



**One Stop Doc Shop
Transcript
Episode 8 - Kathryn Ferguson**



Introduction

(Intro music starts – cinema film reel whirring, and countdown beeps)

Hello and welcome to One Stop Doc Shop, a podcast that celebrates and encourages diversity in non-fiction filmmaking. In each episode, a guest filmmaker will share their secrets on how to make award-winning documentaries.

I'm your host Angela Clarke, and this series was made possible with support from Screen Alliance Wales.

My guest today is the multi award winning director Kathryn Ferguson. After a decade of focusing on short-form work centered on identity, gender politics and community, Kathryn's first feature documentary NOTHING COMPARES about the iconic musician Sinéad O'Connor premiered at Sundance in 2022. The film screened globally and went on to win multiple awards including Best Feature Documentary and Best Debut Director at the BIFA's, as well as clocking up not one but two Emmy nominations.

Later that same year, Kathryn was also awarded the BFI & Chanel award for Creative Audacity for a first-time feature director.

Kathryn and I discuss her journey into the documentary world, navigating the leap from commercial work to long form docs, as well as the kind of films she hopes to make in the future.

I hope you enjoy listening.....(music ends)



Angela Clarke

Well hello Kathryn how are you?

Kathryn Ferguson

Hello, I'm great thank you. Nice to meet you.

Angela Clarke

And you. Thank you so much for agreeing to chat to me today. I've got lots to talk about and I want to pick your brains about loads of things. I just realised earlier today that you're the first fellow Celt that I've interviewed on this series, so I'm going to try and rein myself in and resist the urge to speak at full pelt.

Kathryn Ferguson

(laughs) Ah, and we must reign in the urge to swear I think as is often the way, so we'll be very well behaved. I promise.

Angela Clarke

Very well behaved, otherwise my poor sound recordist will be thinking oh god what have you done, there is a lot of bleeps! *(laughing)* But anyway, I was going to say there's so much I want to ask you about the **Nothing Compares** doc and about the wonderful Sinead O' Connor. But before we get to that, I wondered if we could maybe rewind a little bit, and just start to discuss maybe what was your general path into the world of film or storytelling? Where did the seeds of your interest in that world, where were they first sown?

Kathryn Ferguson

Sure. Well, I studied fashion before I ever got interested...well I always was interested in film, who's not interested in film? But I worked in fashion, I studied fashion then I worked in fashion and whilst I was studying fashion, I became very interested in the possibilities of fashion video. Especially how to bring the fashion photography still to life, in experimental new ways. I was very inspired by the photographer Nick Knight who had set up a moving image platform called Show Studio in the early noughties, and I suppose for me as a fashion student that's really what struck me and was something that I really wanted to try and expand on myself.

So really, that was the first step towards the moving image full stop. I then worked in fashion for a couple of years and was making short fashion films for designers and for magazines and I suppose for pop stars. Then I decided, after doing that for a few years, to go back and do a master's degree. I applied for the Royal College of Arts, and I began a master's there in 2009 and I studied for 2 years. And it was really whilst there that I suppose my interests changed quite dramatically, in that I could see the potency of the fashion image and creating the visual worlds that you can create within fashion, but I desperately wanted to try and tell more personal stories. And I suppose it's when I also started to become interested in documentary.

So, for my graduation project I made at the end of the RCA, I made a short filmed called **Mather** which is Gaelic for mother and it was beginning to look at I suppose themes that

we then go on to see in ***Nothing Compares***, namely around Catholicism in Ireland and its tight grip over the women of Ireland. Really it was that short film that I would say was the very first seed in the making of ***Nothing Compares***. So, it was coming at it from a very unusual entry point, from fashion ending up with this very personal short which then led to the first feature but that was released in 2011 and I can talk a bit about that film because it literally directly brought me to Sinead.

Basically, I then left the RCA unsure which direction to go in. I was making a lot of experimental work at the RCA, but then I was starting to work commercially. I joined a production company as soon as I left college, which was a commercials production company, I suppose specializing in the more traditional commercial work, from music videos to advertising. I got swept up in that momentarily for a couple of years because I thought maybe that's something I should try because at least there were budgets, and I could try and progress. You know for somebody who's not film school trained, I studied fashion and then the course I did it at the RCA was a much looser course, like a mix of graphic design and a little bit of moving image. But really, for me I just studied film, but it wasn't a film course. It was very, very loose. So, I tried that for a few years working commercially and really didn't find it a very satisfying world to be in at all.

However, what it did lead me to eventually, after about 2/3 years of feeling very dissatisfied in it and all the pitching and I just didn't feel like it was the type of storytelling I wanted to do. But what it did lead me on to was my first documentary which was a commission from Selfridges, the shop in London. They had an incredible creative team working there at the time, mainly women, who were in in control, and I suppose conceptualised all these quite high concept ideas for the store that weren't about selling the clothes. It was more I suppose concepts that they wanted to explore themselves creatively and they were able to just come up with these amazing ideas that delved into gender and non-binary dressing, through to modern or contemporary ideals about beauty.

But there weren't any products, so there wasn't any hard sell. It was these kinds of concepts that for me as a filmmaker I was able to respond to as a documentarian without having to sell anything in the film. So basically, they commissioned my first documentary which was called ***Four Tell*** which I think was an 11-minute doc featuring four incredible women including Zaha Hadid the architect, Bella Freud the designer, Sharmadean Reid and Caryn Franklin, the incredible commentator and broadcaster. Really it was a film that interrogated what it was like to be a woman working today, and it was a deep chat, like a call and response style film between the four of them really looking at what that meant, and this was back in 2012.

For me what that enabled me to do I suppose was to create this first documentary. However, what I was frustrated by with that film was almost, I'd made this documentary, and I was happy with the content and was happy with what was being discussed and the storytelling but visually it felt quite..., it just felt a little bit cold. After these years of working very visually, I just thought there must be a way where I can create documentary work but bring all my prior experience of designing these worlds and these spaces into the documentary work and the experimental work that I've been really

enjoying at the RCA. I thought there must be a way to merge this, to make it much more potent as a piece of film. I suppose then, that's what I really started to do as best as I could in the years that followed. That eventually lead to lots of advertising and commercial work, which was great, but it was a kind of a very round the house's way, and I didn't really fit into any boxes. I didn't really know where I was as a filmmaker, if I was commercial or if I was experimental and it was a confusing, I'd say five years of trying to work out what my voice was and what I was interested in and the stories that I wanted to tell.

Angela Clarke

Yeh, I mean I watched a lot of the short films that you made from the moment you're taken on as the filmmaker in residence in Selfridges. And all those films that you made during in that period, they're all beautiful. You're starting to use spoken words in some of them and the images are a bit more ethereal, and as you build that portfolio, they start to get more experimental. They're all visually beautiful and they take you on a journey and they're also very inclusive stories as well.

I noticed that with everything that you did in terms of the breadth of contributors and people that you had in them, and a lot of are female-focused and about female identity and voice and stuff like that. And I think it's interesting what you say, even in those early years because you'd studied fashion and you come into film like many people do through a slightly different path. Even though those first jobs aren't as creatively exciting, they do build a skillset in terms of you understand camera technologies and all that other stuff that comes with how you start to create a film from scratch in a way isn't it?

I've never worked in that background, I've always been in TV so in terms of the world of advertising, in TV there's a common joke of everybody wants everything yesterday! Is that the same in advertising, is it the same kind of pressure for deadlines and things?

Kathryn Ferguson

It is.

Angela Clarke

Often in TV you don't have very long developing things because development costs money in television, because that's never funded by the broadcaster, and I wondered how did that work for you? How did you find that process of coming up with some of the things that you were doing? Did you have time to develop your thoughts as it were on each of those films?

Kathryn Ferguson

I think on the Selfridges films I did because I suppose what was wonderful about those projects, unlike 98% of every other commercial commission I've ever done, I didn't have to pitch for it, because I knew I was doing it with them. It wasn't that horrible process of manically trying to come up with something in 48 hours to present this beautiful treatment, you know a 48-page treatment or whatever they expect these days in 48 hrs where you've fully formed your idea! I mean that's absurd because it takes longer than

that to really work out a good piece of film. But I suppose that collection of work was really the work where I could really experiment and find my voice as a filmmaker because I had that time.

