

Official Selection

tiff

Toronto International
Film Festival 2019

A FILM BY HARRY CEPKA

RAF



logline

Raf paints walls pink. Raf sees no future for herself. Raf meets Tal. Tal is charismatic. Tal is rich. Tal changes everything.

synopsis

A techno-laced exploration of a tumultuous friendship from its giddy beginning to its sudden end. In the twilight of her 20s, Raf works two jobs and spends her free time playing boardgames with her boyfriend's roommates. Privately, she fantasizes of a life of performance and dance clubs. Over the course of several charged encounters, she becomes friends with a charismatic and wealthy woman named Tal. Raf becomes infatuated with Tal's take-no-prisoners lifestyle. With Tal as her guide, Raf begins to see a new vision of herself, until a humiliating weekend at Tal's country home reveals the true power balance between them.

I used to have a fantasy of having a twin, but one that is one year older than me and one degree more outgoing, more interesting, richer, more admired than I was in real life. In a year's time, she reassured me, I would be living in scenarios of lavish wealth and sexy relationships and semi-dangerous adventures. She would tell me that good things are coming.

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Gradually, as I got older, my twin faded. I developed adult relationships, a moderately combative spirit when I needed it, I got better or more comfortable at sex, I drank and smoked sometimes. I worked. I occasionally felt young and cool and that seemed ok to me.

— Raf (opening monologue)

director's note

Raf is the culmination of five years of blood, sweat, and tears shed while living and studying film in New York. The film itself sprang from my long-term friendships with lead actors Grace Glowicki and Jesse Stanley. I wrote the script specifically for Grace and Jesse; I knew that they would have natural comedic chemistry, and that their unique talents and eccentricities would lead us into unknown and exciting dramatic territory. For *Raf*, I was looking to straddle the line between skilled performance and natural spontaneity, and tried to achieve an uncomfortable balance between humour and severity. We worked with the idea of games: for instance, I directed Jesse to ask Grace a hundred questions for a scene which was meant to depict them bonding. The results were hilarious and unpredictable in just the way I was hoping for. We worked this way in many of the scenes and I was always delighted with the results. Much of the film was shot with active collaboration between the three of us and the same result could never have been achieved without our friendships at the foundation of the work.

Raf is my first feature film. It is an exploration of what happens when someone who feels lost meets someone with too much charisma to go around. It is an experiment in chemistry between two amazing actors. It is an attempt to depict the end of youth and express the feeling that one's options may narrow as one ages. It is a plea to escape that feeling, and its ambiguous end might suggest an ongoing search.

production notes

Principal photography took place over 13 days in January 2018 on a budget of \$25,000. We shot with 8 crew members, 8 actors, 28 extras, and 8 locations in Harry's hometown of Vancouver and Chemainus, where we stayed in Harry's childhood home and where his parents cooked for us and refilled our wine glasses at night.

Every member of our crew is a filmmaker in the broadest sense — writers and directors who deploy their array of talents to support each other's projects, whether as an editor or sound mixer or production designer. Seven of the eight of us attended NYU's graduate film program and have worked consistently in reciprocal roles for one another for the past five years. Sara, our Canadian producer, who has a similar band of creatives in Vancouver, blended immediately and seamlessly with the group. Grace and Jesse, our lead cast, were heavily involved in the production process too — costume shopping, taking charge of their own hair and makeup, and helping out whenever they saw someone who needed it. Even within our roles — or three for Zama, our AC/Grip/Gaffer — everybody did a bit of everything and succeeding on such a minute budget was down to the whole team's talent, attitude, and tireless work.

Post production was an extension of this process, though now divided across countries and time zones — Vancouver, Toronto, New York, Los Angeles, London, Berlin...the list goes on. Friends gave us feedback at bicoastal screenings as some amazing new collaborators came on board; Casey MQ, our composer; Eli Cohn, our sound designer; and Kath Raisch at Company 3, who have supported the project since pre-production and the crew on many previous projects.

