



SOLID AIR

ELEMENTAL FILMS presents  
in association with SCOTTISH SCREEN and GLASGOW FILM OFFICE  
an ELEMENTAL FILMS production

# SOLID AIR



Director ..... MAY MILES THOMAS  
Producer ..... OWEN THOMAS  
Screenwriter ..... MAY MILES THOMAS  
Director of Photography..... NEVILLE KIDD  
Production Designer ..... JACQUELINE SMITH  
Editor ..... MAY MILES THOMAS  
Composer ..... BOBBY JAMES HENRY  
Costume Designer ..... CAROLE K MILLAR  
Make-Up Designer ..... SARAH FIDELO  
Line Producer ..... CAROLYNNE SINCLAIR KIDD  
Executive Producer ..... LENNY CROOKS

MAURICE ROÈVES  
BRIAN McCARDIE  
KATHY KIERA CLARKE  
GARY LEWIS

"STUNNING ... CONFIRMS THOMAS AS ONE OF THE MOST AMBITIOUS  
AND DISTINCTIVE FILMMAKERS IN BRITAIN TODAY" Shane Danielson, EIFF

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Four-time BAFTA Award winner, May Miles Thomas, follows up her acclaimed One Life Stand with one of the most beautifully realised and morally powerful films of recent years: Solid Air.

A heartbreaking legal and gambling thriller, Solid Air reveals how big business conspires to deny justice to the victims of asbestos-related disease.

Interviewed by Screen International, May Miles Thomas said, 'Solid Air is a love letter to the sufferers. I should know. My father has asbestosis. I understand only too well what the men and their families go through. I made this film because I wanted to see their stories on screen.'

Robert Houston (Maurice Roëves) is under sentence of death. Stricken with asbestosis he is fighting for compensation from his employers. But the case has dragged on for years – an experience close to the hearts of those who worked in the shipyards and construction works of the director's native Glasgow.

As Miles Thomas explains, 'Asbestos is everywhere so this issue is both local and far-reaching. My aim is to tell a personal yet universal story that underlines the tragedy of the issue, but which can appeal to a wide audience.'

As the story unfolds, Robert's son, Junior (Brian McCardie), discovers his father's claim and soon takes up the case. He confronts Nicola Blyth (Kathy Kiera Clarke), an ambitious young lawyer who tells him that in order to take the case to court, he must produce a witness to testify on his father's behalf.

So begins a quest that leads Junior into his father's past, where he learns how asbestos afflicts the lives of ordinary people.

But Junior's quest for justice hides a terrible truth. A compulsive gambler deep in debt to a wealthy businessman, John Doran (Gary Lewis), his only hope is to get his hands on his father's settlement. And with the search for a witness becoming ever more urgent, Robert's suspicions turn to torment as he learns of his son's deception.

Then, faced with a greater betrayal, father and son discover there is more at stake than the money.

In bringing awareness and understanding of these issues to a wider audience, Elemental Films hopes Solid Air can be a valuable contribution to the campaigns throughout the world for justice for the victims and their families.

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## LOGLINE

A compulsive gambler confronts the Law and his loyalties in a quest to win compensation for his father's asbestosis.

## SYNOPSIS

Robert Houston is under sentence of death. Stricken with asbestosis, a progressive and fatal disease, his legal claim for compensation from his employers has dragged on for years. He will die before he wins.

Then Robert's estranged son, Junior, comes home. Discovering the protracted civil action, he confronts his father's ambitious, young lawyer, Nicola Blyth. She tells him that, for Robert's case to go to court, he must produce a witness to testify on his father's behalf.

So begins a quest that leads Junior into his father's past, where he learns how asbestos afflicts the lives of ordinary people.

But Junior's quest for justice hides a terrible truth. A compulsive gambler, deep in debt to a wealthy businessman, John Doran, his only hope is to get his hands on his father's settlement. And with the search for a witness becoming ever more urgent, Robert's suspicions turn to torment as he learns of his son's deception.

Then, in a final confrontation with the Law and faced with a greater betrayal, father and son discover there is more at stake than the money.

## TECHNICAL INFORMATION

Original format:	HDCAM
Screening format:	35mm anamorphic
Aspect ratio:	2.35:1
Sound:	Dolby Digital
Duration:	113 minutes
Footage:	3238 metres / 10625 feet

## ACTOR BIOGRAPHIES

### MAURICE ROËVES

A veteran Scottish actor, Maurice has enjoyed a long and distinguished career on stage, TV and features on both sides of the Atlantic. Notable film appearances include his roles as Col. Edmund Munro in *Last of the Mohicans*, as God in *The Acid House Trilogy* and as Raymond in the forthcoming *Hallam Foe*. Of his numerous UK television roles Maurice is perhaps best known as Vincent Diver in the lauded BBC series, *Tutti Frutti*. He has also appeared in many US network series, including *919 Fifth Avenue*, *Baywatch*, *Star Trek*, *Murder She Wrote* and *Cheers*. On stage he featured in the Royal National Theatre production of the acclaimed *Gargarin Way* and was awarded Best Actor by the L.A. Weekly Theatre Awards for his role in *The Killing of Michael Molloy*.

