

South Wind Blows/Harvest Films

In association with

RTÉ and

The Broadcasting Authority of Ireland

With the participation of

Bord Scannán na hÉireann / Irish Film Board

presents

S I L E N C E

Directed by Pat Collins

Developed with the support of the MEDIA Programme of the European Union

Developed with the assistance of Bord Scannán na hÉireann / The Irish Film Board

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"Navigating a unique path betwixt fiction and documentary, this film is by turns haunting and utterly beguiling; reference points might include Kiarostami, Apichatpong and Terrence Malick. Ultimately, however, this is unlike anything else you'll see this year – a deeply immersive experience from a major Irish filmmaker."

- **Derek O Connor - Irish Film Institute programme notes**

"Beautiful, delicate and profound, Silence is like nothing else you'll see in cinemas"

- **Sunday Business Post Newspaper**

"...a remarkable film: daring, original, even ground-breaking in its way"

- **Irish Independent**

"A film that drops us into the deep well of the Soul"

- **RTE Guide**

"Abstract, poetic, and curiously haunting, it's an indefinable, enigmatic beast – one that demands your attention, and deserves it"

- **Image Magazine**

Short Synopsis

The cuckoo calls from the well of my mind,
more echo than thought, as it fades through the wind
and flickers away to the silence beyond
like the voice, in myself, of another.

'Insomnia in Southern Illinois' by John Burnside

Eoghan is a sound recordist who is returning to Ireland for the first time in 15 years. His reason for returning is a job offer: to find and record places free from man-made sound. His quest takes him away from towns and villages into remote terrain.

Throughout his journey, he is drawn into a series of encounters and conversations which gradually divert his attention towards a more intangible silence, one that is bound up with the sounds of the life he had left behind.

Influenced by elements of folklore and archive, *Silence* unfolds with a quiet intensity, where poetic images reveal an absorbing meditation on themes relating to sound and silence, history, memory and exile.

About the Production

The Inagh Valley, Connemara, is only miles from Galway city but is a place out of time. On a misty spring morning a small convoy of cars carry the crew of *Silence*: camera and sound crew in front followed by Pat Collins (writer/director) and Eoghan Mac Giolla Bhríde (writer/actor). They turn off into a woodland, drive further into the remote landscape then walk another 20 minutes into a deep forest of ancient oak trees and extraordinary mosses of vivid green. Intuitively and efficiently the crew sets up equipment. There are quiet, gentle discussions between lead actor, director and director of photography Richard Kendrick about how best to approach shooting an unrehearsed scene. The scene is but one of many, but its mood and methods are characteristic of a film making process quite different from the typical. But then there is almost nothing typical about *Silence*. In some respects it is a film that is being 'found', rather than made. For while there was a long period of detailed development and there is an outline narrative and strict schedule, the shoot is unusually open and flexible in its approach. Director Pat Collins explains, "We were interested in subjects like memory, exile, a sense of place. Like our central character, our film is evolving as it's going along depending on what we encounter. We're allowing space for things to develop in ways we mightn't have expected."

Inspiration for the film came from the individuals deployed by the early Irish state to capture Irish folk culture before it was swept away by 'progress.' "The idea for the film started as a story about a folklore collector," says Collins. "I've always been fascinated by the people who went around in the 1930s and 1940s - people like Seamus Ennis and Seán Ó hEochaidh who travelled from house to house and collected stories and songs and folklore. I wanted to make a film about someone travelling around the country meeting people but it needed to be in a contemporary context, so it evolved from being a folklore collector to being a sound-recordist".

The idea slowly took shape in a collaborative process between Pat, his wife Sharon Whooley, and Donegal writer and film-maker Eoghan Mac Giolla Bhríde, who Collins had first met in 2002 while making a documentary on Tory Island, off the Donegal coast.

"I think I've had him in my mind for this role right from the very start but we only spoke about it when we began to collaborate on the script in 2006," explains Collins. "In some respects this film stems from the experience of that earlier film on Tory island. Eoghan was doing some translating (from Donegal Irish – which he speaks as a first language - to English) and I could see that he had a great presence and sensitivity with the people we were meeting. People react well to him and feel comfortable with him. So my experience of that shaped the conception of our central character."

