

I MADE THIS FOR YOU

A film by Cristian Solimeno

A man who has cut himself off from his friends and family and has recently attempted suicide is surprised to find that people haven't given up on him after all. His best friend comes looking for him with a gift, a film made especially for him. *I Made This For You* is a uniquely told tale of friendship and love wherein a man called Al, (played by Gary Grant) receives a documentary made about his life by his worried friend (played by writer and director Cristian Solimeno). The film within a film is uniquely framed and the hybrid format mixes reality with fiction. As we watch Al, he watches the film. As he discovers what his life and his actions have really meant to those he loves, we discover who he is and how he came to this dark place, and at the end, hopefully, we all see a more positive way out.

I MADE THIS FOR YOU is a film written, directed and co-starred in by Cristian Solimeno, about a subject that is tragically more in the news now than it ever has been. As the title card that appears at the start of the film observes: "In the UK and Ireland more than 125 people will commit suicide this week."

A modern take on *It's A Wonderful Life*, the Frank Capra classic in which James Stewart's suicidal George Bailey is forced to watch his life and the effect he has on others, *I Made This For You* focuses on Al (Gary Grant) and his friend Danny's (Cristian Solimeno) quest to rescue him from the despair that has isolated him from everyone who loves him.

As Mark Dinning, former Editor of *Total Film*, Editor-In-Chief of *Empire*, and Editorial Director of *Time Out Middle East* writes: "*I Made This For You* is an extraordinarily powerful, never-more-relevant celebration of the strength of the human spirit, of how in today's world our need for genuine connection is more acute than ever. As a piece of experimental, punk filmmaking it is executed beautifully and as an experience it's simultaneously both heart-breaking and strangely uplifting. More importantly, it's that rare thing: a movie that makes you want to call someone as

soon as you walk out of the cinema, to tell them you love them.”

“At the time I made it there was someone I was really worried about, and I thought, ‘What can I do?’ So the film came out of my attempt to do something, of trying to work that out,” says Solimeno. “Of thinking, ‘If someone really is on the edge of that precipice, what does it take to bring them back?’”

The result is a truly unique execution, one that “deliberately goes against everything you are taught to do as a filmmaker,” says Solimeno, in which his Danny makes Grant’s Al a Documentary – hence the title *I Made This For You* – to show him just how much he is loved, and just how much he would be missed if he was no longer there.

To achieve this experimental approach, Solimeno inverted the traditional model of pre-drawn characters and narrative, starting out with a central character who was a blank canvass, his detail coloured in by the talking heads footage he would achieve in making this film within a film. “I approached people I thought would be interesting and interviewed them about someone they knew,” says Solimeno. “My first question to them was, ‘Do you know anyone who has committed suicide?’ And then, ‘Do you worry about anybody?’ And then we’d talk about that person. So our main character, Al, was filled in with detail from all these interviews with different people, about different people. And what was really interesting was that in so many ways it was like they were talking about the same person.”

In the finished film, we watch Al watching this film within a film, a sort of sofa-bound George Bailey observing intimate footage of old friends, ex-girlfriends and distant family talking about what he means to them. “When I started out, I had this notion that I could make a film that could save people’s lives,” says Solimeno. “I had this idea that if I could make a virtual group, that you could just press a button and they’d be there, then you might be less alone. I wanted to make a film that, when someone was in a desperate state, they could watch and feel like all of this love was targeted towards them.”

Now, Solimeno says that early notion was naïve. “Because, while we were shooting it, one of the

guys in the film [Billy Yates] committed suicide. He was a really good mate of mine. And it's crazy to think that while you're in the middle of making this thing, about this subject, as a group, making this net for people... right in front of me, someone I loved was in great danger, and I didn't clock it. And he fell right through the net."

