



THE SISTER

Created and written by Neil Cross

Based on the novel *Burial*, also written by Neil Cross

THE SISTER
PRESS PACK CONTENTS

CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| SERIES SYNOPSIS..... | 4 |
| EPISODE SYNOPSIS..... | 4 |
| CHARACTER BIOGRAPHIES | 5 |
| CAST INTERVIEWS..... | 6 |
| RUSSELL TOVEY IS NATHAN REDMAN..... | 6 |
| BERTIE CARVEL IS BOB MORROW..... | 8 |
| AMRITA ACHARIA IS HOLLY FOX..... | 10 |
| KEY CREATIVES INTERVIEWS..... | 13 |
| NEIL CROSS -CREATOR, WRITER, EXECUTIVE PRODUCER | 13 |
| KATE HARWOOD – EXECUTIVE PRODUCER / MANAGING DIRECTOR EUSTON FILMS..... | 16 |
| CAST BIOGRAPHIES..... | 18 |
| PRODUCTION BIOGRAPHIES..... | 20 |

THE SISTER
INTRODUCTION BY NEIL CROSS

A long time ago, I was a murderer.

Here's how it happened. Very late one bitterly cold night when I was eighteen and the air smelled deliciously of fireworks, I took a short-cut home through the woods because I'd been drinking and was longing for bed.

Never take a short-cut through the woods. Good will not come of it.

The path was very dark and very lonely. I was about halfway home when I came upon a middle-aged man heading in the same direction, all bundled up in his winter clothes. I took the knife from my pocket and stabbed him to death. I suppose I must have stabbed him twenty or thirty times.

I left him dead in the tangled roots of a big old tree. His wounds were steaming slightly where hot blood was meeting frozen night air. I walked home and collapsed into bed. When I woke, hungover, on a crisp Sunday morning I experienced a sudden, dizzying rush of terror and anxiety as I remembered killing him.

I had not, of course. For one thing there was no blood on me or my clothes. Besides, there were no reports of a murder in the woods. There were no police, no news stories, no missing persons reports. No body was found. I know all this because I checked. And because I kept checking, on and off, for the next twenty years. Just in case.

I was compelled to because it always seemed much too vivid to have been a dream. Dreams fade. This did not. It had exactly the qualities of memory... and like all such memories, it haunted my sleepless nights.

None of which should lead you to believe that I was somehow compensating for lacking other, more normal anxieties. Like everyone else, I've done many stupid and selfish things. And like everyone else I sometimes bolt wide awake at three in the morning, skewered to the mattress by shame and mortification.

But still. A small, haunted part of me always wondered: what if I'd actually done it?

It's not like these things don't happen to real people every day. It's terrifying, how easy it is to be that ordinary, well-meaning person who makes one terrible mistake, who does one stupid thing one terrible night and has to live with the consequences. It's happening to somebody in your town right now. Maybe to a stranger you passed on the way to work this morning. Maybe to your Deliveroo driver. Maybe to you.

I wanted to write a story about that, about someone fundamentally decent who is haunted by guilt — and perhaps by something else. Russell Tovey has given life to Nathan. He is a masterclass in understated but relentless guilt and repressed terror. Bertie Carvel is the antic personification of Bob — that eccentric, charismatic, slightly dangerous friend from the past who becomes someone whom Nathan never, ever wants to see again. Amrita Acharia makes Holly's bravery in the face of terrible loss all-too heartbreakingly real. And Niall McCormick's outstanding direction perfectly captures the emotion as well as the tension of the story... inviting us to enjoy every agonising moment as the threat to Nathan's carefully constructed new life escalates, moment by insidious moment.

THE SISTER

SERIES SYNOPSIS

How far would you go to keep a secret?

One rainy evening, Nathan is surprised by an unwelcome face from the past.

Nathan has never been able to forget the worst night of his life: a party that led to the sudden, shocking death of a young woman.

Only he and Bob, an eccentric old acquaintance, know what really happened... and they've resolved to keep it that way. But years later, Bob appears at Nathan's door with terrifying news that threatens to tear Nathan's world apart. Because Nathan has his own secrets now.

Secrets that could destroy everything he has desperately fought to build for himself and his family.

The four-part series is written by Neil Cross and is inspired by the novel *Burial*, also written by Neil Cross (*Luther*, *Hard Sun*, *Spooks*, *Mama*). Executive Producers are Euston Films Managing Director Kate Harwood (*Dublin Murders*, *Hard Sun*, *Baghdad Central*), alongside Executive Producer for Euston Films, Noemi Spanos (*Dublin Murders*), and Neil Cross. The series is directed by Niall MacCormick (*The Victim*, *The Durrells*, *Doctor Thorne*) and produced by Jonathan Curling (*Tin Star*, *Baghdad Central*).

The Sister is a Euston Films production for ITV and is distributed internationally by Fremantle. The series was commissioned for ITV by Head of Drama, Polly Hill.

EPISODE SYNOPSIS

Episode One

Nathan seems to have it all — a loving wife, a beautiful home and a solid, if unexciting, career. But Nathan has never been able to forget the worst night of his life: a party that led to the sudden, shocking death of a young woman... the sister of the woman who is now his wife. Only he and Bob, an eccentric old acquaintance, know what really happened — and they've resolved to keep it that way. Until one rainy evening, years later, when Bob appears at Nathan's door with terrifying news. They're digging up the woods.

CHARACTER BIOGRAPHIES

Nathan (Played by Russell Tovey)

Incredibly likeable, but ordinary.

'Everyman' caught in an extraordinary situation. Nathan was once a bright-eyed young man about town, but has been forever changed by the events of one dark night, long ago. He has grown up to be measured, sensible, fearful: a shadow of his former self. He is determined to spend the rest of his life making things right.

Bob (Played by Bertie Carvel)

A provocateur. A decade earlier, Bob was an academic working on the fringes, a 'paranormal expert' who knew that science was on his side, even if mainstream academia viewed him as a sideshow. He was charming, energetic, knowledgeable, a relentless self-promoter. Though he loved attention and enjoyed his minor celebrity, frequenting local media as a colourful 'expert', he longed for legitimacy. He was determined to prove the naysayers wrong, no matter what it took. And what it took was his sanity.

