



English transcript of Fifi Garfield's interview with Jean St Clair
and Louis Neethling on 12th April 2017

– based on a live voice over by Darren Townsend-Handscomb and Karen Newby

Fifi	<p>Hello, hi.</p> <p>Are you watching?</p> <p>Facebook viewers, if you're watching, click "Like", or even a "Love" - either one will do - whichever face you desire. This is BSLBT, we're here at our offices. Tonight, we are giving you a preview of the drama to be released tomorrow, Signs of An Affair. As part of that preview, I would like to introduce the writer and actor, Jean St Clair, she is the star of the show. And here we have Louis Neethling who is the producer and director of the film.</p>
Louis	<p>Hello there.</p>
Fifi	<p>And I'm Fifi. I was the First Assistant Director on the film. So, I have a number of question to ask Louis and Jean about Signs of An Affair. Firstly, I'd like you to tell me how this film was born?</p>
Jean	<p>Well, Louis and I had contact on another movie, Still Here, and I've always thought... I did some writing on that, and I always thought I'd like to do a bit more writing, so I spoke with Louis about my ideas and we began to collaborate. We decided to pitch it to BSLBT and that's how we got to where we are today. I originally was toying with the idea of writing, directing and acting, but I wondered whether that might be too much for me and Louis was brought in as director in the end.</p>
Louis	<p>I remember we were on a train journey to France to the Clin d'Oeil Festival. We were chatting on the train about If I Don't Lose, I'll Lose, and so from that, we were talking about that, and she gave me this idea. And that was the very first conversation where Jean had the idea.</p>
Fifi	<p>That's really interesting, so you liked Jean's script but I know you're quite fussy, you won't just make any old script will you? Did you think you would make it regardless?</p>
Louis	<p>Well I always look for an interesting, fascinating story. If I like it then I'll make the film, and when Jean showed me her script, straight away I could see how the story would look, I could see the comedy, I could see the characters, it was all there. And so I decided straight away I wanted to do the film.</p>
Fifi	<p>Okay, and Jean, you were writing the script, but how did you make the decision to also act in the film?</p>
Jean	<p>Well, whilst I was writing I kept an open mind about that. I really liked the idea of directing, but also I'm an actress, and after discussing the workload that that would entail, you know... I didn't particularly want to be the main actress in the movie, I was open to the idea of another actress taking the role, but there's not</p>

	very many actresses available in the right age range and with the right skills. So, Louis encouraged me to take the acting role and he suggested he direct.
Fifi	So you had your vision and you gave that to the director, to Louis. How much flexibility did you have in terms of sticking with your vision or allowing Louis some licence with that?
Jean	I always ask Louis for advice. I ask him what he thinks and what he thought of the script and he told me, you know, "It's your script so you should do it how you want to do it". But when I took on the acting role, I was happy to hand it over to Louis and give him quite a lot of freedom. Because I'm always very impressed with Louis' directing skills anyway, and perhaps if I had directed it, I might have done things slightly differently, but I think that's healthy.
Fifi	And who was in charge of the casting on this?
Louis	Well, we'd already got some decisions around ... ideas about some of the people who might play the parts, and so I agreed with Jean on the people she'd selected and I could see that those people would fit the characters of the script. So, really it was already written into the script, and with the hearing actors, we chose them later. Initially we had a different actor, but unfortunately they had other commitments, so we had to cast for some new hearing actors - it was Bill that we had to cast for.
Jean	Yes, and we cast the hearing actors differently because I kind of wrote those characters quite freely without anyone in mind. I had to be more careful with the Deaf actors. When we auditioned, it was going to create a problem if we couldn't find anyone who matched the character that we were seeking, so I had a number of potential actors in mind. But, you know, there are only a few Deaf skilled actors to choose from, so we had to be very careful with that.
Louis	And also, I wanted to work with a range of different actors. We needed to find someone much older. There are plenty of younger people who could have come to the audition, but when we were looking at people over the age of 60 there are relatively few, and so we discussed auditioning and actually we thought it was a waste of time because we already knew who we wanted. It wouldn't be fair to waste their time putting them through an audition, so actually we just approached them directly. Normally I love auditioning people, I love going through that process and looking at new faces and finding new faces.
Fifi	OK, now you said it was around 2 years ago on your train journey that the seed was sown for this movie.
Louise	Yes, 2 years ago now, but actually 2015, yes, 1½ years before we started filming and at the same time of year, so BSLBT were asking for new ideas for commissioning, so we decided to put a proposal in. That was 2015, October maybe?
Jean	That's right, yes, I think it was 2015, October/November time. We met up, had a discussion. The problem at the time, though, was I was I was touring with The Government Inspector for 5 months. So, things had to be put on hold a little bit, and then BSLBT invited us to come in, but I was still touring. So, from November, it was around a year later when we actually began filming.

