

AMY

Production Notes

 @AmyFilmUK

#AmyFilm

 AmyFilm

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

When filmmakers Asif Kapadia (director), James Gay-Rees (producer) and Chris King (editor) collaborated on the 2010 documentary *SENNA*, which charted the story of acclaimed F1 driver Ayrton Senna, they earned a clutch of awards (including two BAFTAs) and a mass of critical plaudits. Such is the film's popularity, however, it still serves up fresh opportunities.

Two years after *SENNA*'s theatrical release, Gay-Rees was approached by David Joseph, the chairman and CEO of Universal Music UK, who asked whether the team would be interested in turning their talents to another story about a modern-day icon whose life had ended in tragic circumstances.

"David said, 'Would you be interested in making a movie in the style of *SENNA* which captures the musical genius of Amy Winehouse,'" Gay-Rees recalls. "And it took me about a nanosecond to go, 'Yes! We're up for it. Absolutely.'"

Gay-Rees had not considered the Amy Winehouse story up until that point. "But I knew instinctively that there was something interesting going on there," he says. "I immediately called Asif. We weren't actively looking for something to do together after *SENNA*, but he said yes straight away."

Like Winehouse, Asif Kapadia grew up in North London and though the majority of his films have been shot overseas, he was keen to focus his talents on his hometown. He had recently shot *Odyssey*, one of four films about London that were commissioned for the 2012 Olympics.

"When James called me I was living in Turnpike Lane," he remembers. "I had just been doing the film for the London Olympics and that really made me think about the city. I feel very much a Londoner and a North Londoner specifically. James asked what I thought and while I wasn't a crazy Amy Winehouse fan, I had her records and knew that life with her was never boring.

"Something happened with Amy Winehouse," he adds, "and I wanted to know how that happened in front of our eyes. How can someone die like that in this day and age? And it wasn't a shock; I almost knew it was going to happen. You could see she was going down a certain path."

He felt that her story should be explored in detail. "For me, she was like a girl from down the road. I grew up in the same part of the world. It could be someone I knew, someone I was friends with or might have gone to school with. I thought we should investigate."

Gay-Rees then approached film editor Chris King who was immediately excited by the story's potential. King explains, "I think that all of us knew the broad brush strokes. Amy emerged and became hugely successful and then died, but we didn't know that much of the detail at this early stage."

Much of the filmmakers' approach would depend on what material was available. "So the first task was for us to assimilate as much footage as we could and then to start interviewing people," King continues. "And by those dual processes we began to get a narrative idea."

Even before beginning the lengthy and fraught interviewing process, and the difficult task of obtaining new footage, the filmmakers settled on the idea of telling the story through Winehouse's lyrics, which would appear on screen throughout the film.

"The early instinct was that the songs would be key," Kapadia says. "They'd be the spine of the film. We began looking at the lyrics and thinking that this might be like a version of a Bollywood film where the narrative is in the lyrics and in the songs. We thought we might build the narrative around those songs."

Winehouse's lyrics were invariably very personal. Some have suggested that her song writing was a kind of catharsis or therapy, in which she worked through difficult emotions. "It was as simple as that," adds the director. "Once you understand her life and you read the lyrics, they run much deeper than you might have thought."

"I thought, 'All we have to do is unravel what these lyrics are about.' That for me became the big revelation – her writing. Everyone knew she could sing, but maybe people didn't realise how well she could write. She wrote the music herself as well. The whole thing was her."

After settling on Winehouse's songs and lyrics as the narrative vehicle, coupled with the fact that the filmmakers would use as a backdrop the city in which they live, they then began to search for the right interview subjects. This would prove a very difficult process, not least because there is no definitive book that tells the Amy Winehouse story.

"It was a case of seeing who we might meet and talk to," says Kapadia. "With SENNA there were a lot of books and a lot of people knew the story. With AMY it became apparent that no one knew the story, or that people were not willing to tell it."

Gay-Rees agrees. "On SENNA we had somebody on the team who knew how often Ayrton farted every day, but on this film we had no such person. We read a couple of key books, which are fairly inconsistent with each other. I am not saying they are not legitimate but there is a fair amount of conflicting information. She had a really complex social and family life.