I knew I was making the work and I had time prior to making the work to really develop each project and what I wanted it to say and who I wanted to be in it. I didn't have to deal with the usual restraints of commercial filmmaking, which are exhausting really when you're pitching against two to three other filmmakers, and you're literally given two to three days to conceptualize, plus create this document. And I just think that sucks a lot of the joy out of development, hence why I haven't been doing it for a good few years. I'd rather just get on with the work, and work with a client that wants to work with me.

Angela Clarke

Yeah, it always feels a little bit like when you're at school and you learn exam techniques. You can really enjoy a subject but the exam techniques are about how much you can cram into that short space of time on the day and that's used as a measure of your intelligence and actually it's not really when you think about it. It's just how fast can you write in the space of two or three hours which is madness really...

Kathryn Ferguson

Yeh.

Angela Clarke

Especially when you're do something creative because you know yourself, once you're on a project, things evolve and take a different direction...

Kathryn Ferguson

Totally...

Angela Clarke

And you want to be able to experiment I guess and play around. So, I suppose, in a way you've got that beautiful body of work for high-end clients and it's all ultra-slick and it's beautifully shot with great music. All those things as you say when they work to their best advantage, can make some really beautiful pieces and so I wanted to ask at what point then did you decide to make your next indie film, as in true indie film in terms of ***Taking The Waters***? I'm assuming that wasn't and I might be wrong was that a kind of a passion project that you wanted to go and do? Can you maybe tell me a little bit about what that film's about, just in case somebody hasn't seen it, it would be useful to just have a little bit of an explanation.

Kathryn Ferguson

Of course. Yeah, basically ***Taking the Waters*** was conceived in 2016. I suppose I'd been working in commercial film for five or six years by this point and I moved from London, after many years in London, I moved to the coastal town of Margate the week after Brexit, (*laughs*) and arrived into what had been Nigel Farage's flipping stronghold....

Angela Clarke

Back garden!

Kathryn Ferguson

Yup, back garden. You know I had so much excitement about moving to Margate for every reason that's not Nigel Farage but then the realization of landing there and Brexit happening was obviously very sobering. I had a couple of friends that were there when I got there who had previously been hugely vocal about their love of swimming in the sea. I suppose in the weeks that followed Brexit and the shock of moving to this outpost with this happening, I needed something to be quite grounding, because it all just felt completely insane, in terms of what I'd just done. Leaving a cosmopolitan city like London to then deal with this.

I started swimming every day. I went into the water every day. I went into this beautiful gigantic tidal pool called Walpole Bay Tidal Pool in Margate and started swimming and started meeting this beautiful community in the water. It really felt that it was a safe space from all the xenophobia that was happening on dry land. There was this beautiful mix of humans in this water, and it just became like a real solace, and I just loved it so much. I loved meeting people and talking to them. I was literally swimming around thinking I would love to make a film about this, because this is special given what's happening politically outside on dry land.

I think I spent a month or so bobbing around doing that and then decided I was going to try and get it funded and turn it into a film. I had no money to make it really. I think at one point I was trying to convince somebody to get behind it and I couldn't, I can't even remember who that was now. But a friend of mine, who was in Margate, was a journalist. And she was who I was swimming with most days, and I suppose we both started to talk about this together and thought let's just make this together and let's fund it together, my friend Anna Hart.

Basically, we just both chucked in I think 500 quid, we scabbled together 500 hundred quid and thought I think we can do this. I was able to bring in the producer I'd worked with commercially on everything, Shabana Mansouri who's brilliant. We decided just to make this film over a couple of weekends. It was the very end of that first summer and it didn't have a purpose for existing other than we just really felt passionately about it and wanted it to exist, and wanted to show people this special place at this very troubling time and we did it! We managed, I suppose throughout the summer, we'd been meeting so many incredible people in the water that we had our cast. We'd swim up to people that we've met and say hey yeah... *(laughing)*

Angela Clarke

I was just going to say, I just imagine you with a clipboard, swimming around with it in a plastic bag *(laughing)*

Kathryn Ferguson

Literally *(laughing)* and when we did actually get down to the shoot, we had a little boat to float around with our Alexa and we were trying to film in the water *(laughing)*. It all

became a bit of a nightmare to be honest, I think a lens cracked in the water. It was all very dramatic, but we managed I think capture a beautiful moment then and there and it was made purely for the love of the place, and the moment, and wanting to create something that captured this. But what I didn't realize at the time, and I suppose during this whole time I was really trying to get away from the commercial work. By this point I knew I wanted to be a documentarian, and I was trying to work out how could I make the step up to longer format. It just felt impossible when all I knew and all I was surrounded by was commercial filmmaking and production companies.

But I just thought I want to try this, and it did end up being a massive stepping stone to the feature, without me realizing it. It wasn't a strategic move really, maybe it was subconsciously, but I certainly didn't know what it would do. But what it did do was, I suppose I had a self-driven film, that wasn't a commission. There wasn't a brand attached. It was a film for the sake of being a film. I was able to then submit that to festivals, and it got selected for Sheffield Docfest to have its premiere, and then it travelled. It had a lovely festival life and it travelled around many of the short film festivals and was long listed for a BAFTA, which was amazing.

From its origins to have that journey was amazing, but really for me I suppose when I did decide a year or so later that I wanted to embark on ***Nothing Compares***, it was just a bigger stepping stone than the ones I'd had previously from the advertising. Of course, lots of advertising people go straight into feature dramas or can go and do what they want, but for me, the way I work as a filmmaker is I need to try things, and my process is to go a bit bigger and a bit bigger and to feel comfortable. By the time I did get into ***Nothing Compares*** I was ready. I wasn't gung-ho about it, it was still a wild leap, but I was more ready than I certainly had been a year or two prior to that.

I think even with Sheffield for example, Sheffield Docfest, getting to go and screen there and meet the doc community, I then met so many of the doc community then that were completely crucial to the making of ***Nothing Compares***, so it was all hugely important and relevant without me realizing that it would be.

Angela Clarke

Yeah, because there's so many of the themes that you carry over from the work that you were doing through that Selfridges period in terms of it was an inclusive cast of people. And I think that pool reminded me of you know there are certain precincts in life, and this sounds a bit of a weird analogy, but you know on the Tube, you've got everybody from every ethnicity, every age range, every class background, whatever, and sometimes there are spaces where life isn't partitioned off in a way and the pool was reflective of that, it had every walk of life in it.

And it was really ethereal in tone, the light was beautiful and it had those beautiful big wide shots and I loved the way that you kind of used that sea wall almost a bit like a catwalk, where you could see people parading up and down it, and you got a sense of who that person was and just a little bit about what that water meant to them.

Also, it kind of felt like, although it was a small film in terms of it being contained in one area, it gave you that sense of us being a tiny drop in the ocean, when you've got that lovely big, beautiful wide shot, the drone shot with the tiny person floating. They almost look like a little fly in the water, and it gives a sense of scale because I was thinking Jesus God that pool looks enormous....

Kathryn Ferguson

It is enormous. It's the biggest tidal pool in the UK. It's the biggest. It the size of a football field.

Angela Clarke

That's the thing because when you saw the drone shots, which I mean kudos to whoever did your drone shots because they were steady as, and I was thinking I bet that's quite windy. *(laughing)*

When you saw the bits where the waves were lashing off in the wall, I was thinking I bet that's a kind of place that you'd turn a broly inside out in about three seconds...

Kathryn Ferguson

But what was so fascinating with that is because we shot it over two weekends, obviously we planned for it to have complete continuity. The summer had been absurdly warm and calm and beautiful, and so the first weekend we shot reflected that summer. And then the very next weekend where we just planned to keep going with that summer was the wildest, windiest, rainiest weekend there had been since I moved to the town *(laughs)*.