The Bob we meet at the beginning of the series is a very different creature. He is now isolated, unemployed, and living in a squalid basement flat. His laser focus has now turned to obsession, but that keen mind is still whirring, figuring how to get exactly what he wants.

Elise (Played by Simone Ashley)

Vivacious, fun, young and carefree. She is the life of the party. Not one for moderation, she is the opposite of her sensible older sister. She dies brutally in the prime of her life and her loss continues to haunt the present.

Holly (Played by Amrita Acharia)

In short, a good and lovely person. She is smart, funny, pragmatic, and genuine. Her sister's mysterious disappearance changed her forever. She grew up, devoted herself to her family and community and to building a stable, solid middle-class life for herself. She still clings to the hope that Elise is alive and will come home one day.

Jacki (Played by Nina Toussaint-White)

Holly's best friend and a detective on the Elise Fox investigation. She is protective, loyal, committed — and determined to find answers for Holly and her family.

June (Played by Amanda Root)

Loving mother. Utterly devoted to her girls. June identifies more with Holly than free-spirited Elise, but was equally proud of both. Elise's disappearance is an open, never-healing wound, but she is determined to get on with life, put a brave face on things.

Graham (Played by Paul Bazely)

Stoic, reliable, devoted, a consummate family man. He loves his wife and daughters. They are an ordinary family. Utterly ordinary. But the unanswered question of what happened to Elise continues to linger beneath the surface, waiting to rip apart the lovely family he worked to so hard to build.

CAST INTERVIEWS

RUSSELL TOVEY IS NATHAN REDMAN

Q: Was this a difficult role to film?

"This was the most challenging job I have ever done as an actor. I wouldn't classify myself as a method actor, but I do completely immerse myself into every character I play, which made it a rather hard job living with this guy for nine weeks. Nathan was going through so much emotionally every day, including his anxiety and panic attacks as well as trying to be happy but never being fully content. Covering up something and just trying to exist while holding on to this secret was a real weight to bare.

"You would finish a day's filming, get in a car to go home looking over your scenes for the next day and it would be the same conflicting emotions all over again. So I was ready to have a little holiday at the end of shooting for sure.

"I am very proud of what we have done. The Sister is a unique show with its own surreal energy and dynamics. It is scary and dangerous.

"When I first read a script, I just look at the dialogue and think, 'Can I say this? Do I know who this guy is?' and automatically I know whether I want to do it. It usually takes me around ten pages to know if I want to be involved in a project and I knew straight away with this that I wanted to play this guy. I wanted to know more about him and inhabit his world.

"Viewers watching the show are meant to wonder what is going on and be second guessing everything. You are meant to be doubting and questioning who is right and who is wrong. That is all part of the style of writing that Neil Cross embodies.

"Neil brings a distinctive energy to his writing, which is recognised as his style now. He has that ability and incredible skill to root a story in the real world and yet it is heightened to another level. You think you know the characters he has created but then with a flip of a coin you have no idea who they are."

Q: Who is Nathan?

"Nathan, ultimately, is a really nice guy. An outgoing, sweet person with big dreams. Ten years ago, something happens on the night of a New Year's Eve party that changes him for the rest of his life. He has tried to rebuild his life ever since.

"When we first meet Nathan, he is married to a woman called Holly (Amrita Acharia). He absolutely loves and adores her. His main mission is to channel all his energy into making sure she is happy. That is what he lives for.

"He seems to be in a good place having made some better choices in his life. He is coping but he has some anxieties that sit with him all the time. Someone from his past turns up on his doorstep, causing

the past to come flashing right back and sets off a chain of events. In part, the story is about good people making mistakes and how things can change in a moment.

"I loved working with Amrita and the rest of the cast. We all went for it and that was so electrifying. To completely trust each other. I feel really proud to be on the screen with them."

Q: The Sister has a supernatural element. Do you have any personal experience of that?

"I am convinced I saw a ghost dog years ago. A big white ghost dog. I was at a friend's house. They lived in an old rectory building and a week before there was a psychic there who started stroking something in the air. My friend's mum was like, 'What are you doing?' The psychic replied, 'You've got a big white dog here.' Then one day we were sat in the living room and I looked down into the hall and I saw this white dog. I was like, 'Oh my God.' There was a part of me that went, 'Have I just imagined that because I heard the story? Or have I actually just seen it?'. I was with some mates who never saw anything. But I am totally convinced I saw it. Obviously, no-one believes me.

"I guess ghosts are some form of unfinished business or trapped in some sort of limbo. I don't know. It's all energy. It does not make sense to me that you are just here, then you die and there is nothing. I am definitely someone who believes that my nan is looking after me from above. I do believe in energy, definitely. It's easy for me to believe.

"Then you meet people who believe that it's life, death and then you're done. I would like to believe that if you are a good person you do go on to somewhere else. I am not a religious person when it comes to organised religion, but I do believe that this is not it spiritually. If it is about believing in something bigger than us, then I definitely do.

"You only have to look up at the billions of stars in the sky. What scares me more than anything is space: what is it? When you get a clear night sky and can look up at the stars, you think, 'What the hell is all of this?'

"Then you think about something like Coronavirus. It's like an alien invasion, like a movie. With the whole planet united in trying to battle this extraordinary thing that has come out of nowhere. We are all suddenly joined. Hopefully when we finally get through this, on the other side, the world is going to be a much better place. Because everyone is going to realise we are all in the same boat. You have to slow down and think about other people."

Q: Darkness plays its own role in The Sister. Were you scared of the dark as a child?

"I've never feared the dark. I had a period of about three weeks after I watched The Gremlins film and thought they were hiding behind my parents' bedroom door or under their bed. I was terrified of that ... for about three weeks. I once experimented with a Ouija board when we were young and that played on my mind because everyone would just freak each other out. Talking about being haunted. So that used to scare me."

Q: We also see Nathan as a younger man. How was that filmed?

"It's a completely different energy. When you see Nathan at a younger age, I wanted to portray what could have been. I wanted to make him more puppy-ish, more outgoing and confident. Just happy. There is an energy shift that happens until he eventually goes through absolute despair.