"She had her old friends, her famous friends, her new friends and not so famous friends and she would present different versions of herself to all these different people," the producer adds, "so they all had completely different reflections and experiences of her. And not all of them married with each other."

The filmmakers started their base research and secured the co-operation of the Winehouse estate, which is controlled by the singer's father, Mitch Winehouse, and also the Amy Winehouse Foundation. They also secured the co-operation of Raye Cosbert, who managed Amy Winehouse for Metropolis Music.

At the beginning of the production, all the filmmakers knew for sure was that Winehouse was a highly complicated, fascinating, charismatic and very bright individual. 'But as the research period gathered momentum, the signs were more and more evident that she might struggle to last the course' says Gay-Rees. "She was so intense."

It was not long afterwards, however, that the filmmakers began running into problems. "No one wanted to speak out, apart from the usual suspects," continues Gay-Rees. "Certainly, none of the people who were really close to her wanted to speak out."

In fact, Winehouse's closest friends had taken a vow of silence. "Right after her funeral," says Gay-Rees, "they said 'Let's just keep it in-house and never share this with anybody.'"

Kapadia, who completed the 100 or so interviews that tell the AMY narrative, notes that their journey through the filmmaking process was built upon winning people's trust. "It became a journey that was different from SENNA because I had to get so many different people to trust me," he says.

"It was all quite recent and painful for a lot of people and there was a lot of guilt and a lot of baggage."

The filmmakers spent almost a year trying to get a number of vital people to participate in the interview process. "The key people who initially didn't want to be involved; Juliette [Ashby] and Lauren [Gilbert], her two oldest friends who were very close with Nick Shymansky, her first manager, eventually realised that they should participate so that their side of the story would be heard," explains Gay-Rees.

"The whole experience took an awful lot out of all these people, understandably. It is hard to imagine what it must be like to see your closest childhood or teenage friend going through the perils of celebrity and mega-fame, knowing that there were underlying issues that would come to the fore."

Juliette Ashby and Lauren Gilbert were Winehouse's oldest and closest friends, even though their relationship had its ups and downs, especially during the later stages of the singer's life. "But, importantly, these two can contextualize Amy," says Gay-Rees.

"She was just like them, a suburban girl from north London. She wasn't born for fame, necessarily; I don't think anyone is. Amy was just a Jewish kid from North London who became this phenomenon and by having these two friends as a fairly constant presence in the movie reminds you of where she has come from. Amy was not a Justin Bieber. She wasn't a Disney kid."

THE BREAKTHROUGHS

One of the filmmakers' first major breakthroughs was winning the support of Nick Shymansky, Winehouse's first-ever manager. Not only did he have a deep understanding of, and love for, his former client, he also held a lot of footage that would prove integral to the finished film.

Indeed, AMY editor Chris King says that Shymansky was the filmmakers' first guide into the story. "Nick was key," he explains. "We spoke to her friend Tyler James as well and both of them described this girl who was writing poetry and playing music for absolutely personal reasons. They both had different opinions as to why she did it but there was obviously a cathartic element for her, a way of salving some sort of pain.

"Writing was musical therapy for Amy," continues King. "But also her writing was enormously witty and funny. There was a kind of healthiness in it; she had to do it. It was compulsive. She also wrote very funny and rude lyrics. Once we got all that, it became the first chunk of the film. It became solidified in our heads."

It then took a further nine months to bring Juliette Ashby and Lauren Gilbert on-board. "They are just like Amy," says Kapadia. "Nick said that they'd be a challenge, just like Amy was, but that they knew her better than anyone, and that became the next stage — getting their trust.

"People were very wary, very nervous and paranoid," he adds. "Our having made SENNA helped and when people watched it, even if they weren't interested in that subject, they could see how it worked."

When Kapadia began talking to those closest to Amy, it became clear that they were glad to free themselves of the burden that they carried. "It was like therapy for them in some way," the director says.

"There were a number of people who were becoming unwell because they were carrying this burden about Amy, knowing what they knew. And I was impartial. I wasn't part of the music business, I had no agenda, and most of them felt better afterwards.