So that obviously created a panic about how we were going to continue with the film. But actually, I'm so glad that we did experience that because a lot of the film also goes on to deal with mental health and the more serious comments that are made in the film, and it just really created the visual that we needed to be able to juxtapose against what we were hearing as well. I felt like it really created this beautiful paradox and worked very well in our favour, but certainly I remember the first day of the second shoot just being a bit of a hands on our head moment thinking what do we do here!? This is not, *(laughing)* what we were told would be happening weather wise, what the hell! So yes, that was an interesting experience of just having to just go with it and lean into it and make it work, which we did.

Angela Clarke

Yeah, and did that feel really freeing not having anyone tell you what you needed to do because it was only really you and Anna?

Kathryn Ferguson

Absolutely yeah, absolutely it did. I mean I suppose the only bit that felt tricky was that when we did finally finish it a year or so later is what to do with it. You know we'd focussed so much on creating the thing it was then where does it go and who publishes it, and we felt a little bit on our own with that. And it's never actually been published

online which I think is sad because I'd love it to exist on a platform somewhere because I think it's a very meditative soothing film.

Angela Clarke

Yeah, it is.

Kathryn Ferguson

I suppose that was the only downside but certainly the creative freedom it enabled us, just creating it ourselves was huge.

Angela Clarke

Yeah, but I think often like I remember that was one of the things that I struggled with from trying to move from being in TV to being in the independent world is I concentrated on how to make the film, but I didn't think about what happens after that because in that sphere that you'd worked in for so long, there'd always been a broadcaster or somebody to deliver to, and I just I didn't know what to do with that process.

I didn't know that it was almost in reverse, and you are starting at the end and trying to work out where do you want it to go and then you work backwards, rather than doing it the other way around.

Kathryn Ferguson

Yeah.

Angela Clarke

I think that's probably quite a common thing for people starting out, unless you've got a kind of community of people around you talking you through that strategy as you say, you're channelling your energy thinking I want to think about what the film is and what the tone of the film is and the piece and almost that whole journey of where the film goes when it ends and lands is a separate thing entirely isn't it? It takes a little bit of a while to get your head round things.

Kathryn Ferguson

Um, yeah, yes.

Angela Clarke

But that's a different set of skills and it also takes you into different world that if you haven't known, it can be really complicated, I think.

Kathryn Ferguson

Well, which is what we experienced then with *Nothing Compares* because I didn't have a clue what would happen post the first screening, not a clue. Yeah.

Angela Clarke

Yeah, and that's the thing, it's kind of a baptism of fire. But when I watched it, I mean I love the sea and the place we used to go to on holiday in Scotland, we had a window that looked out into the sea, so I could probably sit and watch the sea all day long....

Kathryn Ferguson

Lovely...

Angela Clarke

I mean all day long and so it was a really calming film. But then it sneaks these slightly more serious themes throughout the film. But you just forget what pleasure there is in something that's free and something that simple, just that simple act of exercise and or even floating and the feeling that weightlessness gives you. So there was a lovely pace to the film in terms of the shots allowed you to enjoy the water and the light changing and then just seeing all these different faces, because I guess probably maybe to people outside of Margate at that time, as you say because Farage had inhabited that space, the news as it does focuses on conflict and this film felt like a little place where actually everybody could be collectively.

It was a joyful film and that felt quite nice to see the joy in a place because inevitably in any place where there's conflict, there's also going to be joy somewhere. It's just we very rarely focus on that and so I thought the film was a nice alternative side. You only ever see one side in the news and then you think this is going on too, and not everybody hates each other

Kathryn Ferguson

Yeah...

Angela Clarke

And there are people from different communities in this one space you know floating about...

Kathryn Ferguson

Yeah, coexisting happily. No, exactly and that was the point of it really. I think that's what the driving force was behind it. Yeah, so it's a love letter to the place really.

Angela Clarke

It was a lovely little film if people haven't seen it. Yeah, you should put it up online somewhere because it deserves to have more eyes on that just for the whole floaty and drifty feeling. It's lovely. I was going to say before we then talk about Sinead because I know obviously Sinead kind of brewed for a long time in the background of this type of world, but I wanted to speak to you about the next short that enters the world before Sinead does as it were, so **Space To Be**. That was a Guardian doc that you did. Do you want to tell us a little bit about that film and how that kind of came into being?

Kathryn Ferguson

Yeah. After **Taking The Waters**, because it launched at Sheffield I think I was reached out to by Passion Pictures, by an amazing producer there called Lizzie Gillett who is a massive sea swimmer herself and she'd seen that and wanted me to and talk about a potential feature idea that they had on the table. It directly brought me into Passion which was incredible. So that must have followed the year after, sorry the year after our

premiere. But the feature film wasn't right in the end for me to work on for multiple reasons, but what we did decide is that we wanted to work on something together, and I think at the same time I'd maybe even speaking to The Guardian, as in Charlie Phillips about doing a short for them.

I think they really liked ***Taking The Waters*** and I think Charlie actually had been the moderator at the Sheffield premiere...

Angela Clarke

Oh the Q&A...?

Kathryn Ferguson

Yes I think so, and we were talking to them and then Lizzie was like let's maybe try and do a short with The Guardian, and I thought brilliant, that sounds like a great idea. I'd love to do that, and to get the chance to work with a proper feature documentary company. As I said, prior to that all my experience had been with commercial production companies, so it just felt like a natural thing to explore.

So that must have been 2017/18, and I think I had various ideas of films that I wanted to make and one of them was making a film about this radical women's centre in a loyalist area in Belfast. I suppose at that point I decided to come up with an approach for that and see if The Guardian wanted to get behind it. I did that and luckily, they did and then we went into production with that in 2019, it was pre Covid. I was already in the midst of ***Nothing Compares*** and I think we started working on it in early 2019, (***Space To Be***) and then we shot that in September 2019 with the plan very much to go back in the spring (*laughs*) and keep shooting.

I think we shot like four days' worth in the autumn. I was pregnant at the time, so that was it. I think we were waiting for me to have the baby, and then I'd go back when the baby was like four months old and keep shooting. Little did we know what would happen in the world and sure enough the world shut down just as we were going back to finish the film. Basically, we had to create the film for The Guardian out of the footage that we shot, which was tricky because there's definitely parts of the story that were missing, but we worked on creating this film ***Space To Be*** and it was just a subject that I was very passionate about. The woman that ran the centre, Eleanor Jordan, was a very old family friend and I'd been hearing these incredible stories from her for 30 years about the work that they've been doing at this women's centre, which was really to protect women from the local community. To create job opportunities for them, to help them create qualifications, and it provided childcare, it provided a mental health services, provided trips etc.

Basically, I suppose in Northern Ireland these women' centres really popped up in the 80s and 90s as places that would bring women from these communities together I suppose whilst living through these very toxic situations, often created by the men in the communities. I suppose this was a safe space for the women to come together. And this women's centre had been targeted many times by paramilitaries who didn't like that it was there, so I suppose that was part of the story we were interested in as well. Again,

like ***Taking The Waters*** and like all the previous work, I was interested in looking at who these women were and the incredible mix of women that used them and was trying to tell a whole swathe of stories about that.

Angela Clarke

What I loved about it was that Elinor's that classic kind of stoic Celtic women, kind of like these female foot soldiers on the ground trying to pick up the pieces of society left in the wake of the aftermath of the troubles.

Kathryn Ferguson

Yes.

Angela Clarke

They're the kind of classic people that that often go unnoticed by the wider world.

Kathryn Ferguson

Yup...

Angela Clarke

You know they'll be known within their community for being amazing human beings that care and are trying to help the women that have lived in Ireland for a long time, but also the women that were from overseas who were maybe coming in, and had sought asylum and stuff, that didn't feel that they belonged in that community and were trying to find their niche and groove in that place. She was just an amazing woman herself and then obviously through the film you focus on some of the characters that used the centre.

But the other thing that I loved about the film as well, and maybe partly it would be interesting to know how much archive you were thinking of using before Covid hit or whether the archive partly was used to help flesh out the film? Because there's some beautiful period archive in it where you get a sense of obviously what's happened in Northern Ireland but as you say gave that support to women and how women were treated again in Ireland during that period in the lead up to places like that opening, which gave a real context. I think the archive in that film, if you weren't as familiar with the detail on the ground really painted a picture of what things were like there for women.