"Our hair and make-up team were just incredible. Brilliant. What they accomplished was excellent. At times we were filming all different ages of Nathan in one day. So that was a challenge for them for sure. Just a simple change in hair colour can make the world of difference. It's quite a shift to see Nathan as a younger man."

Q: Where did you film?

“We filmed most of The Sister around London. Some of the most challenging scenes were during two weeks of night shoots in the rain. The crew would probably say that was one of the hardest experiences of their whole careers. It was really tough filming those scenes at night. This was a hard job. But it looks amazing on screen, so it was absolutely worth it. The rewards reaped from everybody’s hard work are was amazing and I cannot wait for people to see the show.”

Q: Does TV drama have an extra value in our current times?

“People need the escape of TV drama more than ever. To hear stories and connect to what it is to be alive and the importance of being human. The way people communicate emotions is through art, which in turn helps in our understanding of the world. Through all levels of art — music, TV, radio, theatre, galleries, museums and so on. People need that escape.

“No one has ever before experienced anything like what has happened this year in our lifetime. But you must have hope. I think it is going to change a lot of things. It has slowed people down. Hopefully, something good will come out of it; something good for the whole planet.”

BERTIE CARVEL IS BOB MORROW

Q: Who is Bob Morrow?

“Bob is described as a ‘shabby alley cat’ when he turns up at the door of Nathan Redman (Russell Tovey). I feel like Bob is the past come to call. But it’s the past brought into the present. He looks like someone who has had a story. And even Nathan can see on first glance that Bob’s story has developed quite a few more chapters since he last saw him.

“Nathan opens his very smart front door to see a figure from his past. It’s almost as though Bob has carried the weight of all of those years since they last met a lot less successfully than Nathan seems to have done. Bob stands outside the normal adult world.”

Q: Did you speak to the writer Neil Cross?

“We didn’t meet but we had a wonderful phone call. I read the first couple of scripts and I had some queries and questions. Neil lives in New Zealand so we had this call and a wonderful conversation as he was writing the third and fourth episodes. He said, ‘It’s like you’re narrating my subconscious, Bertie.’

“There was one moment I was obsessed with. Wanting to play and interpret in a certain way. It felt like a key to me. We were talking about ghosts and as we did this there was a silence. Both of us shared a silence and I don’t know who was about to speak next. But suddenly there was a noise like a bass drum mixed with a strange spectral machine. And the line went down. It was amazing. It was as if we had been visited by the very ghost we were discussing. So that was a good moment will Neil Cross.

“Neil writes extraordinary stories with a real sense of the world we live in. Characters who may be somewhat larger than life with some bold choices but absolutely rooted in the observable and the mundane and even the banal. His writing is very every day. Even though we’re telling this extraordinary story there is a real sense of pavements we all walk up and down on. It’s important to have that. A very recognisable world.”

Q: Neil says he likes to write stories which explore the power of guilt and our ability to love. What are your thoughts about that?

“What I’m interested in is the three dimensionality of people. I like stories like this. It’s layered like an onion. You peel back the layers and piece together the skeleton of the story. But it’s all jumbled up when you first find it. There is something unexpected about these characters and this story. I’m really thrilled with *The Sister*.”

Q: Were you afraid of the dark as a child?

“I don’t remember being frightened of the dark. But I had a wardrobe in my bedroom that faced the end of my bed and as a small child it seemed enormous. Very tall. I had a sense it would fall and crush me. The daylight world puts a lot of reference points in that dissolve when the night comes. Our imaginations are more easily accessed when we close our eyes or are in the dark.

“I’m not afraid of the dark. Bob is liberated by the dark. I love the production design of his flat. The interior of Bob’s flat is an amazing design in the studio. Also, in the way it is lit. Using points of light in the darkness as a visual metaphor for what we are talking about.

“Bob is a creature of darkness. In as much as darkness is fertile and fecund. It’s where things start to sprout. In our upright civic space, we associate the darkness with evil. But actually, in a more Pagan way, darkness is a place from which birth is given. It’s actually a richer and more primal place.”

Q: You worked on lengthy location night shoots. Were they a challenge?

“It was pretty grueling. The most challenging thing about that for me was shooting a whole sequence basically set in a car in the woods. We shot all the exterior stuff around the car in the woods; but all of the interior stuff in the same car in a studio at the other end of the shoot. Including scenes of leaning in and out of the car.

“Film making is always disjointed. But to be jumping in and out mid-scene, in and out of two different sets and shooting days was technically challenging. There is also the cold and the fact you are doing stuff which requires you to get quite dirty or wet as it was raining. It was much more like camping than film making.”

Q: Do you believe in ghosts?

“I’ve got two sides to me. I go through life with quite a reasoned and rational road map. I think things through and try to be analytical and reasoned. Then I noticed in my work I’m most free when I follow instinct.

“Our perennial fascination with ghosts is for exactly the reason we want to find a rational explanation. What are they? Or we want to know they don’t exist which doesn’t accord with the lived experience or the observed reality of some storytellers. We’re fascinated, even though we like to say, ‘Oh those are just stories.’ We are always fascinated when someone mentions ghosts. Everyone has a story. Even if they don’t believe in ghosts they reach for a story.

“I think it’s because whatever our rational beliefs, we want to believe ‘there are more things in heaven and earth...than are dreamt of in your philosophy’. I wonder why that is? It’s not to test our rationality to absurdity. I think it’s because there’s a deeper place in acknowledging we don’t understand stuff.

“That’s where I come to that from. I know there is more than I can know. And I trust there is room in my cosmology for more stuff than I can understand. I do think if you get too obsessed with trying to look into the place in your understanding where there is the blackest hole, it often leads to insanity.

“Although sometimes it leads to massive enlightenment. I suppose rationalist pioneers are those people who have stared at the biggest, darkest problem. Like Isaac Newton and Stephen Hawking, Einstein and so on. But if you’re someone like Bob, maybe it leads to something slightly more jagged. I probably slightly shy away from those things. Except in creative work where that has to have answers.”

Q: We see Bob and other characters as their younger selves. How was that achieved?

“This is part of my job that I enjoy among the most. As soon as I am offered a role, probably the first thing I do is phone up and ask lots of inconvenient questions to make sure it is going to be a happy collaboration. Then after that the next people I phone are the makeup and costume designers and get to work.

