

BRAND UPON THE BRAIN!

A remembrance in 12 chapters



a film by Guy Maddin

The Film Company presents

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A film by Guy Maddin

Canada/USA - 2006 - 95min - B & W

International Press

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INTRODUCTION

BRAND UPON THE BRAIN! will be presented by the Berlinale Forum in association with Volkswagen, the Canada Council for the Arts and the Canadian Embassy as a spectacular live event hosted in the Deutsche Oper Berlin accompanied by the Volkswagen-orchestra conducted by the music's composer Jason Staczek, narrated by Isabella Rossellini with three onstage foley artists and castrato singer. Equal parts childhood reminiscence, expressionist horror movie, teen detective serial and Grand Guignol reverie, BRAND UPON THE BRAIN! is a grand silent movie event custom conceived for the pomp and ceremony of a grand opera house. Shot in Seattle, this exhilarating exercise in stretching film vocabulary to its limits represents Guy Maddin's work at its paradoxically most sophisticated and incautious!

Nuttily wonderful... Delightful - Best of 2006

Manohla Dargis - NEW YORK TIMES

Undeniably enjoyable!

TIME OUT NY

Often uproariously funny and surprisingly touching.
A magical experience.

IRISH TIMES



SYNOPSIS

Guy Maddin lazes away his under-stimulated youth with his teenage sister on the mysterious island that one day, he stands to inherit. They share this island with a horde of orphans all living together in the lighthouse which doubles as the orphanage. Their every move is vigilantly watched over by Guy's overbearing and tyrannical mother from the top of the lighthouse while his father, a scientist and inventor, secretly works away in the basement morning noon and night.

When the new parents of recently adopted children discover mysterious head wounds on their young, teen detectives Wendy and Chance Hale – brother and sister sleuths known as the Lightbulb Kids – visit Guy's island to launch into an investigation. Guy is weak at the knees as he falls hard into his first hormone driven crush for Wendy, while Sis, is rosy cheeked and flushed with love for Chance, a love that must be kept hidden from Mother at all costs.

As the investigation progresses, it leads the kids into the darkest regions of revelation and repression and spins dangerously out of control as the terrible secrets of Guy's family are laid bare...



INTERVIEW WITH GUY MADDIN

Q: Like many of your films BUTB! takes autobiographical themes as a point of departure - can you tell a little about how you and regular co-writer George Toles came to create the screenplay, which memories served as a starting point?

A: The very centre of my childhood – its mystical, imperious and explosive core– was a long-running battle between my mother and my older sister over her freshly blooming adolescence. The two never put this issue into specific words, but that's what all the trouble was about – you could tell. They might have been arguing about hairdos or hemlines, but it was really the presence in the house of a new, young adult with a will of her own, that really placed these two females in violently opposing positions. I knew any childhood remembrances would have to be built around this war.

George Toles suggested an orphanage setting that helped saturate the scenario with children. He also suggested the institution be corrupt, an organ-harvesting operation. That's when it occurred to me to make the proprietors my parents, for what kid ever understands what their parents are really up to? Once George and I had established a bunch of dark secrets kept from trembling children, it was a simple matter of bringing in a teen detective – a favorite stock character of mine, and something Louis Feuillade should have gotten around to, if he didn't already. Then I remembered the agonies of first love and how well this kind of agony suits itself to film, so I combined all these elements and was pleased to find how simply they worked together. Once the framework seemed solid and honest, I could fill in a million details from my earliest years. The thing is literally a true story – only much, much better!

Q: The film is a melting pot of different genres, Expressionist Horror, detective movie, Grand Guignol theatre. Can you talk a little about the different influences in the film?

A: I once read a collection of Grand Guignol plays and decided on the spot I would mount one someday. I never got around to it, but when I discovered I'd be shooting in Seattle I was immediately put in mind of lighthouses, which reminded me of this one play I liked a lot that was set in a lighthouse. I think it had a father and son, both suffering from rabies, trying to kill each other before the next supply ship came into their lonely island. I simply imported the lurid spirit of this play into my script, which fitted the lurid spirit of my own childhood perfectly! That must have been why I liked the play in the first place.

