Magnolia Pictures and Hopscotch Films

PRESENT

MY OLD SCHOOL

A film by Jono McLeod

Starring Alan Cumming

USA, 2021, 104 minutes

Official Selection
2022 Sundance Film Festival – World Premiere

FINAL PRESS NOTES

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Logline

One of the most talked-about documentaries when it world-premiered at Sundance, MY OLD SCHOOL unravels the astonishing true story of a mysterious new student who may not be who his Scottish classmates and teachers believe.

Synopsis

In 1993, 16-year-old Brandon Lee enrolled at Bearsden Academy, a secondary school in a well-to-do suburb of Glasgow, Scotland. What followed over the next two years would become the stuff of legend. Brandon had been privately tutored in Canada while he accompanied his mother, an opera diva, on tour before her tragic death. The preternaturally bright student surprised teachers by blazing toward his goal of entering medical school, displaying a wealth of knowledge beyond his years. Brandon found friends despite his initial awkwardness, taking bullied students under his wing, introducing classmates to seminal retro bands, and even starring in the school's production of South Pacific. But then his unbelievable secret was revealed. Filmmaker Jono McLeod returns to his old school for a nostalgic look at the strange but true story of his former classmate, Brandon Lee. Utilizing playful, period-specific animation, a pitch-perfect soundtrack, the memories of students and teachers, and the talents of Alan Cumming to bring the tale to life, MY OLD SCHOOL offers more than one surprise along the way.
Filmmaker Statement

MY OLD SCHOOL is a documentary which finally reveals the truth behind one of the most incredible stories of the past 30 years. Featuring interviews with my old classmates and teachers, together we tell how a 32-year-old man tricked his way into our school – and, for the first time, how Brandon Lee’s true identity was revealed.

Playing with its theme of identity and deception, this documentary stars the internationally renowned actor Alan Cumming as both the face and the voice of Brandon, albeit never at the same time. In an astonishing performance, Alan perfectly lip-syncs to an audio interview I recorded with the imposter himself. In addition to that Alan also provides the voice of the young Brandon in our animated flashback scenes. As Alan notes, “This is a great Scottish tale, one that gripped the entire nation when it first broke back in the 1990s, and this documentary retells it from the point of view of the pupils and teachers it all happened to! Their experience, their truth and the legacy they still struggle with will, I believe, now captivate a global audience. It's told with a quirky sensitivity, humor and honesty. It's a story that has always fascinated me and I am delighted to play a part in its telling."

One of the roles Alan is best known for is class nerd Sandy Frink in ‘Romy and Michele’s High School Reunion’. But Alan isn’t the only actor in our cast who’s been in an iconic high school movie. Our teaching staff includes ‘Gregory’s Girl’ herself, Clare Grogan, and the star (and US Billboard chart-topping singer) of ‘To Sir with Love’, Lulu. And just like in that movie classic of 1967, Lulu sings our title song, the Steely Dan hit ‘My Old School’. Her powerhouse of a performance plays over a fun end credit sequence where cartoon characters meet their real-life counterparts.

Animated flashback scenes with cartoon characters evoke high school life from 25 years ago. While drawing inspiration from MTV’s 1990s high school icon, Daria, the film also nods to the animation styles of the 1970’s. Producers John Archer and Olivia Lichtenstein say, “this is a story that will remind you of your schooldays; an unforgettable tale told with warmth, verve and originality by Class 5C, who lived through this extraordinary deception and have never forgotten it. And now, neither will you!”

MY OLD SCHOOL is an exciting and unique project - a real-life rollercoaster of a story, told on film in a completely new way.