Not surprisingly, Billy's passing made the idea of finishing the film seem impossible – a feeling exacerbated when Solimeno's cinematographer on *I Made This For You*, Bruce Melhuish, had a car accident just a month later, one that he had just a five percent chance of surviving. "He had emergency brain surgery," says Solimeno. "He's made a full recovery, which is incredible. He so, so, *so* nearly didn't make it. I was all over the place after that, in an absolute daze doing it, just sort of mechanically, until it was done. I knew that was the only way to end that process. To at least know that was my bit of it done. There was a massive sense of duty, to all the people involved [to finish the film]. But a sense of duty to Billy in particular, because I feel like a sort of custodian of a small part of him that still exists. I feel that very keenly and it weighs on me very heavily, that responsibility. And I constantly worry that I'm fucking that up. But I think he [Billy] would have been really proud of the film, as it turned out."

Certainly, the effect *I Made This For You* is having on audiences is "like nothing I've ever experienced," says Solimeno. "People have been massively touched by it, which is amazing," he says. "People have come out of early screenings and sent messages to people they haven't seen in ages. That has happened a lot. And some people thought about their lives as a result. They confided in their wife, for instance, about their inner life. It's such a simple film, but so obvious that no-one's ever done it. It starts a dialogue. It's a small film, but when people watch it together they have a big experience."

CRISTIAN SOLIMENO

(Writer, Director, 'Danny')

Cristian Solimeno is an award-winning filmmaker whose previous films include *The Glass Man*, starring Andy Nyman and Neve Campbell, and which *Screendaily* hailed as “A twisty, thrilling psychological character study with a blistering lead performance,” and the short film *Love*, which collected the prize for best short at Gijon International Film Festival, Best Acting at the Rhode Island International Film Festival and the Onda Curta prize at Circuito-Off Venice Short Film Festival.

Cristian started out in theatre, writing and directing himself in plays across London in the early ‘90s before moving into film and television, where he became best known for his portrayal of Jason Turner in ITV’s #1 rated show *Footballers’ Wives*. Since then Cristian has successfully juggled careers as an actor, a writer, producer and director. Cristian also wrote, directed and starred in *This Is What It Is*, his first feature film.

His acting credits include the feature films *La Terza madre*, *Comet Impact*, *Highlander: The Source*, *Tuesday*, *Perfect Hideout*, *Rogue Trader*, *Dead Babies*, *Unstoppable* and *Fantastic Beasts And Where To Find Them*, and the television shows *Footballers’ Wives*, *Spooks*, *Strictly Confidential*, *Beauty* and *Tunnel of Love*.

His writing credits also include *Tame* for Channel 4, the short films *Not Here Now*, *Much ado about minor ting* and *Love*.

Q&A

I Made This For You is built on such a compelling idea – a friend who’s worried what his friend might do to himself makes a film to show him how much he is loved. Where did it come from?

I knew I wanted to make something full of the vivacity, the raw, natural, open-gated humanity that can exist. And that stuff is really hard to achieve with normal filmmaking techniques. A big

inspiration for me was that scene at the end of *Love, Actually* – the camcorder footage of all the people at the airport, of all the people who haven't seen each other in ages. And it's just so... *alive*. I thought, 'Why do you see so little of that in films?' I also wanted to make something that was a sort of modern-day version of *It's A Wonderful Life*, a different way of doing something Capra-esque.

What is it about *It's A Wonderful Life* that made you want to make a modern-day take?

It's just such an acute story. When you think of the film, you think of the device of him [James Stewart] seeing his life again. But what you can forget, I think, is just how honest a look at a life it is as well. Even though there are wish-fulfilment elements, the characters are so flawed and it's so humane in its look at him. It's almost like the filmmaker's humanity is what saves George in that film. Also, there's no bullshit. He behaves badly. He's awful with his kids. The difficult bits are really difficult. It's really hard-hitting and honestly done. When George reflects on his life, he reflects on it in its totality. It's funny that it's now a holiday favourite, and we think of it as all sugar-coated and icing-topped, because actually it's quite brutal. I was also thinking, 'If someone really is on the edge of that precipice [of thinking of committing suicide], what does it take to bring them back?' And I think that kind of honesty is essential. That's what *It's A Wonderful Life* does. George can see himself, but in a way he can believe. It's not a lie.