"That then became progressive to the next stage, where there were things they didn't want to talk about, but eventually felt as though they *had* to talk about. And then when 10 people have said the same thing you can see how it's all connected."

During the interview process, most of the subjects that were close to Winehouse would break down. It was an emotionally harrowing experience for all involved. "But because I wasn't filming them, that helped," says Kapadia. "You don't need to see that on a camera. The emotion is carried in the voice."

"That process made the trust a lot easier to build, whereas, if you're filming, people are guarded in a different way. We'd then play the edit of the interview back to them and ask them if it felt honest to what they wanted to say."

King agrees that Winehouse's childhood friends were incredibly wary of any involvement in the project. "But eventually they came forward and we managed to get to people who were very close to Amy and the Winehouse family, who had been there all the way through," he says. "Then what had previously been conjecture suddenly became reality."

It was not just the interviews from Shymansky, Gilbert and Ashby that proved key to the movie; it was also the footage they would provide. "There's a lot of concert footage but not that much of Amy in her prime, because her prime was a very short moment before she came famous," says Kapadia.

"But Nick's footage in particular showed us the girl that she really was. You could understand how intelligent, special and also how ordinary she was. I knew I could make a film from just that early footage."

The director says that the early footage gave the filmmakers a strong visual theme. "There's a lot of stuff where she looks straight down the lens, straight at the audience," he says. "I found that very powerful. It starts off being very friendly, and she films herself a lot, literally talking to herself on camera."

"Then you also have these personal photos, where she's photographed herself on her computer in Photo Booth. I remember thinking that was quite a powerful

visual journey — the use of the lens and the camera. It then becomes something very aggressive with the paparazzi.

“Her looking at us down the lens I realised would be very powerful and that came out of her friends filming her and her husband [Blake Fielder, another key contributor] filming her. When they were in that rehab facility and Blake says, ‘Go on, sing Rehab!’ That is quite hard to watch but the fact that she’s looking at us adds to the layers.”

Gay-Rees agrees. “I think that the early footage was key,” he says, “because that shows another side of her from what was presented in the press. Just seeing that side of her character shining through gave us something to go with.”

Like Gay-Rees and Kapadia, editor Chris King believes that this early footage was imperative. He cites the shots provided by her childhood friends from 2005 that show Winehouse giving a guided tour of her holiday apartment.

“She was being so funny and alive and happy and she was really in love when she was on that holiday,” he says. “Her life was great. That is brilliantly funny. The tour of her flat is great, great stuff.”

None of this early footage had ever been seen before. “And it was great to get hold of material that showed Amy on her wedding day, for example,” adds King.

Her friend Phil Meynell, another interviewee, supplied this footage. “And nobody has seen it before. It is amazing,” says Gay-Rees. “It is the intimate stuff; it’s just her kicking back when she is at the peak of her powers. I love the stuff we see of her on the boat on her wedding day.”

THE EDITING PROCESS

On a film like AMY the production schedule involved intensive research, the compiling of the audio interviews and the footage, and then the very lengthy edit, which ran alongside. The edit itself was a 20-month process and Gay-Rees says that the film benefitted enormously from having Chris King on board from the outset.

"There are not many people in the world who are better at straight archive docs than Chris," he says. "He has a brilliant nose for using archive footage."

As with SENNA, there would be no interviewees shown on screen. The audio would play over the existing footage. "And that is incredibly labour intensive," the producer notes. "We have no talking heads and no voice over, so we have got no shorts cuts. We just had to make the images work."

Unlike SENNA, where the filmmakers had an enormous F1 archive from which they could draw material, on AMY there were many limitations. "There are still photographs in there, which we didn't have in SENNA. In certain places there wasn't any footage at all."

The coverage that the filmmakers could use on AMY was also completely different from SENNA. "All the material was different this time as well," says Chris King. "We were reliant on things that many different people had shot. Also, we found ourselves early on with holes during key periods."

He remembers 2005, where a great deal happened in Winehouse's life but where she was out of the publicity cycle and was therefore rarely on camera.