And it looked a really challenging place to just live never mind thrive, but just to survive in a way I suppose as well and that's what I took from that film. There was a real strength in those women, like a real stoic nature. They are the kind of women that their arm would be hanging off and they'd be like no, it's fine, there's nothing wrong here kind of vibe isn't there!?

Kathryn Ferguson

Absolutely and you know I just think in Northern Ireland particularly around the stories around the troubles, I mean they just are so often heavily focused on the men, and I suppose this film and the films I now want to go on to make myself in longer format are really honing in on these forgotten stories of women because they were such a huge

part in all of it and have very much been left in the wake of all this toxic male violence. I just feel like that film was the first step towards the type of work that I am hoping to make next.

Angela Clarke

I think that film was, it's just a beautiful kind of peek behind the curtains really, isn't it?

Kathryn Ferguson

Yeh.

Angela Clarke

Into place that if you don't go there yourself, you've got no idea the richness of what happens in those centres, and the importance of why those things need to be kept alive and why they offer a lifeline.

Kathryn Ferguson

Yeah, and why funding must keep being provided to them, I think that was a big part of it too. It's just they're constantly struggling for survival and been able to highlight the kind of work they do and just how many people they are helping felt like a crucial thing to do.

Angela Clarke

Absolutely. And I think those same themes that you had started to delve into in that Selfridges period, there's a gentleness to that film and there's kindness in that film and there's inclusivity in that film and I think again its shining a spotlight in somewhere like that where quite often you never really hear the stories of people that have arrived into that community. Which is weird because you know Belfast and cities like that are so multicultural, but you often only see the one side of the city told and I guess it's consumed in the bigger picture of what has been the story, as in the one painted in the news kind of thing, so that really intrigued me as well. And also, the women spoke with a real honesty...

Kathryn Ferguson

They did, yes.

Angela Clarke

Yeh, about what it's like to arrive in a place sometimes where just because people are different and cultures and lifestyles are different, it's sometimes difficult for all people to adjust in that kind of space. And I think there was something lovely about that that because you don't often hear those conversations being had publicly, which was nice in itself. I wanted to ask you as well because you use a little bit of a poem, I think isn't it, that opens the film, was it Jan... Jan Carson?

Kathryn Ferguson

Jan Carson, yeah I worked with Jan.

Angela Clarke

I was going to ask, what made you pick that? What drew you to that?

Kathryn Ferguson

Well Jan wrote it, but I commissioned it especially for the film.

Angela Clarke

Ah okay...

Kathryn Ferguson

I just wanted there to be a moment of I suppose reflection that kind of summed up really what the film was emotionally trying to do. And really being able to get a fantastic writer like Jan to put it into prose, just felt like a nice layer. It opens with the poem, and it does it end with the poem (laughs), I can't remember!

Angela Clarke

Yeah, I think it does.

Kathryn Ferguson

I suppose *Taking The Waters* is a little bit like that too, in that we brought the pool to life and gave her a voice and created a script for her. I suppose it was bringing in this idea of creating room for reflection. I've never been a filmmaker that loves to create documentaries with lots of talking heads and being told very directly what your meant think or feel. I really like to create breathing room in all my films so that people can have a think for themselves about what they're feeling and about what they're hearing.

I suppose with the poem, particularly that one, it was how to try and put into words what maybe we were struggling to include in the film itself. Certainly, with that one, there were definitely elements we couldn't include for the safety of the women themselves. I suppose we were trying to have it said in a more poetic way so that it could be hinted at without having to literally include elements that would have caused anybody harm.

Angela Clarke

And if people haven't seen it, it's still available on The Guardian website to watch?

Kathryn Ferguson

Yes.

Angela Clarke

But yeah, it's just a lovely, considered piece and there's a real sense of the respect that they show each other, and the respect that you showed the women to have the space to be able to talk freely like they do so I think in and of itself, that's something lovely just to be able to absorb and watch again as well. I'd love to talk to you about Sinead now and *Nothing Compares*. So, this film in a way feels a wee bit like a kind of really strong pot coffee, that's been brewing for a while on the stove. *(laughing)*

You know you mentioned earlier that you start to delve into those themes of motherhood and Catholicism and the control that religion has over Ireland in that master's film that you did. I know around that same time, you've spoken before about

using Sinead's music in that film and how subsequently later she reached out and, asked you to direct her Fourth and Vine video. I know you'd said before your dad was a big, massive fan and that's how you first came to know her work and then you were a big fan but what was Kathryn the teenager thinking when she got that call and they said do you want to do the video? Were you just like screaming in your head oh my God?

Kathryn Ferguson

I mean I was thrilled to bits. I was so shocked and thrilled. I think I'd sent her team, basically when I made *Mather*, the short at college, I'd reached out to her managers about using the music and they amazingly agreed. I then sent them the short in 2011 out of courtesy, not expecting them to even look at it really, and I can't remember if they got back to me immediately about it or not. But then they did get back a year later about the music video Fourth and Vine and I was just absolutely astounded. Complete delight, but mostly because I knew I'd get to meet her.

I'd get know this person that I had idolized passionately as a young teen growing up in Belfast. Just been able to be anywhere near her just felt thrilling and terrifying actually yeah, really terrifying because literally meeting your hero and all that. It was confronting but I got to go to her house, I remember very clearly, I first got to meet her when we were doing wardrobe, and we were trying on the wardrobe in her house in Bray. I got to meet her, and I got to spend maybe four or five days on this project in Westmeath with her and John Reynolds who obviously became a hugely important part of *Nothing Compares* as well.

It was just outrageous that I got to do that, you know the way that it happened. I think from making this short to then getting to work with her a year later it was very organic but also very shocking that it happened at all, it was a real pinch me moment.

Angela Clarke

I'm so jealous man (*laughing*) and this is just an aside, nothing to do with the film but I just wondered because I've never heard you say, growing up what were your favourite songs of hers that you sang into your hairbrush?

Kathryn Ferguson

Crickey and I loved, loved, loved *Troy*. I loved the drama of *Troy* and just find it thrilling. I loved the video. I loved the John Maybury's work, and I loved the song passionately. I loved *Thank You For Hearing Me*, that was later actually, that was *Universal Mother*. The very early ones were *Troy* and I mean I love *The Lion And The Cobra*, I love and still love every single song passionately. I really loved *Never Grow Old*. I just love what she did with her voice, I loved the lilting.

I recognized it. I grew up with a family obsessed with Irish trad music and I suppose hearing what she did with her voice in that very Celtic way and that very you know, yeah, just the lilting. But creating such power behind it and the ferociousness behind it just felt so thrilling to hear that juxtaposition of something that felt so ancient with this anger which I suppose as a young teenager I felt myself. I really felt, as we all did, I just really felt hugely connected to it. I think so many young teenagers when they heard that music

for the first time felt something very deeply because it felt very reflective of our own feelings and emotions.

That's what I think Sinead just did so magically actually, she was able to connect. You know she talks in multiple interviews about the preverbal sounds that babies make, or children make, and I think that's what she could do. She made these almost like preverbal sounds that came out of her that connected with people rather than the words themselves. It was the noises that touched people so directly.

Angela Clarke

I got very distracted yesterday when I was having a look at different things, I may have taken a segway into watching some of the videos again....

Kathryn Ferguson

Oh yes, they're good...

Angela Clarke

I was thinking about what my favourite song was, I used to love *This is Last Day Of Our Acquaintance*.

Kathryn Ferguson

Beautiful.

Angela Clarke

Yeah I absolutely loved that. I also loved *Black Boys On Mopheads*.

Kathryn Ferguson

Beautiful, it's so good.

Angela Clarke

And I hadn't heard that for years until I watched the film, and I thought my God, why don't I listen to that more! I got distracted yesterday when I was Googling different things and I watched her singing live in a couple of performances, and as you say one of the great things about her as an artist was that she gave a different performance every time, you were seeing something that was kind of primal like the kind of noises that she made. It just sounds like somebody verbalising an ache in a way when she's sings some of the things. The intensity of how she looked down the camera and stuff like that. You forget how absolutely mesmerising she was.

