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PERSMAP



COWBOYS

EEN FILM VAN ANNA KERRIGAN



Drama - 2020 - VS - 86 minuten

Bioscooprelease: 29 juli 2021
(Previously unreleased)

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Meer over de film: [Cineart.nl/films/cowboys](https://www.cineart.nl/films/cowboys)

Persmaterialen: [Cineart.nl/pers/cowboys](https://www.cineart.nl/pers/cowboys)

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SYNOPSIS

In COWBOYS volgen we vader Troy (Steve Zahn) en zijn jonge zoon Joe (Sasha Knight) tijdens een trektocht in het ruige Montana. De twee blijken op de vlucht en hopen de Canadese grens te halen. Waaraan proberen ze te ontsnappen?

Politieagente Faith (Ann Dowd) wordt door Joe's moeder Sally (Jillian Bell) ingeschakeld als die aangifte doet van de ontvoering van haar zoon door haar labiele ex-man. Joe blijkt echter gevluht met zijn vader om te ontsnappen aan zijn leven als meisje. Troy probeert zijn transgenderkind te beschermen tegen de intolerante Sally, maar kampt zelf met psychische problemen en ontbeert de broodnodige medicatie. Faith komt ze op het spoor en zet de achtervolging in.

Regisseur en schrijver Anna Kerrigan weet met alle stereotypen te breken en won de prijs voor het Beste Scenario op het Tribeca Filmfestival. Acteur Steve Zahn won er de prijs voor Beste Acteur.



ANNA KERRIGAN

DIRECTOR

Anna Kerrigan is a Los Angeles-based filmmaker. *COWBOYS*, a Montana-set feature she wrote and directed starring Steve Zahn, Jillian Bell and Ann Dowd, premiered at the 2020 Tribeca Film Festival where it won Best Screenplay for Kerrigan and Best Actor for Zahn. It has since gone on to garner awards at various festivals (Grand Jury Prize for Best Feature at Newfest, Audience Award for Best Feature at Nashville Film Festival, Best Actor for Sasha Knight at Outfest) and is distributed domestically by Samuel Goldwyn. *HOT SEAT*, which she wrote and directed, premiered at the 2017 Sundance Film Festival. She also directed *THE CHANCES*, a digital series written by and starring two deaf actors, which also premiered at the 2017 Sundance Film Festival. Her Gotham-nominated comedic digital series *THE IMPOSSIBILITIES* (2015) follows the interwoven storylines of a magician and a daffy lesbian yogi and was licensed by Studio Plus (Canal) for international distribution. She was selected for the 2020 Warner Brothers Directing Workshop for Television, the 2016 Fox Global Directors Initiative for episodic directing, and is a Film Independent and Sundance Fellow (2016 New Voices, 2017 Episodic). She has developed projects and made shorts for Refinery 29, Funny or Die and Amazon. Indiewire named her one of twenty female filmmakers to watch in 2020.

Kerrigan grew up in Los Angeles and is an alum of Stanford University.

FILMOGRAPHY

2020 COWBOYS
2017 FRIDAYS (TV SERIES)
2017 THE JURY (SHORT)
2017 HOT SEAT (SHORT)
2015 THE IMPOSSIBILITIES (TV SERIES)
2014 THE RUB (SHORT)
2010 FIVE DAYS GONE



DIRECTORS STATEMENT

As a kid, I tagged along on my childhood best friend's family vacations to their home in Western Montana just outside of Kalispell and Glacier Park (right where Cowboys takes place.) Though born and raised in California, I was obsessed with Montana as the ultimate Americana fantasy experience. Even years later when I lived in New York, I would soothe myself on homesick nights with thoughts of night swimming in Flathead Lake, July 4th fireworks from the barge, ice cream on Main Street in Kalispell and pizzas at Moose's bar. In many ways, I am still obsessed.

However, as I got older my visits to Montana were peppered with the realization Montana isn't just a land full of impossible vistas and horseback riding and sailing and s'mores on an open fire. As I was able to relate more and more to the adult locals, it dawned on me that hey, a number of these people hold very different political views than I do. I started noticing the off-handed racist, misogynistic and homophobic comments, the pro-life posters along the side of the road, and the fact that neo-Nazi Richard Spencer bought a house up there. However, people in the Flathead Valley, as they are everywhere, are complicated. There are Trump voters who raved about the sold out drag show the local LGBTQ organization put up at a roadside motorcycle bar. The extremely Christian, pro-life woman who owned a home we filmed in, was really captivated and non-judgmental about the fact that our film centered around a transgender kid. Though there are wide held conservative beliefs in rural America, it is not just a simple monolith of red. It was important to me while making Cowboys to compassionately portray rural America as complicated as it is through the lens of the family at the center. Joe, the transgender boy and Troy, his mentally ill father, feel like outsiders in this world while Sally, Joe's mother, is doing her best to uphold what she thinks are society's standards.

