**SYNOPSIS**

*Verity's Summer* is a contemporary drama set in the haunting coastal landscape of Northumberland. When a stranger comes to town, 16-year-old Verity must confront her father and the secrets surrounding his time in Iraq; secrets which threaten to tear her family apart.

An intimate coming of age story about 'safe' middle class values that asks: Should people seek the truth about their country's involvement in war? Or should they hide from it? Can it ever be 'nothing to do with us?'

**COMMENTS FROM AUDIENCE TEST SCREENING**

(Bournemouth, January 2011)

"Beautiful, atmospheric, tense" (Female/25)

"An exploration of a side of society not often looked at. Very well depicted." (Male/25)

"Excellent – the sadness of humans, the uplifting beauty of the world. Great contrasts." (Male/52)

**ABOUT BEN**

*Verity's Summer* is Ben's debut feature. His first short, 'the man who met himself' was nominated for the Palme D'Or at Cannes in 2005. He has since made several other critically acclaimed short films and won numerous awards. In 2008 he was selected as a British Director participant at the Berlinale Talent Campus, and funded to attend by UK Skillset. He was nominated for the Anthony Minghella Best UK Short Film award (for *Bound*) in 2010.

Ben's short films belong to a cinema of ideas and sensations. With a visually poetic style, he uses images from the exterior world to evoke interior landscapes of memory, guilt and desire. *Verity's Summer* is a realist, character-driven drama enriched by his practice and understanding of the narrative power of imagery.

Ben’s documentary films include a series of shorts, *What would Jesus do?* for Channel 4 and several acclaimed campaign films for international NGOs. He recently filmed in Kenya and in Democratic Republic of Congo on a long-form documentary, looking at how foreign correspondents and photojournalists work. Ben is a founder of the documentary filmmaking collective, ERA Films.
DIRECTOR’S NOTES

Verity’s Summer is a film for our times. Away from the urban battlefields of Baghdad and Basra, far from the wilds of Afghanistan, questions are emerging on the British role in torture and war crimes. Both policy and personnel are implicated. Verity’s Summer purposely sets these ‘big issues’ and global themes in the intimate space of one UK-based family, in the quotidian, the civilian landscape.

It brings the conflict into the heart of a middle class British home, where war is usually considered the occupation of others.

It is also a coming of age story that takes the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan as a defining moment in our recent history and a driver of the seismic shifts in political attitudes amongst young people that are beginning to be felt.

The complex emotional and ethical issues are unraveled within a young woman’s personal discovery of the profound consequences of war: a war that touches her life, her imagination, her relationships, her sense of the possible, real and moral. The film focuses on the responsibility of the individual to bear witness and speak out against abuses of power.

Verity’s Summer suggests we have experienced a generational political failure by our politicians, institutions and democratic culture. Verity’s journey to maturity frames questions about how she can be and act in the wider world without causing violence to others.

The story is set on the beautiful Northumberland coast where I grew up. The wide horizons offer a dual sense of hope and isolation, whilst the ocean signifies both our insignificance and our connectedness.

I selected the locations for their power to tell this story. The bright plastic colours of the semi-urban, seaside town seem a different world to Verity’s fairytale walled garden, yet the presence of this man-made reality is signaled by Anne’s gaudy clothes-peg. The ruined structure where the ex-soldier makes his camp acts as a metaphor for his broken family, as well as allowing Jim the only space where he can come to terms with his past. For Verity the ocean is an ever-present friend as well as a challenge she has to face.

The Verity’s Summer team includes co-producer Emma Biggins, who is currently on Screen South’s prestigious ‘Develop, Connect, Produce...’ Scheme. My ongoing collaborator is script editor Preti Taneja, who has an MA in Creative Writing (with distinction) from Royal Holloway, London. Working with cinematographer Sara Deane allowed me to preserve the authentic colour palette of the locations. Sara brought a great team, attention to detail and sympathy to the dramatic action with a ‘natural lighting’ concept.

I developed the original music in collaboration with Greek composer/musician Alexandros Miaris. We found that an instrumentation of piano, guitar, cello and zither could move from a free spirited feeling to more haunting textures and tones as characters and landscape change. The music has elements of folk as well as Middle Eastern undertones that hint at the background themes.

Overall, I want to offer the audience a quiet but intense vision of complex emotions and relationships that are intricately bound up with world events. Verity’s journey leads to a moment of self-awareness that goes beyond knowing her father’s crimes, to realising that she is more than a daughter: she is an individual with her own future to shape.

Praise for Ben’s previous work:

the man who met himself (2005)

SF Said, the Daily Telegraph: "...a stylish and cerebral super8 mystery."

Cinema Netherlands: “One of the most remarkable (of the Cannes selection) is The Man Who Met Himself by the 27-year-old Englishman Ben Crowe.”

Broadcaster ARTE TV: “fascinating sound and visual montage”

je suis ici (2007)

Film magazine Littlewhitelies: "Deeply invested in place, as the title suggests, but never sliding into landscape porn despite its South of France location, it was full of startling images that actually stayed on screen long enough for the viewer to read, full of tangible images that awoke senses other than sight to memories of travel, full of magical transformations effected by graphic matches, full of imaginative juxtapositions between its classical soundtrack and contemporary images. In short, full."
CAST

INTRODUCING INDEA BARBE-WILLSON as VERITY

Verity’s Summer marks the screen debut of an exciting new acting talent. Ben selected Indea, 17, from dozens of hopefuls, and worked closely with her to bring Verity’s emotional journey to life. To this Indea adds her own sense of adventure, giving a nuanced performance as a middle class girl who must realise that her parents are fallible and fearful, and that their flaws have implications far beyond the safe confines of her childhood home.

