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SONY PICTURES CLASSICS

# Dark Horse

Directed by Louise Osmond

85 Mins

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# **DARK HORSE**

## **Filmmakers**

Directed by LOUISE OSMOND  
Produced by JUDITH DAWSON  
Executive Producers JULIAN WARE  
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ANNA MIRALIS  
ADAM PARTRIDGE  
Director of Photography BENJAMIN KRACUN  
Editor JOBY GEE  
Line Producer JENNY MAUTHE  
Additional Photography ROGER CHAPMAN  
Composer ANNE NIKITIN

## SYNOPSIS

Set in a former mining village in Wales, DARK HORSE is the inspirational true story of a group of friends from a working men's club who decide to take on the elite 'sport of kings' and breed themselves a racehorse. Raised on a slagheap allotment, their foal grows into an unlikely champion, beating the finest thoroughbreds in the land, before suffering a near fatal accident. Nursed back to health by the love of his owners - for whom he's become a source of inspiration and hope - he makes a remarkable recovery, returning to the track for a heart-stopping comeback.

## LONG SYNOPSIS

DARK HORSE is an inspirational and life-affirming true story set in the village of Cefn Fforest in one of the poorest mining valleys in Wales. The story begins in early 2000, when Jan Vokes, the barmaid of the local working men's club, hears a regular talking about the time he owned a share of a racehorse. Walking home that night, Jan has an idea. She'd bred pigeons and whippets before, she thought. How hard could it be? She decides she's going to take on the 'sport of kings' and breed herself a racehorse.

Jan recruits her husband, Brian – a former coal deliveryman and nightclub bouncer – and the regular, Howard, who was reminiscing about his racehorse in the bar. Together they buy a £300 thoroughbred mare – possibly the slowest racehorse in Wales - pair her with an ageing stallion (discount stud fee: £3,500 + VAT) and raise the foal on their slagheap allotment. They name him *Dream Alliance* after the 23 friends from the village Jan cajoles into a forming a syndicate paying £10 a week.

To the astonishment of the racing elite, *Dream* becomes an unlikely champion, leaving his blue-blooded rivals standing. Until one day, running in a race at the famous Aintree racetrack, he suffers a potentially fatal injury. His owners refuse to let him die. By now *Dream* is a local hero and genuine source of hope and inspiration in the valley. Instead, his owners pour their winnings - £20,000 - into high-risk, revolutionary stem cell surgery.

18 months later, defying all odds and judgement, *Dream* makes a heart-stopping comeback in the Welsh National. His fantastic victory makes the national news – *NAGS TO RICHES! SLUMNAG MILLIONAIRE! CHAMPION THE WONDER HORSE!* – and in all the excitement *Dream* is entered for the biggest race of all: the Grand National.

If he won he'd go down in history, but the Grand National is run at Aintree and that meant returning to the scene of the accident that nearly killed him...

## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

This film started life with a chance visit to the Boxing Day races in 2012. It was a freezing December day, the place was packed with punters and food stalls and bookies and in the middle of this travelling carnival were these incredible looking horses: sleek, muscled, wired-looking. The recession had kicked in not long before but at the track that day - and all over the country - people were spending cash they didn't have, to back one of those beautiful animals.

I knew nothing about racing or horses but the idea of a film set in that world intrigued me. Days of research later, looking for *something* though I wasn't quite sure what, I came across this story and knew within seconds I would do anything to make it into a film.

It was funny and moving, full of life and life-affirming with big universal themes and a great dramatic sweep and shape to the story. It was also a wonderful mash of film genres, part classic British *Billy Elliot/Full Monty* underdog tale, part *Lavender Hill Mob* Ealing Comedy caper, plus of course *Rocky*... with a horse.

Too scared to make the first call - I couldn't face hearing a 'no' or worse still failing to persuade them - I phoned Judith Dawson, the producer, who also happens to be the best cold-caller I know. I said you *HAVE* to make this work or we're both going to regret it forever. (She responds well to pressure...)