Louis	Yeah, that's right.
Jean	I remember thinking "Oh yes, it was November last year," when we were pitching the idea. So, about June 2016 we met with David Horbury; he spent some time with us going through the script.
Fifi	Can you explain any more about what his role was?
Jean	We needed somebody to script supervise.
Louis	To supervise the changes to the script.
Jean	Because, you know, you have a vision and you try to get that down, but actually you need someone who is skilled in understanding how to put it together in the right structure. So, you know, I can visualise a funny story, for example, but, you know, getting it together and deciding what order the story is going to flow in can actually be quite difficult and takes quite a great deal of skill. I wanted to include some gags in the film and, you know, I wanted the characters to be realistic. I wanted the whole story to be believable, so we got David in to help with that.
Fifi	Signs of An Affair is kind of, is labelled as a black comedy. Can you tell us more about what that means?
Jean	Well, there might be a situation that's ordinarily quite serious, such as a death, a funeral, a marriage that's experiencing difficulty; but a black comedy finds the humour in those darker scenarios; you know, you kind of find the twists in the tale. For example, in this story, Flora is experiencing marriage problems and suspects her husband is having an affair, and you find the humour in that.
Fifi	What's been the biggest challenge producing this film?
Louis	The biggest challenge? Well, I think, of course, scheduling, particularly with location, because the script, it was beautiful, and there were lots of changes of scene and so that means you have to set up and take down for each and every scene. That was a real challenge in the time. And then, of course, you have to manage within the budget as well. Budgets and time are both the enemy, so trying to get all of that done was a real challenge to produce the film, but actually it's location that's probably the biggest issue. Because previously, I'd used houses of friends to film in, but actually I've run out of my friends' that I can film in.
Fifi	Do you mean they don't want you to return and do that again in their homes?
Louis	Well exactly, so there are websites that say, people who list their properties for filming, but I realise they're really expensive, way outside of our budget, so it was a real challenge to persuade people to let us film there, a budget we could afford. So, as I said, location and scheduling, I think, but we managed it. We were successful.
Fifi	Are you still watching out there? If you have any questions, please post your comments and we can include some of your questions if we have time. We only have half an hour in total. I have another question. What are your most memorable moments during the filming of?

Louis	Well, for me, I think it was the close relationships the crew developed. If I look back, I mean the crew is fantastic, it was relaxed, it ran smoothly, we were really cheerful and that was the best aspect of the play, the crew. I've worked with other good crews previously but there were also a lot of deaf people in the crew. I'm trying to think if there were any more particular moments.
Fifi	Tell us more about that. What was the proportion of deaf and hearing people in the crew and how did communication work?
Louis	It's about 50/50, deaf and hearing. Fifi, you were my first AD for the project.
Fifi	I really enjoyed it, it was an amazing experience. For me, I'd never taken that role previously and you taught me a lot, and at the same time I kind of created my own style in that role, it was very enjoyable.
Louis	Excellent. We had a deaf script supervisor, we had a deaf DIT, a photographer, a deaf make-up artist, deaf runners, in fact all the runners were deaf. And, as I said, the make-up artist was there, the actors were there; in fact, in the unit, the arts director, the camera artistic director was hearing, but otherwise almost everyone else of significance was deaf.
Fifi	Can you tell us about how you sourced the hearing members of the crew.
Louis	Well for this production it was actually really difficult to get the crew because of people with existing commitments and in fact we tried to do this [...] we tried to find someone five times and in the end I decided to advertise for them. And then I had 65 responses, yes, 65, and all of them were good. So I had to try and whittle it down and picked 4 of them from a short list, and finally ended up with one who was fantastic to work with.
Fifi	I agree, they were a very lovely person and very good with communicating gesturally as well.
Jean	I think my experience was the same as you in terms of the team overall. We formed a very, very cohesive team and we were able to collectively tell the story very well. It kind of became a bit like a colouring book where each member of the cast and crew helped to fill in the colours and make it as rich as it could be. We really did share our skill set and I hope to have more opportunities to work with them in the future, they really supported us, you know, so I think it was a very, very sharing experience and for me, that's really very memorable.
Fifi	And the DOP had never actually worked with deaf people before, but he was very open minded.
Louis	Yes, absolutely.
Fifi	I think we have a question from the audience. Celia has asked: "If you could do it again, what would you do differently?"
Jean	Okay, well for me as a writer, I think I'd probably have fewer scenes. I think I was full of so many ideas and in one scene I wanted a limo and the budget wouldn't allow for that, so I had to think more carefully about the budget. If I did it again when I was writing the script I would probably take the budget into account more