Because the story has been in development for several years, the writers have spent a good deal of time thinking about the character of Eoghan and the kind of experiences that led to his return to Ireland. Mac Giolla Bhríde explains that, "We don't go into his past much in the film but we've collectively created a character who comes from an island off the coast of Ireland which

he left when he was 12 when he went to secondary school on the mainland; a move that can be a very difficult change for a person from an island community, especially at an early age. His mother died when he was 17 and soon after he went to college in Dublin. While he was there his father died. So there has been a lot of loss in his life since his early, idyllic childhood. So his connection with the place he grew up in has been made more difficult because his family are no longer there.”

Journeys The ostensible reason for his return to Ireland from Berlin is a job offer: to record sound in a landscape free from man-made sound. “The work takes him on a journey; a journey in sound and in himself,” explains Eoghan Mac Giolla Bhríde. “The film is very internal in one sense and it plots the subtle changes that happen in the central character in his re-entry into the culture he left behind 15 or 20 years earlier. It happens gradually and he’s reluctant to let it happen but slowly he opens up to his surroundings.” Producer Tina Moran describes *Silence* as a film about exile: “We’re an island nation and it’s part of our story that people leave and return. But not everybody wants to return. Eoghan finds the idea of going home very difficult on a personal level.”

The narrative of Eoghan’s return home is structured around a number of encounters. In this cinematic odyssey, the people he meets as he travels through Ireland are real individuals known to the filmmakers, telling their own, true stories. These meetings give the film a hybrid quality, blending the fictional and factual. The people Eoghan meets ‘map’ his journey both in their connection to the place where he encounters them and in the way they reflect his growing reconnection to Ireland. Thus, the first person he meets in Ireland is a German suggesting his place between two cultures. Later he meets a human geographer, a farmer, a museum owner, a fisherman, a writer...

Collins explains “The mixture of fact and fiction is not in anyway trying to mislead people but rather to strip away the techniques of fiction so that the audience can bring themselves to the character. In the way that a reader completes a novel, I think *Silence* has this notion too. I want the audience to be included rather than be shut out by an already completed story”.

Sound is a central pre-occupation of the film on a narrative and symbolic level and therefore a central aesthetic concern. Éamon Little and John Brennan are responsible for the Sound Department. Éamon explains that, “Our first duty is to get sync sound, to get clear sound of the film’s action without background noise or airplanes and so on. But additionally there’s Eoghan’s sound ‘journey’, his mission to record ‘silence’. So he’s using my sound equipment as his kit and we want his recordings to be used in the film: he’s not just pressing a button on a prop. He’s got several different recording devices and a variety of microphones as a real professional would do for different situations.”

Éamon explains that silence in the film shouldn't be understood as "the absence of sound, but soundscapes that are devoid of human contribution. That's Eoghan's mission but he is also someone interested in sound, so I'm looking for sounds that he might 'collect' and so I've been keeping my sound equipment with me all the time, as he would. I make sure that I record stuff – conversations, ambient sound and whatever – even when the camera isn't rolling that might be of use in the edit."

In addition to sync and 'wild' sound recording on a variety of devices, the crew has found inspiration from one of the foremost practitioners in the recording of location sound: "Everyone in the sound department has taken courses with Chris Watson, who does sound recording for David Attenborough," says Éamon. "He introduced us to this amazing microphone called the SoundField ST350 which records in three dimensions and allows you to decode elements of the sound afterwards. He has very generously given us a loan of this of technology and we're using that to capture atmospheres."

Images are central to a film dealing with the topography of the body and spirit in the Irish landscape. Indeed, images came to supersede words in the preparation for the film. Instead of a traditional script, Sharon Whooley produced a small book which included photographs of Eoghan (by Colm Hogan) in the landscape with script extracts and fragments of folklore and poems. This was used to pitch the film to potential funders including the Irish Film Board and RTÉ as well as a guide as to what the spirit of the finished film might be.

The film has been shot by Director of Photography Richard Kendrick on the RED digital camera, using unusual, Soviet-era lenses by Lomo. He explains that while the film is being shot using a digital format, "You can manage the look a lot by your choice of lens and when I saw the initial book that Sharon had prepared, and talked with Pat about the project, the first thought I had was that we should shoot the film anamorphic, a 1950s widescreen ratio that uses the whole frame. We managed to get our hands on a set of Lomo lenses which are very unusual and quite rare actually. They're heavy, difficult to use and not as sharp as modern lenses but they give an indefinable quality which is just right for what we're trying to achieve here. They suit the style we're working in which is slow, quite measured shots and give us great panoramic frames of the amazing landscapes we're working in. The other thing is that we don't have a lot of choice – we've only four lenses – which I thought would make things difficult but it gives us a kind of discipline."