That was the start of our journey with the characters at the heart of the film. Meeting Jan and Brian, Howard and Angela, Tony, Maureen, the film we *thought* we had just got better and better. It was about so much more than racing. They were wonderful storytellers who were able to convey in a very true and funny and moving way, how much the journey with *Dream* meant to each of them. It was something they all needed at some level. It was something very personal.

That was especially true for Jan, the barmaid who began it all. She led a tough life, working long hours behind the bar and as a cleaner and she did that in large part to afford her *other* life with her show whippets and racing pigeons and then with *Dream*. That life with her animals, as a breeder, was the life that gave her a sense of release and freedom. It allowed her to be the person she once dreamt she could be.

In many ways Jan was a sort of pied piper for the project, one by one persuading her friends and then her village to get behind her outlandish plan. Where most of us might look forward and see the obstacles or the snobbery or the doors locked shut, Jan sees only intriguing challenges and the opportunity to stir the pot a bit. She is quite fearless.

For that reason, one of the most touching things about the story is that it comes full circle. At the end of the film the characters are in the same jobs, the same lives, Jan is still cleaning the tills at Asda; they are no richer *materially* but they are richer in every other way.

Our characters were a gift, but bringing their story to life was an adventure all of its own. All that remained of the story was a few snatched pieces of home movie, some newspaper cuttings and a handful of photographs. Plus our central character was a horse – a non-speaking star in the central role. We knew we needed some level of dramatization and the minute we met *Dream* we knew the solution was simply for *Dream* to play himself. Though I don't have much to compare this to, he seemed very charismatic - if a little enigmatic - and he proved the perfect, patient gentleman during filming.

The other central element of the film was the setting: Cefn Fforest and the valleys of South Wales. Coal mining had been at the heart of the valleys for generations. When the pits closed it changed life beyond recognition. Unemployment is now higher here than almost anywhere in Britain. *Dream Alliance* had – in his own quiet way – given a lot to Cefn Fforest. The clubs filled up again, people were proud that one of their own was doing good and putting the place back on the map.

We asked the village to help us recreate those days and they couldn't have been more hospitable or welcoming. No professional extras were used. They are all locals - people and animals - and they made the film possible.

- Louise Osmond

## ABOUT THE CHARACTERS

JAN VOKES: Jan was the barmaid at the working men's club in Cefn Fforest who first dreamt up the plan to breed a racehorse on her slagheap allotment. Today, she still works six days a week, cleaning the tills in Asda and a school in the afternoon. Her ambition now is to win the Cheltenham Gold Cup. A new thoroughbred mare is installed in the allotment stables and the foal is due in early 2015.

BRIAN VOKES: Brian – Jan's husband - was the first of Jan's recruits. A former coal deliveryman and nightclub bouncer (missing a few teeth on account of that work), he's been horse mad since he was five years old, saving up to buy his first horse when he was just 15. '*DIY... no,*' Jan says, '*he'll hang a picture with a six inch nail, but he can bring any animal back from the dead. He connects with them.*'

HOWARD DAVIES: Howard was Jan's next recruit. A tax consultant with a lifelong passion for racing, he'd had a share of a racehorse once before and lost a fortune so at first he was reluctant to get involved. But Jan doesn't really take no for an answer. Today, he has just finished a book on the story and on occasion, he can be found in Cefn Fforest's Dagger Reform Club, telling anyone who'll listen about the time he owned a racehorse called *Dream Alliance*.

ANGELA DAVIES: Angela – Howard's wife – initially viewed Jan's plan with deep scepticism. Knowing her husband's nature as a dreamer she felt sure it would end in tears or debt - or both. As time went on it was *Dream* himself that won her over. There was something about that horse with the white blaze and his unlikely progress through the ranks of the elite that she found irresistible. A teacher for many years Angela has recently retired and now fills her time adoring her new grandson.

