

"I'm detonating what I'd normally do"

Director Steven Soderbergh goes back to his low-budget roots with secret iPhone-shot horror *Unsane*

AS RETIREES GO, Steven Soderbergh is busier than ever. Last year saw the critically acclaimed heist caper *Logan Lucky*. Next up: a thriller entitled *Unsane*, with *The Crown*'s Claire Foy, shot entirely in secret, and on iPhones.

Now the secret's out, the director is still keeping at least a few cards close to his chest, understandably unwilling to give too many plot details. "It's a cautionary tale about reading the fine print," he says, cryptically. *Collider* reported it as a horror movie. Is that an accurate descriptor? "If you're a woman, it's a horror movie," he retorts.

What we do know is Foy is playing the lead, a "young woman who finds herself committed to a facility by surprise", and it's fair to say, quite unlike Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. "She's playing a rather unstable American woman," explains Soderbergh, "who's on the back end of a traumatic emotional experience, and has moved to a new city to try to rebuild her life. I think people will be both surprised and impressed with her transformation and the extreme contrast [from *The Crown*]."

For all concerned, *Unsane* is a remarkably small production. Having started his career as an indie darling with the micro-budgeted hit *Sex, Lies, And Videotape*, Soderbergh says he has been looking for decades to make something in this territory. The ascendant quality in smartphone cameras made it happen. "If I'd have had this technology when I was 15, I'd have a very different career! You've really got to ask yourself the question: how much more [quality] do I need?"

Audiences shouldn't notice any difference in image fidelity, Soderbergh insists ("it's a 4K capture!", he marvels nerdily). It was never meant as a headline-grabbing gimmick; filming



Soderbergh spills a few secrets. Below: Claire Foy has swapped Buckingham Palace for the psych ward.



on smartphones simply allowed for a quicker, scrappier turnaround. *Unsane* went from script to completion in a little over ten months, with a shoot of just over two weeks — all of which served the film's psychological thriller sensibilities well.

"That's exactly what the film needed," argues Soderbergh. "It's designed to be

a very visceral, in-your-grill experience, and I felt I needed to embrace the Italian side of my genetic make-up, and dispense with the Swedish side." In preparation, he watched a number of low-budget indie horrors, including Roman Polanski's *Repulsion* and Alice Lowe's 2016 pregnancy-slasher *Prevenge*. "I was looking at things that I felt were somewhat in our neighbourhood, in terms of story or production approach," he says. "I was interested to see how they were solving their problems."

The whole process, he admits, was liberating. "Part of the fun was to be able to literally do things on set I would never do. That was the fun of it. I would never put a lens that close to anybody! To be able to just go, 'Fuck that'. I'm detonating any idea of what I would normally do." Don't expect him to start drawing a pension any time soon. **JOHN NUGENT**

UNSADE IS IN CINEMAS FROM 23 MARCH

THE SODERBERGH SELECTION

Every year, Soderbergh publishes a list of everything he's read and seen. Here are five surprising highlights

OCEAN'S 8
Soderbergh has already seen nine cuts of the *Ocean's 11* female reboot, which he is producing.

FUCKKKYDUUU
Soderbergh logged this 8-minute short film about time travel from director Eddie Alcazar and a score from Flying Lotus.

THE THICK OF IT
Nineteen episodes of Armando Iannucci's satire are logged, as are 11 episodes of the BBC sitcom *W1A*.

I KNOW WHERE I'M GOING!
One of Powell & Pressburger's more obscure films, Soderbergh double-billed this 1945 British romance with the 1942 comedy *To Be Or Not To Be*.

ASTROPHYSICS FOR PEOPLE IN A HURRY
One of the books logged in 2017 was this popular science book by Neil deGrasse Tyson. Is Soderbergh planning a sci-fi?

Alamy

SMALL TALK TOM HANKS



When you make movies, do you miss doing theatre?

What I love about the theatre is when you've done it 86 times and you're on stage and you hear somebody say a line that you've heard for months — you go, "He says that there? I never heard that before!"

Your latest movie, *The Post*, is less than two hours — much shorter than most awards-season movies. I think the best movie is the one that goes by in 45 minutes. Sometimes a three-hour movie will do that. Sometimes a three-hour movie will seem like four-and-a-half hours.

You famously love typewriters. Is the film typewriter porn? I test typed on every single machine in the newsroom. I picked up one of the Royal Desktops and I now have that machine. It will last me a thousand years.

What's been your best audition? It was for a touring production of *Grease*. I don't sing but I went to an audition with a terrible cold. They said, "Come back in two days." After two days, I still had a cold, so they kept postponing me. On the last audition, I was only halfway through *Alone At A Drive-In Movie* and they were like, "Thank you!" But I view it like this: I got two callbacks for a Broadway musical!

THE POST IS IN CINEMAS NOW



RECOUNT! RECOUNT!

Five *Empire* writers on the films and performances that the Oscars will criminally disregard



Top: Tiffany Haddish toasts her performance in *Girls Trip*. Above: Patrick Stewart put in the performance of his life in *Logan*.

MARK HAMILL FOR BEST ACTOR (STAR WARS: THE LAST JEDI)
Alas, this *is* going to go how you think. The Academy are going to ignore the return of one of cinema's most iconic heroes in favour of less fantastical turns. Mark Hamill reinvented the moon-eyed youngster as a tormented, ultimately inspiring mage, giving the film a heavy measure of growly gravitas. But because he milks a space-cow, he'll be overlooked. **NICK DE SEMLYEN, FEATURES EDITOR**

TIFFANY HADDISH FOR BEST SUPPORTING ACTRESS (GIRLS TRIP)
The Academy doesn't do comedy. It just doesn't get it. So it's highly unlikely that Tiffany Haddish's turn as human cyclone Dina in *Girls Trip* will be recognised. Which is a shame: not only is it one of those force-of-nature star-making turns that come along once in a blue moon, but the clip they'd play would *have* to be where she deep throats a banana that's been rammed through a grapefruit. Don't ask. **CHRIS HEWITT, ASSOCIATE EDITOR**

FRANCIS LEE FOR BEST ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY (GOD'S OWN COUNTRY)
One of the absolute best screenplays of 2017 was unbelievably a debut screenplay from a first time filmmaker. Francis Lee crafted the story of an isolated Yorkshire

sheep farmer in a shed on his dad's farm; creating one of the most understated, authentic and beautifully brutal screenplays of the year. It's impossible to believe that this is his first to make it to screen. It certainly won't be his last. **TERRI WHITE, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**

PATRICK STEWART FOR BEST SUPPORTING ACTOR (LOGAN)
It's possible to win for a superhero movie, but there is a prerequisite: you have to be Heath Ledger. If there's been a better performance over the past 12 months than Patrick Stewart's final turn as Charles Xavier, I'm yet to see it. *Logan* was a spandex-free, adult-orientated drama, but I doubt voters will see past its comic book origins. **JONATHAN PILE, DEPUTY EDITOR**

BEST PICTURE (THE BIG SICK)
Here's another film to fall foul of Oscar's unwritten 'no comedies' rule. Kumail Nanjiani and Emily V. Gordon's charming autobiographical tale has charm, humour, a flawless ensemble, a timely take on at cross-cultural contrasts, even a heartbreaking tragedy to get those awardsy tear ducts working overtime. Alas, as a romantic comedy, it's not even in the conversation. For shame! **JOHN NUGENT, NEWS EDITOR**