Preparing for the shoot Richard and Pat Collins carried out a number of tests to explore the kind of style they would employ. From the outset, both realized that this would be an unusual project mixing documentary and fiction. Richard Kendrick explains "We tried shooting in a more static, classical drama style to begin with, using a tripod and tracks but we quickly realised that it wasn't appropriate for this project because the people our character Eoghan meets are not actors, they're real people, and so they couldn't reproduce things they said for the sake of the camera. So we tried an approach which is more flexible, trying to follow the action as it happens. That can be risky because you might miss something or the camera might be on the

wrong person but after we did some tests and tried to edit it we decided that it was the way to go. It means that I'm much more part of the film-making process because there is no fixed camera position and once you get into a scene you just have to keep going."

Editing. In a film like *Silence*, the editing of sounds and images is a central part of the creative process rather than simply an activity of assembly. In discussing his role as sound and picture editor, Tadhg O' Sullivan explains that his relationship with Pat Collins is a working and personal one which leads to a particular style of collaboration. "We share interests in films and music and books and so when we work together we spend lots of time talking; but not necessarily about the film. We talk about things that are tangential to the film, about other works and ideas, but it all feeds into the discourse around the work. "

Tadhg explains that, "In relation to *Silence* we began our conversations after the first part of the shoot in Berlin. We did a week-long edit before the Irish shoot and that was very useful because it allowed us all to interrogate the stylistic approaches that were being explored at this early stage. We talked a lot about the relationship between sound and picture for instance. The convention in drama is that synch sound is the starting point and anything that deviates from that is quite a bold move. In *Silence* the point of departure for editing was that sound and picture are not necessarily married to each other and that freedom allows us latitude to explore things like time and memory and recording and the persistence of sound which are themes that find voice within the film.

We were trying at that point to figure out the grammar of the film, which is crucial. Once you find the grammar of a particular film it works as a set of guiding principles, the baseline that you can follow - or deviate from. A word we used a lot was 'coherent', in the sense that our aim was to make the film appear entirely unified in its the pace, tone and mood.

While the starting point for any edit is the material shot, for me it is very important to understand what ideas went into generating that material. If those ideas are not apparent on screen then the material needs to be worked in order to draw them out in some other way, or in another part of the film. For a film of ideas like *Silence* - rather than one primarily of story - there is a lot to be gained from interrogating the scenes that didn't work. By understanding the ideas that gave rise to them it's possible to ensure that those ideas aren't lost, even if the scenes are."

Landscape has been synonymous with Irish cinema from the beginning, a key ingredient of foreign and indigenous representations of Ireland. Despite its renown however, Pat Collins believes that this most familiar of elements has been under-explored. "For me the locations are central in the story in that they shape the very story itself. Landscape is important because place is important. And a sense of place is important to me. I wanted to film in genuinely remote areas in keeping with the areas where Eoghan's character would be recording, in locations that were genuinely free from man made sound, and this meant we had to get away from roads. Hopefully the effort of having to walk for an hour to remote locations comes across in the film!"

While *Silence* is specific in its use of language and location, Pat Collins sees its appeal to audiences as emerging from universal concerns. “It is more a meditation than an explicit story. In one way, Eoghan represents a modernity where place has become unimportant... where geography is, as they say, history. The theme of the islands being deserted, of houses and homes falling into disrepair is really about transience. That we need to pay attention because things are going to pass. So his journey is a reckoning with a collective past, with the histories and stories that are attached to any place.”

The Journey *Silence* begins in Berlin where the central character, Eoghan has been living for several years. He returns to the south of Ireland on a work assignment and begins a journey that takes him up the Atlantic west coast, through some astonishingly beautiful locations en-route to his native Donegal. Some of the locations include Berlin, Baltimore, Lough Hyne, Finavara, The Burren, The Inagh Valley, Inishbofin, Ballycroy, Glenveagh National Park, Gaoth Dobhair and Tory Island.

Music The music in *Silence* is an eclectic blend. The main actor Eoghan Mac Giolla *Bhríde* comes from a well known sean nós (old style) singing family in Gaoth Dobhair in Donegal. His brother, Dominic Mac Giolla Bhríde won the Corn Uí Riada prize for sean nós singing in 2010. Eoghan’s mother, Nellie Nic Giolla Bhríde, is also an accomplished singer and old reel-to-reel recordings of her singing 'The Breeze And I' (written by Ernesto Lecuona and Al Stillman) are heard at the beginning of the film. Her version of 'An Chúilfhionn' also features in *Silence*. Eoghan himself sings two extracts from the well known sean-nós songs 'Is Trua nach Bhfuil Mé in Éirinn' & 'A Pháidí a Grá'. The latter song is strongly associated with Tory Island off Donegal.