TONY KERBY: Tony Kerby and Brian have been friends for as long as either of them can remember – certainly from back in the days when Brian had teeth. A former miner who went down the pits at 15, he was one of the first to respond to Jan's sign in the bar: BREED A HORSE TO GET ON A HORSE. £10 A WEEK. '*I had faith in Jan and Brian,*' he says, '*I thought if anyone could do it, they could.*' Today, Tony works when he can and enjoys the occasional pint of rough cider.

MAUREEN JONES: Maureen was also among the first to pledge her £10 a week. During *Dream's* racing career she made her first ever visit to the local bookmaker, an event neither of them will ever forget. Her husband was initially discouraging about her joining the syndicate. When he asked – somewhat sarcastically - which part of the horse exactly she would own, she replied: '*his arse.*' She has taken quiet satisfaction in *Dream's* success ever since.

## PRESS CUTTINGS FROM THE NEWSPAPERS

### **Dream win for Alliance: Fairytale Welsh National win**

By MARCUS TOWNEND Racing Correspondent reports from Chepstow 30 December 2009  
Daily Mail

Dream Alliance, bred on a tiny allotment in the Valleys, produced the most romantic story of the racing year when clinging on for victory in the Coral Welsh National on Monday.

Being bred from a mare which cost only £350 alongside the ducks and chickens on Brian and Janet's Vokes' patch of land in the village of Cefn Fforest was an unlikely enough scenario. But the Philip Hobbs-trained 20-1 shot, who landed the first prize of £57,000, had also recovered from an injury that threatened to end his career and provided jockey Tom O'Brien, who had spent five months of 2009 sidelined with a fractured right thigh, with a first winner since his return.

Sixty years earlier, Fighting Line had become the first Welsh National winner under jockey Dick Francis. But the man who became one of the world's best known crime writers would have shied away from creating such a far-fetched plot.

Janet Vokes, who also runs the working man's club in Cefn Fforest, had been inspired to breeding a racehorse after she had won the equivalent in pigeon racing and her efforts have produced a racehorse with the fighting spirit of former world boxing champion Joe Calzaghe, who hails from the same area near Newport.

He held on by three-quarters of a length from the fast finishing Silver By Nature, who made a costly mistake at the last fence. Third was the 4-1 favourite Le Beau Bai with 2007 winner Miko De Beauchene fourth.

The Grand National now beckons with Corals introducing Dream Alliance at 33-1. Brian Vokes said: 'Janet won the pigeon Grand National and said: "How hard can it be to breed a racehorse.'" This is the first one we ever bred. We bought the mare for £350 and our allotment is less than a quarter of an acre.'

To afford to keep the gelding in training, a 23-strong syndicate was formed which probably believed it had hit the jackpot when Dream Alliance finished second to Denman in the 2007 Hennessy Gold Cup. But a cruel injury struck later that season at Aintree. Hobbs said: 'He cut right through his boot and tendon. He was taken to the Liverpoolveterinary hospital who patched him up but it looked unlikely that he would race again. 'We gave him a year off with one run since when third in a hurdle race here last month. This is a dream come true.'

## **Dream Comes True For Stallion As Alliance Bids For National**

April 10, 2010 Wales Online

IT'S a story straight from the realms of a Hollywood feel-good blockbuster.

And that's exactly where the amazing tale of Dream Alliance will be destined – if the horse, owned by a consortium of friends and business partners, completes its improbable journey into the nation's consciousness by landing the biggest prize in horse racing today.

Born to a £350 mare on a disused allotment on an old slagheap in South Wales and raised by a pigeon breeder, Dream Alliance lacked the cushy upbringing afforded to most champion racehorses. But the young chestnut foal grew into a strong runner, and was well placed for a run in the 2009 Grand National – until a life-threatening tendon tear nearly brought an end to his racing days.

After revolutionary stem cell treatment, the horse was fit to race again – and famously captured the attention of the country after romping home in the Welsh National at Chepstow last December – earning the 22-strong syndicate, who each pay £10 a week for maintenance bills, a £57,000 payday. Today he runs at Aintree as a 33/1 shot hoping to add the Grand National to the five races already secured.