Everything about *Raf* has been a labour of love, infused in the film's distinct look and feel, complementing the story Harry wanted to tell.

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It was important for me to situate Raf in Vancouver, the place where I was born and raised. As soon as I left the city at age 18, I developed a prolonged nostalgia for it; I always thought about moving back and would check the local news online almost every day for years. What struck me, while I sleuthed through local journalism, was the city's primary news obsession: rising house prices. These stories would break weekly and would always say the same thing. Once I had moved well into my twenties, I understood that rent increases affected most of my peers in Vancouver and all over the continent; everything was becoming less affordable. The constant increase in cost of living and the correlating destruction and rebuilding of houses felt like an appropriate backdrop for a story of desperation and longing.

— Harry Cepka



Harry Cepka

writer and director



Harry Cepka lived in Vancouver, Montreal and Toronto and worked in small-press publishing before moving to New York to pursue his MFA in film directing. He has screened his short film work at VIFF and DOXA in Vancouver, as well as various smaller venues in New York, and has also taught in NYU's graduate film program. As an editor, Harry's work has screened at Slamdance, Palm Springs and New Orleans.

He is currently writing his second feature, also a collaboration with Grace Glowicki, for which he received a Canada Council development grant.



Grace Glowicki

Raf

Grace Glowicki is a Canadian filmmaker & actor. In 2016, Grace was awarded a Sundance Special Jury Award for Outstanding Performance for her role in *Her Friend Adam*, and was later named a 2016 TIFF Rising Star. She has co-created / starred in films which have played at Sundance, Slamdance, SXSW, Tribeca & more. Recently she made *Tito*, her feature-length directorial debut in which she also stars. The film premiered at South By Southwest and won the Adam Yauch Hornblower Award. The New Yorker called it “an instant classic of acting.”

Jesse Stanley

Tal

Jesse Stanley is a Vancouver-born actress. She studied at Ryerson Theatre School and holds a masters degree from Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (London, UK). Jesse has performed in theatre productions nationally and abroad. She recently wrapped her third season as a series regular on *Van Helsing* [Netflix/Syfy]. Thanks to the BC Arts Council’s Media Arts grant, Jesse’s first solo-venture as a producer, *Benny’s Best Birthday*, is now in post-production and is currently in preproduction for her first feature length film, set to shoot in 2020.



Sara Blake

Producer

Sara is a Vancouver based producer with a passion for sharing peculiar stories bolstered by distinct visuals.

Her producing credits include feature film *Raf* (2019) and a collection of shorts: *Deady Freddy* (2019), *Cosmic* (2019), *Loretta's Flowers* (2018) and *Medical Drama* (2018). Sara's work has been supported by Telefilm Canada, Harold Greenberg Fund, NFB, and Canada Council for the Arts.

Currently, Sara is in post-production on the feature film *Be Still* and is in development on *Invasions*.

Charlotte Wells

Producer

Charlotte Wells is a director and producer based in New York and London. She has written and directed three short films — *Tuesday* (2015), *Laps* (2016), and *Blue Christmas* (2017) — and produced many more.

Charlie is a graduate of the MBA/MFA dual-degree program at NYU where she was supported by BAFTA New York and Los Angeles.

She was featured in Filmmaker Magazine's "25 Faces of Independent Film" 2018.

Gregory Oke

Cinematographer

Gregory Oke grew up in rural Herefordshire (UK) before winning a scholarship to attend NYU Tisch's Graduate Film Program.

A love of film production as a whole has seen him work in almost every department from boom operating on German soap operas to production designing Scottish period pieces. His cinematography work has screened internationally at a host of festivals including Sundance, TIFF, and SXSW.

He now lives and works as a sound recordist in Germany.