“Make up designer Sophie Slotover was a wonderful partner in crime. I was really keen that Bob should have long hair. The costume designer, Aideen Morgan and I also had huge fun going shopping. With lots of conversations to get it right. Ultimately this is a very visual medium and that’s where a lot of the storytelling happens.

“I was also really keen that not only should Bob have long hair but there should be two lots of long hair. There is the younger Bob who has this mane who should feel like somebody for whom hair, like Samson, is his strength and sexuality; growing from him and expressing his energy and vitality. And with the older Bob, the same hair has become lank and longer but straggly. We had lots of fun cooking up what that should look like.

“I enjoyed the process of working with all of those people involved, through the designers like Sophie and Aideen who are extremely skillful at taking my enthusiasm, slightly crazed energy and determination to have a certain thing, knowing what is practical but also navigating the wider picture. Then finding just the right thing. I was thrilled we did that.

“It’s like an amazing jigsaw puzzle. I have so much respect for these incredible brains that can be both creative and take creative, expressive, purely artistic visions and put those through the lens of very practical problems. Like filming in the woods where there is going to be no hair dryer. And needing to repeat things on several takes across different days.”

Q: Theatres and cinemas have had to close during the Coronavirus pandemic along with the suspension of filming on other film and television productions. Does that matter in the scheme of things?

“I remember when I went to drama school, carrying around huge enthusiasm and excitement for my new role in life. But also, an element of embarrassment or guilt that I wasn’t, as I thought at the time, doing something that was key and really socially useful. That I was basically just making art.

“But as I’ve got older, I’ve become more and more convinced — without wanting to sound worthy — that this stuff is absolutely critical. This is because we make sense of our world through stories. That’s the sort of thing actors say all the time. But I understand more and more what that really means. The importance of story and culture to our sense of humanity and to our common bond.

“The veneer of our civilisation is much thinner than we like to think. We have had an opportunity to reflect in this darkened trance and maybe rebuild our society in a slightly better way.”

AMRITA ACHARIA IS HOLLY FOX

Who is Holly?

“It’s almost like if Holly knows the truth then everything could just come crumbling down. She is the stake the storyline pivots around, for her husband Nathan (Russell Tovey) at least.

“Holly is extremely affected by the fact her sister Elise (Simone Ashley) went missing a number of years ago and has never been found. But she is incredibly resilient. The one who has held everything together and been there for her family. And tried to just get on with her life and make the best possible normal life for herself that she possibly can. Without being attached to the past.

“Her and Nathan have been trying for a baby through IVF for a while and it’s just not happening. The emotional toll of that when we meet them is really getting to her. She is very family orientated. Otherwise Holly and Nathan have a very undramatic life. That’s what she wants.”

What is her reaction when she meets Bob, played by Bertie Carvel?

“When she meets Nathan’s friend Bob for the first time, she senses straight away that something is not quite right. Nathan is not really someone who is particularly social — so this unexpected visitor to their house comes as something of a surprise to her.”

“I think anyone would be thrown off by Bob if he turned up at their door; this odd, straggly-looking man. But also, Nathan has never spoken to her about Bob before. That is the oddest thing for her. And even when she probes, Nathan does not really give much away about Bob.

“Everything starts to go downhill from that moment onwards because it all starts to unravel. She senses something is not right, and there is a disconnect between her and Nathan. Holly can’t quite reach him. In any relationship that is frustrating. But the arrival of Bob is the signal for so much more.”

We see Holly making an appeal through police to find her missing sister. How was that to film?

“It’s a difficult one as an actor to make sure you do it justice. Because it is somebody putting themselves and their vulnerability on the line and asking the public for help. Admitting to themselves that somebody hasn’t come home and is still missing three years later. With also that niggling sensation in the back of your mind that they may be dead...but we don’t want them to be. There is no body so you are clinging on to hope.

“So it’s that fine balance between the desperation for closure and just to know something. The whole topic of loss and death and people’s reactions to that is such a fine line, and a challenge to convey truthfully as an actor. How that hope manifests in you from when it’s very fresh to when it’s then a few years down the line.”

Did you speak to the writer Neil Cross?

“We had a long chat about Holly. I love his writing so this role was a dream come true. The way he writes is so steeped in subtext and everything you are not saying, rather than what you are saying a lot of the time. So the pauses and the beats convey so much for me.

“I had read the original book as well before we started filming and loved that. It was amazing to get stuck into a piece of writing that was so real. The lines were easy to learn. You’re not struggling to understand it. You just get it because it’s how we as human beings would react or respond. It just made sense. The relationships between the characters were clear to me. Also getting to play around and have the freedom to do that with the director Niall MacCormick. It was so exciting.”

What themes are explored in this story?

“A big theme in this story is guilt. But also atonement. The way it is filmed, there is a whole sense of the past catching up with you. You are running away from it but it is catching up with you. Then you end up digging a bigger and bigger hole as you try and drag yourself out of this grave you are slowly digging for yourself. Those themes are immense within the script.

"It also explores the bonds people have. The bonds we create as people. The bonds between husband and wife or sisters or parents to children, and what happens when that starts to break down. Or when there is a lack of communication. How a tragedy can affect those things. You think your life might go in one direction and in a split second everything changes and you're no longer the person you thought you were. How do I find the new 'me' post a tragedy like this?"

"The psychological element of it I found incredibly fascinating. Adaptability just in general. When you are pushed to the edge, when you are pushed to the limit, what are you willing to do? Normal people are capable of great and terrible things.

"Secrets are a horrible thing because they always catch up with you. And they are hard to hold in. It's difficult to keep secrets. Especially when you know they have affected other people."

Were you scared of the dark as a child?

"I love the dark. I was never scared of the dark. Living in Norway in my teens, I used to love the winter months when you get lots of darkness. I find it really comforting. I had such a big imagination as a kid. So I just thought, 'Oh, I'm a vampire.' Or whatever I decided to be.

"I suffered with extreme anxiety and still have done in my adult life. So it's not so much fear of the outside world as it is fear of myself and my own failings — which is interesting."

Do you believe in ghosts?

"I think it would be extremely naive to think we know everything about the world. Given it's been around a lot longer than we have. Whether I believe in ghosts or not... I don't not believe in them but I don't believe in them. I'll believe it when I want to. Then when it suits me I just won't!