I suppose what I loved about the film when I saw it was even though I was a massive fan of hers you forget because we live in a world where everything exists online and you can rewatch it, and rewatch it and rewatch it but obviously back in the day, quite a lot of the footage that was in the film I had never seen before because some of it was talk shows that maybe didn't necessarily air in Glasgow or whatever you know?

Kathryn Ferguson

Yeh, yeh.

Angela Clarke

So I knew the big moments, things like when she was at Madison Square Garden and the things that you'd seen in the press when she'd torn up the picture on Saturday Night Live and stuff but there was lots of other bits that I hadn't seen because obviously back in the day you only watched it go out live or you'd recorded it with your video player.

Kathryn Ferguson

Yeh, yeh.

Angela Clarke

And so I knew she'd been treated badly, but I think watching all of it, you think like jeez I didn't realise quite how badly and quite how horrible it was in some of those moments. Obviously, you'd have been a big fan. You'd reached out, you'd done the video, you knew this was something that you had a passion to tell, and you wanted to tell it. I know you didn't meet the co-producers that you ended up making the film with until about Sheffield time as you say, about 2017/2018, but did you always envisage, was it always a feature doc that you wanted to make with it and was that always what you wanted to tell, was it always that period of her life that you wanted to slice into?

Kathryn Ferguson

I think it was yeah. I suppose it was the feature doc and it was that era. I suppose I wanted to really look at what happened and why it happened. Because it just seemed in Ireland you know and certainly around the world, she'd just been ridiculed and mocked for decades, literally thirty years. For me, I desperately wanted to investigate why, and to be able to do that. I was never interested in doing a biopic or a birth to death film at all. That was never my interest, somebody else can do that. I want to look at why this happened to this incredible Irish woman that I loved. And that was always from the get-go the story I wanted to tell which made it very specific.

But I think that's probably why it got made because I know certainly John has said for decades, he'd had so many approaches of people wanting to tell her story in lots of different ways. But I think it was how focused ours was that made it appealing. Because there's also no way, the reality of telling Sinead O' Connor's story in 90 minutes or however long feels very difficult. It's so dense and it's so layered, and I'd love to see maybe a 5-part documentary series on her life, if somebody ever wanted to do that. But I think for me specifically, I wanted to investigate that part of the story and why that happened to her, and the cause and effect behind it. But to be able to do that properly, it meant homing in, picking a timeline and sticking to it.

Angela Clarke

And even with that, there's so much packed into the film itself and I'm sure there's probably loads you didn't even get to kind of cover at the same time within that period because even if you were just looking at what she did with her work, and her songs and her music, in terms of the themes that she covered and all those other things just within the music itself, never mind the things that she did in terms of speaking publicly and

very vocally about the Catholic Church and the music industry and feminism and racism.

Even when I was looking at the videos yesterday, I thought I'd forgotten there was a video that she signs for the deaf....

Kathryn Ferguson

Oh yeh yeh.

Angela Clarke

There's so much stuff that you think she just she was so inclusive and so expansive...

Kathryn Ferguson

Totally, yeh.

Angela Clarke

I was just thinking where do you drop that net and decide what is your 'in' and what is your 'out'. I mean that was the thing, when I saw the trailer for your film coming out I was thinking oh my God why has nobody made that before, because it felt like such an obvious thing and the zeitgeist around that period of time as well was kind of changing because you'd had all that abortion law and Weinstein and everything else that had gone on. The world had changed quite a lot, and women were finally being given more space to vocalize the things that had happened to them, well there was at least people listening potentially, for a change.

Kathryn Ferguson

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Angela Clarke

And do you think that kind of zeitgeist helped propel that film to get off the ground as well because it was around about the same time.

Kathryn Ferguson

Yeah, I do. I do. I think particularly with John, who as I mentioned I met whilst making Fourth and Vine and got on with very, very well and had kept in touch with over the years. You know, when I brought the initial approach to him, I think it was the right time, I think that's what we had on our side more than anything because of all those reasons you just listed, with #MeToo and the Abortion Referendum in Ireland, and the Equal Marriage Referendum in Ireland there was just so much change. There were so many women using their voices to speak out and were being listened to, finally. And I think for John particularly, it really highlighted the absurdity of what Sinead had gone through and how she'd suffered as a result and why she wasn't really been mentioned in any of these uprisings.

Angela Clarke

Yeah.

Kathryn Ferguson

And it just felt like a critical moment to retell her story. That wasn't a reason for doing it. But I think that certainly helped propel it as you say. I think it just felt suddenly quite urgent, and we had no idea starting how urgent it was going to be, no idea at all obviously with all it's happened since. But I'm so bloody glad we did do it when we did, and we got on with it because it could have dragged on you. Once it was kind of greenlit by them, it was just mad, a bit like making *Mather* or even getting her music in the first place. On both things I just thought there's no way they're going to go for this, or let me do this, but I may as well ask you! You only live once, you've got to try these things and what's the harm. And both times they said yeah, (*laughing*) and I was like okay!

Angela Clarke

Exactly.

Kathryn Ferguson

I didn't expect that in a million years, and I suppose with the feature because one, I'd never made one, two I had no funding, three, I didn't even have a clue how you start other than having this one-page idea, that's all I had. (*laughing*) And a lot of passion. It was then once I had the kind of go ahead to at least start looking into it from him, then that's really where it all began. I had to then work out how to convince the funders to get behind me as a first-time filmmaker, to take on this huge story about an icon. There was a lot of convincing to do all over the place really, and a lot of hoops to jump through but we kept doing it. I suppose once I found the team to work with me on it, Ellie Emptage the producer and writer Michael Malley, I suppose once I had people that were as passionate as I was about it and felt like we should take this on as a group, that's all I needed really to just push forwards with it. I just needed someone to be like all right. You know, let's do it...

Angela Clarke

Yeah, you can do this.

Kathryn Ferguson

Let's try it. Let's give it a go and really that was so extremely galvanizing and that just kind of like set fire to I suppose the drive that was needed to bring this thing to life. It took four years, from that first chat with John, it was four long years. We kind of lost a year because of Covid. So really, it should have taken three, but it took a long time and I'd say three of the years we were gathering the funds.

Angela Clarke

It's such a rich story, and the final film is so accomplished at taking you by the hand, all the way through those key peaks and troughs in her story, and fleshing out the bits in between that we didn't know, or kind of lifting the lid on the things that were fuelling her hurt and anger or drive to speak out about things along the way. But where do you start with that? Where do you begin? I know obviously as a team you would have a collective memory of some of those key moments. At points you might have been too young to really understand the magnitude of what was going on at the time, but you'll have a

collective memory of it, but I just wondered if you would be happy to share like how did you start?

I've just got this image of you with like a massive Post It note board! Like how did you plot it out? You knew you were going to start about 87 and end about 92 ish - did you go with the big political things happening, or did you start with the things that were negative and that were happening to her and unpack from there, because there are all those threads that you're weaving between what she's feeling behind the scenes and what's happening publicly, and I just wondered which led which as it were, does that make sense?

Kathryn Ferguson

Yeah 100%. Well, I mean the very first thing was this one pager, and the one pager is literally the film. I suppose once we'd nailed that bit which took a few months, the one pager that I brought to John, it kind of marked out the story that we wanted to tell. And then I suppose I remember what we did was get together as a group in Belfast, we hired a room for a week with whiteboards and just started putting the plot points down that we wanted to cover.

Obviously so much of it is around her music and her music is so biographical, we were then trying to, it was just like a massive mind map really, trying to make links between all of it, because all of it was so personal to her and I suppose that was how we began. And obviously there were the key things that happened, but because it was very much this cause-and-effect film, it was like this happened, so what caused this to happen? Then it was trying to keep going back to find the origin points of story and why that then affected what happened 25 years later. It was like a massive detective board in many ways, just trying to make sense of it all but then you know that was what made it so remarkable was having John who as our EP lived through all of it with her, from the age of 18 to cross check it, and be like is this right? Are we completely going off in a tangent here, are we reading this wrong, and he'd be like yes or no, maybe this this didn't happen quite like that, but more like this.

Angela Clarke

Yeah.