But the remarkable tale of Dream Alliance truly begins more than a decade ago behind the bar of a workingmen's club in Cefn Fforest, in the Gwent valleys. Janet Vokes worked as a barmaid in the club, but operated a successful sideline as a breeder of whippets and pigeons. After securing entry into Crufts for several of her pedigree dogs, she turned her Midas touch to pigeon racing – winning the first competition she ever entered.

But with even grander aspirations in her sights, she expressed her desire to breed a champion racehorse to Howard Davies, a local man who had a limited amount of equine experience. Despite initial nervousness, Mr Davies agreed to support Mrs Vokes' racehorse project, and the pair travelled to Llanelli, to look for a mare.

The couple located a 13-year-old, badly scarred from a barbed wire injury, from £1,000 down to £300, and Mrs Vokes added £50 for luck. The horse – called Rewbell – was intended to be bred with a stallion called Blushing Flame but following an untimely move to France, she was bred with Bien Bien instead.

Dream Alliance was born in 2001.

“It's hard to believe that something that started as a conversation in a bar has grown into something so wonderful,” said Mrs Vokes, 56. “It's also hard to believe that a little foal who didn't like mud now loves to run in soft ground. If I had any inkling that I couldn't succeed, I wouldn't have embarked on it. I don't like failure. We started with a bit of fun on local tracks like Ludlow and Hereford, but he just went from strength to strength.

“When I talked about breeding the racehorses, Howard was nervous. He'd had them before and it was a disaster. But he'd heard about my 'Midas' touch and he was drawn to it. He probably thought I was mad. I told my husband Brian, and we went out to find a mare. Eventually, I talked Brian into believing it was his idea. We are like the three musketeers – I have the dreams,



Howard has the racing knowledge and Brian has the day-to-day horse knowledge.”

That knowledge has served Dream Alliance well over the 22 races run over his career so far. And while those races have brought five wins, it is the most recent – the Welsh National – that earned a measure of fame for its owners.

The syndicate includes six tax consultants, a garage owner, four retired people, a restaurateur, a painter and decorator, a taxi driver, a bailiff, a mortgage adviser, a Royal Mint storeman, three factory workers, and a property developer.

“People have come up to me in Asda while I’ve been waiting for Janet and my daughter,” said Brian Vokes, 62. A woman in the car next to me started smiling and waving, saying: ‘Aren’t you the owner of Dream Alliance? Let me shake your hand, I’ve never shaken the hand of anyone famous before. Are you a millionaire?’ We’re not millionaires, we’re just working-class people. But it’s the best £300 I ever spent.”

Mr Davies, 55, takes a similar view of his investment in the project. Previous dabbles had not been quite as successful, but he will be forever thankful for Mrs Vokes’ persistence.

“About 20 years before I met Janet I had a small share in a racehorse with my brother,” he said. “It cost quite a bit of money when we realised that the horse had got injured. I made a pledge at that point that I wouldn’t do it again. It isn’t that Jan doesn’t see obstacles, she just steps over them. When she mentioned she was going to breed a racehorse, she asked if I could point her in the right direction on the administrative side of things. I picked up my glass, said good luck and sat down. She wouldn’t take no for an answer and I realised she was serious.

“She was committed enough to find a mare – not many people outside racing appreciate the genes are 80% the mother’s and 20% influenced by the dad. To pay as little as £300 and a tip for luck (is amazing) – and Dream’s got a younger brother and two sisters, and all are going to race or have raced. It was Jan’s persistence in quite a determined way that made me sit down and think how we could do it without having any financial risk.”

Unsurprisingly, the syndicate has not experienced a financial windfall as a result of Dream Alliance’s success. Fifteen members, some from as far afield as Scotland, have joined since it was originally formed by seven members, and much of their winnings have gone back into Dream Alliance’s training funds.