"I definitely believe there is something more. Whether 'ghost' is the right word. I do believe in a transference of energy. As a child I grew up in Nepal surrounded by the Hindu culture and obviously reincarnation comes into that as well. There is something more out there.

"I do believe in energy and karma. I find it hard to believe that you just die and that's it. Maybe that's me just being extremely self-obsessed and thinking, 'How can I possibly leave this Earth and just disappear?', I think you must go somewhere. Even if your body is dead matter it must somehow go somewhere in some way."

We see the characters in flashbacks as their younger selves. How was that to film?

"They didn't have to put any tape on to pull back the skin or whatever they call it. So that was good to know. Just heavier make up and some hair pieces. Plus, of course, it was shown in the clothes.

"A lot of it comes in the energy you have at different ages. When you're older and perhaps more settled. Or when you're younger and, for Holly, a bit more jumpy. I just worked with how she would have protected herself emotionally in the aftermath of her sister going missing. And what sort of face she would have put on to the outside world.

"To appear to herself and to others as normal as possible."

What was it like working with Russell Tovey?

"It was delightful working with Russell. We spent most of the time calling each other ridiculous things and eating all of the biscuits. He was a big catalyst in me starting my 'Rule Not The Exception' podcast with Sagar Radia, who plays AJ Nair in The Good Karma Hospital. We've had really lovely responses to that. If it wasn't for Russell I wouldn't have started it. Because he's got his own amazing Talk Art podcast which does really well.

“We have kept in touch since filming finished. Russell is a delight to work around because he has got so much experience. But he is the furthest away from anything that could be considered a diva on set. He really sets the tone for how the set should be.

“You’ve got this beautiful script, you get into character and the camera rolls and you just play. We bounced off each other. It was great to be a part of something like this. Everything from the crew, costume, make up, director — everything was great. It was possibly one of the best things I’ve ever worked on.”

How do you reflect back now on making *The Sister*?

“If it hadn’t been for a year’s production break in filming *The Good Karma Hospital* I wouldn’t have been able to do this role because we would have been filming that at the time. They are such different beasts; completely different genres. Holly is so different from Ruby in *The Good Karma Hospital*.

“That’s what I love about this job. As much as it’s amazing to be part of a long running show like *The Good Karma Hospital*, the reason a lot of us become actors is because we like faffing about pretending to be other people. Giving other characters a voice. So it was lovely to do *The Sister*.

“At the end of the day what people see is what is on screen. But behind that is a huge amount of work from an unseen team of people. A show like this relies on the crew and everyone else involved. I hope audiences can see how much effort has gone into this behind what the actors have done to make everything come together.

“I also felt it was such an amazing choice and so timely of the production to choose Holly to be of mixed race and make that completely incidental. Along with Elise. I don’t think there is enough of that out there.

“It goes to show it is completely possible to do more of that — and that it absolutely works. You do not have to explain it and it doesn’t have to be a big thing about race or identity. It can just be an incidental thing and the story can belong to everybody.”

KEY CREATIVES INTERVIEWS

NEIL CROSS — CREATOR, WRITER, EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

What did you want to explore in this story?

“When I wrote the novel, it was one of the few stories that came to me almost in its entirety. The original nugget of inspiration was just a universal experience. In common with many other British people, I spent my youth and young adulthood drinking far too heavily. I never had a drinking problem. I had what Billy Connolly called a behaviour problem.

“What stopped me drinking almost altogether wasn’t the drunkenness, the health issues or the money. It was that first strike of anxiety that hits you in the morning when you wake up and you think, ‘Oh my God. What did I do? What did I say?’ And when I remember my youth and young adulthood it’s almost defined by that feeling.

“Then I read somewhere that a vast majority of murders are not only committed between people who know each other, typically spouses or partners, but also when one party is very drunk. So I just put those two very everyday ideas together. I thought, what must it be like to get yourself completely wasted? And then one day you wake up in a new world and your first thought isn’t, ‘Oh my God, what did I say?’ It’s: ‘Oh my God, I killed somebody.’ That’s where the story came from.

“The power of guilt is something which, to some extent, we all endure, we all go through. I still sometimes flush with agony and embarrassment when I think about things I said to people in primary school. The interesting thing about our guilt and shame is that very often when I remember saying embarrassing things or things I shouldn’t have said, I can’t remember to whom I said it. I remember the experience of saying it and the shame — which very often was retrospective shame.

“So it’s a very powerful animal instinct. The power of guilt and shame is, I guess, what makes community possible. It is a very powerful legislator. I would equate it to grief. In that I’m sure it becomes less acute as time goes on. But then you’ll find yourself opening the fridge and suddenly you will remember. It’s never quite gone.

“Why people like to identify in entertainment with serial killers is not because they want people to wantonly kill other people. It’s because there is a certain fantasy about how wonderful it would be to be without conscience. To do what you want and never feel that obligation to the community. Which is ultimately what conscience is.”

Who is Nathan Redman (Russell Tovey)?

“Normally when we meet the close to everyman character, he tends to be a little older, established with a family and so on. Nathan is a young everyman who we witness growing towards maturity.”

What about Bob Morrow (Bertie Carvel)?

“I still like to read writers on writing. I find it an intensely relaxing thing to do. Especially when you realise that nobody else quite knows what they are doing either. The first line of my novel is literally, ‘There was a knock at the door.’ And there we find Bob Morrow.

“Bob is a character that Nathan knew briefly. And with whom he shared an intense experience. Whatever secret Nathan has, it very quickly becomes apparent that Bob shares that secret. Whatever that was, Nathan has moved on from there. He has constructed a life, he is happy and content. But that contentment is shattered when Bob — the face of the past — turns up at his door.”

There is an element of the supernatural to this story. Are you a believer?

“In certain peculiar respects, this is the most autobiographical thing I have ever written. I’ve got a crippling fear of the dark. I’ve had that since I was a child. It’s a lifelong thing.

“I’m an atheist, I’m a rationalist, I believe in the scientific method. Until I wake up at 2am. In which case I fully believe in the presence of the dead. Briefly and with absolutely terror; but utterly. There is an indefinable quality of strangeness and difference. When I’m alone, when my wife is away or whatever, I have every light in the house on.