### BRIAN McCARDIE

With several high-profile roles in Hollywood and US independent features (*Rob Roy*, *Ghost and the Darkness*, *Speed II*, *200 Cigarettes*), and working with many prominent directors, including Stephen Hopkins and Jan de Bont, Brian is a hugely versatile and intuitive lead actor. After completing the US feature, *Mr. Barrington*, in which he played the title role, he returned to the UK, where he is known for his stage and television work. Brian has featured in many major TV dramas, including *Kidnapped*, *Kavanagh QC*, *Doctor Finlay*, *Tinseltown* and the long-running series, *Taggart*. Recently, he's received consistent acclaim for leading roles in *Murphy's Law*, *Low Winter Sun* and the primetime BBC drama, *Lillies*.

### KATHY KIERA CLARKE

A highly accomplished stage and screen actress, Kathy's career goes from strength to strength. From her roles in *The Most Fertile Man in Ireland* and Paul Greengrass' award-winning *Bloody Sunday* to the Royal National Theatre's production of *Scenes From the Big Picture*, she has garnered rave reviews. In television she has appeared as Anna Le Page in *Take a Girl Like You*, as Elizabeth in *Omagh* and took lead roles in *Pulling Moves* and *Proof*. Her most recent feature film is *Small Engine Repair*, in which she stars alongside Iain Glen and Steven Mackintosh.

### GARY LEWIS

One of Scotland's busiest and most respected actors, Gary has numerous screen and stage credits, most notably as McGloin in Martin Scorsese's *Gangs of New York*, and in award-winning roles such as Dad in Stephen Daldry's *Billy Elliot* and as Thomas in Peter Mullan's acclaimed *Orphans*. Much in demand, Gary's other parts include Danny in Ken Loach's *Ae Fond Kiss* and King Hrothgar in *Eragon*. Recent films are *Niceland*, *Joyeux Noel* and *True North*. Gary is also well known for his theatre roles, previously working with innovative companies *Raindog* and *Wiseguise* on several productions including *Love Lies Bleeding*, *Brothers of the Brush*, and *Wasted*.

## FILMMAKER BIOGRAPHIES

### MAY MILES THOMAS – Screenwriter/Editor/Director

A design graduate of the Glasgow School of Art, May worked as a production designer and director at BBC Television, London. Resigning from the Corporation to pursue a freelance career, she then directed music videos and EPKs for major record companies in the UK and internationally. In 1995, May founded Elemental Films to produce her own work. Her first produced script, *The Beauty of the Common Tool*, was short-listed for an Academy Award.

In 1997 May was awarded a Fellowship with the Nipkow Programm, Berlin, where she developed her screenplay, *Ringling the True*, becoming a finalist at the 2001 Sundance/NHK International Filmmakers Awards. Returning to the UK, May embarked on *One Life Stand*, the UK's first end-to-end digital feature, which played at over 20 international film festivals, garnering numerous prizes, including 4 BAFTA Awards. May's achievements as a pioneer of digital filmmaking were recognized in 2000 when she was awarded a National Endowment Fellowship, and in 2003, when she was honoured as a Pioneer to the Life of the Nation by HM Queen Elizabeth II for her services to British Cinema.

### OWEN THOMAS - Producer

An award-winning filmmaker, Owen worked as a physicist and design engineer whilst building his experience as a director. In 1990 he staged the UK premiere of *Vlad Dracula the Impaler* as part of Glasgow's European City of Culture year and, in 1991, scripted and directed his first film, *The Scripture Killer*, based on the infamous Bible John murders. His second film, *Died of a Heart Attack While Under Questioning*, was an ambitious work set in Algiers, and a powerful study of interrogation and terrorism. In 1996, Owen directed *The Beauty of the Common Tool*, subsequently winning Best Film at the 1997 Palm Springs International Short Film Festival and shortlisting for an Academy Award.

Moving to Berlin in 1996, Owen resumed his career in engineering whilst working with May on a documentary, *Colentina*, based on the extraordinary life story of his grandmother and incorporating rare historical footage restored by the National Film and Television Archive. He returned to Scotland in 1999 to work with May on *One Life Stand* as executive producer, winning, in 2000, the British Independent Film Award for Best Achievement in Production. Subsequently, Owen secured inclusion of Elemental Films in the BT Vision 100 Index of the most visionary UK companies for its contribution to the development and promotion of Digital Cinema.