Kathryn Ferguson

We had this amazing source of making it completely authentic which was remarkable without having to keep going to Sinead and saying remember this awful thing that happened to you, can you tell us about it again and again and again. Because John and her have been best friends the whole way through all of this, you know and anything that we did need more clarification on he would ask her. But Sinead was kind of kept in one place and I was kept in the other, and John was this amazing protector of both of us, so it could happen which was a difficult way to work sometimes because obviously I really wanted to be able to chat more to Sinead, but ethically, that was the most ethical way to work. I think it was also the only way for the film to come into existence. I think if we'd worked very closely together, it would have become very complicated and I think having

that distance, but not complete distance, but just being able to just have this like a mediator between us worked very well.

Angela Clarke

Yeah, well that was that kind of led me into something else I was going to ask you then. I think obviously in the very early parts of the film, you get a sense of the layers of trauma that she suffered in her childhood that kind of shaped the rest of her adult narrative as it were. And those are difficult sensitive things to ask somebody, because you are opening that wound up aren't you, and you are recreating that trauma, so it makes perfect sense that John was that buffer between the two of you.

Because it allows you the freedom to be able to ask those difficult questions but without that worry of upsetting that person and then leaving them when you've asked them and walking away which I think is also a difficult place when you're a filmmaker to be in that space. But one of the other things I was interested in was thinking back on it and you see it beautifully in your film, when I grew up at the time there was what I would call a kind of loose cannon narrative attached to Sinead

Kathryn Ferguson

Absolutely.

Angela Clarke

Which I think is unfair because when you see her in the film, people made it out as if she was wild said things and didn't think about things and actually, I think that she was the complete opposite. She was very considered and very well-read and very well-educated, also at a time pre-internet when remember you were having to go and find books, it wasn't that you can just do a quick and dirty Google search to find things....

Kathryn Ferguson

(laughs) Um, yes, yeah, very much so.

Angela Clarke

She was a well-read person, she spent time speaking to people and I think by having that loose cannon narrative, it makes her seem like she's a lot more impetuous and a lot less considered. And in the film and in her interview as a mature adult now, you get that sense she's so different from that. There was something beautiful about the kind of juxtaposition of the interview that was recorded with her as a mature adult now and the kind of almost bird like whisper interviews that she gave in some of those TV interviews.

Because when you saw her perform, as you said, you know she would be that mix of quiet whispery singing and then like this loud screaming, she had a real presence, or her look gave her a real presence. But then when you see in an interview sometimes it's almost like she was quite shy and quiet and her body language in some of those interviews was amazing, because it was almost like she was kind of folding in in herself. You also realize how small and tiny is as well, you know, just this tiny little slight thing that made a lot of noise.

But it just felt lovely to hear the weight in her voice as well as an adult, when she spoke. There's a real gravitas to her voice. I always thought she's got a beautiful speaking voice. And she's got a lovely turn of phrase when she says things and I just wondered like what was it like for you preparing for that master interview, because there's such an intimacy in it, you've got a beautiful intimacy in that conversation, and I thought how did you create that space and that feeling?

Kathryn Ferguson

I think I suppose with the questions, we'd been working on them for years by the time we were granted an interview which was I think around December 2019, we just knew exactly what we needed. We knew that we'd probably only get one shot at it. We wouldn't be going back and forth with her. It would be one go. We might be able to go back, but probably not, so it was trying to make sure it was very focused on what we said it would be. It wasn't veering off into other directions, it was very clear. I suppose with everything that we tried to do with both John and Sinéad was we did what we said we would do constantly. We didn't veer off at any point with anything. We very much stuck to the plan, and I think that probably was somewhat comforting or reassuring. Obviously, Sinéad has been and with many, many journalists and had many horrible experiences which would make her very aware of the interview situation and mainly not enjoying it very much, because of how she's been treated by the press.

Angela Clarke

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Kathryn Ferguson

So, there was all of that to be very considerate of as well. I mean it was done over a long weekend in Dublin. I suppose it was just done in a very calm, slow way. We just wanted to hear her thoughts on these events from this new perspective, as you say, as a mature woman, looking back thirty years prior. It was tricky because I suppose when we got the interview back, there's quite a few bits we thought crikey, we should have asked a bit more. You know there are bits missing here, I think that was our initial response. But then thinking we probably can't go back and get another one. But when we really started listening to it, and started to script it into the film, which is what we did, we dissected it and put it into a script so that she obviously then narrates the story, I just don't think we realized how special it was until we were able to actually lay it all out.

Because there were so many interviews of her that existed, we could have just Frankensteined it with like 50 other sources, from all different eras. But just having this this one, continuous gravelly early 50s voice of Sinéad looking back and yeh the intimacy and how candid she is. She's just very clear-minded, confident and everything she says makes utter sense. It just felt like, I think we realized that we had this very special thing really. We hadn't planned for that to be the hook that we hung everything off initially. But then once we got it into the edit, it became clear that it was. At one point we were going to try and use, we got access I think to a 5-hour VH1 interview which is also excellent but from 20 years ago. It's brilliant and I suppose at one point we thought we might use some of that to tell the story because again it was it was a really brilliant interview but we decided then just to scrap everything else and just use our interview for

a contemporary perspective and then when you see her appear on screen, she's of the age during the era that we're focusing on. There's a clear distinction between the two yeah.

Angela Clarke

But I think that's what works really beautifully with it because she's got a sense of calm and a kind of authority in her voice as a mature artist and because as you say she's so articulate, she's so candid, she's so reflective that it feels like she'd taken a moment and was given breath to look back in on her story with kind of fresh eyes herself. So I think that made the archive feel really special in a way because you were kind of just watching this tiny bird at the start of our journey and that's what she sometimes felt like when you saw it in those interviews, she just looked so tiny and frail, but had all this passion and had all this kind of anger and hurt and pain and everything. It just felt like the weight of her voice then kind of lent itself to go she's been on a big journey and come out the other side of it and made peace with some things along the way. I think that was beautiful.

Kathryn Ferguson

Well, I love the line she says about the ripping of the Pope and Saturday Night Live being the proudest thing that she ever did you know. This one thing so many people thought was the end of her and the ruining of her career and I just love that stoic you know, round up at the end that it was the thing she was most proud of in her life. And I just think people need to hear that.

Angela Clarke

Yeah, and she said like they tried to bury her and but they were just planting the seed kind of thing, she was so eloquent as well like...

Kathryn Ferguson

Yeah, so eloquent.

Angela Clarke

Yeah, because she got such beautiful lyrics and she's got that lovely kind of like Irish turn of phrase as well. Sometimes when she says things, it's just like a kind of poetry.

Kathryn Ferguson

Oh yeah, yeah, she's also funny and I think she was always painted as so self-righteous and earnest, but she had a filthy sense of humour. She just had a real irreverence about her which I just I loved, and I suppose even at the memorial sadly in the summer, meeting a couple of her oldest friends and them saying that was what they loved about the film so much was the humour. But they said they would be watching at the cinema laughing their legs off, but people would be staring at them because they wouldn't get it, but they knew that was her humour, her offbeat humour is what made her.

Angela Clarke

Yeah, yeah, yeah, she got a very wry since a humour hasn't she, a bit kind of mickey taking?

Kathryn Ferguson

But yeah, she yeah, did and so it was lovely to hear that.

Angela Clarke

No, it was beautiful. How soon after you doing that mastered interview because obviously you know all the other interviews that you have, that support and bolster her story are all from her inner circle, close friends, people that she worked with in close conjunction. At what point in the process, you've obviously got this big meaty interview from her herself, when did you start to do interviews with John and the other people, to kind of piece the jigsaw together?

Kathryn Ferguson

I'd say throughout the following year. So yeah, basically Covid hit which put a real halt to things. I also had my first baby which put a big halt to things. So really, for the next year we were locked inside. And all we really could do were contributor interviews, and we did them like we were doing now, so we would do them remotely. What was fantastic for us was you know it was at one moment a real panic, in terms of what the hell were we going to do with the film in general because of Covid. But then we realized so many of the contributors that we wanted to talk to were also locked inside their houses with nothing to do and we thought well this is a perfect time to be approaching people and convincing them to get on board with our film, they've nothing else to do which was the truth, and we really went for it then throughout that year

Angela Clarke

No excuses, yeah.