Irish guitar legend Rory Gallagher features with the track 'I Fall Apart' in the opening credits. 'Who Knows Where the Time Goes' composed and performed by Sandy Denny is used in the final credits and also during the film.

More contemporary tracks include a haunting track by Los Angeles-based composer and author, Akira Rabelais, '1671 Milton Samson 1122 Add thy Spear, a Weavers beam, and seven-times-folded shield'.

'Caves' and 'From Monday Afternoon' are performed and composed by Irish artist and composer Karl Burke. 'Amhrán na Leabhar' is performed and composed by Irish musician and composer Sean Mac Erlaine and 'Derechos' a track performed and composed by Canadian multi-instrumentalist Damian Valles.

Cast

While the narrative and lead character are invented, great care has gone into the selection and use of filming locations which are linked with real people, the majority of whom appear as themselves.

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| Eoghan Mac Giolla Bhríde | Eoghan |
| Hilary O'Shaughnessy | as Eoghan's girlfriend in Berlin, Germany |
| Jens K. Müller | as himself near Lough Hyne, Skibbereen, West Cork. |
| Andrew Bennett | as a barman Eoghan meets in Baltimore, Co. Cork |
| Tommy Fahy | as himself, in the Burren, Co. Clare |
| Patrick O'Connor | as a local man in the Burren, Co. Clare |
| Michael Harding | as a local man in Ballycroy, Co. Mayo |
| Tim Robinson | as himself (voice on headphones) |
| Peter Lacey | as himself in Inishbofin, Co. Mayo |
| Marie Coyne | as herself in Inishbofin, Co. Mayo |
| Jordan Shiels | as himself in Bunbeg, Co. Donegal |
| Paul Rogers | as himself, Tory Island, Co Donegal. |

Film-makers

Pat Collins – Director / Writer

Pat Collins has directed over 25 documentaries. His first film *Michael Hartnett, Necklace of Wrens* won the Jury Award at the Celtic Film Festival in 2000. Since then he has directed *Talking to the Dead* which centred on the Irish funeral tradition. This was followed by *Oiléan Thoraí* which won Best Irish Documentary at the Irish Film and Television Awards in 2003.

Abbas Kiarostami - The Art of Living (co-directed with Fergus Daly) was picked up for international distribution in 2004 by the French company MK2. *Rebel County* used the shooting of Ken Loach's *The Wind That Shakes the Barley* to explore the War of Independence in West Cork. He has directed documentaries on the Irish writer Frank O' Connor, the poet Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill and the Connemara based writer and cartographer Tim Robinson. His film *John McGahern: A Private World* won 'Best Irish Documentary' at the Irish Film and Television Awards in 2005. In the same year his documentary *Marooned* won the Best Irish Sports Documentary award. The feature documentary *Gabriel Byrne: Stories from Home* was completed in 2009 and the film essay *What We Leave in Our Wake* in 2011. He has just completed the feature film *Silence* in 2012.

www.harvestfilms.ie

Eoghan Mac Giolla Bhríde - Actor / Writer

Eoghan is an Irish writer and film maker. He has written two short story collections: 'Idir Feoil agus Leather' and 'Díbeartaigh'. With Éabhloíd, a company he set up in 2008, he's written and directed a number of documentaries and short films, most recently a music documentary on the life of the Donegal fiddle player, John Doherty (2012). In 2010 he published the children's song book 'Ící Pící' and is now working on a book of poems for children 'Ní Thuigimse Daoine Fásta'.

www.eabhloid.com

Sharon Whooley - Writer

Sharon was Editor of Film West Magazine from 1997 to 2001. She is a founding director of Harvest Films which was set up in 2001. She works as a researcher, writer and producer with Harvest Films. She is the co-writer of the feature film screenplay 'Silence'. Her credits include *Rebel County* (2006), *Cathair Chorcaí* (2005), *Famine in Ireland: Remember Skibbereen* (2009), *What We Leave in Our Wake* (2010) *Tim Robinson: Connemara*, (2011, Producer).