“Any money that comes in here goes to the horses anyway,” said Mrs Vokes. “I have got a fantastic vet and a very understanding bank manager. We are lucky to have Dream Alliance, but Dream Alliance is lucky to have 22 fantastic owners. They all love him as much as I do. After he severed his tendon, they all said if he never races again, he had to have a good standard of living. We were told by the vet there was a 90% chance he would never race again – but Dream proved them all wrong.”

Among the syndicate members are Derek Williams, 64, and his wife Eira. Both are pinning hopes on a remarkable second major win today.

“I hope he does the job on Saturday – as long as he comes home safe,” said Mr Williams. “It’s just unbelievable – you get into racing but you don’t expect to win something like the Welsh

National. It's all I could ever have wished for."

Mrs Williams added: "It's Derek's birthday coming up and I asked him what he'd like. 'What else could I want?' he said."

The Williamses are just one of a number of married couples hoping for a successful day at Aintree.

"I've always bet on horses and gone racing on social trips to the Grand National," said Maldwyn Thomas, 62, who has convinced his wife Mary to become involved. I never once envisaged we would have a horse and I still can't believe what we have got. I have known Brian all my life, he persuaded us to join the syndicate. I wasn't part of it until two years down the line, although I had seen Dream Alliance since he was a foal. Brian kept saying, he'll be a winner, if you don't join you'll be sorry. I wouldn't have joined otherwise.

"I was impressed how wherever we took the horse, everyone was interested and said he was a beautiful horse. When he was delivered, the vet said to Brian, 'You have got a perfect horse.' "People can't believe how we have bred him so cheaply. One man asked me how much I think Dream is worth and I guessed £150,000. He said, 'I've just sold a horse for more than that and it's not half as good as yours.' I was glad I was in the syndicate then.

"Waiting for the Grand National is like waiting for your wedding day. There are a lot of things that could go wrong, but you are just hoping nothing does go wrong. But it's a privilege to be involved as well."

Mrs Thomas, 57, said: "I started in the syndicate after Maldwyn. My heart's going now, and has been for a few weeks, waiting for the Grand National."

## **Alliance Fulfills A Valley's Dreams**

28 December 2009, Peter Shuttleworth, BBC Sport

Brian Vokes is proof that dreams do come true - if only men listen to their wives.

Outsider Dream Alliance's 2009 Welsh National triumph at Chepstow is one for the Hollywood scriptwriters because this is a working-class hero who has come from the humblest of beginnings. For the foal - born on a disused Welsh valley allotment nine years ago this New Year's Day - has cheated death, risen again from a career-threatening injury thanks to pioneering surgery and, against all of the odds, bravely galloped to his biggest victory in front of those who appreciated it most.

But the only reason Dream Alliance exists is because one woman dared to take seriously the drunken dream of locals at a Welsh valley workingman's club. Jan Vokes was pulling pints behind the bar at Cefn Fforest's Top Club when a load of regulars shared a theoretical chat about owning a racehorse. "I liked the sound of that and went home to ask my husband to buy me a mare so I could breed a racehorse," recalled the determined bar tender turned champion breeder.

"I won't tell you what he called me. I didn't know the boys from Adam back then and they'd had a few drinks. But I'd always loved animals, I once bred racing pigeons and won trophies, and I thought 'How hard can it be breeding a racehorse?' " Most husbands would have dismissed such a whimsical flight of fancy from their better half following banter with a bunch of unknown blokes at a bar.

But as Brian, a retired road layer, points out: "You ignore my wife at your peril. You don't say no to her." Jan bought a mare called Rewbell for a 'snip' from a breeder in Llanelli, deepest rugby union country, and the dream slowly turned to reality when Dream Alliance was born in 2001. It was then that the 22 syndicate members started paying £10 a week into the Alliance Partnership syndicate.

Their £4,500 rollercoaster ride has been emotional. Dream Alliance, who made his National Hunt debut at Newbury in November 2004, had rarely finished outside the top four before winning the 2007 Perth Cup.