## MAY MILES THOMAS' FILMOGRAPHY

Solid Air, feature film, Screenwriter/Editor/Director

Best Director, Best Cinematographer Silver Dolphins, Troia Intl. Film Festival, Portugal 2004

One Life Stand, feature film, Screenwriter/ DoP/Editor/Director

Warner Bros. Best Film, Best Actress, Silicon Alley Film Festival, New York, 2000

Michael Powell Award commendation, Edinburgh Intl. Film Festival, 2000

British Independent Film Award, 2000

Best Film, Director, Writer, Actress, BAFTA New Talent Awards, 2000

Scottish Screen Outstanding Achievement Award, 2000

Colentina, documentary, co-Producer/Director

The Beauty of the Common Tool, short film, Screenwriter

Best Short Film Academy Award shortlist, 1998

Best Film, Palm Springs International Short Film Festival, 1997

Selected Music Video, Director/Producer

Ten Short Songs about Love – Gary Clark (Circa Records)

We Sail on the Stormy Waters – Gary Clark (Circa Records)

Profoundly Yours – Hue and Cry (Fidelity Records)

Pale Red – Jerry Burns (Sony Music Entertainment)

She Makes a Sound – Hue and Cry (Circa Records)

A Little Sensitivity – Lavine Hudson (Ten Records)

Long Term Lovers of Pain – Hue and Cry (Circa Records)

Flags and Fences – The Blue Nile Documentary (Virgin Records)

My Salt Heart – Hue and Cry (Circa Records)

The Real McCoy – The Silencers (BMG/RCA Records)

Selected BBC Television, Director/Producer

Edinburgh Nights

Saturday Night Clyde

Ex-S

Design Sense

The Great Picture Chase

## ALL THAT IS SOLID MELTS INTO AIR MAKING SOLID AIR

"It's one from the heart," says Gary Lewis, recalling his first reading of the script for *Solid Air*, "You get hit so strongly by the screenplay because of the way it describes this casino economy we live in, where labour's cheap and life's even cheaper. It's so much wider than the issue itself. And the lack of polemic, the focus on characters, real human beings, as they try to square circles, is brilliant."

Gary had previously worked with May on her first feature, the multi award-winning *One Life Stand*, and was so impressed with her talent and commitment that he wanted an opportunity to work with her again. He adds, "You don't often get the chance to be involved in real cinema and it's a privilege for an actor to take part in that."

The idea of *Solid Air* as a film project first appears in May Miles Thomas' journal in 2000. Having completed her first film, she had already turned her attention to a follow-up. "The inspiration for *Solid Air* came from my father's experience of attempting to win compensation for his own asbestos-related disease," says May. "Here was an issue that impacted on so many people's lives, yet it had never been addressed in the context of a drama."

Gary also had very personal reasons for his involvement in the film. He continues, "My da, who worked as a coppersmith, had already contracted cadmium poisoning through his job." Like many men before him he too was then diagnosed with asbestosis. He adds, "The tragedy is that most of the guys my da worked with have already died of the disease. *Solid Air* deals with a lot of issues that are very much my da's story."

Following the critical and popular acclaim for *One Life Stand* May wrote the basis of a story she hoped could describe the experience of a forgotten generation. "There's a hundred ways of coming at this story," says May, "but ultimately the script can only come out of the way characters behave." She adds, "What struck me was the number of people who, when they asked what the script was about, all had their own stories to tell."

But in writing the script there were also practical considerations. May continues, "It seemed to me there was a false perception of asbestos in the media, that exposure occurred solely in the shipyards of Glasgow during the greater part of the last Century. The fact is, the stuff was and is - everywhere in construction, in manufacturing, in everyday products. I knew we could never raise the budget to recreate the shipyards, so I had to concentrate more on people, rather than locations."

Another challenge was to attract finance to an issue-based drama. "A psychological drama about gambling and the law that deals with a man with an industrial disease is not an easy pitch when it comes to raising finance," says producer Owen Thomas. "For us, the trick was to create a script that focused more on human relationships than the issue itself." Rather than opt for a hard-hitting message, the filmmakers approached the subject by stealth. "For *Solid Air* to appeal to the widest possible audience, it was important that the film contained familiar and accessible elements, such as the gambling strand," says May. "That said, I felt that gambling also provided a useful metaphor for the legal process. These cases are about risk and the current system is designed to minimize that risk the risk of having to pay out large settlements to those who deserve compensation."

With the first draft complete, May took a break from writing to explore new filmmaking techniques that would impact on the production of the film. "I had the great good fortune to become one of the first National Endowment

Fellows. The funding helped me try out new methods for digital cinema production." A test shoot took place using SONY's latest HD24P system. "With One Life Stand our company, Elemental, had already pioneered new ways of working," she continues. "The next step was to produce great quality on reasonable budgets but without the trappings of a conventional 35mm film shoot."