Blair McClendon

Editor

Blair McClendon is a filmmaker and editor who was born in California but is based in New York. He works in documentary, fiction, and experimental film. In 2018 he was a mentee in the Karen Schmeer Diversity in the Edit Program and attended the Sundance Doc Edit Labs as a Contributing Editor in 2017. The films he has edited have screened at Cannes, Sundance, TIFF, Tribeca and elsewhere around the world.

Casey MQ

Composer

Casey MQ is a Canadian composer, songwriter, musician and record producer from Toronto. Casey's music blurs between ambient productions and melancholic soul, distorted club music and electronic pop.

With time spent as a composer-in-residence at the Canadian Film Centre, Casey has subsequently gone on to compose original music for a number of films that have screened at TIFF, SXSW, & Hot Docs Film Festival including *Firecrackers*, *Mary Goes Round* and *Tito*. In December 2017, Casey MQ released a collaborative EP with Paris-based artist 'oklou' entitled 'For The Beasts'. The EP is a reimagining of pop-star vocal samples in a mutated form. It is a celebration of darkness and light.

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Working on Raf was a fascinating experience for me. I worked on the score while on a European tour and a bulk of the score was written during an extended time in Berlin. Isolating myself in makeshift studios to work on this film, at times knowing nobody in the cities I was in, created this cathartic outlet for me to express electronic dance music that truly connected with Raf. Sometimes I would attend or perform at club nights in these cities with barely a word spoken to another person. The parallels that came about while working with Harry I think really made for interesting results.

— Casey MQ



technical specifications

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|--------------------|--------------------|
| Original Title | Raf |
| Original Language | English |
| Genre | Drama/Comedy |
| Total Running Time | 91 minutes |
| Shooting Format | ARRI Alexa, Colour |
| Aspect Ratio | 1.85 |
| Sound Format | Dolby 5.1 |
| Projection Format | DCP |
| Production Country | Canada/USA |
| Shooting Location | Vancouver |
| Year | 2019 |

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|------------------|-------------------|
| Teenage Boys | Sam Krochmal |
| Catcaller Friend | Jaafar Al-tameemi |
| Work Colleague | Jesse Irving |
| School Colleague | Mike Haley |
| Pedestrian | Luke Christensen |
| Catcaller Heroes | Joanne Sawatzky |
| | Callan Hoffman |
| | Matthew Harvey |

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|-------------|--------------------|
| Raf | Grace Glowicki |
| Tal | Jesse Stanley |
| Roger | Harry Cepka |
| Scott | Victor Dolhai |
| Alfred | Alexis Teliszewsky |
| Ed | Ed Cepka |
| Irma | Katie Burrell |
| Bar Dude | Trevor Mitchell |
| Mr. Crispin | Ken Scott |
| Catcaller | Darren Andrichuk |
| Homies | Tetsu Takagaki |

cast

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|-----------------------------------|--------------------|
| Sound Designer/Re-recording Mixer | Eli Cohn |
| | Ben Chesneau |
| | Lucas Sanoff |
| | Maya Peart |
| | Nocturnal Sound |
| | Kath Raisch |
| Picture Finishing provided by | Company 3 New York |

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|----------------------|-----------------------|
| Writer and Director | Harry Cepka |
| Producer | Sara Blake |
| | Charlotte Wells |
| Cinematographer | Gregory Oke |
| Assistant Camera | Zamarin Wahdat |
| Assistant Director | Joseph Sackett |
| Production Designer | Marian Mathias |
| Sound Mixer | Joseph Sackett |
| Key Grip/Gaffer | Zamarin Wahdat |
| Production Assistant | Johara “Jo” Boukabous |
| Life Guard | Daina Baker |
| Catering | Heather Crichton |
| | Ed Cepka |
| Editor | Blair McClendon |
| | Harry Cepka |
| Music Composer | Casey MQ |
| | Eli Cohn |
| | Ben Chesneau |
| | Lucas Sanoff |
| | Maya Peart |
| | Nocturnal Sound |
| | Kath Raisch |
| | Company 3 New York |

crew

contact

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