The teen detective genre fused easily with my concerns because I find all adolescent literature very sexual, for everything that's mentioned and for everything that isn't! Nancy Drew! The Hardy Boys! I don't need to say any more! Teen detectives are forever getting themselves into such titillating jams, such horny jackpots! And nothing is hornier than the fantasy of being a young teen in danger! For me, anyway!

The Expressionist Horror? Well, that just comes when the subject matter is right and it's filmed with plenty of plot-significant shadows; long shadows; deep shadows; mystery-concealing shadows! Shadows mean so much more in black & white than in color! In the former, they represent the absence of light,

of knowledge; in the latter the darkness is comprised of mauve and brown grain, meaning who knows what! True Expressionism MUST be shot in black & white.

Q: *BUTB!* is the your first film to be shot outside of your home town of Winnipeg. How did this affect the idea of the film as a memoir? How was it to working with The Film Company?

A: The beach at Puget Sound in Washington looks EXACTLY like the lakeshore at Gimli, the site of my family's summer home just an hour's drive from Winnipeg. When cinematographer Ben Kasulke and I were running around the beach with our cameras I felt like I was a kid with a new friend at my lake! We played outside together, all the old favourites: hide'n'seek, spin-the-bottle, bonfires and hotdogs – running, running, running in the strength-sapping sand, just as all beach-intoxicated kids do. Except we ran with cameras in our hands, and we filmed everything that whirled around us out there in that vast seaside playground. Not since childhood have my lungs been so filled to bursting with that fresh air only kids can pack in with their hard, all-day playing! I was COMPLETELY at home in this faraway place!

And my crew at The Film Company, this wonderfully quixotic, utopian, not-for-profit film studio – the only one in the world I'm sure – were unbelievable! We all had this cause, this manifesto, this wild banner beneath which we all marched out every morning! I stayed in one of those hospital hotels common in Seattle, got picked up by crew members every morning at 5 a.m., waved good-bye to the patients smoking outside the infirmary, and plunged into



the long day's shooting with the feeling one gets on the first day of summer. Producer Gregg Lachow has a tough honesty about him – he'll tell you what he's thinking, no matter what it is, but it never gets personal. He's filled his dream factory with similar temperaments, hard-working and supportive people that are so easy to get along with, that are keen to work and learn. Most utopias collapse before they get off the ground, but this one stands a chance because of the people involved.

Q: How did you go about casting the film? Sullivan Brown as the young Guy Maddin seems cannily accurate and Kellan Larson as Neddie seems to exude such vulnerability that you know something terrible is going to happen just by looking at him. Because it's a silent film did you cast from a purely visual/physical perspective?

A: Casting Director Joy Fairfield videotaped auditions in Seattle and sent the recordings to me. Since this was a silent film, I knew the most important thing an actor could give me was an interesting and expressive close-up. Informative body movement is also incredibly important, but that was something I only asked to see in the callbacks. Joy had great casting intuition in organizing these sessions. I pretty much had everyone I wanted in the first tape she sent me. I liked Sullivan Brown not because he resembled a young me, although he kind of does – only cuter – but because he reminded me of a young Jean Pierre Leaud, circa 400 Blows. At least in the audition he did. He was exceptionally restrained, brooding. Kellan Larson I chose in two seconds – he looks and acts exactly as I pictured him.



Q: Was the film always conceived as a silent movie with live accompaniment? What led you to collaborate with Jason Staczek?

A: I've wanted to do a silent film with live music for a long time, really give the people what they used to get all the time in the twenties, the real Grauman's Chinese Theater experience! A lavish spectacle for the masses, only more lyrical than what we're used to now! Piers Handling of the Toronto Film Festival once bounced the idea off me, but it got forgotten for a while. An event like that is not cheap to mount. It's all in the timing. A festival has to want to do it *and* have the money. The timing was right this year: we have the screening in Toronto and a couple in New York.

