

AMY GEORGE

A film by Yonah Lewis & Calvin Thomas

2011 - 98 Minutes - Canada - English - HDCAM - Color - 2.35:1

Official Selection: Wisconsin Film Festival 2011

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Short Synopsis

Thirteen year old Jesse wants to be an artist, but believes that his mundane middle class Toronto life has left him unprepared. After reading a book on what it takes to be a “true-artist”, he sets out looking for risk, ecstasy, wildness and women. *Amy George* is a microbudget independent drama about the time in a boy’s life when he’s at his least likeable.

Long Synopsis

Thirteen year old Jesse is assigned a school project. A photographic self-portrait intended to portray one’s self without resorting to literal representation.

Jesse lives with his parents, Sabi and Tim, in the lefty, middle class Toronto neighborhood of Riverdale. A quiet and distant only-child with budding artistic aspirations, Jesse is inspired by the assignment to look for excitement and meaning in the world around him.

Wielding a newly-acquired camera, Jesse sets out to capture his surroundings, but soon realizes the undramatic nature of his family, neighborhood and existence.

Meanwhile, Sabi and Tim find themselves questioning Jesse’s developing character as they watch him abandon his childhood personality and mature into an uncommunicative adolescent.

Frustrated by his lack of inspiration, Jesse discovers a book in the school library which advises him:

“You can never be a real artist until you have made love to a woman”

Taking the text at face value and with the encouragement of a family friend, Jesse begins to look for incident, both foreign and adult, which leads him to an encounter with his young, female neighbor, Amy. Peering into her window at night, he snaps a quick photograph of her.

Days later, the two are inadvertently reunited, allowing Jesse an opportunity to explore his prepubescent fascination with the opposite sex. After a long evening of games, exploration and hypnosis, Jesse awakes with confusion and guilt, unsure whether or not he may have overstepped his boundaries.

The question of rape consumes his thoughts and Jesse is left struggling to reconcile his uneasy mind.

Amy George is a microbudget independent drama about the time in a boy’s life when he’s at his least likeable.

About the Production

‘Twas the early winter of 2010 when Calvin and Yonah conceived the words that would become *Amy George*. Years of scriptwriting had yielded much learning for the pair, but little in the way of material results. And so, their intent was to craft a piece of writing that not only presented their current relationship with the cinema, but would also be a viable production; one that could exist without the aid of significant financial backing and be readied for the verdant spring.

C&Y’s screenscripts (sp?) of yesteryear had enjoyed an elephantine gestation period. But *Amy George* was no elephant! *Amy George* was an ant! (http://wiki.answers.com/Q/Whats_the_opposite_to_an_elephant) A fortnight or something later and they had penned 83 pages worth of paper.

The baby born and the umbilical cord cut but not yet eaten, C&Y ventured, babe in arms, into the mysterious waters of pre-production. Producer! Production Manager! Editor! Cinematographer! Composer! Actors! These are the confusing strands that form the helix of the filmic process. Of course, let it be known that many of these roles were filled by the two boys, Calvin and Yonah, such was their devotion to self-fulfillment. Still, a motley crew was banded together, replete with a minion of eager friends, family and foe, many of whom had never before set foot near a film production.

By keeping many aspects of the story small, some success was achieved. But: C&Y had failed to realize that in order for the script to be legitimately performed they would need more teenage actors than poppy seeds on a poppy seed bagel. Metaphorically speaking. The daunting task of casting the film’s major role, the thirteen year old Jesse, who appears in 104 of the 107 scenes, began. Billions auditioned but “there can be only one” (Mulcahy, Russell, Dir., *Highlander*. 1986, Film). For obvious reasons (made clear upon any *Amy George* screening), the young and unknown Gabriel del Castillo Mullally won the part of the vaguely dissatisfied lead. The boy’s parents, Sabi and Tim, were assumed by real-life partners, acclaimed writer Claudia Dey and Toronto musical icon, Don Kerr. Elsewhere in the cast, a range of inexperienced little (as in kid) actors and experienced big (as in adult) actors filled it all out.

With the film’s family assembled, production began.

Twenty-three days of photographing actors and props and places and then suddenly Calvin and Yonah realized they had shot a film. Some *week* for these guys!

The next months were devoted to the squeezing together of shots, for the duo had decided to edit *Amy George* themselves. Their time was filled with aching backs, over-stuffed hard-drives and loose women.

Eleven hundred diaper changes later, the film reached moody adolescence; rows of horizontally-moving images that together composed the dimly-lit, glacially-paced movie experience, *Amy George*.

