

Strand Releasing presents

I USED TO BE DARKER

A film by MATT PORTERFIELD

Starring Deragh Campbell, Hannah Gross, Ned Oldham & Kim Taylor

PRELIMINARY PRESS NOTES

Official Selection: Sundance Film Festival 2013
Official Selection: Berlin International Film Festival 2013

Country of Origin: USA
Format: DCP/2.35/Color
Sound Format: 5.1 Surround Sound
Running Time: 90 minutes
Genre: Drama
Not Rated

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LOGLINE

A runaway seeks refuge with her aunt and uncle in Baltimore and finds their marriage ending and her cousin in crisis. In the days that follow, the family struggles to let go of the past while searching for new things to hold onto.

SYNOPSIS

When Taryn, a Northern Irish runaway, finds herself in trouble in Ocean City, MD, she seeks refuge with her aunt and uncle in Baltimore. But Kim and Bill have problems of their own: they're trying to handle the end of their marriage gracefully for the sake of their daughter Abby, just home from her first year of college. A story of family revelations, people finding each other and letting go, looking for love where they've found it before and, when that doesn't work, figuring out where they might find it next.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

My third film, *I Used To Be Darker* is firmly grounded in narrative tradition while pushing outward and turning inward in surprising and formally adventurous ways. It's full of big emotions, broad gestures and songs, but it also finds time for the quotidian. *I Used To Be Darker* poses questions of craft, utilizing formal devices that shatter the illusion of reality while honoring the naturalism inherent in working with a non-professional cast and real environments.

I wanted to tell an honest story about divorce and so did my co-writer, Amy Belk. Each of us has gone through it ourselves, me twice if you count my parents' separation the summer I returned from my first year of college. We wanted to honor our experience and what we learned about how complex and full of life even the dying of a marriage is, how it is a beginning as much as it is an ending for both the couple concerned and for the people whose lives they touch.

I Used To Be Darker is my most personal film to date, but it's also my most collaborative. I'm happy to be working again with Jeremy Saulier, who shot my first two films, and editor Marc Vines, who cut *Putty Hill*. I wrote the screenplay with fiction writer Amy Belk – the world of this film is as much hers as mine. Danny Meltzer's experience as a field recordist brought real fidelity to the production track, while Gene Park brought an impeccable ear and the finest attention to detail to the sound mix. Production designer Bart Mangrum created the spaces our characters occupy, which tell us as much about their lives as the words they speak and the songs they sing.

The thing about *Darker* I'm most excited to share with audiences is the remarkable cast. Every time I watch it, I'm moved by what they bring to the screen. Though more subtly fused than in *Putty Hill*, the performances in *Darker* rely just as much on the real lives of the actors: they drew on their own experiences, their strengths, weaknesses, intelligence and intuition, and found ways to make the interior lives of their characters come to life. This is the first time any of the principle cast has appeared in a film, but I'm sure it won't be the last.

Music plays a very important role in *I Used To Be Darker*. Not only do two of the lead actors, Kim Taylor and Ned Oldham, sing original songs on screen, we also brought in a few of our favorite artists from Baltimore to add to the soundtrack, including Dope Body, Dustin Wong, Jana Hunter and The Entrance Band. I've always been interested in the idea of limiting the use of non-diegetic music in my films. *I Used To Be Darker* is the first I've made in which every music cue has an onscreen source.

At its core, *I Used To Be Darker* is a story about family: what pushes us away from our own, what draws us back, how we negotiate new terms of engagement as we carve our own space in the world. And it's a story about home, based on the belief that you can too go home again, but it always involves building something new.

ABOUT THE DIRECTOR

Matt Porterfield studied film at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts and teaches in the Film & Media Studies Program at Johns Hopkins University. His first feature, *Hamilton*, was released in 2006. Named "one of the finest American independent films ever made" by New Yorker film editor Richard Brody, it was recently acquired for the Museum of Modern Art's permanent collection. His most recent feature, *Putty Hill*, premiered at the Berlinale's International Forum of New Cinema in 2010 and was released in the U.S. by Cinema Guild in 2011. Matt has two projects in development, *Metal Gods* (IFP No Borders, 2012) and *Sollers Point* (IFFR's CineMart, 2013).

