# Frequently Asked Questions

**What’s the film about?**

It’s a romantic/social coming of age drama set in a northern coal-mining town in 1974; a young artist falls in love with the new girl from London but their relationship causes problems with his family and community. It explores community, friendship, first loves and teenage rebellion and is one boy’s search for validation in relation to these issues.

**How did you find the cast?**

They’re from the North East but mostly work in London. It was a bit strange going all the way to London to audition a bunch of Geordies all week but it was really worth the effort. Jennifer is beautiful, Lyndsey had previously been hired by Kevin Spacey and Andy Black is really versatile, able to do the Billy Elliot musical and then pull off the heartbreaking depths of the character in Young Hearts Run Free.

There are some great performances in the film, how do you go about working with your actors?

Many directors ignore this aspect but I think working with actors is vital and one of my strengths as a director. Getting the right actors in the first place is half the job done but you still need to do the other half. This means doing a huge amount of preparation really exploring the complexities and depths of the script and finding many different ways of giving direction, adapting to how each actor works. The main thing is to be interested and to care; I just about fall in love with the characters in the script and with the actors playing them.

**Where did the idea come from?**

I started writing the idea several years ago when I was a teenager and I’ve drawn from my own experiences. The sense of pride and identity growing up in Northumberland is one of my favourite things in the world and I wanted to celebrate it but it can also be very frustrating living here, especially if you want to be an artist or a film-maker. My natural inclination towards nostalgia made me wonder if it would have been the same for my parent’s generation and I realised these frustrations would be magnified and more dramatic in a 1970s setting.

It’s a period film, a large cast, dozens of locations and a riot! How did you manage on a low budget?

Without wanting to offend anyone, parts of South East Northumberland look like 1970s mining towns anyway! The Pit top scenes were filmed at the fantastic Woodhorn museum in my home town and we went to the Scottish Mining Museum for the scenes at the coal-face. It took a great deal of lateral thinking and creativity for some issues and we always had a small and mobile crew. I owe people some huge favours too. We also had the help and support of the local community and councils and this was very important.

**Are there parallels with today’s economic situation?**

There are parallels with the economic situation today but I also think the themes of teenage rebellion, friendship and first loves are timeless.

**Strangely your degree is in History and Politics, how has that influenced this film?**

Well I spent most of my uni time doing film stuff anyway but studying politics helped inform the background of the film and there are some relevant debates about living under a crumbling 1970s economy but this film is more about the characters and their relationships. I’m more interested in people than in politics.

**Who are your influences?**

I love all sorts of films. Joe Wright is my favourite current director. The 1940s was my favourite decade for cinema with Italian Neo-realism, British directors such as Lean and Powell and also Hollywood Golden Age classics. ‘It’s A Wonderful Life’ is my favourite film.

It’s largely from my own experiences but some other influences are fairly apparent in Young Hearts Run Free, such as ‘Billy Elliot’ and Ken Loach films, though there were also literary influences such as Thomas Hardy novels ‘The Return Of The Native’ and ‘Far From The Madding Crowd’.

**The film has a unique distribution strategy doesn’t it?**

We’re doing a series of one-off screenings, touring around the country, with some venues having a longer run. We want to give the audience a greater experience so each screening will have a Q&A session for audiences to learn more about any aspect of the filmmaking process or to discuss the mining history or political issues raised.

**What’s next for you?**

Young Hearts Run Free is hitting cinemas so I’ll be doing promotions and Q&A sessions and I’m writing two more features and have recently directed a short film which is a slightly grittier romantic/social drama. Young Hearts Run Free has been seen as a great accomplishment and doors are beginning to open.

Working on