- Jono McLeod
Filmmaker Bios

Alan Cumming, “Brandon Lee”

The host of PBS’ Masterpiece Mystery! and star of Schmigadoon!, The Good Wife and over 130 other shows and films, Alan Cumming is prolific and versatile. He’s been honored by the Olivier Awards, the Golden Globes, the Screen Actors Guild, the Critics Circle, Film Independent, GLAAD, the Emmys and Queen Elizabeth II, who awarded him an Officer of the British Empire for his acting work and LGBTQ activism. His Broadway debut in Cabaret garnered him a Tony, a Drama Desk Award and five other major awards. He dueted with Liza Minnelli, sang at the Hollywood Bowl and the Sydney Opera House, appeared in a Jay-Z video and played Mack the Knife on Broadway opposite Cyndi Lauper’s Pirate Jenny. He is the author of 6 books including the memoir Not My Father’s Son, a No. 1 New York Times best seller. He has earned four honorary doctorates, 40 awards for humanitarian and activist work, and the Great Scot and Icon of Scotland awards. He has performed with the Royal Shakespeare Company, the Smurfs and the Spice Girls. He has appeared with Pierce Brosnan in Goldeneye, Patrick Stewart in X2 and Tom Cruise in Eyes Wide Shut. Time magazine called him one of the three most fun people in show business.

Jono McLeod, Director

Jono began his career as an onscreen reporter for Scottish TV news before moving behind the camera at BBC Scotland. He's since directed documentaries and factual programming for every major UK TV network. His debut short film, BEING STAVROS, was a hit with audiences at scores of major gay film festivals including Los Angeles Outfest, San Francisco Frameline, Toronto Inside Out and Moscow Side by Side. MY OLD SCHOOL is his first feature film.

John Archer - Hopscotch Films, Producer

Hopscotch Films is led by producer John Archer, working with great documentary directors to make their passion projects: Jono McLeod’s MY OLD SCHOOL premieres in Sundance 2022; Mark Cousins’ THE STORY OF FILM A NEW GENERATION was the first film to play in Cannes 2021 and is now out in cinemas; the 14 hour WOMEN MAKE FILM: A NEW ROAD MOVIE THROUGH CINEMA (Venice, TIFF and LFF) had its full premiere at TIFF in September 2019, and awarded the European Film Academy’s inaugural ‘Innovation in Storytelling Award’ in 2020. Other recent feature films are with Matt Pinder, HARRY BIRRELL PRESENTS FILMS OF LOVE AND WAR (Winner Audience Award GFF); Stephen Bennett EMINENT MONSTERS (Traverse City Film Festival); Rachel Maclean’s MAKE ME UP (LFF, Rotterdam, Gothenburg); Paul Wright’s ARCADIA (LFF) and Mark Cousins’ epic THE STORY OF FILM (Peabody Award, Stanley Kubrick Award) recently remastered in HD.
Olivia Lichtenstein, Producer

Olivia Lichtenstein is a BAFTA, Grierson, and RTS award-winning documentary filmmaker. At the BBC, she was editor of the flagship documentary strand, Inside Story where she commissioned and executive produced over a hundred single documentaries in addition to numerous other documentary series. Her own recent films include PRINCE PHILIP AT 90; TWINS OF THE TWIN TOWERS, MELVYN BRAGG - WIGTON TO WESTMINSTER and the feature length theatrical documentary, TEDDY PENDERGRASS: IF YOU DON’T KNOW ME (DOCNYC, SFBFF, SoundUnseen, MelbourneFF, PhiladelphiaFF...) She is producer of the feature length documentary, THE LAST MOUNTAIN, directed by Chris Terrill, which recently aired on BBC TWO and is released by Universal in 2022. She is producer, with John Archer, of MY OLD SCHOOL, directed by Jono McLeod, with whom she has long collaborated.
Production Credits

Director Jono McLeod

Producers
John Archer & Olivia Lichtenstein

Editor
Berny McGurk, Jono McLeod

Cinematographer George Geddes

Composer Shelly Poole

Animation Director Rory Lowe

Lead Animator Scott Morriss

Production Manager David Brown

Production Coordinator Mhairi Valentine

Assistant Producer Jack Archer

Music Supervisor Gemma Dempsey

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Mark Thomas