	during that process, because there were certain things we had to leave out, which is a shame.
Louis	So, I think I would have filmed in the street more because... however, the problem was that actually to get permits to film in the streets is really expensive.
Fifi	How much is that?
Louis	A lot of money. So just for a single section of street, if you want to film in there, it's really expensive, so I would have liked more time, but we couldn't really afford it.
Fifi	Do carry on posting your questions. I had one in mind, but now I've forgotten!
Louis	How did you feel working with us?
Fifi	Well, it was really lovely because of the great mixture of deaf and hearing crew. Also, for me, the new role is a challenge. I wasn't certain at the beginning whether I could do it and I found that I could. I learnt so much and we've worked together previously on Switch and I remembered then that the crew becomes your kind of temporary family. You work so intensively together through this period of time, the whole week, and if someone spoils the atmosphere it can spoil it for everyone, but this production was a very happy one. Oh, we have another question from a viewer, from Vicky: "What was your favourite moment when writing and creating the film?"
Jean	I'm sorry, I missed that.
Fifi	Vicky is asking "What was your favourite moment from your writing and creation of the film?"
Jean	I think when I was writing it got a bit silly because, you know, sometimes I got stuck on looking for the right exact word or phrase and I found that I was researching on the internet, you know, people's stories. I might spend an hour, or two hours, just searching for the right word and then I'd have this lightbulb moment, you know, and I was able to move on, just three words after having done 3 hours of research. And it felt like a huge achievement for me at the time, it was really important.
Louis	For me, my absolute favourite was when you're filming and you've finished filming and then you go to editing. That is my favourite moment when making films. When you're filming and everything's going on, it all comes together when you're editing. You can see the film; you can see it as it forms.
Fifi	So when you film the scenes, you didn't film in sequence, you don't follow the script as it moves and evolves?
Louise	No, that's right.
Fifi	Okay, so Jean, when you're writing the script, what did you do, did you have sleepless nights?

Jean	Well I found that I really enjoyed going for a walk in the park for 30 minutes and during those times I would find some more ideas, so I'd use my phone and just jot down a few words to remind myself when I got home. It wasn't so much having sleepless nights, but I used walking as a creative tool.
Fifi	Okay, we have a question from Roger who asks: "When you were putting this together did you consider how it would appeal to a non-signing audience or did you only consider a Deaf audience?" What was your aim, who did you consider as your audience during the production?
Jean	Well, for this film I was really seeing it as a journey and I was imagining hearing members of the audience to think of it as a vision into a Deaf life. You know, Deaf people live among hearing people and I wanted to reflect that, so I had a deaf person and a hearing person come together and it was just a very normal occurrence in life, it wasn't a film about being deaf, you know. So I had people in the film speaking English, you know, coming and going, using different forms of language, and I guess I wanted to portray a positive model.
Louis	I actually think I didn't have a particular audience in mind, I think it's a fantastic story, it certainly worked for everyone. I don't think it matters whether it's a deaf or hearing audience. Certainly, of course, it's for our audience, it's accessible in BSL, because it's BSL TV. But I don't think it's only open to them.
Fifi	And is the film dubbed?
Louis	No, there's no voice over. We just keep the natural voices from the actors, that's what we kept. I think that's really nice. People do have their own sounds. We could have taken that off and dubbed in some other hearing actors, because that takes away you wouldn't take off a hearing person's voice, so we decided not to, in fact, I disagree with doing that. And there is a debate about how you should do that and what's most comfortable for hearing people to listen to. So we debated it but actually we stuck to what we decided, which was to just use the natural voices.
Fifi	OK, that's great, we've had another question from the audience, from Joe: "So you've had a number of challenging productions and you've moved on from Small World , which is a comedy. How does this production differ from that experience?"
Louis	Well, they were very different. In Small World it was a sitcom. In this, in Signs of An Affair , it's a black comedy. And so they are very different. In Small World , you had three cameras that you're changing in shots and perspective, whereas in Signs of An Affair , it's just one camera. In Small World it's a kind of a series, it's showing relationships between friends as they develop. In this, it's drama, it's a comedy. Actually, I'm finding it quite difficult to describe. In fact, I haven't thought about how they're different. So in Signs of An Affair , it's more like the drama in the style of it; it's still a comedy; but in Small World , it's a sitcom, it's a different kind of comedy. I think that the three cameras filmed in real time; that poses particular challenges with making sure you catch the actors in the right shot and so on. In this, it's a different issue about polishing off the filming that you're doing.