By now, the script had attracted some interest. Says Owen, "As a producer you have to be open to offers, especially from companies who can access sources of finance that you can't." He cautions, "But striking a development deal can be a perilous business, because too often you're required to give away your only asset your script." Following one such encounter with a prominent London company, Owen decided to pursue a fiercely independent approach to development.

By the time May had completed a second draft screenplay, Owen had attracted serious interest from a leading UK distribution company. "It was gratifying that within the space of 10 days they had read the script and expressed how impressed they were," says Owen. "But at that stage the proposed budget had risen because of early casting considerations and so they were wary of getting involved in financing."

The choice for the filmmakers was a tough one - to drop the budget or to try to attract another source of finance that might never arrive. "It's the dilemma facing any emerging filmmaker," says Owen. "Unless you're established, it can be extremely difficult to attract foreign sales. Besides, we've always maintained that the only way to build a business was to make fiscally sensible films. To sell off the world just to raise what would still be a relatively low budget just didn't make sense."

After a long and dark winter, the filmmakers decided they would rather make Solid Air on a lower budget than not at all. With a revised draft and budget, Owen finally secured an agreement on the UK rights. With industry endorsement secured, the way was open to access public funding from the Scottish Screen agency. "It was important to approach the public investors with industry backing already in place," says Owen, "because it's not enough just to get the film made, it has to be visible."

When Scottish Screen agreed to invest in the project further finance from the Glasgow Film Office became available. GFO boss, Lenny Crooks, had been hugely impressed with the screenplay and was now willing to complete the budget. Things were beginning to fall into place.

An air of optimism led May to have her first discussions with Director of Photography, Neville Kidd. Neville, a highly experienced cameraman with numerous broadcast and short film credits was enthusiastic from the start. "The High Definition tests led me to conclude that what we needed was someone who really knew video as an acquisition format," says May. "That Neville is also talented, adventurous and very easy to get on with was a big plus. I felt from the get-go he deserved his break into features.

Because of budgetary considerations, it had been suggested that Solid Air could be shot on Digibeta so Neville shot some test material, which was transferred to 35mm. "But by this stage my ambition for the movie had grown and I wanted to shoot at a Cinemascope ratio," says May. "The tests were invaluable in helping to make the decision to commit to Hi Def, which is a technically superior medium."

By coincidence, Owen had been in discussions with Neville's partner, Carolynne Sinclair Kidd. Carolynne, an established producer in her own right, had made numerous award-winning shorts. Again, it was the strength of

writing and the originality of the screenplay that impressed her and she agreed to take on the role of Line Producer. Together she and Owen refined the budget and a tentative schedule was put in place to begin pre-production for a six week shoot.

Now the filmmakers had to seriously address the cast. Over time, several actors had been approached, but a combination of timing - and other offers - conspired against their involvement. Gary Lewis, who was to play the role of John Doran, was on board right from the start, but he too was getting offers from elsewhere.

Starting from scratch, a chance encounter at the Edinburgh International Film Festival led the filmmakers to consider Maurice Roëves for the part of Robert. May recalls, "I had spotted Maurice at a party, but felt too inhibited to approach him." But Owen did. "Originally we offered a smaller part to Maurice and sent a script," she adds. "To his credit, he faxed me the next day to say that although he thought the script was terrific, he didn't want to play one of the smaller roles. Then I thought, why wouldn't he be ideal for the role of Robert? The answer was staring me in the face so I offered him the part."

"I loved the script and when May offered me the role I told her I would be honoured to accept it," says Maurice Roëves, "but once I accepted, I immediately began to get nervous about it because I knew it would be an emotional, mental, spiritual and physical drain on everything that I believe an actor's craft is."

Up to that point, for the role of Junior, the filmmakers had pretty much drawn blanks. It was during one of the many casting sessions that Brian McCardie emerged. "I knew of Brian because of his more high profile roles, but didn't even know if he was based in the UK at the time," says May, "but he turned up for an audition and we were delighted." Another plus was that Brian paired with Maurice made the father-son relationship highly credible.

Rehearsals began in October. "The rehearsals gave me a clue about how May goes about the process of directing," says Brian McCardie. "My first impression was that she had a high opinion of herself because she's so direct. I knocked her off-guard at the audition, but in rehearsals I realized she was always right - because everything had been thought out. She's got a well-developed bullshit detector and will never settle for less than excellent."

With three of the four leads on board, the priority was to find an actress to play the role of Nicola Blyth. May had auditioned several actresses, but was having difficulty. "When I write character descriptions, I tend to be very specific because I have the ideal person - physically and behaviourally - in my head," says May, "and sometimes that's unfair to very capable and talented actors." But Kathy Kiera Clarke was at the top of May's list. She adds, "I just had an instinct that Kathy would be perfect for the role." At the time Kathy was playing Lady Macbeth at the Lyric in Belfast, but was intrigued by the script and agreed to meet with the director.

