

staying 'aros mae'

a film by
zillah bowes

Ffilm Cymru Wales & BFI NETWORK in association with BBC Cymru Wales & Sixteen Films present

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Written & Directed by Zillah Bowes • Produced by Jack Thomas-O'Brien
Executive Producers Peter Cox, Alice Whittimore for Ffilm Cymru Wales & BFI Network Wales, James Robinson for BBC Cymru Wales
Cinematographer Robbie Ryan • Editor Matteo Bini • Animal Handler Steve Lewis

Sixteen
FILMS



BFI NETWORK



FILM



'Staying (Aros Mae)'

Logline

A woman from the city has a brief but life-changing connection with a hill farmer and the landscape in remote Mid Wales.

Synopsis

Ruth, a newly divorced gallery manager selling her city home, sees a video of a sheepdog, Mick, for sale. She visits farmer Huw and his wife Megan in the remote hills. Huw takes Ruth to try Mick. She admits she doesn't have any sheep but dreams about moving to the countryside. She returns and he invites her to a sheep gathering with his neighbours later that week. In the pub after the gathering, Ruth goes to leave but Huw persuades her to stay. After a brief encounter, the next morning Ruth finds Mick attached to her car. She takes him but changes her mind and drives away alone to reconnect with the land.

'Staying (Aros Mae)' features real-life members of a traditional hill farming community in Radnorshire, Mid Wales, whose historic way of life is threatened by climate crisis, Brexit and the UK economy.



Writer/Director **Zillah Bowes**
Producer **Jack Thomas-O'Brien, Sixteen Films**
Cinematographer **Robbie Ryan**

Zillah Bowes

Zillah is a Welsh/English writer and director. She trained at the National Film and Television School in the UK, where she was awarded the Kodak Scholarship, and has made films as a director and cinematographer which have been shown worldwide. Her debut as a director, 'Small Protests', was nominated for a Grierson Award and won the Current Short Cuts Award and Best Short Documentary at the London Independent Film Festival.

Zillah has worked as a director on documentaries for BBC, Channel 4 and online, and has collaborated on films and music videos with Turner Prize-winning artist and musician Martin Creed including 'Understanding', recently shown at SXSW. As a cinematographer, her feature films include 'Enemies of Happiness', which won the World Cinema Jury Prize at Sundance Film Festival. 'Staying (Aros Mae)' is her first fiction film as a writer/director.



Jack Thomas-O'Brien

Jack has been working at Sixteen Films for the past 5 years – and now works as Head of Production and Development at the company. He was assistant producer on Ken Loach's most recent feature film 'Sorry We Missed You' as well as working on 'I, Daniel Blake'. As assistant producer, Jack was closely involved in the development of the film, its production, moving on to become the post production supervisor, and finally working closely with Entertainment One on its release.

Jack oversees the slate at Sixteen Films which in the last 18 months has expanded to take on a diverse range of projects – seven feature films, three short films and the adaptation of a young teen series of books. Sixteen Films has been producing politically motivated cinema for the past two decades and 'Staying (Aros Mae)' fits well within the company as it moves forward.



Director's Statement

Just before I wrote 'Staying', I was artist-in-residence in the Elan Valley near Rhayader, Mid Wales. I'd begun to know my neighbours, a remote community of traditional hill farmers - some still gathering sheep on horseback - whose livelihood and identity were under threat from Brexit, climate crisis and economic uncertainty. Several had encouraged me to photograph them, which I'd started to do for a later project. I set 'Staying' in this community as a fictional story, aiming to represent them as faithfully as possible.

I'd previously lived in the mountains further north, where I'd seen a phone video posted by a farmer selling his sheepdog. The video brought me right into the moment he'd taken it, his breath misting in the valley. Since then I'd wanted to use this image somehow. It became the starting point for 'Staying': a woman sees a video of a dog for sale and travels on a whim to find it, prompted by a need to flee pain in her life.