PREVIOUS FILMS BY MATT PORTERFIELD

PUTTY HILL (2011)

*Putty Hill looks closely, burrows deep... with as much perception and sympathy as a film is allowed to look. *****

Roger Ebert, *Chicago Sun Times*

Nothing this inspiring has emerged from the American indie scene in a long time.

Mar Diestro-Dópido, *Sight & Sound*

Putty Hill transcends the usual docudrama hybrid to occupy a thrilling third place, dreamlike and scruffy, opaque and pellucid.

Sheri Linden, *Los Angeles Times*

SELECTED FESTIVALS

Berlinale Forum, SXSW, Buenos Aires IFF, CPH:PIX, IndieLisboa, Viennale IFF, Edinburgh IFF, Gijon IFF, Haifa IFF

SELECTED SCREENINGS

2012 Whitney Biennial (New York)
Museum of Modern Art (New York)
Brooklyn Academy of Music (Brooklyn)
La Cinémathèque Française (Paris)
Harvard Film Archive (Cambridge)
Institute of Contemporary Arts (London)
Australian Center for the Moving Image (Melbourne)

HAMILTON (2006)

A minor miracle. [...] One of the most original, moving, and accomplished American independent films in recent years.

Top 20 Films of the Decade; Richard Brody, *The New Yorker*

...astonishing in its simple beauty, amazing performances, and hypnotic pace. The real thing.

Top Ten of 2006; John Waters, *Artforum*

SELECTED FESTIVALS

Viennale IFF, Stockholm IFF, Bradford IFF, Buenos Aires IFF, Maryland FF

SELECTED SCREENINGS

Brooklyn Academy of Music (Brooklyn)

Anthology Film Archives (New York)

Centre Georges Pompidou (Paris)

AFI Silver Theater (Silver Spring)

Facets Cinematheque (Chicago)

Baltimore Museum of Art (Baltimore)

MUSIC

Amy Belk

When we started writing, we were listening to Bill Callahan a lot. Matt had gotten through a divorce listening to *Sometimes I Wish We Were an Eagle* and had shared the songs with me. I'd been through a divorce, too. It's not something you hope you'll ever do again, though this is often how the story goes.

"Jim Cain" was kind of our anthem. The title of the film comes from lines in that song: "I used to be darker, then I got lighter, then I got dark again / Something too big to be seen was passing over and over me." That was the best we'd heard it articulated for a while: how it felt, the rhythm of living.

With Bill Callahan in our heads, we imagined a character like him on screen. Our imagined Bill, a man who could communicate like Callahan, in song, with moody depths and meticulously twisted logic, had lost something and was finding something. Because it was a story about relationships, there was someone on the other side of it, equal in weight, who shared his language.

I met Kim Taylor in the '90s when we were both teenagers at Bible college in Florida, shortly before I got kicked out and she flunked out. She is the only person I still know from that strange, balmy with a chance of fire-and-brimstone time. I've followed her music career through the years, and shared her songs with Matt when we started writing. He fell for them like I knew he would, particularly "Days Like This" and "American Child." Even before Matt met Kim and had her read for the role, her music and grace informed the story we were crafting. In many ways, Kim was Kim from the start.

Matt had been friends with Ned Oldham for years, and knew his music well. We knew his brother, Will, could act — Matt thought Ned might be our Bill. I knew Palace Brothers, and when Matt showed me footage of Ned's bands Old Calf and The Anomoanon, I wanted to meet him. We drove to Ned's home in Virginia. He showed us around his big yard, the trees, the garden, the creek, the music studio in the garage. By the end of the day, drinking wine at his table, he was Bill.