"She wasn't that well known and so for a while 2005 was simply a question mark," King adds. "It was a case of, 'What happened and how can we tell that part of the story?' That was the year when she was in between records and she probably got lost a little bit."

She became immersed in the Camden scene and was dabbling with drugs. "She started an intense relationship and she wasn't writing. We knew there wasn't much evidence of her actually writing tunes, she wasn't performing, and yet this massive thing happened."

The intense relationship that began during this period saw her fall head over heels in love with Blake Fielder. "What was all this about?" asks King. "We did not understand it because there was no record of what was happening.

"From the outside, he looks like the wrong bloke for any girl to get involved with. All this happened off camera. How could we get that across? And then drip by drip, bits and pieces of interviews and then little bits of footage and stills came in and we were able to fill in holes and begin to work out how to get that part of the narrative across."

Even during periods when the coverage was strong, the quality was often very weak. "The material was so scrappy a lot of the time," the editor says. "Very seldom was there anything where you would go, 'Well, that's a good shot.'

"Yet there were plenty of that on SENNA. A lot of stuff was impressively shot on that film, or there was great coverage or some useful old film stock. There were many aesthetic things that were quite pleasurable to look at. But in AMY there wasn't very much of that at all. The most interesting stuff was the roughest. That stuff was the most revealing."

Kapadia concurs. "With SENNA we had an amazing amount of footage with really brilliant camera people, while on AMY you've got ordinary people filming in a car or on the street, so technically it's never going to be as good. But you have to learn to trust that it's real. You have to trust the quality of the material and the emotional truth over the technical quality.

"Some of it looks awful," he adds, "and you worry whether you can't use it but you have to. Plus, we can make it look better and sound better. Also, people do get immersed in it."

On a cinema screen, viewers are likely to forgive the quality more than if they were watching on a monitor, says Kapadia. "And having done a few footage-based films, I would take a wobbly shot of something that only exists in that format over a beautifully composed shot that doesn't have the same meaning. You have to learn to free yourself up to imperfection. In fact, the imperfection is something that I find interesting."

That said, an enormous amount of effort was spent working on the footage and the sound quality to ensure that everything used in the film would play as effectively as possible on screen.

King explains, "A lot of the job was me and Asif sitting in a room wondering where we should we go next. But I was also working with people at the other end of that process who have to take what we have spent a year-and-a-half putting together and then remake that at high resolution, so that it can be projected on to a screen in cinemas.

"And those people were just amazed by the sheer amount of craft and impeccable work that had gone into what looked like a fairly messy time line. With every shot, we had to do a lot of stabilization and reframing and colour correction. We had to slow shots down and speed shots up and reformat things that were shot in a different format.

"The on-line editor who took the job on said it was by far the most technically complicated film he had ever worked on," adds King. "Even though it looks like a messy honest home video at times, it was an absolute labour of love to turn this very, very disparate collection of scrappy bits and pieces into something that flowed and felt like a piece of cinema."

And then there was all the work done on the sound quality as well. "There was a lot of care and attention paid to how we unify all this stuff, which was shot over 10 years on people's mobile phones, amateur stuff, professional stuff, stuff from America and from all over the world," King says.

"There was a lot of intricate work that went in to trying to make that feel as if it were a unified piece of filmmaking. That side is probably not something that people are aware of when they watch it.

"Hopefully, as usual, the editing side is disguised and viewers will be caught up and be swept away with Amy's music and the narrative and the story. But it was very hard work."

The filmmakers concede that some powerful material, and some especially shocking moments, had to be excised in a bid to keep the narrative balanced, and to maintain a manageable running time.

"There was quite a lot that we could not put in because it would make the film too long," says Gay-Rees. "We really, really, really tried to get it down to a more traditional length, 90 minutes, but it was just one of those narratives.

"There were definitely other things that we would have liked to pursue but we were all prepared to sacrifice things to keep it to around the two-hour mark."

The filmmakers were also keen to ensure that the film was not too harrowing for the viewer. "I think is it dark enough," the producer concludes. "You have to be careful about that tipping point whereby it becomes self-defeating and actually people can't enjoy the film.

