

Strand Releasing presents

The Arbor

A film by Clio Barnard

**Starring Manjinder Virk, Christine Bottomley,
Monica Dolan, Jimi Mistry**

*European Premiere – Karlovy Vary International Film Festival
(Documentary Films in competition)*

Tribeca Film Festival 2010, Best New Documentary Filmmaker – Clio Barnard

San Francisco International Film Festival 2011

British Independent Film Awards- Winner Douglas Hickox Award

Country of Origin: UK

Running Time: 90 min

Genre: Documentary

Color

Not Rated

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SHORT SYNOPSIS

THE ARBOR is an unconventional documentary exploring the life of late British playwright Andrea Dunbar through the eyes of her eldest daughter. It utilizes the innovative technique of verbatim theater to create an unparalleled viewing experience.

LONG SYNOPSIS

THE ARBOR traces the tormented life and legacy of British playwright Andrea Dunbar. While renown for her three plays – *The Arbor*, which premiered at London’s Royal Court Theatre in 1980; *Rita, Sue and Bob Too*, which was turned into a film in 1986; and *Shirley* – Dunbar’s life was plagued by chronic abuse and alcoholism. She died, tragically at the age of twenty-nine, leaving behind a brief, but illustrious career and three children from three different men. The documentary revisits the site of Dunbar’s dark upbringing, the notorious Buttershaw Estate in Bradford, in present-day. Compelling interviews with Lorraine revealing Dunbar’s devastating effects on her daughter are juxtaposed with those of other family members who have a contrasting view through the innovative technique of verbatim theater: actors lip-synch documentary recordings of the people they’re playing. The film follows Lorraine’s journey of reflection and self-discovery as she comes to terms with her own struggles and those faced by her mother. Equal parts art and reportage, THE ARBOR is an unconventional and poignant piece of cinema.

CAST

CHRISTINE BOTTOMLEY
NEIL DUDGEON
ROBERT EMMS
NATALIE GAVIN
MANJINDER VIRK

Lisa
Steve
David Dunbar
Andrea Dunbar
Lorraine

CREDITS

Directed by
Produced by
Post-Production supervisor
Production Manager

CLIO BARNARD
TRACY O’RIORDAN
AMEENAH AYUB
SCOTT BASSET

Sound Designer
Sound Recordist
Original Music by

Music Supervisor
Production Designer
Casting by
Edited by

Cinematography by
Costume design

TIM BARKER
TIM BARKER
HARRY ESCOTT
MOLLY NYMAN
LUCY BRIGHT
MATTHEW BUTTON
AMY HUBBARD
NICK FENTON
DANIEL GODDARD
OLE BIRKELAND
MATT PRICE

INTERVIEW WITH CLIO BARNARD – OBSESSEDWITHFILM.COM

OWF: What first drew you to **Andrea Dunbar**?

CB: I guess ‘Rita, Sue and Bob Too’! But I’m from near Bradford, it’s where I grew up, and I’m the same generation as her and I just really liked the film, I liked the friendship between the girls, I liked that it doesn’t moralize about them enjoying sex and I love the writing. So that’s what drew me to her.

OWF: And were you surprised by what you encountered when you started looking deeper into Andrea’s life?

CB: Well yes, I didn’t really know anything about her life other than that she died tragically young, and I felt that was a real loss because her writing was so vital and had such energy and wit. I didn’t start finding out about her life until I actually started interviewing people.

OWF: One of the most interesting things about Andrea’s story was how such rich texts could come from such a deprived background, how did you go about showing how her work sprang from this place?

CB: I think in a way she wrote what she knew, and I think what was very extraordinary about her was her ability to write very directly, truthfully and honestly about very difficult things like racism and domestic abuse; and she had a way with words that way very economical I suppose. And Lisa, Lorraine and Andrew, her children [who feature in the documentary], have that same way with words, being able to talk about complex issues very succinctly and directly... unlike me!

OWF: Unlike most of us I think!... But as well as these positive characteristics, the film dealt with a lot of sensitive issues surrounding both the area and Andrea’s family, were you ever worried about how this could potentially paint a negative picture of the region and the participants of the film?

CB: Yes, and I tried my best to do it responsibly and so that there were lots of voices for her [Andrea], not just [her daughter] Lorraine's. I suppose she becomes very central, and I think that's why it was vital that we heard what Lisa [Andrea's other daughter] has to say, which is very different from what Lorraine says.

OWF: That counterpoint between the two sisters' views is a big part of the doc, was it difficult to cut together such sensitive material?

CB: It was very difficult and the editors I worked with worked incredibly hard to keep things balanced and do things responsibly, making sure we had the full consent of the people whose voices we were hearing. During the first part of the edit, which was just the sound, I was constantly in touch with people informing them of the direction things were taking and making sure that was OK. But it is incredibly difficult material and I tried to be as rigorous and sensitive as I could in handling that, and when people are open with you, the way they were with me, it's a relationship of trust and you have must not betray that trust.

OWF: I imagined that it would be very easy to paint a sensationalist picture of a family falling apart, was there any point when you wondered whether it was possible to portray something that wasn't big and dramatic and even hurtful to those participating in the film?

