney.

Cara Speller – Producer

Cara Speller is an Oscar-nominated, Emmy-nominated, BAFTA-winning and Grammy-nominated producer, and serves on the Executive Committee of the Short Films and Feature Animation branch at The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

In 2020 Cara teamed up with author and artist Charlie Mackesy to form a new film and television production company, NoneMore Productions, to develop multiple projects based on the world of Mackesy's books. NoneMore's first project is an animated short film adaptation of Mackesy's book *The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse* being co-produced with J.J. Abrams' Bad Robot Productions. The 30-minute short features hand-drawn animation capturing the look and spirit of the book and involves a team of artists from 20 countries working alongside Mackesy to bring the project to the big screen.

Prior to forming NoneMore, Cara was best known for her work with Damon Albarn and Jamie Hewlett on their animated band Gorillaz with responsibility for the visual side of the band – producing their music videos, awards performances, press, website, games, merchandise and tour visuals across three albums and sold out world tours, as well as the Chinese opera *Monkey: Journey to the West* with Manchester International Festival, The Chatelet Theatre in Paris and Staatsoper Berlin, composed by Damon and designed by Jamie. In 2013 Cara set up the film and TV unit for Passion Pictures, developing and producing a slate of projects including Robert Valley’s Oscar-nominated and Annie-winning film *Pear Cider and Cigarettes*; the Emmy-nominated *Marvel’s Rocket & Groot* and *Marvel’s Ant Man*; *Zima Blue* and the Emmy-winning *Ice* from Tim Miller and David Fincher’s critically acclaimed anthology series helmed *Love, Death and Robots* for Netflix; and *101 Dalmatian Street* for Disney Channel – a 50 episode series based on the much-loved 1961 classic film.

THE BOY, THE MOLE, THE FOX AND THE HORSE

A Matthew Freud Production

A Charlie Mackesy Film

©: Wellhello Productions Ltd

Directed by: Peter Baynton and Charlie Mackesy

Production Companies: NoneMore and Bad Robot

Presented by: BBC, Apple Original Films

Executive Producers: Jony Ive, Woody Harrelson

Produced by: Cara Speller, Matthew Freud, Hannah Minghella, JJ Abrams

Based on the book *The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse* by:

Charlie Mackesy

Adapted by: Jon Croker and Charlie Mackesy

Casting Director: Rachel Freck

Editor: Daniel Budin

Art Director: Mike McCain

Composer: Isobel Waller-Bridge

Sound Designer and Mixer: Adrian Rhodes

Voice cast

Jude Coward Nicoll

Tom Hollander

Idris Elba

Gabriel Byrne

UK 2022©

32 mins

Courtesy of NoneMore Productions,

Bad Robot Productions, Apple Original Films and BBC

IN PERSON & PREVIEWS

Missing Believed Wiped Session 1: World Preview Lost and Found:

Spike Milligan: The Unseen Archive + intro

Sat 3 Dec 11:45

Missing Believed Wiped Session 2: oddities and rarities

Sat 3 Dec 14:20

Preview: Tori and Lokita + Q&A with director-screenwriters Jean-

Pierre and Luc Dardenne

Sat 3 Dec 17:45

BFI Fright Night

Sat 3 Dec 21:00 until morning BFI IMAX

Mark Kermode Live in 3D at the BFI

Mon 5 Dec 18:30

Preview: Enys Men + Q&A with director Mark Jenkin

Mon 5 Dec 20:45

TV Preview: Happy Valley Final Series Episode 1 + Q&A

Tue 6 Dec 18:15

Preview: Emancipation

Wed 7 Dec 18:00

Book Launch Event: The Shining (Extended Version) + Q&A with Lee Unkrich

Thu 8 Dec 18:40

Peter Greenaway in Conversation

Fri 9 Dec 18:20

The Precious Things: BBC Centenary Special + intro

Sat 10 Dec 14:20

TV Preview: His Dark Materials + Q&A with Cast & Crew TBC

Tue 13 Dec 18:00

TV Preview: Ghosts Christmas Special + Q&A with cast and crew

Thu 15 Dec 18:20

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