“So I am scared of and interested in ghosts. I’m interested in the universality of the experience. In real life, as we speak now, it’s a lovely bright, sunny, blue sky morning. I know absolutely with total conviction that the spirits of the dead do not manifest themselves to the living. However, quite a large majority of people at some point will experience the presence of someone they have loved who has died. And the nature of that experience really interests me. Ultimately, I think it comes back to physics and Darwin.

“But also as well as this abiding interest in the nature of the experience, there is a very direct relationship between a story to tell about the double meaning of being haunted. Nathan is haunted by the past. But as to what the nature of that haunting is, that’s for the audience to discover.”

You have said terror inspires you to write along with a prime interest in our ability to love and what that can lead to. Can you expand on that?

“Maybe this marks me out as an old softie. I’m most interested in thrillers. In stories that excite, terrify and make the heart race a little bit. I think all thrillers in some way are love stories. All thrillers are about the fear of loss. That loss, for example in Nathan’s case, could just be the life he had made for himself. And the life he has made for himself actually is the people around him who he loves.

“All thrillers are, in essence, about being separated from what you love. The people you love, the places you love, the communities you love. One of the functions of getting older is that you learn the mysteries of life are unutterably banal. There is no big secret. Everybody across the world wants the same thing: which is each other at peace and enough to eat.”

You keep a ‘nightmare tally’. Can you tell us more?

“I did when I wrote the original book. From submission of manuscript to my agent all the way through the publishing process to the release of the book — I had a lot of people writing to me telling me the book had actually given them nightmares, which I took to be the greatest possible compliment. The book came out around the same time as I did Luther. Which generated nightmare tallies of its own.”

Are there compromises in translating a novel into a TV drama series?

“You don’t adapt a book for the screen. You transform. You have to look at any given text and analyse what job it’s trying to do. Then you have to think of a way to translate that to the screen. What was fun about doing this — was doing that with my own book. So, partly, it was a challenge. ‘Can I step back from something I wrote, something I love and am very fond of?’, knowing there are elements that cannot be changed but which must be changed.

“The biggest challenge for The Sister was how to transform the book for TV. It took me months to work out how to tell the story in the format of television and the number of hours we have to tell the story. Also structuring for ad breaks as well.

“I realised the way to tell the story was not in an almost directly linear narrative, which is how the novel is. Rather it was to take it to pieces like Lego and have these nested timelines. There is a 2010 timeline, a 2013 timeline and a present day timeline. And they are nested like Russian dolls; which is something I had never tried to do before. I’m a very linear storyteller, typically.

“It seemed to me to be the right way to tell this story. That was exciting and liberating and it freed me from all these assumptions about the book. About what needed to be kept in.”

You must have been pleased with the actors chosen to tell this story?

“The cast in this show are carrying an enormous amount of weight on their shoulders — because it’s a very small cast. Probably the smallest I have ever worked with. I had a very clear image of who Nathan was and how he moves through the world. Every time you write a script, no matter how experienced you become, between submission of the written word and someone switching a camera on, there is a sense of letting go of the characters you have made up.

“You might base a character on the page on someone you’ve come across in the past or a combination of people. But you have a picture which then is inhabited by an actor and inevitably changed. Very often for the better and in surprising and unexpected ways.

“With Nathan, because so much of the story was autobiographical, I was very worried about the thought of casting that role. I thought it was going to be a horribly unfair thing to an actor for me to just be looking at them, thinking, ‘No, you are wrong. You as an entity are wrong.’

“But as soon as someone mentioned Russell Tovey I could see the possibilities. And as soon as I heard him say a single line I just knew there was no process of letting go. He just completely was the character of Nathan as I imagined it. That was a very strange and unique experience for me.”

You say the most common question people ask you is, ‘How can someone so normal write such disturbing stories?’ What is the answer?

“The truth is I am scared of what everybody else is scared of. I am so very normal and I’m scared of such common things that are so widely shared. That’s what enables me to tell these stories.”

KATE HARWOOD – EXECUTIVE PRODUCER / MANAGING DIRECTOR EUSTON FILMS

“I first read the novel *Burial* on which *The Sister* is based when Neil Cross and I were working on *Luther* together at the BBC. I thought it was a really compelling, scary story and so I filed it away, as one does. Then while I and my fellow Exec Noemi Spanos were working on *Hard Sun* with Neil, we talked about picking it up and taking it to ITV. ITV’s head of drama, Polly Hill, had commissioned *Hard Sun* when she was at the BBC and was really keen to work with Neil again.

“*The Sister* is Euston Films’ first show with ITV, in its new incarnation. Knowing the long history of Euston Films connection with the channel — it feels as if in some ways we have come home.

“Neil has a very distinct style with a firm grasp on his material, and this is a story that occupies a very small canvas. There are only really four key characters but we meet them in three different time frames — and Neil’s script navigated that very clearly. During the shoot it was obvious where the dynamic and the heart of each scene was. There is a pin sharp precision to his writing that is powerful on the page and easy to lift off the page.

“The themes explored in this four-part drama include guilt, redemption, longing, love, fear and vengeance. However what was most important was that it was grounded in the love story between Nathan (Russell Tovey) and Holly (Amrita Acharia). They really need each other, but as Neil has observed, love doesn’t always bring out the best of us.

“Russell Tovey is amazing. It is also fascinating to watch Russell and Bertie Carvel (Bob) together. They are very different types of actors. Russell has been acting since he was so young and he can turn on a sixpence. He is also an actor that audiences really empathise with, which is a great gift. Bertie is detailed, meticulous and loves creating character. They are superb on screen together.

“Our director Niall MacCormick brings quality, scale, vision, beauty and empathy with the cast. He is a terrifically good storyteller and had a firm grip on the genre of this psychological thriller with a supernatural twist.

“*The Sister* tells a story across three time frames with only four main characters. This became quite a challenge in the edit because if you moved one element, however small, the whole thing changes. It’s like a Rubik’s cube! Trying to keep the tension and equilibrium over the different time frames (with very little to cut to) was definitely tricky, but as with a Rubik’s cube so satisfying when it all clicked into place.