Is that need for truth and honesty more relevant now than ever?

Absolutely. The time we're living in has this added layer of artifice. And it's not just top-down any more, things like beauty magazines telling you how to look. It's bottom-up. It's us, too. Us constantly showing our 'best' selves [on social media] is feeding into all of that too. They are not our best selves. And that's what I wanted to push back against, because I think it's important that we do push back against that. They aren't our best selves, they are our most *flawless* selves. I feel like everyone is living in a sort of 'Bad Third Album' state, where we're all over-produced. What's real and raw and powerful is drawn out of us. We're giving it away, even. We want to project that everything's great. I think there's a huge need now to be addressed – a recognition that you are flawed, and that that is okay.

Your lead character in *I Made This For You* is very much like that, isn't he? The world sees him as happy, but the reality is that he's about to take his own life...

Yes, and that's something you hear about a lot; people who were perceived as the life and soul of the party, who did present as being really fine and really fun, but who were actually incredibly sad.

How did you achieve the talking heads footage in the film?

Because I wanted to capture this vivacity, this 'aliveness' in people, I wanted to make the film in

a completely different way than I've ever made anything before. So, I approached people I thought would be interested, and interviewed them about someone they knew. My first question to them was, 'Do you know anyone who has committed suicide?' And then, 'Do you worry about anybody?' And then we'd talk about that person. So, *I Made This For You's* main character was a blank canvas at first, who was slowly filled in with detail from all these interviews with different people, about different people. And what was really interesting was that in so many ways it was like they were talking about the same person. I thought I'd have to do a lot more rejigging [in the edit] to make it work, but so often the person they had lost or were most concerned about was somebody who *was* the life and soul of the party. And with many of the people I interviewed, the person they were talking about was also their favourite person.

With that in mind, is society's perception of suicide massively wrong? That people thinking of suicide must somehow *look* like someone who's thinking of suicide?

There are certain areas where the statistics really clearly illustrate that there's a huge problem. And we don't know how to solve it. With depression, for instance, we don't have a clear model. We don't fully get it, yet. If we did, people would be able to intercede in a better way, a way that had more predictable outcomes. One of the things we get wrong as a society, I think, is that our model of each other is way too simplistic. This idea of, 'This you, in this moment, is the whole *you*.' Where, if someone's behaving a certain way, then that's who they apparently are. Not that that was just a fleeting moment. Our impressions of each other aren't detailed enough. We don't take the time we ought to, to really look at the person in front of us, to try and understand what's really going on inside their heads. That takes more work. But it's really worth doing because it opens the door to greater intimacy, to knowing people better. And that opens the door to different kinds of enjoyments and pleasures in this life.

What do you want *I Made This For You* to achieve?

When I started making the film I had this really naïve notion that I could make a film that could save people's lives. I wanted to make a film that could help somebody. At the time I made it there was someone I was really worried about and I thought, 'What can I do?' So *I Made This For You* came out of my attempt to do something, of trying to work that out. Ultimately, when you perform something like that [suicide], you're probably not surrounded by a group of people. It's a moment where you're separate. So, I had this idea that if I could make a virtual group, that you could just press a button and they'd be there, then you might be less alone. I wanted to make a film that, when someone was in a desperate state, they could watch and feel like all of this love was targeted towards them. Now I'm not sure that was realistic, it feels very naïve.

Why does it now feel naïve?

