



THE SWEARING JAR PRESS KIT

Producers Jane Loughman of Monkeys & Parrots, Kyle Bornais of Farpoint Films, and Tony Wosk of Middle Child Films present the musical romance, ***The Swearing Jar***, starring Adelaide Clemens (*Rectify, Parade's End*), Douglas Smith (*Big Little Lies, The Alienist*) with Patrick J. Adams (*Suits, The Right Stuff*), and Golden Globe-winner and Oscar-nominee, Kathleen Turner (*The Kominsky Method, Romancing the Stone*).

The Swearing Jar is directed by Lindsay MacKay (*Wet Bum*) from a script by Kate Hewlett (*Malory Towers*) adapted from her award-winning play and produced by Jane Loughman (*All About Who You Know*), Kyle Bornais (*From the Vine*) and Tony Wosk (*Sorry For Your Loss*), with Morris Ruskin (*Glengarry Glen Ross*) serving as Executive Producer. It is being sold worldwide by Metro Films International and released in Canada by Level Film.

Cinematography by Jordan Kennington (*Goliath, Body & Bones*), music composed by Timothy Williams (*Brightburn, We Summon the Darkness*) with production design by Diana Magnus (*The Invisible Man, The Middle Man*), costumes by Hanna Puley (*Run This Town, Octavio is Dead*) and editing by Lindsay Allikas (*American Woman, Through Black Spruce*).

The Swearing Jar is funded by Telefilm Canada and Ontario Creates; and financed by Bell Media/CRAVE; Canadian Federal and Ontario & Manitoba Provincial tax credits; Media Capital Group; Vigilante Productions; Middle Child Films; Farpoint Films and Monkeys & Parrots.

Adelaide Clemens is represented by United Talent Agency and Mosaic; Douglas Smith by Gary Goddard Agency, ICM Partners and More Medavoy; Patrick J. Adams by ICM Partners and Ginsberg Daniels Kallis; and Kathleen Turner by Don Buchwald & Associates.

Synopsis

The Swearing Jar is Carey's story: a music teacher who throws a birthday concert for her husband, Simon, which rekindles reminiscences of their past. Through comedy, music, and memory, we follow the story of Carey and Simon's relationship, the birth of their child... and the lie that threatens to f*&k it all up! Equal parts humour and heartbreak, it tells two love stories at once - exploring the blessings and challenges of romance, marriage, parenting, loss... and moving on.

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

Narrative is linear, but life has breadth and depth and often circles back on itself. ***The Swearing Jar*** is the intricately constructed musical romance about what a couple will do for love: from swearing off swearing, to keeping life-changing secrets, to holding on to feelings longer than most would expect. Based on a script by Kate Hewlett, ***The Swearing Jar*** is also an exploration of loss and moving on and what if you can't. "So many stories are about moving on after you've lost the love of your life," said Hewlett. "But what if you can't?"

The Swearing Jar made its debut as a play at the 2008 Toronto Fringe Festival, where it won Best of Fringe. Two years later, in August 2010, the play opened at the New York International Fringe Festival where it won Outstanding New Play, and in 2013 it was a finalist for the 2013 Governor General's Literary Award for Drama.

"The framework of the story is this fabulous musical concept that opens in a bar where our hero, Carey, a music teacher, is throwing a concert to celebrate her husband Simon's 40th birthday," said producer Jane Loughman. "The intricacy of the story is that it lives in multiple timelines. The concert at the bar where Carey is performing, accompanied by the guitarist, Owen, is in the present, and through the songs she has written about her romance with Simon, the audience sees their history together, through the reminiscences the songs inspire and flashbacks to moments from their history. But in the here and now of the concert on stage, a different kind of relationship between Carey and Owen is revealed."

The first memory we see is Simon coming home to Carey to share some news. Carey also has news, and she goes first - she's pregnant with their first child. The joy of this revelation overwhelms them both and Simon's news remains unannounced. He keeps it to himself throughout the progression of the pregnancy.

Neither Carey nor the audience discover what Simon was going to say that day - until the moment his secret kills him - a fatal brain aneurysm. "In the process of the film, this will come as a devastating shock to the audience in the same way as it does to Carey who has, until this point, lived a fairly blissful, carefree life, happily in love with her partner and about to embark on their first family, with a new family member," explained Loughman.

"The structure of the film and the play are the same," elaborated Hewlett. "In order for the audience to judge the character of Carey in the same the way she's judging herself, we need to believe that she is cheating on Simon. If we know up front that she's a widow, we will have sympathy for her upfront. And then it becomes a different story."

Most filmmakers are happy to just engage an audience. Hewlett likes to play with them. "I love the idea of an audience turning on the main character a little. It's something I've done in a couple of my plays. And then, when the audience realizes what's *really* happening, they

check themselves in an interesting way. That's why a second viewing is fascinating because people see all the clues they missed the first time through when they jumped to conclusions."