“Post-production during the Coronavirus pandemic in the spring of 2020 was another big challenge. Luckily we had finished filming in December 2019 but the subsequent post-production was very slow. We worried there would be compromises and indeed there was a big learning curve for everyone as we had to work out new ways of doing things, but we got there in the end with a lot of ingenuity from the team. But everything did take three times as long.

“Interestingly some of the things we thought were going to be massively difficult worked out very easily. We talked to others in the business and asked what they were doing and all learned from each

other. It turns out actors can do things like ADR — re-recording dialogue — remotely if you deliver the equipment to their home and feed the director in on Zoom. It's more time consuming and fiddly. But it's do-able.

“From our point of view we were lucky we had finished filming and could work on delivering the show.

“The future of the industry as we emerge from the Coronavirus pandemic cannot be anything but worrying particularly given the needs of a large freelance workforce. There are so many people who may fall through cracks, who are living on savings and not quite fitting in to the various government schemes. Some are on the brink of not coping and not having enough to live on. It is very worrying.

“Thank goodness the film and TV industry is full of people who are brilliant at imaginatively managing risk and logistics so there's the right raw material in the people we work with. But I think as things get going the risk is that things are going to be more expensive, take longer and will involve working with fewer people. All of those things are going to have an impact.

“The one good thing for our business is there is clearly ongoing demand for TV drama; a demand that has shot up over the lockdown. Audiences are bonding with their dramas, with the characters and with story, and are needing it — I know I do.

“So if demand is there then supply will turn up, somehow!”

CAST BIOGRAPHIES

RUSSELL TOVEY

With an extensive background in film, television and theatre, award-winning actor Russell Tovey made his stage debut as part of the original company for Alan Bennett's 2004 play *The History Boys*, both at the National Theatre and on Broadway. He then reprised his role of 'Rudge' in the much loved 2006 film adaptation directed by Nicholas Hytner.

On stage Russell was most recently seen as Joseph Pitt in critically acclaimed *Angels in America* at the National Theatre alongside Nathan Lane and Andrew Garfield, as well as *The Lover* and *The Collection* at London's The Pinter Theatre. He last appeared on Broadway in the critically acclaimed Tony Award-winning revival of *A View From the Bridge*, directed by Ivo van.

On television, Russell was recently nominated for a 2020 Critic's Choice Award for best supporting actor for his role in the critically acclaimed BBC / HBO Drama series *Years and Years* written by Russell T. Davies, alongside Emma Thompson and Jessica Hynes. Russell also starred opposite Imelda Staunton and Stephen Rea in ITV's *Flesh and Blood*, directed by BAFTA nominee Louise Hooper. Previously, Russell played the leading role of George Sands in the BBC's fantasy comedy series *Being Human* with Aidan Turner and Claire Foy. He also starred in BBC's comedy television series *Him and Her*, where he went on to win the 2012 Royal Television Society Award (RTS) for Best Comedy Performance. Other notable television credits include BBC's *Doctor Who*; critically acclaimed BBC TV mini-series *Little Dorrit*; *Sherlock*; HBO's *Looking*; *The Night Manager*; *What Remains*; *The Job Lot*; *Freedom Fighters: The Ray*; CW's *Legends of Tomorrow* / *The Flash* and ABC's *Quantico*.

Russell has had many roles in film including a key part in Bill Condon's *The Good Liar* for Warner Bros. opposite Sir Ian McKellen and Dame Helen Mirren. Other notable film credits include *Grabbers*; *Blackwood*; *The Lady in the Van*; *Mindhorn*; *The Pass*; *Effie Gray*; *Pride*; *Hymn of Hate* and *The Sea*. As well as acting Russell also has a successful podcast, *Talk Art*, with friend and gallerist Robert Diament. They have gone on to interview many world-renowned names such as Sir Elton John, Billy Porter, Lena Dunham and Raven Smith to name a few.

BERTIE CARVEL

Bertie Carvel is an award-winning actor and considered one of the most versatile actors of his generation, often completely unrecognisable from one role to the next.

This year, Bertie starred in two critically acclaimed television productions; *Baghdad Central* (C4/Hulu), a crime thriller set during the US occupation of Iraq, and two-part Agatha Christie adaptation *The Pale Horse* (BBC/Amazon).

Other key television credits include Bertie's critically acclaimed performance in series one and two of BBC One's award-winning drama *Doctor Foster*, Channel 4's one-off 90 minute political drama *Coalition* playing Nick Clegg, the BBC adaptation of Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell as 'Jonathan Strange' and BBC One's *Sherlock* and *Doctor Who*.

Bertie has had an extraordinary couple of years scooping up both a Tony and Olivier 'Best Supporting Actor' award for his performance in the James Graham play *Ink* (Almeida, West End, Broadway) playing Rupert Murdoch. A prolific stage actor, he is best known perhaps for his seminal turn as 'Miss Trunchbull' in Dennis Kelly and Tim Minchin's *Matilda, The Musical* (RSC, West End, Broadway).

Other theatre credits include *Bakkhai*, *Rope* (Almeida Theatre), *The Hairy Ape* (The Old Vic), *Parade* (Donmar), which earned Bertie a nomination for 'Best Actor in a Musical' at the Olivier's, *The Man of Mode*, *The Life of Galileo*, *Coram Boy* (National Theatre) and *Pride* (Royal Court).

AMRITA ACHARIA

Amrita Acharia is best known for her leading role of 'Dr Ruby Walker' in ITV's hugely popular medical drama *The Good Karma Hospital*, which follows a British Asian NHS junior doctor who impulsively responds to an advert for medics to work at a public hospital in the southern Indian state of Kerala. The first series averaged 8 million viewers per episode and, following an equally successful second series, was recommissioned for a third.

She was most recently seen onstage at the Soho Theatre in *The Special Relationship*, a play based on real life stories from the edge of immigration that followed six British nationals sent back to the U.K. after years living in the USA, due to laws which allow foreign nationals to be deported after serving prison sentences.

Amrita's first role in her year after graduating from drama school was as 'Irri', handmaiden to Daenerys Targaryen in the global phenomenon *Game of Thrones*. Following her character's brutal murder, Amrita 'rose again as queen of Nordic noir', playing a defence lawyer in the Norwegian noir-thriller series *Acquitted*, (Independent). She also had considerable success in the Norwegian film *I Am Yours*, which was put forward as Norway's Oscar Submission, Norwegian-Pakistani writer-director Iram Haq's autobiographical drama about a divorcee and a single mother caught between two cultures. Variety praised her performance as 'a naturally warm lead thesp, who gives a literally and figuratively naked performance'.