"When I read the script what attracted me was its intelligence," says Kathy Kiera Clarke, "which is such a rare thing. That and the fact that Nicola had a heart. So when I met May I knew that she had a heart and soul and would make the film she wanted to make."

As the shoot approached, Maurice faced the challenge of finding the character of Robert Houston. "The best roles are the most difficult to play," says Maurice, "but it's not about acting, it's about being. The more I thought about Robert, gradually I became pregnant with a terrible weight of sadness, which produced a collapse inside. I started to shrink physically and even found a different way of walking." Brian also searched to grasp his character. He says, "Junior's selfish, so in the story he has a bigger journey to make before he can make intelligent choices."

May agrees, "Junior is essentially an anti-hero, a psychologically complex guy and because he's a gambler and suffers so many reversals, it makes his quest all the more compelling."

The 34 day shoot commenced in late October. As an unbonded production, the producer was able to put together a crew, most of whom had never worked on a feature. "If Solid Air had been an averagely budgeted film shoot with a completion bond, we would never have been able to give our crew their break into features," says Owen Thomas. "Yet the majority already had plenty of experience in broadcast and short films." May adds, "I feel privileged to be making another feature, especially when I know of so many talented people who can't progress from shorts, so it was great to be able to give people the chance."

Key crew were brought in, including Production Designer, Jacqueline Smith, whose previous experience included several TV dramas and commercials. She approached her task with some trepidation. "I knew May had come from a design background herself so I wasn't sure how much input she would want," she says, "but she gave me complete artistic freedom. We spent a couple of invaluable days going through the script and she gave me more guidance than I've had from any other director I've worked with. Before I met her I had heard she was mad, but she's mad in the best possible sense. I think you have to be mad to get films made!"

Another key member of crew was Costume Designer, Carole Millar, who had worked with May on *One Life Stand*: "The great thing about May is she knows exactly what she wants." "I love Carole", says May, "she's got great taste and intuition and she always comes up with the goods."

The schedule and scale of the shoot brought its pressures. Owen continues, "For a low budget UK film, *Solid Air* is ambitious - a crew of around 50, over 40 speaking parts, over 40 locations and 350 extras." Maurice Roèves adds, "Great crew. Every day we were fighting the clock, but everybody worked their nuts off." But the filmmakers' decision to work on *High Definition* also helped to meet the schedule. Owen continues, "We could never have made this on film because of the time and expense required to light, the shooting ratio would have been drastically cut and the post production route would have been much more complex and expensive."

The shoot was completed on schedule in December. As the editor, May began the cut the following day and continued, without a break, for the next 12 weeks. "I don't understand the value of a rough assembly during the shoot, apart from persuading the financiers that the film hangs together," says May, "which has little to do with the director's intention. I believe a film is made three times anyway - in the writing, on the shoot and at the edit. A director ought to be responsible for all three stages."

With a rough cut ready, Owen screened it for the financiers. He says, "Obviously there was an issue of length, which is normal for any first cut of a film, but we got very little adverse criticism in terms of what had been shot." May is more candid about the evaluation process. "Everybody hedges their bets, whether they love or hate the movie."

After receiving feedback from the backers, May proceeded to fine cut the picture, losing several scenes and cutting the length. She says, "You can't be precious about altering things that affect the clarity of the storytelling. After all, everyone involved wants to make the best picture they can, but there's a balance to be struck between a film's natural pacing and bringing it in at a reasonable commercial length."

With the picture 'locked' in June, the more expensive part of the post production got underway. "The high-end post production for Solid Air had been planned two years previously when we tested the best route to transferring the HD material back to film," Owen explains. "As much as we would have liked to keep the post production in Scotland, there just aren't the facilities, especially for picture post," says Owen. "We already had a good relationship with the Farm Group and Digital Film Lab in London. It's as much about the people as the facilities."

In London, May worked with online editor Andrew Mitchell and colourist Perry Gibbs to transform the raw HD material into its finished form. "This is the part of the process I love," says May. "After six months of being locked in a black room on my own, I was at last able to widen the loop and give other people their chance to do magic." Equally as important as picture, the sound post production process got underway. "We were absolutely delighted to be able to take the post sound work to Savalas in Glasgow," says Owen, "and they really relished the chance to do a soundtrack quite unlike anything ever attempted in Scotland before." A large team was assembled to transform the sound, led by Supervising Sound Editor, Douglas MacDougall.

Another vital component was the score. Bobby James Henry, who had collaborated with May on *One Life Stand*, had been drafted in from the start. During the shoot, Bobby began the process of sketching his ideas for a score that would reflect the various atmospheres and story strands, uniting the music into a cohesive whole. May had long talked about the notion of breath as a key to the music and Bobby responded in his choice of instrumentation, including horns and voices to produce a rich ambience and poignant melodies.