Once we found Ned and Kim, they were part of the collaboration. We built whole scenes around performances of songs they'd written: Kim's songs mentioned above, Ned's "One That Got Away" and "A Gift, A Ghost." Ned wrote "You Weren't Dead Yet," angrier than anything he had, with us, in the voice of Bill.

Other Baltimore musicians were essential to the process, as well. Jana Hunter's simple "Guitar" opens the movie. We gave our friend Dustin Wong script pages for a scene, and he composed the haunting theme "I Used To Be Darker." The Entrance Band's album *Prayer of Death* seemed like music a character in a place of metamorphosis, like Abby, would listen to. And because we wanted to see a Dope Body show, we threw a party with the band, peopled with their fans, and had the teenage characters, played by Deragh Campbell and Hannah Gross, go to that show.

When I listen to “Jim Cain” now, its later lines that stick out to me: “In case things go poorly and I not return / remember the good things I’ve done.” We made this movie because we needed a document of good existing inside of terrible. We needed it for ourselves, because it would get darker again before it got lighter again (repeat), and we were going to forget again. We thought it might be something other people needed, too. And if it succeeded in no other way, it would have a really good soundtrack.

ACTING WITH FRIENDS

Deragh Campbell

I met Hannah Gross (Abby) when she was two days old. Our parents are close friends – I think they all met in Ottawa around the National Arts Centre. My mother lived in Belfast at the height of the troubles – she left as soon as she could, moving to Manchester to study drama. My dad comes from an old English theatre family. Both his parents were actors. His mother’s parents were actors, too.

Hannah and I had very different upbringings – Hannah going to an all-girls private school in a large metropolis and me going to a public school with kids who were mainly the children of farmers and laborers in the auto parts factories of southern Ontario. However, our lives have always had odd parallels, and in our fairly regular visits with each other, we’d find ourselves having similar attitudes and, often, the very same jackets.

I think the period after we both left high school was sort of a new era in mine and Hannah’s friendship – partly because we could get into bars and partly because we’d both (at least partially) come out of a rather extensive awkward period (adorable children, but absolutely hideous teenagers) and were attempting, in a somewhat chaotic manner, to construct the lives we wanted for ourselves, me in London and Hannah in New York.

Matt offered me the part of Taryn a week before my birthday and a week after Hannah had been cast as Abby. Our ideas about the characters aligned completely. It was so surreal: how these characters were so invariably connected despite growing up in completely different circumstances, how we’d both come into a position of playing these characters – it is a spectacular convergence both for Hannah and my friendship and for the ideas we have about humanity and art that we find reflected in this script.

CAST BIOGRAPHIES

Deragh Campbell / Taryn

Deragh grew up in a theatre family – her mother, from Belfast, runs the Shaw Festival in Niagara-on-the-lake and her father is a member of the festival ensemble. Campbell's father's side of the family has been in theatre for generations – her great-grandparents were members of Shaw's company and Shaw's play *St. Joan* was written with her great-grandmother in mind. Deragh and Hannah (who plays 'Abby') have known each other since childhood, their parents being close friends. Deragh studied creative writing at Concordia University and lives in Montreal, Quebec. This is her first film role.

Hannah Gross / Abby

Born and raised in Toronto, Canada, Hannah studied in the Experimental Theatre Wing at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts. She has performed in *DOC* by Sharon Pollock (Soulpepper Theatre Company, 2010), and "Talk To Me Like The Rain" by Tennessee Williams (The Dirty Blondes @ Collapsable Hole, 2012), as well as directed Tennessee Williams' "A Streetcar Named Desire" (Stella Adler Studio of Acting, 2010). This is her first film.

Kim Taylor / Kim

Originally from Florida, Kim Taylor is a musician currently based in Cincinnati. Her latest release, *Little Miracle*, is teeming with candid emotion and sonic spaciousness. She has been featured on NPR's "World Café," and her songs have appeared on TV shows including "Smallville," "The Unit," "One Tree Hill," "Ghost Whisperer," "Hawthorne" and "Army Wives."