While envisioning this story about two outsiders in the American West, it only seemed natural to play with the tropes of the American Western. Not unlike Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid trying to elude the authorities in Mexico, Joe and Troy are outlaws running from persecution trying to get to Canada where they think everything is gonna be better. In my early twenties, I watched The Last Picture Show for the first time, and while that film isn't squarely a western, I loved how it was a fairly realistic character-driven drama that feels "Western-ish". I think Cowboys does something similar, I tried to encapsulate a performance driven, of-the-moment story in a nostalgically "Western-ish" shell.

Once we were greenlit, we began the search for the two perfect actors to play Troy and Joe, the beating heart of our movie. As soon as Steve Zahn came up for Troy, I had a difficult time getting him out of my head. Steve is an incredible, hard-working actor, so lovable and larger-than-life in a completely grounded way. It was clear that he understood the world perfectly: he has lived on a horse ranch in Kentucky for years. Once Steve, and the wonderful Jillian and Ann were attached and we had a shoot date, we started looking for a non-binary or transgender child to play Joe. There was no way I was going to make this movie, without an emotionally intelligent child at the center who could really understand Joe's experience on a personal level. GLAAD, who I'd consulted with on a script level, helped our team, lead by Casting Director Eyde Belasco (Transparent) reach out to transgender children and their families across North America to find our kid. Since we're a low budget production, I had a lot of meetings and casting sessions via Skype. I was really encouraged by how much these families related to the script. Like in Cowboys , there were a number of families where one parent "got it" while the other had very sadly become estranged due to their unwillingness to accept their child's gender identity. As soon as we found Sasha, there was no question that this Paul Newman-incarnate was our Joe. Once we cast Sasha, I spent a number of sessions just getting to know him and talking about the role in Los Angeles before we headed to Montana. I wanted him to feel involved and have a sense of ownership over the role.

I hope that Cowboys can find an audience on both sides of the aisle and start a conversation. This isn't an "issue" movie: it's a film about a family in crisis because they don't fit in. In one way or another, every person feels this way: that they are hiding something that makes them unlovable, that they can't let people know what they're really like. People are only bigoted towards people they don't understand. I strongly believe that if you can highlight the universality of the human experience, enable an audience to connect to unfamiliar characters by making them relatable, you can open minds incrementally.

INSPIRATION

I used to go to Montana as a kid with my best friend's family. It was my happy place – and I was always sort of embarrassed to say this because it's not like it was my family home – but I really did and do feel homesick for it when I haven't been there for awhile. It's just so beautiful and I have so many fond memories of being there in my teen years. I wrote the film during a kind of dark time and I think returning to Montana as a backdrop was comforting for me.

I didn't actually know what the script was about when I started, I just knew it was about a son and father on a trip on a horse and it organically revealed itself to me. I think it also expresses a kind of internalized conflict I have with Montana, like I said it's not monolithic in its socio-cultural beliefs, but it's predominantly white and feels pretty dominantly heterosexual.

I encounter more pioneer types in the part of Montana where we shot, there's a general distrust of "the government" in some places, but there is also an Alt Right presence there – I mean Richard Spencer lived there. But at the same time, there is a liberal community, I mean there was a whole drag show in a local motorcycle bar that was a huge success. So it's complicated there as it is in most places. And I think that though I didn't set about with a clear agenda, the film presents this part of Montana in a more complicated way through the viewpoints of the central characters. Though I rarely think about other movies while I'm writing, I could see my love for movies like BUTCH CASSIDY AND THE SUNDANCE KID and THE LAST PICTURE SHOW shining through.

BRINGING COMMUNITIES TOGETHER

My greatest hope for this film is that it can be enjoyed, and related to, by folks on both ends of the political spectrum. COWBOYS portrays rural America in a nuanced non-monolithic way, and that was pretty important to me. There's such a black and white way of looking at the world these days in America – and I think that extends to both sides of the spectrum. I do believe people's perspectives can shift but I believe it's through personal interactions and sometimes even through representation in film and TV. A lot of people I've met in red states, learned about transgender kids, and developed compassion for them, by watching I AM JAZZ on TLC. In that way, I am optimistic about people and I believe everyone is too complicated to write off and neatly categorize.

I've been good friends with a woman in Montana for the last 22 years who used to be the caretaker of my best friend's house and yes, she did vote for Trump, but her two best friends are lesbians and she used to be pro-life but now she's changed her mind. See, complicated. She was really into the idea of my movie even though she voted for a president that has turned back rights for transgender people and the rest of the LGBTQ community.

On an even more universal level, I think that COWBOYS examines how difficult parenting can be, especially when you're kid is different, and I think that that's something a lot of people can relate to. Both Sally and Troy think they're doing the right thing with the limited tools and resources they've been given.