CB: I think the events that happened hurt the participants deeply and I suppose the reason I thought it was an important story is because, in a way, we all need to grieve for Harris [Lorraine's young child who tragically died] and I'm glad if there's a collective grieving that comes out of the film. And I think the point at which Anne and Steve, who were Lorraine's foster parents, break down in the film is very important.

Though I suppose there is the bigger question of why you would make private grief public, and I think the reason for that is because Harris's death was really in the public domain because of the circumstances, and because it was such a tragedy. And in that sense I think we have a collective responsibility to him, and children like him, and therefore it's important that we grieve for him.

OWF: With such emotive and emotional material, how important was this unique style of documentary filmmaking that you deployed? And what made you want to work in this way?

CB: Because I think often documentaries are shaped like fictions, and I think actually there's a very close relationship between documentaries and fiction and a lot of crossover. But we have this peculiar expectation with documentaries that they not be mediated, but of course it is and it always is, and, in a way, I think it's more honest and straightforward to acknowledge that it's constructed.

OWF: How hard was it to get the actors to imitate such strong emotion?

CB: It was very challenging for them and they did a remarkable job because they had to learn every breath, every pause, every swallow, and give a true performance.

OWF: Another very important thing in creating this combined artifice and intimacy was the way each scene was staged, how much time and effort went into getting that right?

CB: A lot. There was quite a big gap between finishing the audio cut and then shooting, and in that gap I storyboarded the whole thing while we were waiting for the financing to fall into place, and though it was a scary time when we thought this might not happen I actually did this storyboard and that turned out to be a great thing. Then I worked very closely with the DoP and the production designer to get things right. Like it was very deliberate to have the performance of ‘The Arbor’ on the Arbor performed as you might expect fiction to be shot, and the interviews and the documentary element shot just like fiction too, you know, actors hitting their marks and carefully lit tracking shots. The language of fiction really.

OWF: When you were shooting on the Arbor itself did you get much time to chat to the residents about what you were doing?

CB: Oh all the time, yes! What you don’t see on the film is that whenever we cut there were kids all over the sofas, riding their bikes through the doors, I got to know and love everybody on Brafferton Arbor in the time we were there. I think part of the reason those scenes have the energy they do is because of the people on the Arbor.

source: <http://www.obsessedwithfilm.com/interviews/interview-clio-barnard-director-of-the-arbor.php#ixzz1CG2XkczZ>

ANDREA DUNBAR – THE PLAYWRIGHT

In 1976 when she was just 15 years old, Andrea Dunbar wrote her first (highly autobiographical) play – *The Arbor*, as part of a school assignment. The play describes the experience of a pregnant teenager with an abusive drunken father. After a successful run at London’s Royal Court Theatre it had a successful staging at the Young Playwrights Festival in New York, where it received many favorable notices including the notoriously difficult-to-please New York Times.

Following *The Arbor* Dunbar wrote *Rita Sue and Bob Too*, which was adapted for the screen by Alan Clarke and was selected for the Cannes Film Festival in 1987. Described provocatively as a story of “Thatcher’s Britain with her knickers down” it did well in cinemas around the world including North America where Orion Classics released it.

Unlike most who take the opportunity to move when success beckons, Andrea Dunbar never left her hometown for the bright lights. She stayed in the neighborhood where she was born all her life. A single mother with three children by different men, she descended deeper into alcoholism and died of a brain hemorrhage at 29.

LORRAINE DUNBAR – ANDREA’S DAUGHTER

Andrea Dunbar’s eldest child from a relationship with a Pakistani man and just 10 when she died, Lorraine Dunbar’s own life followed a similar downward path to her mother’s. She became a heroin addict and drifted into prostitution to finance her habit, during which time she too became a single mother to three children by different men. Her life didn’t improve with marriage and conversion to Islam. *The Arbor* catches up with Lorraine in the present day, also aged 29 and estranged from her family and community. We learn that Lorraine sees her mother as a destructive force throughout her childhood, an alcoholic who let her suffer abuse and whom Lorraine blames for all that is wrong in her life.

“THE ARBOR” – A STREET IN BRADFORD, NORTHERN ENGLAND

Andrea Dunbar’s family lived in a street called Brafferton Arbor known to everyone as “The Arbor”, located in Bradford’s notorious Buttershaw housing estate. It was her unflinchingly honest writings inspired by these surroundings that led to her being described as a “genius straight away from the slums”. This economically depressed area has always been home to the white working class and Dunbar vividly depicts families blighted by unemployment and alcoholism, and young people with few prospects drifting into crime.

Being an overwhelmingly white estate in a city with a large Pakistani immigrant community, the Buttershaw was a hotbed of racism during the 1980’s when Andrea was writing there. She experienced this racism in a hugely personal way by having a relationship with and becoming pregnant by a Pakistani man, thus interracial relationships were a significant feature of her writings. As a mixed race child in these surroundings, her daughter Lorraine was to suffer much abuse.

FILMOGRAPHIES

CAST

CHRISTINE BOTTOMLEY FILMOGRAPHY

2010 *The Arbor* Actress Lisa
Tribeca Film Festival 2010, Best New Documentary Filmmaker,
Clio Barnard
British Independent Film Awards, Nominated for British Independent
Film Award
British Independent Film Awards, Nominated for the Douglas Hickox
Award

2010 *The Secret Diaries of Miss Anne Lister* Actress Ann Walker