Kathryn Ferguson

We gathered up our key interviews remotely as VO. We'd always known it was going to be VO interviews only and not talking heads. So, we just really used that time to our advantage. Also really from the very beginning, starting to get the film funded, any tiny pot of money we got in the early years, we would bring in our archive producer Joe Stones who would be going out and beginning to troll all the archive houses for pre-existing footage. So really both of those things were happening and by the time we began the edits in January 2021, we had probably 60/70% of our archive ready. We had most of the contributor interviews done. We had a master interview from Sinead, so we had a lot to be getting going with. I mean there was still an awful lot to gather up, more contributors to speak to, and more archive and then the shoot itself and for the recon's that I created. So that all happened throughout the edit period, but really, we went in with a lot already there.

Angela Clarke

Well, that's what I wanted to ask you next really about the edit and is it Mick? Have I made that up, I suddenly thought I'd got the name wrong there? Yeah, because I watched the Doc Society Q&A session when it went out, I can't remember when that was, a year or so ago whenever it was. But I remember Mick saying how you kind of cut it like a podcast to begin with and I was thinking when I then started to take a deeper dive

into your work and obviously the short stuff that you'd done were all so visual I thought like how did you feel about that in the edit? Did that take a bit to get your head round because it seems like a slightly different way of how you maybe would have worked up to that point?

Kathryn Ferguson

It is, like kind of, but isn't though. I mean yes, it was in that it went on longer than I hoped it would and we had a black timeline for many months whilst getting the story beats down, but I think even with my short docs that's what I've been doing as well. Cutting them like a radio doc and then bringing the pictures in when they were ready. But yeah, I mean we really were in that kind of radio doc world or podcast for about four or five months and just you know kept going and going with the story itself. So, by the time we were able to start bringing all of the visuals in, I remember that feeling like a real joyous moment to be able to start decorating it and bringing it to life. I had done it previously, but it was long, but it worked.

I mean it was much simpler to be able to hear the story, and to think was it working for us then to be able to keep scripting and rescripting until it was right? And because we'd had so much of the archive being sourced as I said in the years prior, I kind of knew exactly what I wanted to put in, so it wasn't a panic then when we were at the end of that part of the process. It was like let's just start breaking all this down now. I had earmarked obviously everything that I thought might work. But then what was interesting, even when we did get all the existing footage in, I suppose that's why the recon had to happen, because there were huge swathes of black, that nothing existed for. Huge swathes like 20-minute blocks at points where there was just nothing there, it didn't exist apart from maybe the odd photograph. And that was where we had to think creatively about how to bring it together as a cinematic film.

Angela Clarke

Yeah, that's what's going to ask you as well. In a way, I know that you've spoken about how you wanted to shoot maybe some on 16mm and VHS to be in keeping with the archive footage that you already had. But I wondered how much of a challenge was that given that your background in advertising I'm assuming, you maybe didn't do as much in terms of filming like that, you'd been using digital footage where you've obviously got that immediacy of being able to see the work straight away. What was that process like for you? Did you enjoy that? Or was that challenge?

Kathryn Ferguson

Oh I mean I loved it. I drove that. I mean I'd spent so many years in as I said, even at the Royal College of Art making these experimental shorts and running around with VHS and attempting to work with 16mm. So, for me, it was just such a joy to be able to go back to that on this large-scale project. It felt ridiculous that I was able to do that. Of course, we also shot on the Alexa's because we had to, but that was a joyous part of it for sure. It just felt like I was getting to be more experimental again, and on this project that meant so much to me, so it felt great. I suppose for me I mean the reason for using it all as you mentioned was to try and make it as immersive as possible in that era. I didn't want you to be constantly taken out into contemporary digital footage, when

everything then, it was quite a scrappy era, with all the MTV archive, you know there is a scrappiness to it, and I just really wanted to be able to mirror that back in what we shot.

Angela Clarke

Yeah, and I think also as well the other thing in terms of the archive that you had and obviously, I know there was buckets of TV archive, but the archive that I really loved was like the wedding video of her teacher is amazing.

Kathryn Ferguson

Um, yeah, that's beautiful.

Angela Clarke

And I loved the behind-the-scenes video footage of the *Nothing Compares* shoot. Like those shots, it's insane isn't it. You forget how powerful something is when you do remove the sound of things. Because what I loved with that, was just watching her face and that video which obviously everyone remembered at the time because she's got those amazing big, massive eyes that stare through your soul, through the other side kind of thing. But what was beautiful is that because her voice is so gorgeous, I think sometimes you forget - just staring at her face and watching her eyes, you could see her going into the headspace of right, I'm back on.

It looked like the footage was just rolling all the time and you could see her between the shots where she's like 'I'm on' and I'm doing the video now and then shots when she's kind of drifting in and out, and you could almost see her brain tick in those shots. There was just something so beautiful about that because you just got a sense of how fragile she was. You think you've stripped everything else away, and you're just watching her, and she was just so engaging and I just thought I think that's what made her so powerful as a singer, you were kind of mesmerized by her when she sings.

Kathryn Ferguson

Yeah.

Angela Clarke

You know and it always felt like she was just singing to you and not the room full of people round about. That piece for me was just amazing to kind of peep behind that scene, because that video had become so iconic, hadn't it?

Kathryn Ferguson

Absolutely and we were just so privileged to be able to use the rushes, you know. I mean you know John Maybury as a filmmaker was also a huge hero of mine as a teenager, so it was just getting the chance to look behind the curtain of that work as well. It was extraordinary.

Angela Clarke

Yeah, yeah, it was amazing. And so what was it like for you at Sundance, when after all these years, not just the 4 years you've been making the film but those years going back to you as a kid listening to her music, and then you dabbling with the stems back in

2011, what was that like for you all that time later being in Sundance did that just feel so surreal?

Kathryn Ferguson

It did but it was very tricky because basically we got into Sundance, and I mean yeah I remember the call from the Sundance team. Just a real good night, it will be one of the happiest moments of my life. It was just such a surprise and such joy. Such a joyful moment. But then what followed was a couple of months of just sheer hell in the lead up to Sundance. You know we had the issue about the rights over *Nothing Compares To You* for the song, which was an ongoing battle that lasted months and didn't get anywhere, which was very disappointing.

And then Sundance itself. It was the year of Omnicron so it went digital, so we didn't get to go. We were all booked to go out there, but it became a digital festival which luckily didn't affect the film but was just extremely disappointing as we were all excited to be able to go and to be with this for our first feature. But all of it paled into complete and utter insignificance weeks before the festival, when her son passed away. It was a very unbelievable and traumatic time. Obviously with the film itself, we weren't sure whether to go ahead and screen it at all. We were going to pull it out of the festival completely, but the thinking from the estate was very much it would just be a double tragedy for it not to screen.

Angela Clarke

Not to air...yeah...

Kathryn Ferguson

Because it was so in her corner, and it needs to be shown. So, we kind of went ahead, well it went ahead but we stepped down as a film team and kind of stood out of Sundance, but the film screened and it was just a very surreal time for this being my first film to know what to feel, it was very distressing, it was very bad. But then really, I suppose, what became apparent immediately, and it really was immediately, the film screened on a Friday night, LA time which is a middle of our night, and we were lucky that we had an excellent publicist who'd been working on it with us months prior which meant that it had something like 50 reviews that were embargoed.

So they all came out the second after the premiere at Sundance and there were suddenly 50 reviews of the film from all over America, and luckily 98% of them were very positive so that happened immediately. I suppose that told us that the film was going to be okay, that part of it had been received in the right way, so that was very emotional for us as filmmakers to read that, and to see that people got it and that they understood what we were trying to say. There wasn't any confusion about it. There were some stupid reviews as there always are, (*laughs*) but most of them just really got her and got what the point of it was and what we were trying desperately to communicate through it.

