



**IN DREAMS ARE MONSTERS**

# A Dark Song

Sophia is grief-stricken and overwhelmed with sadness since the untimely death of her son. In a desperate attempt to achieve some form of closure, she reaches out to Solomon, an occultist with experience in an ancient invocation ritual that Sophia believes will allow her to make contact with her deceased child.

Locked away in a remote country house, the pair undergo a long and arduous ritual, risking both their mental and physical safety as they attempt to access a world beyond their understanding.

But when Solomon finds out that Sophia has not been truthful about her wish, a greater danger threatens them. In the dark, they find that they are no longer alone in the house. They are now in the world of real angels, and real demons.

Debut director Liam Gavin's inspiration for his ghoulish chamber piece was none other than the notorious occultist Aleister Crowley (once described as the most wicked man in the world) and his attempt to carry out 'the Abramelin Procedure', an arcane ritual that Crowley abandoned halfway through.

Filming on location at a suitably cold and creepy derelict house, Gavin has fashioned what *The Hollywood Reporter* calls 'a spellbinding psycho-horror debut', garnering a brilliant performance from the excellent Steve Oram, usually seen in more comic roles, as the surly occultist who bites off more black magic than he can chew. Catherine Walker, as the woman who enlists the occultist to help realise her dream to contact her dead child, gives a powerfully convincing and gutsy performance.

With shades of cult horrors *Kill List* and *Wake Wood*, *A Dark Song* is nevertheless fiercely original and innovative, helmed with an assurance that is all the more astonishing given it is Gavin's first film. After a slot at the London Film Festival, and winning Gavin the New Visions award at the 2016 Sitges Festival, *A Dark Song* is brooding, brutal and brilliant.

## **Kaleidoscope Entertainment**

'I don't do forgiveness,' Sophia (Catherine Walker) insists to Solomon (Steve Oram), in writer/director Liam Gavin's astonishing feature debut *A Dark Song*.

Three years after her seven-year-old son Jack was murdered, Sophia, inconsolable with grief, anger and loss, hopes to fill the gaping hole in her life; she has rented a large, isolated house in the Welsh hinterlands for a year, and is now sealed inside with occultist Solomon, who is guiding her through a prolonged magick ritual. Wishing to be able to speak once more with Jack, and to secure a dark favour from the guardian angel she will summon through this ritual, 'posh girl' Sophia commits to acts of transgression in order to shift herself from her current malaise. She transcends social boundaries by cohabiting with, and submitting to, the proletarian Solomon, and goes against her Catholic faith through demonic invocations and necromancy – as well as through an earlier questioning of God's goodness and an abandonment of forgiveness in the wake of Jack's death.

In cinema, ritual practices are a familiar trope of horror, with stock scenes of exorcisms, séances, pentagrams or ouija boards all marking a point of transgressive contact between this world and another. In *A Dark Song*, however, the scenes of Abramelin ritual, far from representing a mere episode in a broader story, form the very essence and architecture of this intensely intimate chamber piece, in which two flawed but driven individuals work through problems all at once worldly, psychological and spiritual via an irrational yet rigorously methodical process. Apart from the brief prologue, there is nothing else in the film besides these hermetic rites, furnishing a scripted scenario and an expressionistic stage on which Sophia can rehearse her internal struggles and psychological damage, in a desperate search for some sort of dramatic resolution. As Solomon says, 'It's essentially a journey. That's a poor metaphor, that is, but it will do for now.' The ritual itself proves similarly provisional, as Sophia keeps changing the story of what she really wants, forcing Solomon accordingly to make drastic adjustments to the proceedings.

Solomon's workaround for Sophia's inability to forgive is to make her drink a glass of his blood – an ambiguous requirement, falling somewhere between vampirism and an act of Christian communion (later, Solomon's side will be pierced, marking him further as a Jesus figure). Ambiguity pervades *A Dark Song*, as it remains unclear whether the increasingly strange goings-on in the house are products of Solomon's chicanery, hallucinations caused by Sophia's state of mental and physical exhaustion, or genuine, uncanny intrusions of the otherworldly. Based on any of these interpretations, however, the house's interior, now reconfigured as a sigil-covered mystic portal, provides the setting for a magical personal transformation in Sophia that is ultimately as sublime as it is deeply moving. For amid the personality clashes, cabin-fever claustrophobia, class conflict, sexual tension and endlessly repeated gestures, there are also momentary miracles and awe-inspiring epiphanies, all serving as a psychodrama of damage and rebirth in extremis. The film's final sentiment, coming after this long, dark ordeal of despair, is hard-earned, requiring no forgiveness from the viewer.