"The Swearing Jar is a true hybrid film," Loughman explained. "From moment to moment, it is a romance, a drama, a comedy, and a musical. It's all of the above. The musical aspect is spectacular. Kate, the super multi-hyphenated talent that she is, has written all the songs. And we brought in this amazing composer, Tim Williams, a Canadian based in LA, who composes, orchestrates and conducts. We are so proud to be bringing this gorgeous, relatable, musical romance to the screen. **The Swearing Jar** presents the perfect opportunity to produce a prestige independent film, with huge audience appeal, incredible emotional impact, and gorgeous visual style. I am so excited to shoot this lovely film with such an incredibly talented team, including AFI alumna, director Lindsay MacKay and our amazing cast: Adelaide Clemens, Douglas Smith, Patrick J. Adams and Kathleen Turner."

Producers Jane Loughman and Tony Wosk thoroughly searched for the right director for this film and concluded that Lindsay Mackay was the perfect choice. "We loved her work on *Wet Bum* and were excited for Lindsay to bring her artistry and aesthetic to our film. We felt we had all the emotion in the bag with the script and the actors would bring the performances, so we really wanted Lindsay to elevate it visually. Our partners were keen to see her creativity brought to the direction, too. Plus, everyone who we trusted who had worked with her gave her a massive thumbs up!"

The structural complexity of the film called for a helmer who could handle multiple timelines and nuanced revelations. "**The Swearing Jar** is specifically designed so audiences have access to how the characters connect, how they relate to each other and the romance between them," Loughman continued. "The audience is seeing it all as the characters experience it without knowing the timeframe. It's crucially important for the integrity of the relationships that you see it without any emotional coloring from what eventually discover about the tragedy. We see Simon and Carey at moments in their lives when they are truly happy, when they're expecting a child, as they're going through the usual ups and downs of hormonal changes with pregnancy. But we are seeing it as it happens, not tinged by the retrospective nature of the concert. The audience isn't tricked - the clues are there, but they're not hammered over the head with them."

Director - Lindsay Mackay

"When I finished reading **The Swearing Jar**, I took a deep breath and immediately picked it up to read again. I was floored by the well-drawn characters and the maze of emotions that Kate Hewlett led me through while I was reading," said Director, Lindsay MacKay.

In a 2014 interview that MacKay did for *Wet Bum*, she had said, "When I was starting out as a filmmaker, one piece of advice that really stuck with me was when a professor of mine referred to filmmaking and shot choice as a language. Once you learn the basics of the

“filmmaking sentence structure,” you can learn to play with the language and, if you choose, create poetry. As a baseline, you understand that there are wide shots, medium shots and closeups. The films that have really stuck with me play with that. You use words to make a sentence, but poetry makes words sing. In the same way, shot choices and editing shots are a language that can make stories sing in different ways.”

Mackay was excited to make ***The Swearing Jar*** sing. “(It) is a beautiful play that Kate that has translated into a movie. There is a lot of dialogue and complex emotions, so to find ways to make two people standing around talking interesting I’ve shot through a lot of doorways, and I utilize reflection. I block up frames to add a layer of language that fits with the themes of keeping secrets and living in that world of feeling those secrets. To do this, I have people watching each other: Simon watches Carey when she performs or in the kitchen cooking. Carey goes to the bookstore and watches Owen.”

Carey - Adelaide Clemens

At the centre is Carey, played by Adelaide Clemens who has never sung before in a film, despite having a radiantly beautiful singing voice. “I’ve done voice work, as an actor, but never singing voice work. As soon as I got the job, I connected with two singing teachers and seriously began the process of learning how the voice works. I’ve been doing an hour a day of warm up and because we’re in quarantine while filming, I have certainly annoyed many hotel guests. We recorded the songs a week before going to camera so I’ve had that in my ear while filming,” said Clemens.

Clemens found that singing didn’t change her acting, but her acting informed her now elevated understanding of singing. “It was quite difficult for the few hours when we were in the recording booths, putting down the songs because the way I know how to perform is to unlock something and become incredibly vulnerable. In singing, you need to still hold onto the technical side of things. So, there are some big notes for me and what I learned is that when a song is executed beautifully, it’s incredibly powerful.”

The character of Carey was so fully realized in the script that Clemens was able to examine her intensely both from the inside and, objectively, from without. Appreciating that Carey was married to Simon for 12 years and that it was such a strong relationship that their friends admired them for it, Clemens found it strangely interesting to think that no matter how well you think you know the person you’re with, “I don’t believe you’ll ever know every nook and cranny. And you’ll never know what their response will be to certain pieces of news. It’s exciting to think that you always be getting to know them as you go through the landmarks of life.”

