

A BEAR NAMED
WOJTEK

PRESS PACK

A BEAR NAMED WOJTEK

'HE'S A SOLDIER, JUST LIKE THE OTHERS'

Displaced by the Second World War, a troop of Polish soldiers find an inseparable bond through an orphaned bear they name Wojtek.



TRAILER:



CAST

Bill Paterson

Richard Gadd

Shauna MacDonald

Michael Golab

Tomek Borkowy

James Sutherland

Piotr Baumann

Remi Rachuba

CREW

Director: Iain Gardner

Producers: Iain Harvey, Włodzimierz Matuszewski

Writer: Wojciech Lepianka

Music: Normand Roger

Art Director: Rachel Bevan Baker

Animation Director: Ross Hogg

Compositor: Will Anderson

TECHNICAL FORMAT INFORMATION

Running time: 28 minutes

Aspect ratio: 16:9

Original language: English

Audio: 5.1 and Stereo

Genre: Animation, Family, Drama, War, Animal

Animation type: 2D Computer, hand drawn, rotoscope

SYNOPSIS (under 50 words)

A BEAR NAMED WOJTEK tells the fantastic journey of an orphaned Syrian brown bear who was adopted by Polish soldiers during World War II, becoming a beacon of hope and an emblem of their fate.

SYNOPSIS (under 100 words)

A half hour animated film, A BEAR NAMED WOJTEK is essentially a love story for one's homeland – an important subject in times of refugees, nationalism and xenophobia. It relates the experience of the Polish people during World War II through the true story of Wojtek and his friend Piotr Prendys, a member of the 22nd Artillery Corps of the 2nd Polish Army.

OUTLINE (200 words)

The story begins with a platoon of Polish soldiers, exiled in the Persian Desert, trading rations for a small orphaned Syrian bear cub that Piotr names Wojtek – 'happy warrior'. To Piotr, the bear comes to represent his lost homeland, needing protection and care to become strong and independent again. To Wojtek, Piotr and the soldiers become his only family.

Piotr and Wojtek's epic journey is explored through the semi-mythical tales of Wojtek's personality; how he become an enlisted soldier of the Polish Army and the famous image of Wojtek carrying munitions at the Battle of Monte Cassino; ultimately, he represents the soldier's hope for independence.

Tragically, the realpolitik of the War's outcome force Piotr and Wojtek to become refugees in Scotland. Piotr's experience echoes that of many Polish people, who would become the biggest losers of the War as their land is bargained off to the Soviet Union. Despite feeling abandoned and betrayed, the Polish fortitude continues today via Wojtek: still a celebrated legend – and symbol of hope.

The film ends with Wojtek confined in the Edinburgh Zoo, visited by his Polish friends. While they do not have the freedom they once did, the soldiers salute – brothers until the end.



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

IAIN GARDNER



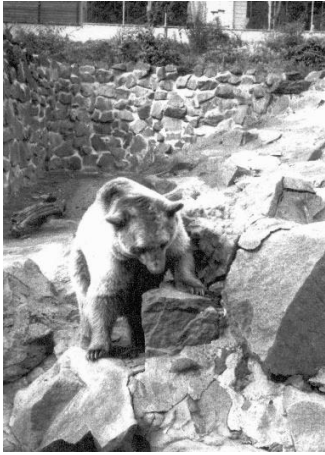
A Bear Named Wojtek is an animated half hour special which took its inspiration from timeless classics such as 'The Snowman', 'Crac!' and 'The Man Who Planted Trees'.

Our story follows the Polish 22nd Artillery Corps during WWII who adopt an orphaned Syrian Brown Bear as their mascot – naming him 'Wojtek'. The theme of people displaced by conflict is, sadly, forever relevant.

Whilst based on true events, our film is not an animated documentary. I am interested in how within our cultures and traditions we create mythologies in nature to reflect our human experience. Wojtek becomes a metaphor for the refugee.