Amrita also joined the voice talents of Hugh Jackman, Zoe Saldana Emma Thompson, Stephen Fry and many others for *Missing Link*, the fifth film from animation studio Laika, which won a Golden Globe for Best Animated Feature, and has been nominated for the Oscar for Best Animated Feature this year.

SIMONE ASHLEY

Simone has worked across a wide range of roles in film and TV. She has appeared in *Broadchurch* alongside Oscar winner Olivia Colman well as the popular *Strike* series for BBC/HBO. Simone has also appeared in box office and critically acclaimed hits such as *Straight Outta Compton* and *Pokemon: Detective Pikachu*.

In 2018, Simone landed the role of 'Olivia' on the hugely successful Netflix series *Sex Education* alongside Asa Butterfield and Gillian Anderson and is due to shoot season 3 later this year.

NINA TOUSSAINT-WHITE

Nina has had an extensive career across screen and stage. Recently, she was seen as DS Louise Rayburn in the award-winning BBC and Netflix series, *Bodyguard*, and also in the lead role of Kate Hatfield in the social media infused sci-fi psychological drama *The Feed* (Amazon).

She has also featured in *Emmerdale* (ITV), and regular roles in *Eastenders* (BBC), *Gameface* (E4), *S*Witch* (ITV2), and three series of *Uncle* (BBC3).

Theatre includes roles such as Jane in *The Libertine* (Theatre Royal Bath and Haymarket) and Susan in the European premiere of David Mamet's *Race* (Hampstead Theatre).

She was Nominated for Best Performance in a Musical at the UK Theatre Awards 2016 for *The Etienne Sisters* at Theatre Royal Stratford East.

PRODUCTION BIOGRAPHIES

NEIL CROSS – CREATOR, WRITER, EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

Neil Cross is a British screenwriter, showrunner and novelist best known as the creator and sole writer of the multi-award winning BBC crime thriller *Luther*, starring Idris Elba, for which he has twice been nominated for an Emmy award for Outstanding Writing. He is currently the show-runner of *Mosquito Coast* for Apple, and is the creator, writer and executive producer of *The Sister* for ITV in the UK and Hulu in the United States.

NIALL MACCORMICK – DIRECTOR

Niall MacCormick is a British film and television director. His credits include the feature-length comedy-drama *The Long Walk to Finchley*, *Firewall* (the second feature-length episode of *Wallander*), and *The Song of Lunch* (starring Alan Rickman and Emma Thompson). All of these were created for BBC Television. He directed *The Game* in 2013 and won a BAFTA in 2014 for the Channel 4 film *Complicit*. In 2019 he directed the acclaimed BBC mini-series *The Victim*.

KATE HARWOOD - EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

Kate Harwood is Managing Director of Euston Films and is the executive producer of *Baghdad Central* and *Dublin Murders*. She was the executive producer on *Hard Sun* and was previously Head of Drama (England) at the BBC. Her early career began in an in-house BBC drama production, starting as script editor and then producer and executive producer (*Twenty Thousand Streets*, *Cranford*). Her career includes BAFTA-winning shows such as *Holding On* and *Charles II*.

NOEMI SPANOS - EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

Noemi Spanos is Executive Producer at Euston Films working on the recent crime series *Dublin Murders* for BBC One. She left the BBC in 2014 to join Kate Harwood in relaunching Euston Films as the label's Creative Director. Previously, Noemi has worked both within the BBC and independent sector; undertaking development exec roles for BBC Drama Production, Kudos Film & Television and BBC Wales.

JONATHAN CURLING – PRODUCER

Jonathan Curling is a freelance producer who began his TV drama career at the European Script Fund, before becoming Development Executive at BBC NI Drama.

Since then he has produced many award winning dramas for the main UK and Irish networks including the BBC (*Amongst Women*, *Holy Cross*), ITV (*The Secret*), Sky Atlantic (*Tin Star*), RTE (*The Clinic*, *Raw*) and Channel 4 (*The Government Inspector*, a BAFTA and RTS winner)

His most recent production is the critically acclaimed *Baghdad Central* for Euston Films and Channel 4.

EUSTON FILMS

A prestige label with an international reputation for ground-breaking, iconic drama, Euston Films was relaunched in Autumn 2014, with Kate Harwood as Managing Director and Noemi Spanos as Creative Director. *Hard Sun* was Euston Films' inaugural production, a 6-part drama series for BBC One written by Neil Cross (*Luther*). Euston Films has two further ambitious drama series: *Dublin Murders* written by Sarah Phelps (*The ABC Murders*), an 8-part series for BBC One and Starz which aired in the UK and US in 2019; and *Baghdad Central* written by Stephen Butchard (*The Last Kingdom*), a 6-part series for Channel 4 which aired in early 2020.

ABOUT FREMANTLE

Fremantle is one of the largest and most successful creators, producers and distributors of scripted and unscripted content in the world. From *Got Talent* to *My Brilliant Friend*, *Family Feud* to *The Young Pope*, *Idols* to *American Gods*, *The Price is Right* to *Neighbours* and *The X Factor* to *Deutschland 83* — we are behind the world's most-loved and most-watched shows.

We have an outstanding international network of production teams, companies and labels in over 30 countries — our Fremantle family includes UFA (Germany), Wildside (Italy), Abot Hameiri (Israel), Miso Film (Denmark, Sweden and Norway), Blue Circle (Netherlands), Original Productions (USA) and Easy Tiger (Australia) to name a few.

We produce in excess of 12,000 hours of original programming, roll out more than 70 formats, and air 400 programmes a year worldwide. We also distribute over 20,000 hours of content in more than 200 territories.

As a world leader in digital and branded entertainment, we have more than 370 million subscribers across 1,500 social channels and over 100 billion views across all platforms — and are the creator of Facebook's most viewed video of all time, *The Sacred Riana*.

For more information, visit www.fremantle.com, or follow us @FremantleHQ and visit our LinkedIn and Facebook pages.