In July, the filmmakers travelled to Ireland to complete the final surround mix at Ardmore Studios with John Fitzgerald. "I was astonished to hear how the mix totally transformed the tone of the film," says Owen. "Sound is usually the last part of the process and tends to get neglected but it's so important to get it right because it can affect the entire feel of the film."

"I have never trusted a director as much," says Maurice Roëves, "She's terrific," Brian McCardie agrees. "May's the best director I've ever worked with." Gary Lewis adds, "On the shoot a couple of the crew asked me about working with Scorsese on *Gangs of New York* and it struck me there's similarities with the way May works - she knows what the whole picture is, where lateral time stops, where music comes in - it's already in her head."

At the end of over three years of work, *Solid Air* is now complete. "It's quite sad to reach this point," admits May. "Gradually, as you close down the stages of the film - the shoot, the edit, the grading, the sound - you have to let go." She continues, "It may sound like bleeding heart rhetoric, but I still feel that to have had the chance to tell this story was worth three years of my life. Obviously I've lost any objectivity about whether the film is a success or not - ultimately that's for others to decide. All I know is I set out to make *Solid Air* for the right reasons. If the audience can come away feeling a little wiser about the issue, and if they're moved by the characters and the story, then I'll consider my job done."

## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

One cold, drizzling morning in January 1996 at the Court of Session, Edinburgh, I stood with my father as he made a decision that effectively placed a cash value on his life.

Like thousands of men before and since, my father accepted the fact of his disease, asbestosis, with a stoicism common to most men of his class and generation. He also accepted the hopelessness of attempting to pursue his claim for compensation because, as his own lawyer was quick to emphasize, to enter Court with a civil case is a high risk.

I might forgive the process, the route to this outcome. I might accept the years it had taken to be in that place, only to witness the chicanery designed to achieve the required result. But never will I forget the look on my father's face as he made his decision about accepting an out-of-court settlement; the only kind that satisfies the other parties concerned. Here was the weight of an entire legal system bearing down on an individual, a decent man at the end of his working days, who was forced to shoulder the burden of proof against a faceless Defendant. In the end, it was about the money.

Had my father's case been unique, I suspect I would have let matters rest, rather than revisit the trauma of that day. But on learning that, in pursuit of a witness my father had discovered that an unseemly number of his colleagues had died of asbestos related diseases, the idea of creating a film based on their collective experience began to haunt me. We all lose our fathers one day, sure, but the unlawful nature of what will certainly be the cause of my father's premature death gave rise to an anger so strong that I felt compelled to seek a moral reprisal.

The fine line between empathy and sympathy made me wary of patronising those who can't articulate their dissent. But given my father's experience, I felt entitled, at least on his behalf, to attempt to express his plight within the framework of a fiction. I already knew the title would be *Solid Air*, taken from the Communist manifesto - all that is solid melts into air - to describe the effects of this debilitating, progressive and fatal disease.

After having made my first feature, *One Life Stand*, I finally gave in to these thoughts and set out to write the story. The idea of a man, a lonely divorcee, seeking personal injury compensation from his former employers soon developed into a broader tale linking the personal - the difficult relationship between a father and his estranged son - with the public - the vagaries of the legal establishment and those who maintain the system. As the script evolved, it occurred to me that the last thing I wanted to make was a worthy and prosaic drama. *Solid Air* would be morally significant, yes. Miserable and sermonizing, absolutely not.

To reach its natural audience, the film had to contain an element of entertainment, of glamour even. I arrived at the idea of gambling as a means of providing motivation for the son, Junior, to pursue his father's claim in order to pay a debt. Gambling also served as a metaphor for a system of civil law so fraught with risk. What better way to illustrate the system than by placing a gambler at the heart of it?

Films are lumbering and expensive creatures. They have to be willed into existence. The pitch for *Solid Air* was met with bemusement and rejection. A legal and gambling thriller about a man with an industrial disease? In Scotland? What we had in terms of an original story for the screen appeared to lack everything in terms of

commercial, mass market appeal. But for the faith and perseverance of my partner and producer, Owen Thomas, this film would never have been produced.

Eventually, however, we found commercial backing through a UK distributor. With this we were able to approach other sources of finance, finally completing the budget with investment from Scottish Screen and the Glasgow Film Office.

A six week shoot took place on location in and around Glasgow. From the get-go I had envisaged a dark, autumnal look for the film which would reflect the solemnity and interior nature of the narrative. Working closely with Director of Photography, Neville Kidd, production designer, Jacqueline Smith and costume designer, Carole Millar, together we agreed on a palette of colours. Having committed to shoot on High Definition two years earlier, our challenge was to create photography of the highest quality, partly to demonstrate what the format was truly capable of and partly to dispel the myth that digitally-acquired movies are inferior to celluloid. Two years earlier, as a National Endowment Fellow, I had the good fortune to test the best routes to creating high value imagery for low budget features. I hoped Solid Air would consolidate that knowledge.

