



Cannes admits there's a Happiness Thief in the Festival

UK Short The Happiness Thief is competing for the prestigious €15,000 Cannes Film Festival 2004 Cinefondation prize.

Screening at the Salle Luis Bunuel, Cannes at **14.30, Thursday 20 May 2004.**

This **UK National Film and Television School graduation film**, the first international film festival selection for both its **director Derek Boyes**, and **producer Matthew King** is competing against 17 other films from round the world. Previous British prize winners of the Cinefondation include **Asif Kapadia** (*The Warrior*) and **Emily Young** (*Kiss of Life*).

It is the story of a miserable girl who curses her younger brother for being so happy, not realising that her curse would summon a grotesque figure who, in the darkness of night, would steal the boy's happiness. Horrified and ridden with guilt, the girl chases the Thief onto the city's rooftops in a desperate attempt to bargain with him. But he is not an easy creature to please...

The film-makers employed **cutting edge digital technology** in order to render **visual fireworks** often associated with much bigger budget films. The Happiness Thief was one of the **first films in the UK to shoot on the Thomson Viper FilmStream Camera**, a technological advance that considerably eased the seamless integration of live action work with digital matte paintings and CGI effects. The result is a film made by students that leaves professionals envious.

For further information and pictures contact:

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Biographies and Additional Information:

The National Film and Television School is the UK's premier film school. It's alumni include Roger Deakins, Nick Park, Bernard Rose, Michael Radford, Lynne Ramsay, and Nick Broomfield. It is currently under the Directorship of veteran UK producer Nik Powell.

Tom Brooke (The Happiness Thief). Since leaving the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art last July Tom has appeared in *D-Day Landings* (BBC/Dangerous Films), *Bridget Jones' Diary: On the Edge* (TE Films), and most recently played the lead in Joe Penhall's *Some Voices* at London's the Young Vic Theatre to great critical acclaim.

Derek Boyes (Director) After graduating in film from the University of Northumbria, Derek spent four years working in the film industry in various assisting roles where he had the opportunity to observe many directors at work, including George Lucas, Beeban Kidron and Robert Altman. In 2002, he returned to directing and completed a two year M.A. at the National Film and Television School. He is currently developing several feature scripts.

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Matthew King (Producer): A past President of the Oxford University Dramatic Society (OUDS), Matthew has worked extensively as a theatre producer, recently winning a major UK theatre award for Cue Deadly, A Film Live on Stage. He started his film career as an assistant to Duncan Heath at ICM, where he met writer-director Justin Kerrigan, with whom he worked as script editor on the feature I Know, You Know for Miramax. Matthew recently completed the M.A course at the National Film and Television School and is currently in development with three feature film projects.

Others:

Emily (Cast): Chloe Smyth

Timmy (Cast): Beans Balawi

Director of Photography: Vladimir Trivic

Production Designer: Andrea Hughes

Editor: Benjamin Putland

Composer: Richard Chester

Sound Designer: Miha Jaramaz

Costume Designer: Richard Cook

Prosthetic Make-Up Designer: Paul Hyett

Visual Effects: Leigh Took

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The Thomson Viper FilmStream Camera has improved on current Hi Definition technology to allow the cinematographer to capture every single piece of information a scene has to offer without loss to video pre-processing or filtering. The result is that post-production operators have complete freedom to change the visual and emotional effect that the picture gives - even after the set has been destroyed and the crew has gone home – and a look almost indistinguishable from film.

Mattes and Miniatures Digital, based at Pinewood Studios, have produced quality images for feature films, television and commercials (credits include Lost In Space, Enemy of the State and more recently Hallmark's Tenth Kingdom, and the main title sequence for George and the Dragon). Supervising the work on The Happiness Thief was Leigh Took – a traditional optical matte painter who has supplied shots to many top directors, including Terry Gilliam, Tim Burton, Wim Wenders and John Boorman. His understanding of how current digital effects technology could be used with more traditional optical and model techniques meant a sophisticated effects film could be realised on a relatively low budget.