Following that, came sound, and all related topics. C&Y had made the foolhardy decision to attempt a preliminary pass on the sound design, and, after the purchase of a small recorder (not the kind that you blow into) and microphone, went about compiling Foley and ambiance. Alongside them was composer Lev Lewis who was steadily piecing together his idea of what *Amy George*'s musical soundtrack should be.

Backtracking here: early on in the process C&Y were introduced to the musical stylings of Michael Holt, a Toronto singer/songwriter not from Toronto. They were so into the guy that they decided his musical footprint on the film would have to be enormous and so it was.

With picture locked and all sonic textures in place the filmmakers handed their film off to veteran sound editor and mixer, Stephen Barden. For the first time, out of their pale, bony hands.

The moral here is long-winded, not easily identified. Is it a moral of fortitude? Lunacy? Exploration? After *Amy George*, Yonah Lewis and Calvin Thomas have the whole world in their hands. After a feature film what else can there be? The whole world may be theirs, but more importantly, the whole world is a song.

Directors' Notes

"I was not born in wartime. I was not born in pain or poverty. I need an addiction, the needed affliction, to cultivate a personality."

- Jarvis Cocker

They say you should write what you know, but where to start when there's two of you? Calvin was raised in the car-friendly, big-box suburbs and Yonah clutched transfers as he moved from streetcar to subway in an urban metropolis. Our combined knowledge was great, but also greatly different and so, after much searching, we latched onto a common area of expertise: male adolescence. *Amy George* is a work of fiction; its actions and narrative derived from our imagination, but its themes and emotion gathered from our collective memories.

When first freed from film school, it was our strict intention to set our screenplays outside of Canadian borders. Our immediate feeling being a youthful reaction against modern Canadian cinema. It was only in writing *Amy George* that we gradually warmed to and eventually embraced the idea of setting a film in our own backyard. At first imposed by financial necessity, we shaped our story around the areas we knew were easily obtainable, but after narrowing our sights on the bike-riding, organic-eating, lefty homes of Riverdale, Toronto, we grew attached to exploring the specificity of a world we had not seen portrayed on screen. In Jesse we wanted to create a character like us, initially bored by his seemingly mundane surroundings and then with a growing interest in the commonplace minutia of his own life.

- Yonah Lewis & Calvin Thomas

Crew

Yonah Lewis & Calvin Thomas are filmmakers and best buds. They become best buds while enrolled in film school and continued to be even after graduating in 2008. Since then they've devoted their time to the watching, writing and directing of films. Before *Amy George* they wrote six feature screenplays together, which means *Amy George* was their seventh. It is also the first production of one of their screenplays. C&Y intend to create as many movies as they can and are currently raising funds to turn *Amy George* into a play starring Kiefer Sutherland. The two hope to remain best buds and look forward to giving high fives to each other and making money.

Andrea Leigh Pelletier (Production Designer) is in her final year of her BFA in Photography at Ryerson University. She enjoys working on conceptual photography projects and has recently had her pieces exhibited as well as published through collaborative efforts of emerging artists in Toronto. Her eye for aesthetics is what lured her into working on *Amy George* as Production Designer, where she caught the film bug. Upcoming projects by Andrea include work with audio/video installations, as well as a continued pursuit in production design.

Michael Holt (Musician) is a composer, singer, musical explorer, and native New Yorker. Michael has been releasing albums since the 80's, and regularly tours North America and Europe. His shows and writing reflect all the music he has loved over the years, from indie-rock, folk, and experimental to afrobeat, and jazz, and lounge. His deepest loves are for pop and classical, and is proud to have both these styles featured in *Amy George*, and hopes to contribute more classical pieces to films in the future.

Lev Lewis (Composer) is a young and inexperienced musician with little in the way of formal training. An obsession with the music has haunted him since he was a baby child and on a few occasions he has been completely overwhelmed by the musical experience. *Amy George* was one of those occasions. Lev's interest in sound waves has led him to the creation of a few pop records as well as live performances with his band Calvados and some girly singers such as Alexz Johnson and Qwyn Charter. Lev is also an avid watcher of films. He has a crush on Terrence Malick and looks forward to the Oscars every year.