Ned Oldham / Bill

An educator, writer, and musician, Ned received his MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Virginia in 1993. He has published dozens of arts features for magazines including *Baltimore* and the *Oxford American*, and released seven albums with his band, The Anomoanon. Currently, he lives with his family in Charlottesville, VA. His new band, Old Calf, released its first album *Old Horse* on No Quarter Records in 2011.

CREW BIOGRAPHIES

Matt Porterfield / writer-director

Matt Porterfield studied film at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts and teaches in the Film & Media Studies Program at Johns Hopkins University. His first feature, *Hamilton*, was released in 2006. Named "one of the finest American independent films ever made" by New Yorker film editor Richard Brody, it continues to tour festivals, museums, and art-house theatres around the world and was included in John Water's 2006 Top Ten in *Artforum International*. His most recent feature, *Putty Hill*, premiered at the Berlinale's International Forum of New Cinema in 2010 and was released in the U.S. by Cinema Guild in 2011. In 2012, Porterfield was a featured artist in the Whitney Biennial and was awarded grants from Creative Capital and the Wexner Center for the Arts. He has two projects in development, *Metal Gods* (IFP No Borders, 2012) and *Sollers Point* (IFFR's CineMart, 2013).

Amy Belk / writer

Amy Belk received her MFA in fiction writing in 2007 from the Iowa Writer's Workshop, where she was awarded the Richard Yates Prize for Fiction. Her short stories have appeared in literary journals such as *Fiction*, *Eyeshot* and *Epoch*. She teaches English and creative writing at the Community College of Baltimore County and the Maryland Institute College of Art. In 2012, she was awarded a Creative Capital grant for *Sollers Point*, her next collaboration with Porterfield.

Steve Holmgren / producer

Steve Holmgren has produced five feature length films since 2010 under his label Steady Orbits including Matt Porterfield's *Putty Hill*, Marie Losier's *The Ballad Of Genesis And Lady Jaye*, Cory McAbee's *Crazy and Thief*, and the recent omnibus project conceived of by John Gianvito, *Far From Afghanistan*. Steve began his film career in production at HDNet Films. Following this, he worked with Cactus Three, primarily in international sales, and on the institutional distribution of silent and experimental films with the boutique outfit Gartenberg Media Enterprises. He has worked at a variety of film festivals in various capacities including The Robert Flaherty Film Seminar, Tribeca, Sundance, and Sound Unseen, and is a visiting film professor at Pratt Institute. He is a Minnesota native and graduate of Boston University's School of Management. Currently in addition to producing, he is the curator at the Brooklyn microcinema UnionDocs.

Ryan Zacarias / producer

In just two and a half years, Ryan Zacarias and partner Brooke Bernard have produced four narrative feature films and a feature documentary, along with their colleague Brent Stewart, through their company Nomadic Independence Pictures. Their first two features, *The Colonel's Bride* and *Septien*, played festivals such as Sundance, Rotterdam, and SXSW. IFC Films purchased the distribution rights to *Septien* and released it to theatres in the summer of 2011. Bernard and Zacarias premiered Matt Boyd's documentary *A Rubberband Is An Unlikely Instrument* at the 2011 Hot Docs Film Festival. Prior to its premiere, the film was work shopped at the prestigious IFP Labs. Currently, the duo has two films in post-production, James Clauer's *When The World's On Fire* and Michael Tully's *Ping-Pong Summer*. Zacarias also produced Harmony

Korine's past two short films, *Umshini Wam*, starring South African rap sensation, Die Antwoord, and *Snowballs*.

Eric Bannat / producer

Eric Bannat currently works as a Producer, Production Manager and Location Manager for feature films and television. A graduate of The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Eric began his career in Baltimore and DC as an associate producer and editor for numerous reality TV series and documentaries. Following an editing stint in New York, Eric returned to Baltimore, where he served as the location scout for the final three seasons of HBO's "The Wire." He has been a producer/UPM on three features (*Putty Hill*, *The Brooklyn Brothers Beat the Best*, *LUV*), is currently working on the David Fincher/Netflix series "House of Cards", and resides in Baltimore, MD.