Fifi	Okay, thank you. We have more questions coming in. Joe, I hope you're happy with that answer. We have another question from Vicky: "If you had an unlimited budget what would you do, and why?"
Jean	Well, I'd get a limo! A very, very nice limo. Well I guess you can extend the film, we could have made a whole hour, because we did have to remove a number of scenes that we had planned because the time allowed for us was so limited and that took a lot of work, deciding what to keep in and what to leave out.
Louis	Absolutely, I think we could have filmed for longer. We could have filmed for more days. We had 10 pages that we could go through per day, 8-10 pages, and so if we had more time we could have done maybe a couple of pages more each day, so it would have extended it, but I think, overall, we would have made a longer film.
Fifi	Maybe there's a viewer out there who has some spare cash they'd like to send our way! Right, we have 3 minutes left and we'd like to get more of your questions in. We have one from Oliver who says: "How many films do you make per year?"
Louis	In terms of drama? One per year. There would be other work that I do as well, but because in terms of developing, filming, editing, altogether that could take 7-8 months.
Fifi	So, you might only do one per year?
Louis	So, you can only really focus on one of those in a year. Sometimes it might take less time if it's a shorter script, but so far, for me, it's usually one a year, one drama a year.
Fifi	Okay, another question from Adam: "You said it's a black comedy, does that have to be blood or death?"
Jean	Well it doesn't have to be, it can be more subtle than that. I'll give you an example of black humour: Prior to my father's funeral, my uncle went to the pub, but died there, which was unfortunate. We were traumatised back then, but reflecting back on it, we joked that we should have taken my uncle to the funeral and had a double funeral; two for the price of one! So, that's dark humour for you. There's no blood and guts involved, it's that kind of scenario.
Louis	It could have, but for this particular one, no. I think it's very funny but there are moments of real awkwardness.
Fifi	Okay, another question from James: "What is your next project and how does it differ from this one?"
Jean	Well, as I said, I like to walk in the park to come up with ideas and I've got a couple of ideas that I'm ruminating on. One is to do with a real experience of mine that I don't really want to share it with you right now. I've got the ending right but I need to work out the middle bit.
Louis	I think my next project, well it's going to be smaller, and so after that, well I'll have to see what new ideas there are, any projects and dramas. I'll have to think ... it's

	hard to start thinking ... that's the hardest part of this, thinking about those new ideas.
Fifi	Okay, we have one final question from Celia: "Are there plenty of choices for Deaf actors and if not, what can we do about that?" Are there roles out there for Deaf actors?
Louis	Well that's a really, really good question. I always struggle to find Deaf actors. There aren't enough and it's almost difficult. I don't want to use the same partners over and over again because ... I mean certainly if I have worked with them, I feel safe with them and I know that they will believe in my film and I believe in their acting. If the acting isn't up to standard they will have, in effect, brought the standard of the film down too. But what I wish is that I had a wide choice of actors so I could bring in one fantastic actor to draw in the audience, then choose another one. But I agree, there actually isn't enough choice of actors.
Jean	Yes, my experience of acting has lasted since I was 17 years old and it's rare to work with other deaf actors, jobs are rare. People have dropped out of acting because the roles are so rare. A lot of actors are out of work for big chunks of their career and then they might have a spurt of a lot of work occasionally. But the difficulty is, training to be an actor, access to drama school is problematic. You have to have some real determination to proceed with the studying.
Louis	And it's hard when you're an actor because if there isn't work, well then you have to work. Quite often I'll ask them; people who are acting have other jobs; they are having to ask for days off from the normal day jobs so they can act, or they end up taking holidays which means they don't have time to go on holiday with their families.
Jean	And sometimes you get offered an audition for tomorrow, you know, this might be a mainstream show and they've written in a Deaf character and sometimes it makes you cringe because of the way they've written it in the script but you think well, I'll go along anyway but then if they offer me the job I hope that that will change, the way they've written it will change, so... you know, there are a fair few difficulties and challenges that come with being offered a role for a Deaf character, you know, because often people don't understand how to write those characters effectively.
Fifi	Okay, how much time do we have left? Oh, I'm so sorry, we have multiple questions waiting in line, but we've run out of time, thank you so much, Louis and Jean. Hopefully, audience, you've enjoyed this. Now then, don't forget, whatever you do, tomorrow, Thursday, at 7:30 in the evening, the film will be broadcast. Watch it and enjoy it.
All	Goodbye!