Connor Jessup (Executive Producer) is a Canadian actor and all-around film lover. A childhood full of theater groups, one-man performances for family and friends and repeat viewings of many classic movies helped foster Connor's deep love for the dramatic arts. At the age of eleven, Connor began to pursue acting professionally. After various early jobs, Connor got a lead role in the children's television series *The Saddle Club*, which shot in Australia. Most recently, Connor landed a lead role in the upcoming TNT sci-fi series *Falling Skies*, from executive producer Steven Spielberg and starring Noah Wyle. *Amy George* is Connor's first experience serving as executive producer. (as well as camera assistant). He has written and directed several of his own short films and hopes to continue doing so in the future.

Cast

Gabrielle Del Castillo Mullally (Jesse) was born on a snowy Toronto morning December 1997, and thanks to the diligence of his mother grew up speaking both Spanish and English; he has since added French to his linguistic repertoire. Gabriel began playing piano at the age of four and continued to study at the Royal Conservatory of Music for 8 years earning his Grade 7 Certificate, as well as winning awards at recitals and festivals. Gabriel has also played the clarinet and saxophone and has recently grown determined to master the guitar. Sports have always been an important part of Gabriel's life. He learned to skate at the age of three and started playing hockey a year later. His role in *Amy George*, his first real acting experience, is an incredible dream come true and has awakened in him a new passion. Gabriel will be starting high school at Rosedale Height School for the Arts in Toronto in September, where he will continue to pursue his love of the arts.

Claudia Dey (Sabi) is a novelist, playwright and columnist. She writes the weekly Coupling column for The Globe and Mail. She also wrote The Globe and Mail's Group Therapy column and Toro magazine's sex column under the pseudonym, Bebe O'Shea. Her plays have been produced internationally and include *Beaver*, *Trout Stanley* and *The Gwendolyn Poems*, which was nominated for the Governor General's Award and the Trillium Award. Her debut novel, *Stunt*, was chosen by The Globe and Mail and Quill & Quire as Book of the Year and was shortlisted for the Amazon.ca First Novel Award. Her non-fiction follow-up, *How to Be a Bush Pilot: A Field Guide to Getting Luckier* is published by HarperCollins and being developed for television by Temple Street Productions. Other than performances as maids, farmers and French pastries at the National Theatre School of Canada, *Amy George* is Dey's first foray into acting.

Don Kerr (Tim) is a Toronto-based producer, engineer, musician, and songwriter. He produces a variety of musicians and songwriters at The Rooster Recording Studio, and plays drums and cello and sings with many bands including Ron Sexsmith, Bidiniband, and Minotaurs. Don has composed and performed the soundtrack for two films, *Seven Painters*, *Seven Places* directed by Andy Keen in 1999, and *Carny* directed by Alison Murray in 2007. In 1999 he wrote, illustrated, recorded and published a children's book and CD, *The Sniffing Princess*. In 2006 he began producing children with his wife, the brilliant author Claudia Dey. In 2010 he embarked on an acting career, portraying a father in the film *Amy George*.

Natasha Allan (Tara) began her acting career 14 years ago in Montreal, landing roles in local theatre, commercials, short and feature films. She has been lucky enough to have had the opportunity to play a spectrum of different characters and the chance to film abroad. With two features holding the honor of opening night galas in two major festivals and other projects showing across the globe. Now based out of Toronto, Natasha is currently playing the lead in a psychological thriller and is set to begin filming a television pilot.

Emily Henry (Amy) was born September 1995 and quickly developed an interest in film, television, and theatre. She has performed in school plays, attended courses and workshops in the dramatic arts and acted in various public service announcements, music videos and short films. *Amy George* is Emily's first feature film. She enjoys reading, traveling, skiing, hanging out with friends, and baking. Emily plans on continuing her budding acting career and intends to attend medical school.

Cast

Gabriel del Castillo Mullally	Jesse
Claudia Dey	Sabi
Don Kerr	Tim
Natasha Allan	Tara
Emily Henry	Amy
Candice Barkin	Liv
Yaari Magenheim	Jake
Brian Scott	Mr. Fontana
Andrea Verginella	Marianne
Ester Reyes	Yetta

Crew

Written, Produced and Directed by	Yonah Lewis & Calvin Thomas
Executive Produced by	Connor Jessup
Production Managed by	Anna Cook
Original Score by	Lev Lewis
Photographed and Edited by	Calvin Thomas & Yonah Lewis
Casting by	Marjorie Lecker, CDC
Production Design by	Andrea Leigh Pelletier
Wardrobe by	Maerin Hunting
Sound Recorded by	Jeffrey Magat
Sound Edited and Mixed by	Stephen Barden, MPSE
Featuring Songs by	Michael Holt