Despite its modest budget, Solid Air is an ambitious film with a large cast, including an exceptional group of lead actors - Maurice Roëves, Brian McCardie, Kathy Kiera Clarke and Gary Lewis - together with a strong supporting cast - including James Cosmo, Laura Harvey, James Martin, Neil McCormack, Anne Downie, Laurie Ventry, Ian Hanmore, Eileen McCallum, Bryan Larkin, Matthew Bill Boyd - and many, many others to whom I am grateful for their shared belief in the project.

Similarly with the crew, we were fortunate to have the freedom to work with people whose skills and talents we admired but who were deemed as untried and untested by the industry. In the event they took their opportunity and worked tirelessly and with total conviction. For the majority it was their first experience of working on a theatrical feature and I'm proud of their achievements. Many I hope will now be able to progress their careers in feature films.

Few filmmakers ever confess the truth of how films actually get made. Solid Air was not an easy film to make, financially, psychologically or emotionally. Over the last three years Owen and I made tough decisions as potential executive producers and financiers came, saw, reneged, lied, cheated but mostly ignored - business as usual in an industry where all that is solid melts into air. But to dwell on those negatives does not serve the result of three years of work accomplished with commitment and sincerity. Or those who inspired the story. Nor does it serve the audience, many of whom crave an antidote to the formulaic. Sometimes, a film arrives from nowhere, without the weight of the industry machine, that touches people's hearts because they believe in the people they're watching or believe in the story told.

I hope Solid Air can be such a film but, as the filmmaker, I'm no longer in a position to tell. Just as I stood outside the Court with my father, I can only look on while the chips fall where they may.

May Miles Thomas

## CAST IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE

Robert Houston Junior	Brian McCardie
Doughboy	David Fehilly
Sapphire Dealer	Matt Costello
Sapphire Smoker	Archie Shearer
Sapphire Walkman	Marc Deans
Robert Houston	Maurice Roëves
Nicola Blyth	Kathy Kiera Clarke
Leena	Laura Harvey
Adele	Carmen Pieraccini
Douglas	David Gallacher
Gerry	Jamie Harrison
Legal Secretary	Suzanne Dance
James	Alexander Bell
Hooded Youth	Mark Heavenor
Niall	Bryan Larkin
Funeral Director	Douglas Stewart Wallace
Todd	James Martin
Ounce	Neil McCormack
Denise	Carolyn Calder
Ounce's Son	Reiss Watson
Casino Floorman	Ben Adams
Finn	James Cosmo
Consultant	Linda Duncan McLaughlin
Doctor	Saj Chaudhry
Patient	Hugh Tonner
Man in Corridor	Peter Daniels
Cleaner	Margaret Rose Stewart
Junkie Girl	Nicola Jo Cully
Pawnbroker	John McQuiston
John Doran	Gary Lewis
Brian	Rab Mullen
Waiter	Allesandro Cannetto
John Hutchison	Ian Hanmore
Bookie	Gerry Langan
Dogtrack Smoker	Andy Townsley
Barbara Ross	Anne Downie
Barman	Melvyn Brian Williamson
Hugh Ross	Mathew Bill Boyd
Nurse	Ellen McLellan
Helen Law	Eileen McCallum
Girl on beach	Kaitlin McMillan
John McLellan	Laurie Ventry
Cammy	Ron Paterson
Noble	Jackie Farrell
Blackjack Dealer	Amanda Bradley
Interviewer 1	Patrick Hannaway
Interviewer 2	Dave Anderson
Alexander Currie QC	Richard Addison

Minister	Charles Donnelly
Mourner	Jean Wallace
Junior Counsel	Pamela Clarke
Company Rep	John Carson
Insurance Rep	Arch White
Insurance Defender	Jason Keating
Defender QC	Ralph Gonella
Old Man in Court	James Murphy
Old Woman in Court	Bet Gault
Old Couple Lawyer	Harry Cartmill
Ray	Nick Farr
Chris	Paul Birchard
Casino Dealer	Marc Bradley
Paulie Malone	Paul McParlane
Dealer 1	Martin Forry
Dealer 2	Rana Singh
Casino Receptionist	Sarah McMinch
Voice Artists	James Agnew
	Paolo Bardelli
	Raymie Day
	Margaret O'Brien
	Lucy Watt
	Gail Wylie