RELEVANCE

Well, we're living in Trump's America and like I said above, it's easy to villainize the other side, but I'd rather make a film that reaches across the aisle with compassion for these characters going through a very difficult transition and moment of crisis.

Of course I'd like to see more LGBTQ, female and working class characters of all races on screen. I wish filmmakers (and studios) were bold enough to make more nuanced films about difficult issues that actually explore the grey areas realistically. Like I've said a few times, I think the black/white mentality of our political climate has filtered down into filmmaking in an uninteresting and alienating way.

CASTING JOE

It was really important to me that we bring *GLAAD* on early as consultants and that we cast a non-binary or transgender child to play the role of Joe.

Nick Adams, the transgender media consultant at *GLAAD*, advised me from script to casting. Eyde Belasco, who's an amazing casting director that also cast *TRANSPARENT*, lead a predominantly North American search for this kid. Since we're on a budget, I was really trying to help the word get out there as well. It's a hard age range to find any child actor at (10-12) and we reached out to transgender support groups for families and parents across North America as well as going through conventional casting channels.

Most kids submitted via video – and most of these kids were non-actors. Eyde is incredibly personable and she talked a lot of parents and kids who were new to this whole acting thing about everything from how to set up your cell phone for a self tape and larger questions about the ramifications of what it could mean for a young kid to be in a film, how production works logistically etc. I watched about 50 or so submissions and then met in person and via skype and facetime with 5 or so kids and their parents.

I found the whole thing very moving because a lot of parents and kids really related to the script – some found it hard to read. They shared their stories with me, which was really generous. That all felt very good to me, that it was resonating. Sasha actually had recently moved back to the LA area. He's such a sweetheart and super fun and it was evident pretty quickly that this kid was the one. I also think he looks a lot like Paul Newman. He was already taking acting classes and was interested in acting which was ideal for me. I felt better about casting a child who wants to be an actor than casting a kid who hasn't already taken steps to do that. Nick at *GLAAD* and I had a bunch of convos about that.



STEVE ZAHN AS TROY

Steve Zahn is perfect for this role and as soon as he came up, I had a hard time getting him out of my head. His performance in this movie is really moving, dramatic and multi-layered. He read the script and really connected to it.

The first time we talked on the phone, actually we started to skype but got so weirded out that we both agreed to switch back to regular phone, he was walking around his place in Kentucky and he says "I'm sorry for all the noise". I didn't actually hear anything but I asked him what he meant. And he said, "Ah I'm just feeding the animals". Animals as in horses, goats, rescue dogs. I just was so charmed. He rides a horse throughout the movie and our horse wrangler, this amazing guy Bobby Lovgren, was put at ease the second he saw him mount and ride around on the horse.

Steve's lived in Kentucky for awhile and I felt really good about that for the role because he sees people who live in rural America as multi-dimensional. I knew he wouldn't have some weird fetishized take on playing a working class character. As soon as I cast him, I tailored the script even more to him, and he put SO MUCH work into the role. I basically had no notes for him. All the leads, Jillian Bell, Ann Dowd and Sasha Knight included, worked really hard and had very clear ideas of who their characters were.



THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER

'Beautifully observed moments of illumination [that] will strike chords with every queer kid who ever felt like an outsider'

INDIEWIRE

'As sweeping in grand landscapes as it is delicate in scope'

THE QUEER REVIEW

'COWBOY' portrayal of unexpected familial acceptance and understanding gives us some hope for the future'

LA TIMES

'COWBOYS feels like the right movie at the right time'

ROUGH CUT CINEMA

'It's a sparse, beautiful film'

THE FILM STAGE

'Zahn and Bell are perfectly cast'

THE GUARDIAN

'There's a marvellous gentleness and warmth to this Montana-set drama'



CAST

Troy STEVE ZAHN
Sally JILLIAN BELL
Joe SASHA KNIGHT
Faith ANN DOWD
Robert Spottedbird GARY FARMER
Jerry CHRIS JOY
Grover JOHN REYNOLDS
Sherrif George Jenkins BOB STEPHENSON
Stevie AJ SLAGHT

CREW

Written & directed by ANNA KERRIGAN

Produced by GIGI GRAFF & ANNA KERRIGAN
Produced by DYLAN SELLERS & CHRIS PARKER
Executive producer ALEX DONG

Co producer CHRIS CHAVEZ LASZLO
Associate producer NATALIE SELLERS
Associate producer CJ BARBATO
Executive producer ANIL BARAL

Director of photography JP WAKAYAMA CAREY
Production designer LANCE MITCHELL
Editor JARRAH GURRIE
Composer GENE BACK
Supervisor sound editor RENEE TONDELLI
Costume designer EMILY MORAN
Music supervision CHRIS MOLLERE & MARC MOLLERE
Casting EYDE BELASCO, CSA