Executive Producer / Dan Carey

Dan Carey is a New York-based independent producer. He currently runs Touchy Feely Films with partners Paul and Elizabeth Giamatti. At present, the company is in post-production on *Lucky Dog*, directed by Phil Morrison (*Junebug*) and written by Melissa James Gibson. The film stars Paul Giamatti, Paul Rudd and Sally Hawkins and is due out in 2013. Other producing credits include *Cold Souls* (written/directed by Sophie Barthes), *Pretty Bird* (written/directed by Paul Schnieder), *John Dies At The End* (written/directed by Don Coscarelli), and Chris Zalla's *Padre Nuestro*, which won the Grand Jury Prize at Sundance 2007. Projects in development include an adaptation of Dirk Wittenborn's novel *Pharmakon*, an adaptation for television of Charles Willeford's *Hoke Moseley* novels, and an HBO mini-series based on the Pulitzer Prize-winning book *The Making Of The Atomic Bomb* by Richard Rhodes. Dan is an alumnus of Yale University and of NYU's Graduate Film program.

Executive Producer / Laura Heberton

Laura Heberton has an MFA in Creative Writing from NYU and has written as well as edited fiction and non-fiction for many national publications. A recent convert to the film world, she has executive produced/produced a number of award-winning independent features in the past two years: Jonathan Lisecki's *Gayby* (SXSW 2012); Andrew Neel's *King Kelly* (SXSW 2012); Andrew Semans's *Nancy, Please* (Tribeca 2012). Features in post-production include *Bluebird* (Lance Edmands) and *Test* (Chris Mason Johnson). Heberton is based in New York and London.

Jeremy Saulnier / director of photography

Jeremy is a filmmaker based in Brooklyn. He studied film at NYU and braves the corporate world to finance his independent film habit. He directed and photographed the award winning short *Crabwalk*, the cult feature *Murder Party* (Magnolia Pictures), and is currently in post-production on his second feature *Blue Ruin* (produced by Filmscience). Recent cinematography credits include *Septien* (Sundance 2010), *In Our Nature*, and *See Girl Run* (SXSW 2012). *I Used To Be Darker* marks his third collaboration with director Matt Porterfield.

Marc Vives / editor

Marc Vives is a filmmaker and editor living in Brooklyn. A graduate of NYU, his editing credits include Matt Porterfield's *Putty Hill*, Michael Tully's *Septien*, Marie Losier's *The Ballad Of Genesis And Lady Jaye*, Jonathan Caouette's *Walk Away Renee*, Jem Cohen's *Museum Hours*, and a handful of short work including Porterfield's music video for the Thrill Jockey post-punk band Double Dagger.

Bart Mangrum / production designer

A production designer on films with strong, relatable stories, Bart Mangrum visually communicates the back-story. Recently, he was the production designer on *Septien*, *Umshini Wam* and Brent Stewart's award-winning film *The Colonel's Bride*. On top of his feature film work, Mangrum has been the production designer or art director on over 50 music videos. He has worked as set dresser for studio films such as *Country Strong*, *Water for Elephants*, and *Black, White and Blues*. As a painter, Mangrum has shown his work in Rome, Amsterdam, New York, and Nashville.

CAST

Deragh Campbell
Hannah Gross
Kim Taylor
Ned Oldham
Nicholas Petr
Geoff Grace

Taryn
Abby
Kim
Bill
Nick
Geoff

CREW

Director
Writer
Producers

Matt Porterfield
Matt Porterfield & Amy Belk
Steve Holmgren
Ryan Zacarias
Eric Bannat

Executive Producers

Dan Carey
Laura Heberton
Jeremy Saulnier

Director of Photography
Editor

Marc Vives

Production Designer

Bart Mangrum

Art Direction

Bart Mangrum

Costume Design

Lane Harlan

Makeup Department

Lisa Hawks (Hair Stylist)
Miranda Pfeiffer (Makeup Artist)

Sound Editor

Danny Meltzer