We decided to cast local people, in which my producer, Jack Thomas-O'Brien at Sixteen Films, was experienced from Ken Loach's films. A hill farmer skilled with dogs, Steve Lewis, committed to the project at an early stage. We filmed on his farm with all his animals, including the sheepdog 'Mick'. I cast another farmer and his wife, Stella and Kerena Pugh, to play 'Huw' and 'Megan', along with other members of the community. Only the main character 'Ruth' was played by an actor, Welsh actor/singer Lisa Jên Brown. I wanted to create naturalness in the performances, aided by the cast being familiar with the world, my time getting to know them and the flexibility of cinematographer Robbie Ryan.

As well as the connection between Ruth and Huw, 'Staying' is about nature and its working on inner pain. It's from Ruth's perspective as she navigates a change in life, precipitated by meeting Huw. The film exposes a rare moment someone is offered to change. I wanted to track Ruth's emotions using nature images and sounds - how they carry her. 'Aros Mae', the song at the end and film's title, is a 19th century Welsh poem by Ceiriog, describing how the mountains remain as generations come and go. It evokes an ancient connection - our human connection - with nature and the land, which Ruth re-discovers.





Main Credits

Writer/Director
Producer
Cinematographer

ZILLAH BOWES
JACK THOMAS-O'BRIEN
ROBBIE RYAN

Ruth
Huw
Megan
Jed
Bryn
Mick the Dog

LISA JÊN BROWN
STEPHEN 'STELLA' PUGH
KERENA PUGH
KAYED MOHAMED-MASON
IAN REES
MICK

Executive Producers

PETER COX
JAMES ROBINSON for BBC Cymru Wales
ALICE WHITTEMORE for BFI NETWORK Wales

Animal Handler
Sound Recordist
Editor
Script Supervisor
1st Assistant Director
Production Manager
Production Designer
Costume Designer
Hair and Makeup
Sound Designer

STEVE LEWIS
SIMON FRASER
MATTEO BINI
SUSANNA LENTON
GRAHAM NEALE
MOLLY MCGREGOR
NIAMH CLEARY
SARAH JANE-PEREZ
HAYLEY BAKER
MAIKEN HANSEN

Gatherers

ELINOR EDWARDS
TOM EDWARDS
TREVOR EDWARDS
DANIEL JONES
ELIN JONES
GEORGE JONES
MARK JONES
MAURICE JONES
NOAH LANGFORD
PIP LANGFORD
BETHAN LEWIS
CHRIS LEWIS
MOLLY LEWIS
PETE LEWIS
ROBERT LEWIS
JENNA SHERRARD



'Aros Mae'

The film's title is taken from a 19th century Welsh poem 'Aros Mae' (translated as Staying) by the bard Ceiriog. He lived in mid-Wales, not so far from where the real-life hill farming community featured in our film live and work.

The poem also forms the lyrics of an original song 'Aros Mae' by contemporary Welsh folk band Ffynnon (Stacey Blythe and Lynne Denman). This song features at the end of our film: a haunting unaccompanied melody, sung in Welsh by Lynne Denman.

Aros mae'r mynyddau mawr,
Rhuo drostynt mae y gwynt;
Clywir eto gyda'r wawr
Gân bugeiliaid megis cynt.

The great mountains remain,
The wind roars across them;
The song of shepherds is heard again
With the dawn as before.

Eto tyf y llygad dydd
Ogylch traed y graig a'r bryn,
Ond bugeiliaid newydd sydd
Ar yr hen fynyddoedd hyn.

Also the daisies grow
Around the feet of rock and hill,
But there are new shepherds
On these old mountains.

Ar arferion Cymru gynt
Newid ddaeth o rod i rod;
Mae cenhedlaeth wedi mynd
A chenhedlaeth wedi dod.

Upon the customs of the former Wales
Change came with the Earth's turn;
A generation has gone
And a generation has come.

Wedi oes dymhestlog hir
Alun Mabon mwy nid yw,
Ond mae'r heniaith yn y tir
A'r alawon hen yn fyw.

After a tempestuous age
Alun Mabon is no more,
But the old language is in the land
And the old tunes live.