And then really we had about three months just dealing with the fallout of what had happened, and I was just so desperately worried about her. It was very hard to know

what to feel about any of it. Then I suppose the film then had its European premiere at the end of March 22, so two years ago and we did go to that one and we screened it, but that was terrifying, terrifying. I didn't know what to say about it, I didn't know what to think about it. And I think a lot of the first year of the film was like, not knowing what to say or think but just trying to put one step in front of the other and keep getting it out. Just to stay with it, to protect it, and making sure that everything I was doing was the right thing with John in this very delicate situation and just to keep going with it.

And then I started to get beautiful messages from her in the early autumn of 2022 and just beautiful, beautiful messages, about what it meant to her, that it was there, that it was out. And just one example was when the film was sold to an American platform Showtime at Sundance and they were then pushing out their marketing for launching on Showtime and basically I remember of friend who was in New York at the time, I remember I was in the woods somewhere in the middle of England with my four year old and my friend sent me a picture saying and have you seen this? And I thought what, and I opened up the picture and it was a gigantic billboard of our poster which is just Sinead's big beautiful face on a massive billboard in the middle of Times Square.

Angela Clarke

Wow.

Kathryn Ferguson

Just staring down at Times Square. It's giving me chills even thinking about it. And it just hit me, there and then, like this is surely, that was surely the first time her image had even appeared in Times Square since there were steamrollers steamrolling over her records...

Angela Clarke

Um, yeah, yeah, I remember that? Yeah yeah.

Kathryn Ferguson

In the days after she ripped up the Pope on Saturday Night Live and it just felt so potent and so profound that there she was again. And she loved that and her messages, she thought it was hilarious. She thought it was great and that's where it became a lot more fun, I think. When I knew that she was really getting something positive from all of this. Because obviously everything was positive the thank God all the reviews were positive. She'd read everything and she'd been really supportive before we started speaking about it and she'd been posting on her Facebook about all the different good reviews that had come out, so she was really proud of it throughout that period, but it was just, I don't know I suppose once I really started to talk to her about it, that was around the time of the premiers. The cinema premiers in Ireland and the UK I just felt absolutely bulletproof because I thought right, let's do this because she really wants this to keep going and I'm going to go at it a million percent now and I felt like that was where I could really start to take ownership with it and talk about it openly. I think I'd been quite frozen prior to that with all that had happened.

Angela Clarke

Yeah, well she'd had such a lot of mud thrown at her in her youth that had already life scars and wounds anyway so it's always difficult isn't it because even if you, which you did, treat her with respect and treated the people around her with respect, you can never control what happens once a film was entered the ether can you?

Kathryn Ferguson

No, no.

Angela Clarke

That's the thing she was still to some people a divisive character even though the film I think through the film you'd be hard pushed not to agree that she was dealt a crappy hand let's be honest, by the press along the years and how things have got misconstrued and misunderstood. But that said, it's always feels vulnerable when you're putting yourself in that position because you are at the mercy of whatever people say and that's bad enough never mind what then happened with her in her private life at that time...

Kathryn Ferguson

Unbelievable.

Angela Clarke

Which is unimaginable to begin with isn't it.

Kathryn Ferguson

Definitely.

Angela Clarke

But at the same time, I'm glad that it was so well received and that it kind of gave her the chance to finally kind of reclaim that narrative back from that period and for people to acknowledge her as the hero that she was...

Kathryn Ferguson

Totally...

Angela Clarke

You know and that weirdly obviously that all happened before I guess what nobody could see come was to her untimely death the following year type of thing, that whole period just feels like it was, it was so bonkers wasn't it?

Kathryn Ferguson

Yeah.

Angela Clarke

And it feels tragically kind of in keeping with the kind of peaks and troughs that have happened in her life, like early on something good happens and then tragedy happened you know, it kind of seems like it never just goes her way, where something

good happens and just something else good happens. It always feels like there's one step forward and kind of two steps back doesn't it.

But in a way I suppose the good thing is that you know that she was happy with that film and the legacy that that film will leave, and I guess I wonder how many people have seen it now from younger generations that probably didn't know of her really.

Kathryn Ferguson

Yeah, well I think a lot actually and sadly I think because of the bizarre circumstances of the film finally going on television in the UK and Ireland, it was meant to be out last Christmas, and there had been lots of delays for lots of reasons and it finally was booked in for the end of July and she died three days before its release which was just unbelievable, unbelievably harrowing all over again, just unbelievable and but I think what it meant is that because of the timing, so many eyes were on it.

So many eyes people that hadn't heard of her, people that didn't know her, they wanted to know why everyone was making this fuss about this woman and then the film just appeared because it was always going to appear on that day and I mean I think so many young people saw and what I always just find so beautiful about all of the screenings that I've done and the Q&A's is the young people that would come up to me with their fists clenched and their eyes flashing just almost with their jaws on the ground being like how did I not know about her? How did she slip me by? I mean especially today, she's such a contemporary icon for so many reasons. I mean she's so relevant for everything that she said, she did, she wore. All of it.

Young people today are just absolutely flabbergasted by her in the best possible way and that's been beautiful because I think that's really who I made it for. It was for young women and not just women. It was for young people who need someone like her to look up to, like I desperately needed as a young teenager grown up in Belfast in the early 90s. I wanted that to be available for people today.

Angela Clarke

Yeah, but as you say as well even older audiences or people like me that had grown up with her and as I say because you've got a piecemeal memory of things that happened at the time. Just to remember how amazing she was. I knew she was an amazing singer and an amazing performer and I knew that she had a very strong moral core and all these values that she stood up for, but you forget just with the passage of time how much she stood up for it and I think that was what was so beautiful, you think there was literally nothing she didn't cover.

Kathryn Ferguson

Yeah, yeah, yeah. No.

Angela Clarke

You know when you think about it, all the people that she stood up for across the board and not just people that were in her immediate kind of wheelhouse of experience, all

outside of that as well which in and of itself was amazing. I think you know in a way it's great that all of that is there now for people to kind of you know...

Kathryn Ferguson

Um I hope so I hope so yeah.

Angela Clarke

To enjoy and watch for posterity type of thing. But yeah what had happened was just almost so unbelievable in and of itself as you say, the timing and everything else is just, that must have been really such a surreal period for you and the family and everybody else around it, to kind of almost build to this moment where finally we're going to see her in a different light and hopefully people treat her better and then for everything to happen.

But at least I hope that what people said about her and the outpouring that happened after her passing kind of showed how many people there were on the ground whose lives she touched, and who held her in high regard. I think that was the lovely thing about it in terms of it's easy to forget when you only ever see the media or the press that's only one dimension of things isn't it, and there's so many other people that are thinking my feeling about that is completely different to the narrative that was portrayed for her.

Kathryn Ferguson

Ah, 100%. And I think you know as I mentioned the young people at the screenings, but I feel like there was always three tiers of audience members at all the screenings. There were the young ones, who I loved, there were the fans who were great but obviously it's preaching to the converted, they already knew all of this and loved her. But then what was so fascinating was the third tier who would have just, and so many people, that had blatantly been naysayers and had believed the press, had believed the narrative around her would always want to come up and were always very contemplative, looking at their shoes, trying to make sense of what they'd just seen, and really wanting to talk about it.

Because they were trying to make sense as they were talking to me about how they'd been so gullible as well, to this narrative and why they'd also been that person saying she was she was mad and bad. And I just found it fascinating I loved talking to them because I liked their honesty, so many people wanted to talk it through. There were plenty of them and I think that is what makes me the happiest of all really is knowing that it's changed people's perspectives and hopefully created a much more authentic narrative around her.

Angela Clarke

Well, that's the best-case scenario isn't it, for what film can achieve. I think with a shadow of doubt that film has done that. Well look it's been so lovely to speak to you today, I'm appreciative of your time and your honesty as well. I can't wait to see what you make next I'm really looking forward to it.

Kathryn Ferguson

Thank you. Yes, a new a new film hopefully coming out in the next few months, so fingers crossed.

Angela Clarke

Woohoo! Fingers crossed for a nice easy ride for this one. That's what you want!

Kathryn Ferguson

Oh, my goodness, yes please. It was an easy production thankfully so at least that's something. Touch wood, touch wood, yes please. But look it's lovely chatting to you as well. Thank you so much.

Angela Clarke

Ah thank you so much for coming on, much appreciated.

Kathryn Ferguson

Not at all, cheers.

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