HISTORICAL BACKGROUND



1 September 1939, the beginning of World War 2 was set in motion when Nazi Germany invaded Poland. Unprovoked and drawn into what was globally titled as a *Blitzkrieg*, meaning lightning war, Poland was forced to defend themselves. The Soviet Union joined the war on 17 September by invading Eastern Poland. The country was divided into Soviet and German territories, splitting Poland in two.



However, the Polish people were not alone as their allyship with Great Britain and France triggered the response for a declaration of war against Germany. The fight against the Nazi's was strengthened when Germany broke their non-aggression pact with the Soviets and attempted to invade Russia in July 1941. This caused the Soviet Union to join the allies and supported the reformation of the Polish Armed Forces who were relocated in Iran. They were given the unofficial title of *Anders' Army* as it was named after the commander in charge Lieutenant General Władysław Anders. This is where Wojtek becomes a part of their story and joins the Polish 22nd Artillery Supply Company sworn in under the rank of Private.



They marched in 1944 alongside the British 8th Army to overthrow the German occupation in Italy. The allies needed to break through the Nazi's Gustav Line, a defensive stronghold spanning across the Italian Peninsula, blocking the way to Rome. After many strategic assaults from the allies, they finally found victory at the Battle of Monte Cassino where German soldiers were exhausted and retreated.



Germany surrendered on 8 May 1945 which marks the end of World War 2 in Europe. This day is now celebrated as V-E Day.

INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR

How and when did you first come across this remarkable story?

Since I was an art student, I've visited Edinburgh Zoo to study animal movement and was aware of Wojtek due to his association with the Zoo. But in a weird way the bear has been whispering to me from those first drawings of Polar Bears who occupied his enclosure, to my tutor Dave Harding having sculpted the bear during his career. Perhaps even more relevant, I now have a studio at Summerhall, which was formerly Edinburgh's Veterinary School, where Wojtek's remains were examined by the students in the 1960's in a demonstration room yards from my space.

Would you say this is an obsession of yours?

I wouldn't necessarily call Wojtek an obsession of mine, although I've been deeply committed to telling his story in as impactful a way as possible. I've always been interested in stories about the human/animal relationship, and how these can express powerful metaphors about ourselves and the world. Wojtek's story is a very profound story of identity; of belonging; of home. In this way, it is not really a story about a bear, it's a story about refugees, about hope and about love.

What were the biggest challenges creatively?

The film happens over the lifetime of a bear, during one of the most tumultuous times of the 20th Century (World War 2). Creatively, it's therefore challenging within a half hour film to portray the characters & story in way that is truthful to the situation, but also does not complicate the narrative with historic detail. We solved this problem bouncing off the brilliant writing of Wojciech Lepianka and finding visual solutions to bridge the main story points.

With crew now often based at home, how does that affect your direction?

Prior to the pandemic I was looking forward to working in person with a great group of people. Some of them were actually in the same building at Summerhall, so we all worked well together there. But communication technology is good enough, and our pipeline was designed to be quite simple, so I was able to do 'how-to' demo reels and give specific feedback to crew via the apps.

Where to, next?

The next thing is to follow Wojtek's progress around the International Film Festival circuit. We've entered the film into events around the World and hope we will be invited to screen at them over the coming year. We're also excited to share the film with individuals and institutions, such as the Sikorski Institute in London, for whom Wojtek and what he represents has a deep personal connection.

PRODUCER'S STATEMENT

IAIN HARVEY

'FOR ONCE THE FAIRY TALE IS TRUE'

Many strange ideas are presented to you as a producer – but none were as unexpected as that of the story of Wojtek, a Syrian bear. At first, on hearing the director's pitch, I was sceptical of the facts as presented. But a phone call to my friend and fellow producer Wlodek Matuszewski quickly confirmed both the truth of this fairy tale and his enthusiasm to join the production. Ironically, what I first thought would be one of the more difficult concepts to raise finance for suddenly became half financed. The balance then came from the strong and consistent support of Screen Scotland, BBC Alba and the BFI through the – now sadly discontinued – Young Audiences Content Fund.

This is an emotional story, not just because it is true (though the film makes no pretence of being a documentary) but through the extraordinary parallels of recent events: the Covid pandemic restricting movement and then the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The agony of losing loved ones and the plight of refugees is symbolised by the history of Wojtek the Bear. Coupled with the beautiful artwork and the haunting music by Normand Roger, it is a film that will never lose its appeal.