Ends

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PRESS RELEASE

BOYES COMES OF AGE AT CANNES

Film director, Derek Boyes, talks to Tom Bill about his ambitious short film 'The Happiness Thief', which has been selected for the 2004 Cannes Film Festival

Coming to a rooftop near you soon, "The Happiness Thief" is one of three British student films that have been selected for the 2004 Cannes Film Festival, which takes place from 12th to 23rd May in the Cote d'Azur resort. The ambitious 14-minute short, directed by Derek Boyes, 32, is an M.A. graduation film from the National Film and Television School. "I'm excited about Cannes" Boyes says, "it's a fantastic stamp of approval for any film."

After twelve years of financial struggle, which were spent studying filmmaking and working in the industry, Boyes hopes that this could be his breakthrough. The film's protagonist is a frolicsome child-catcher figure who sucks the happiness from two children through a glass straw. Perhaps not traditional Cannes material. Certainly not your average student film.

Boyes, who is originally from Maidstone, explains, "In a way, I feel like I'm submitting Terminator 3." "It's a very unusual short film that's bound to stand out for being so commercial." Along with 17 other worldwide entrants, Boyes will be in the French resort from 17th to 21st May. The student filmmakers will compete for 3 Cinefondation awards that will be presented at a ceremony on 20th, with a first-prize of €30,000.

He cites his early influences to explain the thinking behind the £14,000 project. "The escapism of Star Wars, Indiana Jones and E.T. left me with a buzz of excitement in my stomach when I left the cinema" he says. From the age of 12 he was hooked. "A few of us would go down to a local quarry and blow things up, experimenting with latex and fake blood and capturing it all on a VHS camera. Then I started adding a narrative. It was great for learning the basics of film grammar." Spoof Star Trek and Alien films followed, but it was always more than a schoolboy sideline. "I had to bribe people out of bed at 9 o'clock on a Sunday morning. I persuaded them to swing on ropes and wear papier mache alien heads in return for pot-noodles," he recalls.

"With 'The Happiness Thief' I've essentially come full circle. It's the kind of emotionally-driven escapism that I was trying to capture all

those years ago," he says. "I didn't want to get sucked into realist social drama. I'd already done those. The problem was that during development, people didn't really get it." He likens the story to a Mr. Man book. "It's a simple fairytale. A cinematographic experience with a human pulse. If people want to pick it apart and see it as a metaphor for child abuse, that's up to them. There were lots of different influences as I was making it - Homer Simpson is even in there somewhere!"

Production of the film was also hindered by the technically pioneering nature of the project. "It was the first time that a fiction film had been shot in the U.K. on the new 4k high-definition Thomson Viper camera. We were basically guinea-pigs."

Between his B.A. in Media Production at Northumberland University and M.A. from the NFTS, Boyes worked on a number of films in assisting roles, including *Sleepy Hollow*, *Ideal Husband* and *Gosford Park*. "In 1997 I did five months on *Star Wars* at Leavesden Studios as a Photography Assistant. "It was a childhood fantasy come true," he says. "Seeing that kind of escapist filmmaking from the inside filled me with enormous confidence about eventually tackling such a project."

Reaction to "The Happiness Thief" has been very encouraging so far. "'Amazing' is the word we keep hearing." However, Boyes remains realistic about his future. "I may be ambitious but I'm a risk as a first-time feature director, especially in the U.K. Production companies here don't have the money to gamble with. In the U.S. they are more willing and able to roll the dice - a good short can lead to a feature." He also points to the lack of tradition for writing commercial material in Britain. "We're more used to the Mike Leigh stuff, although things are beginning to change post-Harry Potter and the Lord of the Rings."

THE HAPPINESS THIEF (2004) Hi Def. - Duration 13'30"

THE REVIEW

Have you ever come out of the cinema with the feeling that you've been robbed? If not of the £7.00 you paid for the ticket, then of the two hours of your life that you could have spent doing something far more productive? I have. On this occasion however, neither is true. Not simply because I have just attended a free screening at the National Film and Television School, nor because the film in question is a mere 13 minutes, short. I would in fact have been happy to pay and although not unsatisfied, I left knowing that I could have watched more.

The Happiness Thief, based on a short story written by the Director, Derek Boyes, is an unpredictable mix of fairytale and fantasy tinged with unpleasantness. An unhappy little girl curses her younger brother for being so overtly happy and has to face her demon as a consequence. The 'thief' in question arrives in a ball of light, but his appearance is anything but angelic. Reminiscent of characters like Fagin, Beetlejuice, the Child Catcher and the Wicked Witch of the West; he dances across the rooftops with unnerving fluidity, searching for the last drop of happiness to suck from unsuspecting children.