**Anton Bitel, *Sight and Sound*, May 2017**

## A DARK SONG

*Directed by:* Liam Gavin  
©: Samson Films Limited  
*In association with:* Bord Scannán na hÉireann/The Irish Film Board  
*Produced with the assistance of:* Ffilm Cymru Wales  
*Presented by:* Samson Films  
*In association with:* Tall Man Films  
*Producers:* David Collins, Tim Dennison, Cormac Fox  
*Associate Producer:* Eoin O’Faolain  
*Production Executive:* Laura McNicholas  
*Executive Producers:* Rory Gilmartin, Hannah Thomas  
*Production Manager:* Steven Davenport  
*Production Co-ordinator:* Jason Cullen  
*Production Accountant:* Con Cremins  
*Location Manager:* Lorcan Berney  
*Assistant Location Manager:* Glen Delaney  
*Director of Post-production:* Tim Morris  
*Post-production Supervisor:* Maura Murphy  
*Production Assistant:* Ailbhe Fitzpatrick  
*1st Assistant Director:* Craig Kenny  
*2nd Assistant Director:* Neil Guerin  
*3rd Assistant Director - Dailies:* Fiona Bonnie  
*Script Supervisor:* Fiona Graham  
*Script Supervisor - Dailies:* Eva Kelly  
*Casting:* Louise Kiely  
*Extras Casting:* Movie Extras  
*Script Editors:* Maggie Mitchell, Michael Kinirons  
*Written by:* Liam Gavin  
*Director of Photography:* Cathal Watters  
*Focus Puller:* Rory O’Riordan  
*Focus Puller Dailies:* Niall O’Byrne  
*Camera Assistant:* Richard Lacey  
*Gaffer:* Tim Fletcher  
*Best Boy:* Terry Mulcahy  
*Grip:* Paddy Treanor  
*Stills:* Paul Doherty, Darius Weglarz  
*Visual Effects Supervisor:* Declan Boyle  
*Creature Design and Guardian Angel Armour:* The Bowsie Workshop  
*Special Effects:* Dennison & Walsh  
*Editor:* Anna Maria O’Flanagan  
*On-line Editor:* Robbie O’Farrell  
*Production Designer:* Conor Dennison  
*Graphic Designer:* Anais Chareyre

*Graphic Artist:* Emma Grattan  
*Set Buyer:* Ciara O’Donovan  
*Props Master:* Jim Walsh  
*Standby Props:* Rupert O’Neill  
*Costume Designer:* Kathy Strachan  
*Wardrobe Supervisor:* Gwen Jeffares-Hourie  
*Make-up Designer:* Julie Ann Ryan  
*Make-up - Dailies:* Sinead Egan, Elaine Finnan, Niamh O’Malley  
*Title Design:* Cian McKenna  
*Composer:* Ray Harman  
*Sound Supervisor:* Cristina Aragón  
*Sound Recordist:* Rob Flanagan  
*Boom Operators:* Stef Jaconelli, Alan Scully  
*Re-recording Mixer:* Mark Henry  
*Audio Post Co-ordinator:* Deborah Doherty  
*Dialogue Editor:* Anna Sulley  
*Sound Designer:* Jack Whitney  
*ADR Supervisor:* Nick Roberts  
*Foley Artist:* Gareth Rhys Jones  
*Foley Mixer:* Julien Pirrie  
*Stunt Co-ordinator:* Peter Dillon  
*Dialect Coach:* Cathal Quinn  
*Animal Wrangler:* Julie Holmes  
*EPK Cinematographers:* Liam Testasecca, Gareth Nolan  
*Lighting Equipment:* Cine Electric  
*Digital Intermediate Colour Grading:* Matt Branton

## Cast

Steve Oram (*Joseph Solomon*)  
Catherine Walker (*Sophia Howard*)  
Mark Huberman (*Neil Hughes*)  
Susan Loughnane (*Victoria Howard*)  
Nathan Vos (*Jack*)  
Martina Nunvarova (*guardian angel*)  
Brefni O’Connor (*emaciated man*)  
Sheila Moloney (*old woman demon*)  
Rudy Kearns, John Carton, Aaron O’Neill, Ann Mulvaney,  
Daniel McConnell, Jim Dolan, John Cantillion, John Tyrell,  
Liam Young, Peter Crookes, Judith Smith (*demons*)

Ireland-UK 2016©  
100 mins

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