Then, as their beloved ran the great Denman close at the 2007 Hennessey Gold Cup back at Newbury, the syndicate dreamed of Grand National glory. But their excitement and anticipation turned to anxiety and anguish 18 months ago when Dream severed a tendon in his leg - an Achilles tendon in a human - in the handicap hurdle at the famous Aintree track where they one day hoped Dream Alliance would live up to his name. Such an injury could end the animal's life, let alone his career, but 21st-Century stem-cell surgery ensured the Dream lived on.

That weekend in April 2008, however, was a testing time for animal and owner as Rewbell died giving birth to her fourth foal, meaning that the Vokes could not be beside Dream's bedside when he was at his lowest ebb. "We had to rear the foal ourselves," said Jan. "It was a tough time so that makes this high all the more enjoyable."

The stem-cell treatment cost the modest syndicate £20,000, but as Dream galloped to glory and a £43,580 winning cheque in front of the television cameras and half of Cefn Fforest on the Chepstow terraces, any debts were repaid with incredible interest. The gaggle of garage owners, bailiffs, tax consultants and more agreed in unison that all their Christmas presents had come at once - it was just a shame the noodle factory worker could not get time off work. But how much better her Chinese chow mein snack must have tasted on her break this Bank Holiday.

It would have been fitting symmetry if Richard Johnson, the jockey that helped save Dream irreparable damage at Aintree, was on board the loveable gelding for his finest hour. But Johnson chose Phillip Hobbs's other Welsh National hope Kornati Kid and had to watch his stablemate Tom O'Brien take the plaudits from way back up the three-mile-five-furlong course after Johnson's chance had pulled up.

Syndicate member and warehouse storeman Gwyn Davies, though, was quick to praise the man he describes as Dream's "saviour". "We feared the worst when we heard about the injury," he said. "But Richard immediately knew the problem and kept him still so that minimised the damage. Then he made sure Dream was not put down because he knew his injury was not curable. He helped save Dream. Once we knew he was OK, we were resigned to taking him home and having him as a pet - that would have been fine with us. But this win shows with a bit of belief, tender loving care, determination, ability and a never-say-die attitude what can be achieved in sport because we are just 23 idiots from a small Welsh village with a horse bred on an allotment. That makes this such an awesome feat. The drinks will be flowing long into the night. I doubt I'll be going home tonight."

So here's a case of Dream by name, dream by nature. And as Brian concludes: "I'm happy I did what I'm told!"

## TIMELINE

1999: Jan Vokes, barmaid at a working-men's club in Cefn Fforest in South Wales, decides to breed a racehorse. She recruits her husband, Brian 'Daisy' Vokes and then Howard Davies, a local tax consultant with a passion for racing.

2000: Jan buys a 13 year old mare called Rewbell for £350 and forms a syndicate of 23 friends and associates paying £10 a week. She chooses an American stallion at stud in Oxfordshire called Bien Bien and Howard does a deal for a stud fee of £3000 + VAT.

2001: March 2001 Dream Alliance is born. He is raised on the Vokes' slagheap allotment.

2004: Jan and Brian visit the top trainer Philip Hobbs and ask him to assess their horse. After a few months training he shows little promise but Hobbs decides to try him out in a race anyway, entering him in his first novice stakes at Newbury in November. He comes 4<sup>th</sup>.

2005/2006: To the astonishment of his trainer, the bookies and the racing world, Dream Alliance gets better; coming 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> in his next races and then winning twice in a row.

2006/2007: Dream has a run of poor form. Many start to write him off but he roars back with a blistering win at Perth in April 2007 and on the back of it is entered in the Hennessy Gold Cup, one of grandest races in the calendar. He storms home second only to Denman, the best jumps horse in the country at the time.

2008: By now is he a contender, a racehorse winning a real reputation. He's entered in the race before the Grand National at Aintree in Liverpool, a huge occasion on the day of the most famous and dangerous race in the world.