Yet Carey was less than charmed by the mystery, never fully understanding why Simon kept his diagnosis a secret and because he’s gone, she will never be able to ask him. “What Carey

is dealing with after Simon passes is rage. Coupled with the rage is the guilt that she has that rage. The saddest part," Clemens paused while speaking because this aspect of the story gets her every time, "is that she loved someone for 12 years and didn't really know him. How can she ever trust that she'll ever know anyone else or will have the faculties to identify a good partner? This story is brilliantly written. Kate's a genius. But it's heartbreaking."

Simon - Patrick J. Adams

The focus of Carey's consternation is her loving husband, Simon, played by Patrick J. Adams, who is chuffed that at his ripe old age of 40 (at the time of filming), he is finding that he can put his life experiences into his work. "I've certainly played people with kids before," Adams said as he was completing scenes on ***The Swearing Jar*** so he could race home for the birth of his second child. "And I'm able to do that better since I became a parent, but Simon's at the beginning, that sweet spot of having just found out that he is about to become a parent. He and Carey are just starting to get comfortable with the idea of it which involves a lot of questions like 'How are we going to do this?' and 'What is this going to look like?' It changes the way you look at your own life and the way you look at the world."

There are powerful themes running through this story, and the ones that Adams responded to were trust, love, self-sacrifice and putting someone ahead of yourself: "A big part of becoming a parent is realizing that something in the world is going to be bigger than you and bigger than the two of you. When you first meet Carey and Simon, it's easy to see they've already shared a lot of experiences together, but they've never done anything like this before." In navigating around something as new and profound as parenthood, previous synchronicity is no guarantee that they will react identically to whatever comes their way. It is how the couple reconciles their differences and finds new ways to lean on each other that is the payoff.

When you have a complex story and a nuanced script that plays out in multiple timelines, the actors realized it's not just the characters who are exploring new territory together. The cast is as well. "It's been a gift to work with Adelaide," said Adams who had never met Clemens before this. But he knows the indie film dynamic which means little rehearsal time. "She's such a giving actor, totally present and wanting to try new things and that's all that matters to me. We became very comfortable with each other in a very short period of time, and it's been so easy and so much fun."

And then Kathleen Turner happened. To be frank, ***The Swearing Jar*** is a very small, independent, labour-of-love Canadian film, shot in a tiny, little town in Ontario (Dundas) in the middle of COVID. Turner, the multi-award-winning actor known for her work on stage and screen, in short, *an icon*, landed on set for her first day of filming to play Bev, Simon's mother, and Adams had a lot to say about the experience. "When you're working someone like Kathleen Turner, it's less about an energy level and more like a holy person has walked in the room."

Adams paused, looked over his shoulder, and then admitted, "She'd kill me if she heard me say that. There's nothing high and mighty about her, no ego. But I feel like something really important just happened here. Immediately, the mood is all about 'let's get to work, let's create the space for it.' And I love that. For me, what follows someone who's accomplished so much and been such a profound artist, is that you gotta bring the respect. You have to quiet down so you can get the most out of it and really enjoy the process."

The character of Bev that Hewlett has written is a serious piece of steak to chew on. From Adams' perspective, his character's mother is a tough woman who raised Simon mostly on her own because she has a 'complicated' relationship with her ex-husband. "Bev likes to smoke. She likes to drink. She has a very particular way of doing things, doesn't bite her tongue, doesn't suffer fools, and calls it like she sees it. I think Simon has become a softer person as a result. He likes to keep her at arm's length because she's an intense energy. When we meet Bev in the story, she shows up and *she has things to say*." Adams has a gift for understatement.

Bev - Kathleen Turner

The elephant question in the room at this point is: How did the producers and director of this tiny film land Kathleen Turner? "I like the writing. I like the language. I like the character. I like the humour. Humour is very important for me," Turner stated plainly and directly. "That's the reason I take any role. If the script doesn't sing to me, I'm not gonna do it."

And there you have it. ***The Swearing Jar*** sings.

"I do like Bev. I understand her well," Turner explained in a voice that never fails to command. "She's a very angry woman, stuck somewhere in the past when her husband left her after multiple affairs. She's never gotten over it. She wants to hit something. She wants a target for her rage, her disappointment, but she's never really found anything satisfying - so her satisfaction comes from holding onto it. And sometimes she takes it out on her son, Simon. I don't think Simon blames his father in the same way Bev does, for the treatment that she received or for his leaving. There is love between Simon and Bev, but it's very unsatisfying not to have my boy on my side."