PRODUCER'S STATEMENT

WŁODZIMIERZ MATUSZEWSKI

Wojtek the Bear is a cult figure in Poland and his story a symbol of Polish fate during and after WW2. Strongly connected with Britain and especially Scotland, where he lived after the war.

The idea came from Scottish artist Iain Gardner, and we went along through all development and production processes together with Iain Harvey's Illuminated Films. That was a fantastic creative experience.

On our side the script by Wojciech Lepianka and most of the animation team.

Animation: that was a real challenge! To put the director's original artistic vision in motion, make designed, very complex characters move and act, express their feelings, when even the slightest, subtle emotions matter... They must be true and must appeal to the audience.

That is the essence of animation filmmaking. A big effort and creative synergy within the multilateral – multinational crew... this is what matters.

I hope Wojtek now looks at us with satisfaction from his Bear's Heaven!



COMPOSER'S STATEMENT

NORMAND ROGER

Wojtek's adventures take us from Poland to Scotland, passing by the Middle East, North Africa and Italy and entail that succession of musical influences.

For our main character, Wojtek the bear, I choose to associate an instrument originating from Armenia but played all over the Middle East, the duduk. The colour of the instrument, when heard in the context of Scotland for instance, reminds us of his far away native land and his displacement in his adoptive country. The sound is somewhat reminiscent to that of an oboe and we can hear it in the excerpt when Wojtek is taken to the zoo.

For the sequences with traditional Scottish music, I asked Pete Clark, a first-class Scottish fiddler, whom I had not yet met but knew well his music. In this excerpt, Piotr, one of the Polish soldiers in exile, tries to learn how to dance the Gay Gordons.



EXECUTIVE PRODUCER'S STATEMENT

NICK HARVEY

This film and subject has attracted great attention, demonstrating how much of an icon Wojtek the bear is to the people of both Poland and Scotland. I am very proud that we have been able to bring this story to life and to the screen in such a beautiful way. Wojtek's story deserves to be shared with as many people as possible and I hope this film will achieve that.

We couldn't have done this without the help of those who backed us; Screen Scotland who backed the project from early development and BFI's Young Audience Content Fund with BBC ALBA who saw this as an ideal project to help into production.

This support is so crucial within the industry in order to make the films that would otherwise not be made. It has also provided an opportunity for new and up and coming talents to have their first step into the animation industry.



BIOGRAPHIES

IAIN GARDNER

Iain Gardner graduated from the Royal College of Art, MA in Animation in 1996 with a previous BA Hons in Illustration from The Glasgow School of Art in 1993. Based in Edinburgh, Iain is an animation filmmaker with an International reputation that has been enhanced by the McLAREN 2014 project celebrating the Centenary of Scottish born filmmaker Norman McLaren. His most recent short film THE TANNERY qualified for the long list of 45 short animations considered for the 2012 Academy Awards®.

His early career got off to a flying start as an apprentice on triple Academy Award® winning Richard Williams' legendary Masterpiece THE THIEF AND THE COBBLER. Other studios Iain animated at include TVC in London, which produced THE YELLOW SUBMARINE and THE SNOWMAN. His animation techniques are discussed within THE ANIMATION BIBLE by Maureen Furniss (2008) and the 2nd edition of THE FUNDAMENTALS OF ANIMATION (2016).

NORMAND ROGER

Born in Montreal, Normand Roger began his career as a freelance composer in 1971 for the National Film Board of Canada. Although he has worked primarily in the domain of animation, creating well over two hundred sound tracks in the last 52 years, he has also composed music for documentaries, features, television dramas, children series, commercials, multi-media installations and many music themes for television in Canada and in the US.

He is known abroad largely due to the success of the animated films on which he collaborated. These films have garnered several hundred prizes in international festivals including 13 Nominations for Academy Awards of which 6 received Oscars. He regularly works for productions in the US, Europe, Russia and Japan and he has also been invited regularly to give lectures on the theme of "Music & Sound for Animation" which remains his field of choice.