Because while we were shooting it, one of the guys in the film [Billy Yates] committed suicide. He was a really good mate of mine. And it's crazy to think that while you're in the middle of making this thing, about this subject, as a group, making this net for people... right in front of

me, someone I loved was in great danger, and I didn't clock it. And he fell right through the net. I think, 'God, if that can happen there, then what chance has the film got of doing it somewhere else?' But you never know. For me, if I was falling off the back of a speeding bus, anything that might cushion my fall would be helpful. I genuinely hope the film can be of some help. It would be awesome if it could be of a massive help, but even if it's just a little help to someone that would be great. I'd really like for a lot of people to see it and feel inspired to reach out to people they might be concerned about. To feel equipped to do that, too. Because that's another feature of life now, as it stands, is that we live in a world of experts. It's like someone will say, 'Well, you're really sad, so you should really go and talk to somebody.' And you're like, 'But I am talking to somebody. I'm talking to *you*.' Sometimes we don't feel qualified or we don't feel like it's our place, and I think it's important that we feel confident enough to try; to try and engage, to try and trust our own impulses.

How did people respond when you first screened the movie?

The first time we screened it was on my birthday, a year and a half ago. And people really liked it, which was nice. And then a week later Billy, who wasn't there that night because he was working, committed suicide. So then I went on this very strange journey with the recuts that had to be done. It was such a weird, difficult, unpleasant and sad year. Billy's in the film, so you're cutting it and he's just there, you know, talking to you.

Was there a time you felt you couldn't finish it?

At the time, I could easily not have finished the film, but somebody put it forward for a film festival. They submitted it, I didn't do that. But it got in and suddenly that gave me the impetus to finish it. None of it was an easy process. The second screening we had was our premiere, at the East End Film Festival, and it was packed. We sold the place out. And I was sat at the front, thinking, 'Shit, this is such a stupid film', because it is a strange and experimental film. I thought, 'This is too personal, too small, too weird. They're all just sitting here hating it'. And then, when it finished, people started clapping, and I thought, 'Yeah, you've got to clap. It's a premiere'. I was sat there, looking straight ahead, feeling so uncomfortable. But they kept clapping, and I turned around and people started to stand up, and loads of them were crying... And the response afterwards was like nothing I've ever experienced. It was one of those moments you read about, where something just works for a bunch of people, who just really get it and are massively touched by it. People were so positive, and several things happened in the weeks following. People came out of the cinema and sent messages to people they hadn't seen for ages. That happened a lot. And some people thought about their lives as a result. They confided in their wife, for instance, about their inner life. It's such a simple film. But it's so simple, so obvious, that no-one's ever done it. You know, where do you go to experience that bit of yourself reflected back at you? I think when people see it in that way it opens a door for them to be able to talk about stuff. It starts a dialogue, an internal and an external one. It's a small film, but when people watch it together they have a big experience.

The small things in life are sometimes the most important, aren't they?

That's what life is like, right? When you fall in love it's not because a spaceship lands, it's because you catch each other's eyes and you both feel something. Something happens between you but it's almost imperceptible. And some of the most important things are really microscopic. I know that, as an audience member, I'm desperate to have that feeling that I've been seen, that I'm being spoken to in a sincere manner. What you're told as a filmmaker is to make everything bigger all the time. That's how society works, too. You're basically being encouraged to conform to some standard that is just really... *bland*. And actually it just makes you super-beige. And if you completely give into it then society says, 'We're not interested in you any more, you're really beige. We want something more exciting'. And you're like, 'Fuck, but it was you who asked me to be this way!' I wanted to push back against that. It was a very punk influence and mentality, I suppose: 'Fuck everything that I'm supposed to do. I'm going to do everything wrong. I'm going to go out of my way to defy everything you want me to do, as a process, to see where it leads'.

Going back to after Billy died and you were editing... What was that like, hearing him again?