"We definitely had earlier versions of the movie where we were showing what a lovely, bright creature she was, but then you went into an hour-and-a-half of hardcore misery. Then it becomes like a trial. People could have justifiably said, 'What is the point of this?' So we had to be very careful in finding that balance."

THE AMY WINEHOUSE STORY

According to the filmmakers, the worst thing that audiences could say is that they had seen this story before in the media. They're confident, however, that this will not be case.

It is not just the quality of interviews and the footage that sets AMY apart from the existing coverage, it is the way the film broaches the Amy Winehouse narrative.

"We were very keen not to just rehash the awfulness that had been shown before," says Gay-Rees, "because there was a lot of that going on in the media at the time, and what would be the point of recycling that? We had to dig deeper – what were we trying to say?"

Kapadia feels that he got to the core of her story. "This is a film about Amy and her writing," he says. "People didn't realise how important her lyrics were and how personal they were.

"Just putting her lyrics on the screen lets people know that they might have danced to that song and maybe didn't realise how personal the content really was."

Ultimately, the filmmakers believe that AMY is a film about love. "It is about a person who wants to be loved," says Kapadia, "someone who needs love and doesn't always receive it.

"Often, when those who cared for her did try to show her love, she pushed them away. She was a very complex, intelligent girl. AMY is a film about love."

∞ ∞ ∞ ∞ ∞

THE FILMMAKERS

ASIF KAPADIA - Director

BAFTA award winning filmmaker Asif Kapadia is known for his visually striking films. He directed the universally acclaimed SENNA for Working Title, a documentary on Formula One legend Ayrton Senna. SENNA is the highest grossing UK documentary of all time and has won international prizes including two BAFTAs for Best Documentary and Best Editing and was nominated for Best British Film. The film won the World Cinema Audience Award at Sundance 2011, along with the Evening Standard Film Award and the British Independent Film Awards for Best Documentary.

Kapadia has an interest in exploring the lives of 'outsiders', characters living in timeless, extreme and unforgiving circumstances or landscapes. Born in Hackney, London in 1972, Kapadia studied filmmaking at the Royal College of Art where he first gained recognition with his short film THE SHEEP THIEF (1977) telling the story of a gifted street-kid, made in India, the film won Second Prize at the Cannes International Film Festival 1998 (Cinefondation).

Kapadia's distinct visual style continued with his first feature THE WARRIOR shot in the deserts of Rajasthan and the Himalayas. The Warrior won two BAFTA awards for Outstanding British Film of the Year and The Award for Special Achievement by a Director in their First Feature as well as being nominated for Best Film Not in the English Language. Kapadia's FAR NORTH (2004) shot in the high Arctic had its world premiere at the Venice Film Festival.

Kapadia is currently in production on new drama feature ALI AND NINO for Archery Pictures.

JAMES GAY-REES – Producer

James Gay-Rees has produced a wide variety of feature films but is perhaps best known for producing high-profile documentary films including the double BAFTA winning SENNA, directed by Asif Kapadia, and the Academy Award® nominated EXIT THROUGH THE GIFT SHOP directed by Banksy. His recent work ALL THIS MAYHEM directed by Eddie Martin received an AACTA nomination for Best Feature Length Documentary.

After graduating from Southampton University in 1988, James worked briefly for Arthur Andersen in London before moving on to Miramax Films in New York and then Paramount Pictures in Los Angeles. After setting up Midfield Films as a first-

look deal with Working Title Films in 1998, he has produced 11 films.

In 2014, Gay-Rees joined forces with Asif Kapadia, Jolyon Symonds and David Morrissey to form 'On The Corner', an independent production company set up to produce original, high-quality drama and documentaries.

Alongside AMY, Gay-Rees' next project is PALIO, Cosima Spender's feature documentary on the Palio horse race in Siena, which world premieres in competition at Tribeca Film Festival.

CHRIS KING – Editor

Chris King is a BAFTA® Award winning editor with more than 40 films for cinema and television to his name, including the award winning SENNA, for which he received the 2012 BAFTA® award for Best Editing and the 2011 IDA International Documentary Award for Best Editing. King also received an AACTA Award for Best Editing in a Documentary for his recent work on ALL THIS MAYHEM.