During the race he suffers a potentially fatal accident. His owners refuse to have him put down. Instead they pour his winnings to dates – money that would have been theirs - into revolutionary stem cell surgery costing £20,000. He returns to Philip Hobbs' stables and a long and difficult period of rehabilitation follows. Jan and Brian visit him regularly.

2009: Against all odds, Dream recovers well enough to gallop again. If anything he seems faster than ever. He is allowed back into training and comes second in his first race back. That December he is entered in the Welsh Grand National, one of the biggest races in the calendar...and wins.

2010: Dream is entered for the biggest race of all, the Grand National. If he won he would go down in history but it means returning to Aintree, the scene of his near fatal accident.

## ABOUT THE FILM-MAKERS

Director LOUISE OSMOND started her career at ITN on their news journalism graduate trainee scheme, covering stories in Europe and Africa before moving into documentaries. Her most recent feature length documentary was the BAFTA nominated, RTS award-winning RICHARD III: THE KING IN THE CAR PARK. Other work includes the theatrical documentaries DEEP WATER – selected for the Telluride Film Festival, winner of a Grierson Award and Best Documentary at Rome Film Festival, and THE BECKONING SILENCE – winner of an Emmy, Special Jury Award at the Banff Mountain Film Festival and Grand Prize at New Zealand Mountain Film Festival; KILLER IN A SMALL TOWN, selected for the Sheffield International Documentary Festival and McQUEEN & I, a film about the relationship between the fashion designer Alexander McQueen and his muse, Isabella Blow.

Producer JUDITH DAWSON was a journalist and senior political correspondent at Westminster for many years. She produced and directed the three part series ALISTAIR CAMPBELL'S DIARIES for BBC1, based on the controversial memoirs of Tony Blair's spin-doctor. She made two further films with Campbell, including the award-winning CRACKING UP, which documented his battle with drink and depression. For the sake of even-handedness, she went on to make three films with one of the Conservative party's most controversial figures, Michael Portillo. They included DIGGING UP THE DEAD, a film about the search for the 'disappeared' of the Spanish Civil War and the BAFTA short-listed 'DEATH OF A SCHOOLFRIEND' – a film about the suicide of a childhood friend.

Executive Producer JULIAN WARE started his career as an editor, cutting Nick Broomfield's film CHICKEN RANCH and a landmark series about Vietnam before moving into management as Head of ITN Factual, later joining DSP, first as an Executive Producer and then as Creative Director. During his career he has served as a wise if irascible Executive Producer on many award-winning films including the Grierson award-winning HOW TO BUILD A BIONIC MAN, the Channel 4 drama, THE MILL, the BAFTA-nominated 9/11: FALLING MAN and the RTS-winning RICHARD: THE KING IN THE CAR PARK. He claims DARK HORSE is his last film before retiring to Devon.

Editor JOBY GEE has recently worked on the feature documentaries FOR NO GOOD REASON about the artist Ralph Steadman, SMASH & GRAB: THE STORY OF THE PINK PANTHERS and MY ATOMIC AUNT. It follows an award-winning career in British television including DOGGING TALES, GYPSY BLOOD, EDUCATING ESSEX and THE FALLEN, for which he won a BAFTA for Best Editing and an RTS Craft award.

Director of Photography BENJAMIN KRACUN is a rising talent in British cinematography. His recent work includes HYENA – selected for TIFF and the opening night gala at the 2014 Edinburgh Festival, FOR THOSE IN PERIL – nominated for a BAFTA and winner of a BIFA

for Best British Debut - THE COMEDIAN as well as a number of BAFTA nominated short films.

Composer ANNE NIKITIN wrote the critically acclaimed score for the BAFTA-winning film THE IMPOSTER and was nominated for Best Original Score at the Cinema Eye Honors Awards in New York. Other recent credits include the German feature film FREISTATT. She has also composed music for the BBC, Channel4, Film4, five, A&E, Discovery, National Geographic, History Channel, the BFI, and Sky Movies, as well as a range of independent short and feature films.