James Doherty (Jim)
Ben elicits from James a restrained, complex performance of a man struggling to come to terms with his past, even if he might risk losing his family. James’ previous film roles include Armando Ianucci’s satire In the Loop, and he will shortly be playing a lead (Amos) in the West End production of Chicago.

Nicola Wright (Anne)
In her powerful depiction of Verity’s mother, Nicola draws on her well of experience in film, theatre and TV. She has appeared in work by acclaimed directors such as Kenneth Brannagh (in Peter’s Friends) and in dramas including The Bill and Silent Witness.

Martin McGlade (Castle)
Martin’s moving portrayal of a troubled ex-soldier was elicited over long conversations with Ben, who researched deeply into the lives of Britain’s returning soldiers and the way society perceives them. Martin immersed himself in the back-story of his character to accurately portray every detail, from the way he holds himself while talking to an officer, to how he folds his clothes by the fire before disappearing into the dark.

Christian Hogas (Karol)
Christian is well known as a TV and theatre actor and director in his native Romania. In 2010, he won the prestigious ICR London Attic Arts residency, directing fringe theatre in Camden and Edinburgh. He is a graduate of the National University of Drama and Film I.L. Caragiale Performing Arts department, Bucharest.

Jacqueline Phillips (Mrs Robertson the Pub landlady)
Jackie is an experienced TV and theatre actor, and appears regularly in many of Britain’s best loved Northern dramas including Doctors, 55 Degrees North and Spender.
**VERITY’S SUMMER: THE BACKGROUND ISSUES**

Ben spent months researching the background to Verity’s Summer talking directly to the families of service and ex-service people who have served in Iraq. They shared their stories of life back home and spoke particularly of the challenges of post-traumatic stress, and fitting back in to civilian life. Meanwhile, Ben was also working on documentaries for non-governmental organisations that brought him into contact with Iraqi refugees in Europe. They described the violence and torture they experienced first hand since the US-led invasion of Iraq began in 2003. Articles about the UK’s involvement in torture of Iraq prisoners and deaths of civilians started appearing in the British and international media as early as 2005; and in October 2010, after filming had wrapped on Verity’s Summer, the Iraq war logs, around 390,000 previously secret US-military files detailing the hidden realities of the war in Iraq, were exposed by Wikileaks.

**EXCERPTS FROM THE IRAQ WAR LOGS**

“Bringing Britain to book” Human Rights Lawyer Phil Shiner says, “As evidence of UK forces’ role in the killings of Iraqi civilians mounts, our government must face up to its responsibilities”... Precisely how many were killed will never be known partly because the US and UK did not consider it necessary to keep any public record....There is a huge body of evidence about killings, ill-treatment and torture of Iraqis while in custody with UK forces. We act for hundreds of Iraqis who complain of being subjected to deeply disturbing coercive interrogation techniques at the hands of a secret squad of UK interrogators. Insofar as the logs add to this body of evidence, it will help us to gain a single public inquiry into the UK’s detention policy.... As evidence of atrocities perpetrated in Iraq by UK forces continues to grow, we must act to ensure that our government faces up to its legal and moral responsibilities.

(Iraq war logs: guardian.co.uk, 23 Oct 2010)

“A British police mentor described entering the office of a notorious figure at the interior ministry and found a man with a bag over his head standing in the corner of the office...Later, when it was men in police uniforms who were doing the killing, reported in the Iraqi papers day after day, the official line was "anyone could buy a uniform" or that these were difficult times and there would be "bad apples." ...Why did we not investigate allegations of murder and torture in Iraq at the time, when it was well known what was going on? The most shocking of the revelations in the current batch of leaked Iraq war logs is that most of the acts of torture and murder were committed in the open. They weren’t secret. They were tolerated, sanitised – justified, even.”

(Peter Beaumont, the Guardian, 25 Oct, 2010)

**RETURNING SOLDIERS, HOMELESSNESS AND POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER**

“More than 17,000 troops are estimated to be suffering from anxiety and depression, and around 3,500 reservists are thought to be facing similar problems. Yet, between January 2003 and October 2006, only 2,123 military personnel received treatment for mental health conditions from the MoD; of these, 328 were diagnosed with PTSD.”


“Today 5,000 veterans are forced to live, abandoned and forgotten, on the streets....military charities expect the numbers to rocket as troops from Iraq and Afghanistan, many maimed, return to civvy street only to find the economic slump means they can’t get a job. Most homeless veterans are single men – meaning they languish at the bottom of housing waiting lists, despite laws that say they should get priority... Even veterans left traumatised by conflict and with children to support are refused help by over-stretched councils and housing associations.”

(Rupert Hamer, the Mirror, 10 Jan, 2009, http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/top-stories/2009/01/10/home-for-heroes-help-war-veterans-abandoned-on-our-streets-115875-21031108/)

www.veritys-summer.com
www.bencrowe.co.uk
www.multistoryfilms.co.uk

Contact:
Ben Crowe
bencrowe@bencrowe.co.uk
+44 (0)7810 650 854

Emma Biggins
emma@multistoryfilms.co.uk
+44 (0)7525 613 838

www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/oct/22/iraq-war-logs-introduction