Tina Moran - Producer

Tina Moran is a company director of South Wind Blows Ltd. which she set up in 2006 with Philip King and Nuala O'Connor, with whom she has worked since 1996 under Hummingbird Productions Limited. Among her credits as producer are *Other Voices – Series 1 to 9* (2000-2010), *Limits of Liberty* (RTE, 3 x 52 mins 2010), *Gabriel Byrne: Stories from Home* (2008) *John McGahern: A Private World* (2005).

Tadhg O'Sullivan - Editor

When he is not making his own films, Tadhg specialises in sound and picture editing for creative documentaries. Among his credits are: *Living Colour* (Eamonn Little, 2011), *What We Leave in Our Wake* (Pat Collins, 2010), *About Beauty* (Conor Horgan, 2008), *A Massacre Foretold* (Nick Higgins, 2007). His directorial credits include the documentaries *Bow St.* (2009), *Ramallah TV* (2009) and the Irish Film Board short film *Quarantine*, which received a Special Mention at the Cork Film Festival in November 2011.

Richard Kendrick - Director of Photography

Richard is an award-winning DOP specialising in high-end documentary. Among his many credits are the *The Yellow Bittern* (Alan Gilsonan, 2009), *Treasure of the Bogs* (Alan Gilsonan, 2010), *Coast* (BBC TV series 2010), *Gabriel Byrne: Stories from Home* (Pat Collins, 2008), *Cromwell in Ireland* (Maurice Sweeney, 2008), *Tory Island* (Pat Collins, 2002).
www.richardkendrick.ie

Éamon Little - Sound

Éamon Little is a film maker with a deep interest in matters of sound. He recorded and track-laid all three of his short films *quickfix* (1996), *Nobody Home* (2002), *Neighbourhood Watch* (2010), the latter two having been shot entirely mute. He has recorded sound for a number of Pat Collins' previous films (*Oileán Thorái*, *John McGahern - A Private World*, *Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill - Taibhsí i mBéal na Gaoithe*, *David Marcus - A Conversation with Dermot Bolger*). As a director, his documentary *Red Mist* (2007) was nominated for an Irish Film and Television Award in 2008 and his feature documentary *Living Colour* (2011) is screening at national and international film festivals.

John Brennan - Sound

As former Marine Engineer in the Merchant Navy, John has travelled to all five continents. On return from the sea in 2001 he retrained as a Sound Recordist. He works with Director Pat Collins extensively, including *Gabriel Byrne-Stories From Home* (2008) and more recently with *What We Leave In Our Wake* (2010) and *Tim Robinson-Connemara* (2011). His television work

includes, *Mobs Mhericea1*, *Mobs Mhericea2*, *Mobs Ceanada*, *Bothar go dtí an White House* and *Seactar na Casca* for Abu Media. *Silence* is his first feature.

Additional Crew

Colm Hogan - Camera

Colm has worked as a stills photographer on over 30 feature films and hundreds of dramas and documentaries over the past 15 years. Colm also worked for some of Ireland's leading theatre companies including the Abbey Theatre and Rough Magic. Over the past 5 years, Colm has mainly worked as a camera man shooting documentaries. His credit's Include *Tim Robinson*; *Connemara* (Harvest Films 2010) *What we Leave in our Wake* (Harvest Films 2010) *Seachtar na Cásca* (Abu Medi,a 2010) *Kingerlee* (Counterpoint Films, 2011). His feature film stills credits include *Becoming Jane* (Hanway Films, 2007), *Cairo Time* (Foundry Films, 2009) *The Escapist* (Picture Farm, 2008), *Middletown* (Green Park Films, 2008) and *50 Dead Men Walking* (Handmade International, 2008).

www.colmhogan.com

Chris Watson – Sound

Chris Watson is one of the world's leading recorders of wildlife and natural phenomena, and for Touch he edits his field recordings into a filmic narrative. In 1971 he was a founding member of the influential Sheffield-based experimental music group Cabaret Voltaire. He has developed a particular and passionate interest in recording the wildlife sounds of animals, habitats and atmospheres from around the world. As a freelance recordist for film, tv & radio, Chris specialises in natural history and documentary location sound together with track assembly and sound design in post production. He also makes performances, live sound installations and specialises in multi-channel works, for example, recreating the sound of John Constable's "The Cornfield" in front of the original painting at The National Gallery in London. In 2006 he was awarded an honorary Doctor of Technology degree by the University of the West of England "in recognition of his outstanding contribution to sound recording technology, especially in the field of natural history and documentary location sound".

www.chriswatson.net