For the Academy Award® nominated EXIT THROUGH THE GIFT SHOP, King received the 2011 American Cinema Editors Documentary Award and the Cinema Eye Editing Award. In 2010 King received a BAFTA® Television Award for his work on WELCOME TO LAGOS - the acclaimed BBC mini-series following the lives of Nigerians in the slums of the world's fastest growing megacity. His other credits include Shane Meadows' MADE OF STONE, YOUNG@HEART, MEET THE NATIVES (for which he received the 2008 Royal Television Society® Award for Sound Editing & a BAFTA® nomination for Best Documentary series) the docu-drama HIROSHIMA: A DAY THAT SHOOK THE WORLD, for which he received an Emmy® Award for Sound Editing and a BAFTA® nomination for Editing, and Stephen Walker's cult pornography documentary HARDCORE.

ANTONIO PINTO – Composer

Celebrated for his brilliant score to the indie smash CITY OF GOD, Antonio Pinto has been scoring films for over a decade, with a filmography that includes award winning pictures including SENNA, CENTRAL STATION, and BEHIND THE SUN.

Pinto has worked with such directors as Fernando Meirelles, Walter Salles, Sergio Machado, Heitor Dhalia, Ric Roman Waugh, Tarsem, Michael Mann, James Foley, Asif Kapadia, Mike Newell and Andrew Niccol.

Recent projects include the scores for: SELF/LESS directed by Tarsem (Focus), TRASH (Working Title/Stephen Daldry), MCFARLAND (Disney/Niki Caro), SENNA

(Working Title), THE HOST (Open Road), and LORD OF WAR (Lionsgate) for Andrew Niccol, SNITCH (Lionsgate) for Ric Roman Waugh and PERFECT STRANGER (Sony) for James Foley.

Previously, Pinto collaborated with Michael Mann on COLLATERAL (Dreamworks) starring Tom Cruise and Jamie Foxx, and LOVE IN THE TIME OF CHOLERA for Mike Newell, where he co-wrote two songs with Shakira and was nominated for a Golden Globe.

THE CONTRIBUTORS

The following people contributed to the documentary and their audio interviews appear in the film.

ANDREW MORRIS	Bodyguard
BLAKE FIELDER	Ex Husband
BLAKE WOOD	Friend
CHIP SOMERS	Drug Counsellor
DALE DAVIS	Musical Director & Bass Guitar
DARCUS BEESE	A&R (now President), Island Records
DR. CRISTINA ROMETE	Doctor
GUY MOOT	UK President, Sony / ATV Music Publishing
JANIS WINEHOUSE	Amy's Mother
JULIETTE ASHBY	Friend
LAUREN GILBERT	Friend
LUCIAN GRAINGE	Chairman & CEO, Universal Music Group
MARK RONSON	Music Producer
MITCHEL WINEHOUSE	Amy's Father
MONTE LIPMAN	Chairman and CEO, Republic Records
NICK GATFIELD	President, Island Records, 2001-08
NICK SHYMANSKY	Amy's first Manager

PETER DOHERTY	Musician
PHIL MEYNELL	Friend
RAYE COSBERT	Amy's Manager , Metropolis Music
SALAAM REMI	Music Producer
SAM BESTE	Pianist
SHOMARI DILON	Sound Engineer
TONY BENNETT	Singer
TYLER JAMES	Friend
YASIIN BEY	Hip Hop Artist

CREDITS

Directed By	ASIF KAPADIA
Produced By	JAMES GAY-REES
Executive Produced By	DAVID JOSEPH, ADAM BARKER
Edited By	CHRIS KING
Original Music By	ANTONIO PINTO
Archive Producer	PAUL BELL
Co-Producer	GEORGE PANK
Production Manager	RAQUEL ALVAREZ
Online Editor	JAIME LEONARD
Colourist	PAUL ENSBY
Supervising Sound Editors	ANDY SHELLEY, STEPHEN GRIFFITHS
Re-Recording Mixers	TIM CAVAGIN, DAFYDD ARCHARD