It is seemingly an unpretentious tale of sibling rivalry. If you are looking for a moral to the story then it is no more complicated than the reminder that happiness is found in the simplest of things. Walks in the park on a sunny day, a hug from your Mum or the first sensation of ice cream on your tongue. Whatever it may be, because of its simplicity it can be easily forgotten, but just as easily remembered when forced to stop and think.

Some however may not be content to smile their way through to the happy ending; ignoring the unsavoury finger-licking and uncomfortable moments of physical contact between 'thief' and Emily. If one is intent on digging around in the squalor for something sinister, this parentless world, in which an unseen charismatic malevolence steals in and out of children's bedrooms in the cloak of darkness becomes a powerful metaphor for child abuse. Personally, I prefer the uncomplicated route. It is a film that makes you say 'urgh' as much as it makes you say 'aah' and with a little hocus pocus and the tiniest bit of 'buffle dust' you are reminded that in a way we are all our own happiness thieves, but at the same time our own saviours. Aah.

THE INTERVIEW

Q: The Happiness Thief uses magic to seduce his victims – Do you like magic?

A: Yes, I've always been fascinated by magic (in fact I was a member of the Medway Magic Society when I was twelve) and that was what led me to film

really, from magic I became interested in special effects and began to blow things up in a local quarry. But I realized that blowing things up isn't really satisfying enough, you need a story or a reason, so my friends and I started to make up stories. It was great fun.

Q: Who are your major influences?

A: Originally, George Lucas, who I was lucky enough to have worked on Star Wars and meet him - he's a very quiet, timid shy man who knows a phenomenal amount about the technical side of things and special effects and is extremely creative in that area, but doesn't necessarily connect with his actors, which for me as a Director is key. So, in later days Steven Spielberg because he is a brilliant story-teller and also David Fincher I admire for his darkness. I have a dark streak that shows in the Happiness Thief. Also Ray Harryhausen, who did all the stop motion animation films, Jason and the Argonauts etc

Q: What's the single most important thing that you've learnt about the industry so far?

A: That this is a business. In realizing that you can come up with ideas that will please the audience, please yourself and convince the financiers that it is a marketable film. Generally, a film only becomes marketable when someone is attached to it, a big name in the lead role.

Q: If you were touted as the next big Director, who would you want to be compared to?

A: Tarantino, Spielberg I guess but they are two such big names and especially Spielberg, as he's a generation apart that it's inconceivable to me now to think that I could achieve that status....So being more realistic I'd say Danny Boyle, I'd like to think I could achieve Danny Boyle type status, he's a good solid British role model.

Q: If you could sit amongst the audience in a cinema watching your first big feature and listen to what they said about it as they came out, what would be music to your ears?

A: Well, anything to suggest they'd enjoyed it really! That may sound a bit bland but there's nothing more rewarding than sitting amongst the audience as people watch your film and hearing them laugh, cry, gasp or whatever in the right places, because that's what it's all about. Entertaining people.

Q: What was the first film that had an impact on you?

A: Star Wars. I remember the hype around the playground and asking my Dad to take me to go and see it. Because there was no video back then once I'd seen

Star Wars I had the memory embedded in my brain for a long time and it is attached to my childhood.

Q: If there was a film version of Monopoly which two film would you have to land on to “Go straight to jail, do not pass go, do not collect £200?”

A: Two of the many that pop into my head are Godzilla and Tomb Raider (which I watched on fast-forward!)

Q: Which two films would be the equivalent of Mayfair & Park Lane?

A: Raiders of the Lost Ark & ET (without any hesitation)

THE BIOG

Fiction Director: DEREK BOYES

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Films at the NFTS:

The Happiness Thief*

Raiders Of The Film Festival*

In-Between

The Last Day **

No Fixed Abode

* Selected for the Cinefondation, Cannes Film Festival 2004

**Runner-up in the Edinburgh Film Festival Sting Competition

***Selected for the 3rd Imperial War Museum Student Film Festival