Jason Staczek is the house composer at the production company The Film Company. He also happens to be VERY good. He hung around the set quite a bit playing mood music for our actors on his giant Hammond organ. Improvising for hours on end he would put us into a spell with his strange keyboard moans. In this trance it was easy to believe the jerry-built sets in which we worked were real rooms, that we were actually in the eerie turret atop a crumbling lighthouse overlooking the ocean, that a long stone stairway spiralled away beneath us to the doorway opening up onto the sea-level – when in fact we were bumping into each other inside a bunch of flimsy papier maché walls. Jason has that Film Company temperament as well – the guy has composed over 95 minutes of original score by working practically round the clock for many months! The work is brilliant and, to judge from his cheery demeanour, a stirring reward in itself! Oh, Utopia!

Q: How do you envision the on-stage actions of the foley artists, singers and narrators interacting with the film?

A: The sound effects guys will be thoroughly fascinating to watch! I love foley artists. When I first met Andy Malcolm in 1992, he enthusiastically conducted an audibly plausible car chase and crash before my disbelieving eyes using nothing but a hot-water bottle and his thumb. This guy can make any noise a movie needs. And he has the eyes of a hawk, too! He can spot a missing sound, like the little rustle a man unfolding his crossed legs might make, at a thousand paces. He hears with his eyes! And sees with his ears! He can make a forest fire out of celery! A disrobing woman out of two iron wheel rims! These foley artists are bizarrely intriguing! I really needed to make them part of the show! Everyone should see what they do! Of course, I want people to watch my movie, too, and they will because when foley works it's paradoxically unnoticeable! So I hope everyone enjoys hopping back and forth between the movie's interior and exterior.

I want something similar to happen with the narrator – Louis Negin in Toronto, Isabella Rossellini in New York, and whoever else we get wherever else we play. The narrator, a kind of extension of the old interlocutor used in the early days of the silents to help keep confused viewers on board, is not going to be used so much for expository purposes. Rather, inspired by what I've read of the Japanese benshi tradition of movie narrators who offer personal commentaries on the filmic proceedings, I want my narrator to build up a personal relationship with the audience. Both Louis and Isabella have theatre experience. I want them to feel the audience and adjust accordingly, to warm to the audience, dial themselves up or down as they see fit, cajole an experience from them.

Q: While BUTB! carries many of your recurring themes there's a palpable modernity in the kinetic editing style, the speed with which the title cards flash by, the hand-held camera, etc. It seems much freer and seems to break out of the 'willful' primitivism and 'constructed' feel of your previous work. How do you see BUTB fitting into your oeuvre?

A: I hope the movie is the crowning achievement, so far, of my oeuvre! There's no pastiche! It's a new hybrid of previously un-combined filmic elements. There's nothing dishonest! It has its own pace that's neither slow nor overly urgent! I'm pleased with the look – I think a viewer can just drink down most of the images like so much cool water – and I love the music! Music takes the shortest route to the heart, as we all know, and these images, by dint of being welded by Jason to his music so perfectly, get to ride this shortcut right on into the viewer's heart as well – I hope! That's what silent film does best – it reaches people as instantly and as powerfully as music. That's the effect I'm counting on from Brand upon the Brain!



GUY MADDIN BIOGRAPHY

Guy Maddin, born and raised in Winnipeg, has directed nine features and numerous shorts, including *My Dad is 100 Years Old* – Isabella Rossellini’s tribute to her late father Roberto – which played at last year’s TIFF. The features include *The Saddest Music in the World* (2003), also with Rossellini, and the television ballet *Dracula – Pages from a Virgin’s Diary*, which won an International Emmy for Best Performing Arts Program in 2002. Maddin, who won the prestigious Telluride Silver Medal for life achievement in film back in 1995, and a U.S. National Film Critics Award for best experimental film for *Archangel* in 1991 and *The Heart of the World* in 2001, is also an author, a freelance film journalist and a teacher of film studies at the University of Manitoba. He has a BA in economics from the University of Winnipeg.