It was really weird to hear his voice again. It was different for me because obviously I knew what he said – I'd heard it before. Some of the people who love him still haven't seen the film. They will obviously feel a cascade of things [when they do], with that freshness. That's one of the things when somebody dies, you don't get to hear anything new from them, ever again. You never get to hear a new sentence that they'll ever say. This is sort of the exception to that because, you know, here he is. And that hits you hard. For me, it wasn't as bad as it would have been if I hadn't already edited that footage. So it was manageable in that sense. But then, at other points, I had to go back into the raw footage I'd shot of him and listen to the whole thing. I did that a couple of times, with a view of, 'In light of what's happened, is this what I want to show?' That was really difficult. And the other thing is that it's tinged massively with regret. Because I listen to the interview and there's me waffling on, and I think, 'Why don't you shut the fuck up?' There are a couple of bits where he is clearly... I guess you have this with interviews, you listen to them back and realise how wrong you had it in the moment. And that happened in the interview with Billy. I redirected him at a certain point and I look back and think, 'Why did I do that? He was building up a head of steam. Why couldn't I just let him speak?' I was in a daze afterwards because also the guy I work with as a cinematographer, Bruce Melhuish, he had a massive car accident a month after Billy died. He had emergency brain surgery, where they gave him a five percent chance of survival. And he was fucked, for ages. And he's made a full recovery, which is incredible. I mean, he so, so, *so* nearly didn't make it. I was all over the place after that, in an absolute daze doing it, just sort of mechanically, until it was done. I knew that was the only way to end that process. To at least know that was my bit of it done.

So there was a sense of duty, for both Billy and Bruce, to finish it?

There was a massive sense of duty, to all the people involved. But a sense of duty to Billy in particular, because I feel like a sort of custodian of a small part of him that still exists. I feel that very keenly and it weighs on me very heavily, that responsibility. And I constantly worry that

I'm fucking that up. But I think he'd have been really proud of the film, as it turned out.

Where did the title come from? Who is the 'you' in I Made This For You?

I really like ambiguity. The 'you' has multiple meanings. On the one hand it's that my character [Solimeno is Danny in the film as well as directing] made this movie for Gary [Grant]'s character. But then, obviously, it's also that I've made the film for you, the audience. I really want audiences to have *their* film. I don't want to hammer them over the head with *my* movie. You watch a film and you go away and hopefully you talk about it with people. Hopefully it sits inside you. That's the kind of exchange point. It's like, say, Scarface. I don't remember the last time I watched Scarface but [points to his chest] it's in here. We could do impressions of it, couldn't we? It's inside us.

How do you go about coming up with an idea you hope will resonate with people?

To some degree it's a punt. You don't know if it'll resonate. But you can probably have faith that the human condition is universal, that if something resonates with you it'll resonate with someone else. That's why people like films, because they're full of the things that life is made up of – characters, people, narrative, story. Films are crucial to how you experience your life. The bits you pull out of something that just happened [to you] is filmmaking of a sort. The kind of person you are affects what you take out of things. What's gratifying is that some people are really touched by I Made This For You. I often think of myself like, 'I don't care what people think!' But that's total bullshit, and this has made me realise that more than anything. Because if people came out of a screening not caring, I think I'd have just left it. You know, I'm a miserable fucker. But when I have an exchange with someone, when they dig the film, I get an awful lot from that. It sustains me massively. It's like food for me.

Famously, in 2003, your character in Footballer's Wives, Jason Turner, came second only to the Daleks in a public vote for TV's best baddie. How do you look back on all of that craziness now?

[Laughs] That's true about coming second to the Daleks! Hilarious! You know, it's strange to look back because that show probably did have more impact than I realised at the time. And they really achieved their goal, which was to make watercooler moments and be outrageous. It was great and tabloidy, and really got up the noses of certain people, who wanted their entertainment more highbrow. It's interesting looking back, because it also had moments in it that you still see reflected on TV today, on shows like Made In Essex and Geordie Shore. It almost had a sense of scripted reality about it.

It was such a talked-about show. Were you pigeonholed by that role at all?

Not at all, actually. I remember being nervous at the time, worried people would come up to me on the street and say, 'You're horrible, you are!' But they didn't. People just got it. I did have

some strange auditions afterwards, though. I remember at one the casting director took me to one side and said, 'Okay, so this part is a vampire, you know. Not a footballer'. I was like, 'Thanks. I picked that up from the script'. But the move into directing was just really an extension of what I'd already been doing. I'd had my own youth theatre group when I was young. I was making very small films already. So it felt natural.