Although he works in a traditional way when he composes music for dramas or documentaries doing exclusively the music, he has a particular approach with animation where he creates the full soundtrack including the sound effects.

IAIN HARVEY

Iain Harvey was executive producer on: the Oscar nominated, BAFTA award winning Christmas special THE SNOWMAN (1982); WHEN THE WIND BLOWS (1987), directed by Jimmy Murakami which won the feature film prize at Annecy; SPIDER! (1991), animated series for the BBC; and award winning FATHER CHRISTMAS (1991).

Iain was producer on: animated special PRINCE CINDERS (1993); THE VERY HUNGRY CATERPILLAR & OTHER STORIES winning various festival prizes including an award in Germany for Best Children's Video and released in America on the Disney video label; T.R.A.N.S.I.T (1997), BAFTA and Cartoon d'Or nominated, winner of The Grand Prize and Best Film in its category at The World Animation Celebration in Los Angeles, won the LA Film Critic's Award, as well as the Audience Prize and Grand Prix at the Espinho Animation festival; animated feature CHRISTMAS CAROL – THE MOVIE (2001); half-hour special WAR GAME (2002), which won numerous awards including the Children's Choice Award at the BAA, Best Television Special at the Annecy International Animation Festival, the International Student Jury Award at the Banff International Television Festival, Best Production of the Year at the Cartoons on the Bay Festival in Italy and 1st prize at the Cinemagic Festival in Belfast; Three times BAFTA nominated LITTLE PRINCESS series (135 x 11 mins and 2 x 22 mins); feature film LITTLE PRINCESS AND THE LEGEND OF BLUE FOOT has also been announced; award winning special ON ANGEL WINGS; and a new surreal comedy series THE RUBBISH WORLD OF DAVE SPUD (6+), commissioned by ITV and winner of the RTS Award for Best Children's Series 2022.

WŁODZIMIERZ MATUSZEWSKI

Włodzimierz Matuszewski is a Polish producer and screenwriter. He started to work in 1976 in Studio Miniatur Filmowych in Warsaw as a screenwriter and script doctor. In 1991 he became the head of SMF and kept this position until the 2019. He produced many TV series (HipHip Hurray, Mami Fatale, Patchwork Kingdom etc.) and short & feature animated movies (Mr Blot's Triumph, Magical Mountain, A Bear Named Wojtek). As one of the main producers of Polish animation cinema Matuszewski left state owned SMF to head his private animation studio Filmograf, also based in Warsaw. He continues to produce and write animation films for both kids and adult.

WOJCIECH LEPIANKA

Wojciech Lepianka is a Polish film screenwriter. He is a graduate of Polish philology at the University of Lodz and the Screenwriting Studies of the Film School in Lodz. Winner of the most important Polish film awards including the Award for the script of the film „My Bicycle” at the 2012 Gdynia Film Festival and a nomination for the Polish Film Award, Eagle for the script of the film „Edi”. Both films were artistic and commercial successes in Polish cinemas.

PIERRE YVES DRAPEAU

Born in Quebec, he lives in Montreal. In the early 2000s, he specialized in the creation of soundtracks with Normand Roger as mentor, internationally renowned sound designer and composer with whom he worked full-time over ten years.

Active as a composer of music for image, sound designer and mixer, he has created more than sixty soundtracks for films and animated series, in addition to several others for documentaries, series, live-action films, multimedia installations and advertisements.

JOANNA RONIKIER

Joanna Ronikier is an experienced producer of animated series, docs and feature films for children. She graduated from EAVE workshops in 2016. Joanna took part in many internationally awarded co-productions such as: "Magic Mountain" by Anca Damian (awards in Karlovy Vary 2017) and numerous animated series for children ("Mami Fatale" series II and III, "Bali" II, "Socks" and many others). Joanna for many years works for one of the TVP most popular live action series "Commissioner Alex".



CONTACT INFORMATION

The Illuminated Film Company
2 Glenthorne Mews, London, W6 0LJ
+44 7843 982 482
nick@illuminatedfilms.com

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