## CREW LIST

Screenwriter	
Editor	
Director	May Miles Thomas
Producer	Owen Thomas
Executive Producer	Lenny Crooks
Line Producer	Carolynne Sinclair Kidd
Director of Photography	Neville Kidd
Costume Designer	Carole K. Millar
Composer	Bobby James Henry
Production Designer	Jacqueline Smith
1st Assistant Director	Patrick Conroy
2nd Assistant Director	Ray Kenny
3rd Assistant Director	Graham Galloway
Camera Assistant	Francis MacNeil
Focus Puller	John Harper
Grip	Lucien Grieve
Camera Trainee	Kate Reid
HD Consultant	Julian Guillaume
Sound Recordist	Douglas Kerr
Boom Operator	Martin Ireland
Gaffer	Donny Campbell
Best Boy	Ewan Epton
Electricians	Scott Napier
	Alan Fraser
Genny Operator	Pat Sweeney
Production Manager	Rebecca Knapp
Production Assistant	Rohanna Law
Runner/Drivers	Andrew Townsley
	Alistair Harling
Runner	Liam McCallum
Production Accountant	Neil Cairns
Script Supervisor	Belinda Newman
Stills Photographer	Mark Hamilton

Location Manager	Naomi Liston
Location Scouts	Alexander Logie Campbell Cameron Law
Unit Manager	Mark McGhee
Security	Drum Security
Wardrobe Assistant	Alissa Galloway
Wardrobe Daily	Dani Millar
Make Up/Hair Designer	Sarah Fidelo
Make Up Assistant	Karen Brotherstone
Make Up Daily	Noirin Doody O'Connor
Set Decorator	James Gray
Standby Art Director	Fiona Hutchison
Art Dept. Assistant	Martin Kelly
Art Dept. Runner	Carly Parris
Art Dept. Trainee	Julie Ann Moore
Property Master	Jim Elliot
Standby Props	John Booth
Dressing Props	Matt Mooney
Dressing Props/Driver	Angus West
Construction	Phil Bowen
Painters	Sandy Bothwick John Hughes
Additional Carpentry	Derek Fraser
Background Casting	Casting Call
Fight Co-ordinator	Michael Scott Law
Animal Handlers	Animals for Action Creature Feature
Medical Advisor	Stef Swiatek
Location Catering	Screen Cuisine
Facilities	Cabervans
HD Colourist	Perry Gibbs
HD Online	Andrew Mitchell
Digital FX	Barney Jordan
Assistants	Anna Cliff Aoibhinn Dinnigan Bonnie Gilmore Mark Hodgson

Supervising Sound Editor Douglas MacDougall

Re-recording Mixer Chris Sinclair  
Dialogue Editor Kahl Henderson  
Assistant Dialogue Editor Lorraine Keiller  
Foley Artist Micheal Mackinnon  
Foley Editor Diane Jardine  
Foley Recordist Giles Lamb  
Post Production Trainee Steven Ferguson

Final Mix John Fitzgerald

Dolby Sound Consultant Chris Ralph

Music recorded by Ali Macdonald for Audiofusion

Musicians  
Mezzo-Soprano Carolyn Dobbin  
Soprano Catriona Holt  
Accordion Caroline Hussey  
Trumpet, Flugelhorn Ryan Quigley  
Piano, Percussion Les Rice

HDCAM system Visual Impact  
Lighting equipment Lee Lighting  
Grip/Access equipment Grip House North  
Bernard Brogan

HD Post-Production The Farm Group, London  
Tape to film transfer Digital Film Lab  
Sound Post-Production Savalas  
Ardmore Studios

## MUSIC CREDITS

You Don't Know What Love Is  
(Don Raye & Gene DePaul)  
published by Universal - MCA Music Publishing  
performed by John Martyn  
courtesy of Independiente Ltd

Prendi, prendi, per me sei libero  
from 'L'elisir d'amore'  
(Gaetano DONIZETTI)  
DWNX 8.660045-6 de Wolfe Music / Naxos

I Only Have Eyes for You  
written by Harry Warren and Al Dubin  
published by B Feldman & Co Ltd  
performed by Peggy Lee  
licensed courtesy of EMI Recorded Music Ltd

Shot By Both Sides  
(Howard Devoto & Pete Shelley)  
published by Mute Song & Complete Music  
performed by Magazine  
licensed by courtesy of Virgin Records Limited

Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child  
performed by Rev. Cleophus Robinson  
from 'Someone To Care' (The Battle Sessions)  
Speciality Records, Inc  
courtesy of Fantasy, Inc

Love Brought Me Back  
(DeWayne Julius Rogers)  
published by  
Jennifer Holliday Music Publishing Inc  
performed by D. J. Rogers  
courtesy of Columbia Records  
by arrangement with Sony Music Licensing

Reverie  
(Claude Debussy)  
performed by George Shearing  
licensed courtesy of EMI Recorded Music Ltd

Taking a Chance on Love  
written by  
Vernon Duke, John Latouche and Ted Fletcher  
published by EMI United Partnership Ltd  
performed by Peggy Lee  
licensed courtesy of EMI Recorded Music Ltd

Ebben? N'andrò lontana  
from 'La Wally'  
(Alfredo CATALANI)  
DWNX 8.550606 de Wolfe Music / Naxos

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