Having made a film around the subject of suicide, do you feel that it's a bigger issue now than it ever has been, or is it more that there have been a lot of high-profile cases recently?

I'm just a dude who made a film about a topic he's interested in. I'm not an expert at all. It does seem like suicide is growing as a problem, but is that just because our awareness of it is growing? I'm not an expert in the statistics, and don't pretend to be. But, anecdotally, it feels like more of a thing, and that it's affecting different people. When I was young, by the time you were in your 30s, you might know somebody [who had committed suicide]. But these kids now, they know people at school. That's standard. Kids know someone. And that seems new. It's a big fucking problem, and really heartbreaking. Especially when it's someone like Anthony Bourdain, and you think, 'But you've got everything! You're amazing! You're such a cool dude, you've done all this stuff, all these things that we hope would make you immune to despair.' And it doesn't. And that is really chilling. And it should give us serious pause. It should make us ask the question: 'What does insulate us from despair, if not that? If not that, then what?' And I don't know what the answer is. I'm just completely confused by it, if I'm honest. I wish people could understand how precious and critically important they are.

What do you mean by 'critically important'?

You can look at it from one way and go, 'We're insignificant'. And yeah, we are. It doesn't matter. That's true. But, also, it really matters. We are so significant, each one of us, and so fucking unbelievably amazing. It's great to want to do big things, but I think it's wrong to live life based on the scale of the action. Like, another good friend of mine that I grew up with, he died maybe six years ago now. All that time without him, the stuff I really miss... It's like film quotes, you know? Where you do one half of the quote and they do the other? From obscure films, that only you two know. What is that? How does that work? How could you say to somebody, 'You're worth something, because you know the end of that film quote'? You can't communicate that to somebody. But the reality of that, when you're on the other side of it, is real. That shit is real. The value of those microscopic things is huge. Sometimes they're the most precious things to you in your life...

CAST

CAST

Al | Gary Grant

Danny	Cristian Solimeno
Joe	Luke Sullivan
Uncle Jay	Ken Cave
Cara	Danielle Meehan
Paulie	Brett Allen
Tony	Vinta Morgan
Aido	Dermot Murphy
Dad	Francis Magee
Mr. Boyce	David Solomon
Marcus	Ayo Davis
Angela	Natasha Redhead
Marcel	Mason Redhead
Peter	Adam Shakinovsky
Hannah	Siobhan Dillon
Polly	Rebecca Foster
Mustard	William "Billy" Yates
Cooper	Nick Cox
Rosy	Holly Weston
Meghan	Tia Oak
Karl	Ali Cook
Adem	Daniel Schutzman
Louise	Nicola Harrison
Freja	K D Grant
Jamie	Lorien Slaughter
Shalimar	Kaleem Aftab
Cris	Dean Kyte
Melissa	Sarah Storer
Mum	Alison Newman

SUPPORTING ARTISTS

Ben Summers

Carrie Wallder
Kate Vasquez
Will Hogg

CREW

Story Writer & Director	Cristian Solimeno
Director of Photography	Bruce Melhuish
Editor	Cristian Solimeno
Camera Op & Sound	Bruce Melhuish
Boom Operator	Sam Keeley
Sound Design & Mix	Dom Weaver
Producer	Cristian Solimeno
Legal & Business Affairs	Nina Vainorius
Production Notes	Nemo

Polly's artwork which was
featured in her flat is by
Rebecca Foster

Al's Artwork as featured in the
exhibition at the end is by
Ben Summers

"Don't Waste Your Life Away"
written, performed and produced by
Losers
(Tom Bellamy, Paul Mullen
& Eddy Temple-Morris)
published by BMG Rights Management

"Sing Your Praises"
written and performed by
Bear Bojack