Among the many themes running through the film, it is love that stands out most for Turner and when she talks about it, the conflicted affections this mother has for her son and his pregnant wife play out: "This young couple has a rhythm to their lives, they are established, so having a child is the logical next step. Bev is quite thrilled about it but fights the idea of becoming a grandmother. In the midst of all this, it's very hard for Simon to carry the burden of his secret alone. He doesn't feel he can tell his wife however loving and wonderful that relationship is *or maybe it's because that relationship is so loving*. That only person that leaves is Bev, and she honours his trust."

Owen - Douglas Smith

Stepping into the story, and unwittingly into the middle of a messy drama, is the character of Owen, a frustrated, struggling musician who works at a bookstore. That's where he meets Carey for the first time, and it's an unequivocal meet-cute, according to Douglas Smith, who plays Owen. "Carey is this unique force of energy that Owen is instantly drawn to. He doesn't know why, but he knows he is." The two talk about music, and Owen floats an idea about maybe collaborating on a song with her, which Carey initially resists.

As their romantic relationship develops, the music relationship develops too - and that leads Carey to plan a birthday party for Simon's 40th and play all of these songs she's written about him. Owen is in a complicated position because he wants to encourage this part of her because she's so talented, but only too late does he realize what it feels like to be up on stage accompanying Carey, listening to these torch songs for Simon. "It's not a great feeling. But Owen's not really allowed to feel bad because he can't really be jealous of a dead person," said Smith.

Owen comes into the relationship with only one condition: no lying. Having been cheated on in the past, this is a dealbreaker. He accepts that Carey is slow to reveal herself and is generous in offering her the space to open up at her own speed, Douglas explained, "But it's not easy because she's been so damaged that she puts up a lot of walls and there's thorns on the walls. When she does lie to him, his desire for her is more powerful than his fear of getting hurt so he does keep pursuing her."

Smith, a musician in his own right having made a couple of albums and played in bands, was captivated by the writing device that Hewlett had created and the way it flowed in and out of time, and how one moment you are with Owen, and then Simon, then Bev, and then in the hospital and then back on stage. "There's a propulsive nature to this script. It's enticing. And Adelaide, she's a lot like Carey. She's got an impressive vocal range. Her voice is really good. She's definitely more talented of a singer than I am."

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Kate Hewlett wrote all the songs for ***The Swearing Jar***: "I've always written songs. I can hear a song in my head, so I write the melody. I write the harmony. And I write the lyrics. But the funny thing is I don't have the mathematics of music, so I can't play them. What I have to do is talk to a musician and explain what I'm hearing, literally hum the melody and the harmony and then they make it happen." The team turned to Tim Williams to make it happen - a Los Angeles-based musician, orchestrator and composer - who just happens to also be a family friend, and who taught Hewlett to play piano when she was 10!

This is how Williams became the composer for ***The Swearing Jar*** and he sees this film as such an incredible knife edge. "It operates in the wonderful area of comedy, but in deep drama as well. Films that can do both are so powerful because one minute you're laughing and the next you're crying. From a musical point of view, the score has to capture both the comedic side of the relationship between Carey and Simon and, at the same time, that depth of working through the grief of losing a loved one and coming out on the other side of it." Music helps audiences connect to the emotion of a story. "It's a language that talks to people's hearts, and if you get it right, audiences don't notice it, but they feel it, they feel the story. Music is not only telling the story, but it's undergirding the storytelling process," said Williams.

All music rehearsals that Williams had with Clemens were via Zoom, which were tricky because of the time delay, but very productive. Once everyone landed in Toronto for principal photography, Williams and Clemens were able to work in the same room and record all the songs in the rehearsal environment which made them feel natural. Williams then tempo-mapped out the live version of the songs so that they would never change when filming. The next step was to go into a proper recording studio where Adelaide recorded her vocals and Douglas came in to record his material. "Even though it all feels very natural, it was completely locked," Williams explained. "Once on set in the bar scenes, the director filmed the live version of Adelaide singing. The guitar is the recorded version, but Adelaide's voice is live which means, that she's had another four weeks of living with the material, and we capture the immediacy and the passion."

The final stage of this musical journey took Williams to London - and to the legendary Abbey Road Studios. For the British-born producer, Jane Loughman, this was a magical experience - to come home for the final leg of the lengthy, emotional, journey of this film. She explains "Once we had picture-locked, we recorded the score, and mixed the songs, at the Abbey Road Studios in London, where Tim was born, and I was raised. Tim has spent many sessions there conducting and orchestrating scores for giant movies such as *Guardians of the Galaxy*, *300* and *Hobbs & Shaw*. So he knew exactly which studio he wanted to record in. We were the very last film to record in the infamous Studio 3 before they renovated the space - which usually houses The Beatles' original piano, known as the "Mrs Mills". But for us they brought in a Baby Grand piano, and a 12-piece string orchestra. It was incredible."