GUY MADDIN FILMOGRAPHY

- 2006 Winnipeg (feature documentary) in post-production
- 2006 Nude Caboose (2 mins)
- 2006 Brand upon the Brain! (feature)
- 2005 My Dad is 100 Years Old (17 mins)
- 2005 FuseBoy (4 mins)
- 2004 Sombra Dolorosa (6 mins)
- 2004 Sissy-Boy Slap-Party (6 mins.)
- 2004 A Trip to the Orphanage (4 mins)
- 2003 The Saddest Music in the World (feature)
- 2003 Cowards Bend the Knee (feature)
- 2002 Fancy, Fancy Being Rich (6 mins)
- 2002 Dracula - Pages From A Virgin's Diary (feature)
- 2001 It's A Wonderful Life (3 mins)
- 2000 The Heart of the World (5 mins)
- 1999 Hospital Fragment (3 mins)
- 1997 Rooster Workbook (4 mins)
- 1997 Zookeeper Workbook (4 mins)
- 1997 Chimney Workbook (4 mins)
- 1997 Twilight of the Ice Nymphs (feature)
- 1995 Odilon Redon (5 mins)
- 1992 Careful (feature)
- 1990 Archangel (feature)
- 1988 Tales From The Gimli Hospital (feature)
- 1985 The Dead Father (21 mins)





THE FILM COMPANY

The Film Company is a unique independent studio, based in Seattle, USA, that greenlights artists, not projects, and provides all the support and collaboration necessary to create a feature film, in any format, from concept through distribution. Founded in 2004 by Gregg Lachow, TFC has so far greenlit six artists' projects: Guy Maddin's Super-8 feature, *Brand upon the Brain!*, which will have its world premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival; Lynn Shelton's 35mm feature, *We Go Way Back* (which won the grand jury prize for Best Feature at Slamdance 2006 and will open theatrically in the US in the fall); Gaelen Hanson's 35mm short, *Your Lights Are Out or Burning Badly*, currently playing festivals ; two projects currently in post production: William Weiss' Super-16 feature, *The Telephone Pole Numbering System*, and Brian Short's dv/Super-8/16mm feature, *All My Love* ; and Megan Murphy's 35mm feature, *The Part I Love the Best*, which goes into production in October 2006.

The Film Company will announce its next slate of five directors in September 2006.

CREW

Directed by	Guy Maddin
Written by	Guy Maddin George Toles Jason Staczek
Original Score by	Benjamin Kasulke
Director of Photography	John Gurdebeke
Editor	Tania Kupczak
Production Designer	Nina Moser
Costume Designer	Joy Fairfield
Casting	Denise Giago
Hair/Makeup Stylists	Dan Wolcott
Stills Photographer	Adam Weintraub
Assistant Director	Anna Waggoner
Production Manager	Joy Fairfield
Line Producer	Amy E. Jacobson
Executive Producers	Jody Shapiro Philip Wohlstetter AJ Epstein
Associate Producer	Brian Grant
Produced by	Amy E. Jacobson Gregg Lachow

CAST

Grown-up Guy Maddin	Erik Steffen Maahs	
Mother	Gretchen Krich	
Young Guy Maddin	Sullivan Brown	
Sis	Maya Lawson	
Chance Hale/Wendy Hale	Katherine E. Scharhon	
Father	Todd Jefferson Moore	
Savage Tom	Andrew Loviska	
Neddie	Kellan Larson	
Young Mother	Cathleen O'Malley	
Old Father	Clayton Corzatte	
Old Mother	Susan Corzatte	
Murderous Sisters	Megan Murphy	
	Annette Toutonghi	
Oarsmen	David Lobo	
	Eric Lobo	
Adopting Couple	Sarah Harlett	
	Daniel Tierney	
Orphans	David Armo	Maia Lee
	Erica Badgely	Emma Mercer
	Maggie Brown	Eli Pruzan
	Riley Calcagno	Lucia Rathbun
	Jesa Chiro	Madeline Rathbun
	Munya Chiro	Connor Russell
	Bailey Gibart	Electra Fire Scott
	Frank Hughes	Vincent Scott
	AnnieRose Kafer	Iris Seiwera
	Emma Kelley	Ruby Seiwera
	Eleanor McQuinn Kopf	Olivia Spokoiny
	Samuel Greer Kopf	Maya Sugarman
	Charlie Lachow	Augustine Vanden Brulle
	Sam Lachow	Anna Wichman

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the directors label

