

AULD

JOHN & ALAN LAWSON IN A FILM BY CINDY JANSEN

LANG

SOUL OF WIT, LIFE OF THE PARTY, NIFTY DANCER, INDOMITABLE FRIEND, EXEMPLAR OF COURAGE, RESCUER OF THE DESPERATE, BROTHER

SYNE

FEATURING **ALAN LAWSON, JOHN LAWSON, BOB LAWSON, MARY BETH TABACCO, NEL LAWSON, DICK LAWSON**
DIRECTOR, EDITOR, DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY **CINDY JANSEN** SUPERVISING EDITOR **KATHARINA WARTENA** MUSIC **METROPOLE CHORALE OF BROOKLINE**
COLOUR GRADING **LAURENT FLUTTERT** SOUND DESIGN **BART JILESEN** GRAPHIC DESIGN **YVO ZIJLSTRA**
PRODUCER **CINDY JANSEN FILM** CINECROWD ASSOCIATE PRODUCER **READY FOR CHANGE**



Synopsis

A portrait of two American brothers who start out being close and very similar, but end up on opposite ends of the social spectrum.

Filmmaker Cindy Jansen met John Lawson in Paris shortly before he died in 2009. The story of the love for his brother Alan, a life of partying, and ultimately alcoholism and lies convinced her to look up his brother, who made a career for himself as a professor at Brown University in Boston.

The thread of the film lies in the audio recordings of John that were made in Paris in 2008. His voice-over alternates with images of Alan in his daily surroundings, films from the family's archive and images and places John spoke about.

The calm, loving film subtly makes you ponder life's choices and the accompanying expectations.



Project history

In 2008, I met an American in Paris named John Lawson (76). He told me all about his years of alcohol addiction, his family and the special bond he had with his brother Alan in Boston, with whom he maintained contact through letters. The story of this man inspired me to create a cinematic portrait of him.

Due to throat cancer John spoke through a 'Provox', a prosthetic voice, and his speech came out raw and monotone. I saved the recorded discussions with John with the intention of inserting visual material at a later date. The direction I focused on was the personification of his relationship with alcohol and with his brother. In the film John speaks in monologues to Alan as if they were in the same room together, and projects himself as a kind of 'seductive woman' when he slips into the role of the alcohol. However, the project took a different turn in 2009 as John again became ill and died.

At this point only sound recordings were made. I asked John's brother Alan whether he would send me some footage of John, so that I could finish the film. During our discussions, major differences came to light about their separate characters and their intense relationship. It was at that point that the subject of the film shifted. It was no longer only about John but about both brothers, their shared past and their varying perspectives.

The brothers grew up in Providence, Rhode Island, USA, in the 1940s. Their family had Swedish/Canadian roots. Besides the parents, the family was made up of John, Alan and their youngest brother Bob. All three studied at Brown University. But where Alan spent his free time studying and doing sports, John focussed on ballroom dancing, drinking champagne and attending social gatherings.

Alan's career and personal life – he was a successful professor/writer and is married with two children – stands in stark contrast to that of John, whose aspirations as a professor were frequently undermined by alcohol addiction. John had long periods of abstinence after his first stint in rehab at the age of 43. During this time, he was mainly engaged in working with substance abuse care facilities, studying and publishing articles.

John lived clean in Paris, 'the place to be', for the last 10 years of his life. He spent his time studying French songs from the 1920s, the music of Alan's choir, and the Impressionists in the Louvre. He was an obliging host to his visitors and wrote letters to friends and family every day.

Director's Statement

Today's diverse society balances delicately between the extremes of encouragement and unacceptable behaviour. And its core values regulate to what extent social behaviour is seen as acceptable or deviant. We live in privileged times. It seems that more attention is paid to the differences between groups of people than to what brings individuals together. In a society that is evolving faster than ever before, that is characterized by so many temptations, it can be difficult for an individual to keep their personal reality in sight.

Auld Lang Syne

'Using this as my starting point, as the director I have literally placed myself in the middle of the lives of both brothers', explains Cindy Jansen. By the way in which the subject is approached and the slow pace at which the images are edited, the film goes beyond the daily issues. This film challenges viewers to reflect on bigger themes; the transience of love and friendship, traditional family ties and the timelessness of existence. *Auld Lang Syne* is therefore not merely an autonomous visual statement about the relationship between two brothers. It also goes beyond this very personal history and beyond the basic choices between pursuing behaviour that will be praised or behaviour that will be condemned.



Cindy Jansen

Director Cindy Jansen knows how to arouse a viewer's past experiences. Even though her themes may be a little rough around the edges from time to time, Jansen's imagery is very precise.

As in her previous productions, documentary elements form the thematic basis of *Auld Lang Syne*, often as an extension of social conventions and expectations. A strong balance is maintained between what is abstract and what is real, between the dramatic elements of people's lives and how those elements are reflected in the big picture. Major themes are approached with respect for the characters and without judgment. Language and imagery are interwoven: from the absurd and full on irony (*Alice*, 2004) to the oppressive (*Don't hit me I love you*, 2009) and the dramatic (*Come Spring*, 2009).



Biography

Cindy Jansen (1976, Veghel, NL) graduated from the Academy of Visual Arts in Arnhem (NL), Milan (I) and the International script development and directors programme of the Binger Filmlab in Amsterdam. Since 2000, she has her own studio in Rotterdam. Jansen's films and videos vary from non-linear narrations to more fragmented art works that find their audience in both the international art scene and at film festivals.

Her videos and photo works have been presented in multiple group and solo exhibitions, such as Loop '05 Barcelona, the Empire Project Gallery Istanbul and Gerhard Hofland Gallery Amsterdam, whereas her films have reached international audiences at film festivals, among which Hamburg International Short Film Festival and the International Film Festival Rotterdam.

Filmography

Alice (2004), Useless is Blood (2004), Don't hit me I love you (2008), Come Spring (2009), With Love (2010), Belgrade Forest (2012), Crows of the Sunday Pond (2013), Auld Lang Syne (2015)



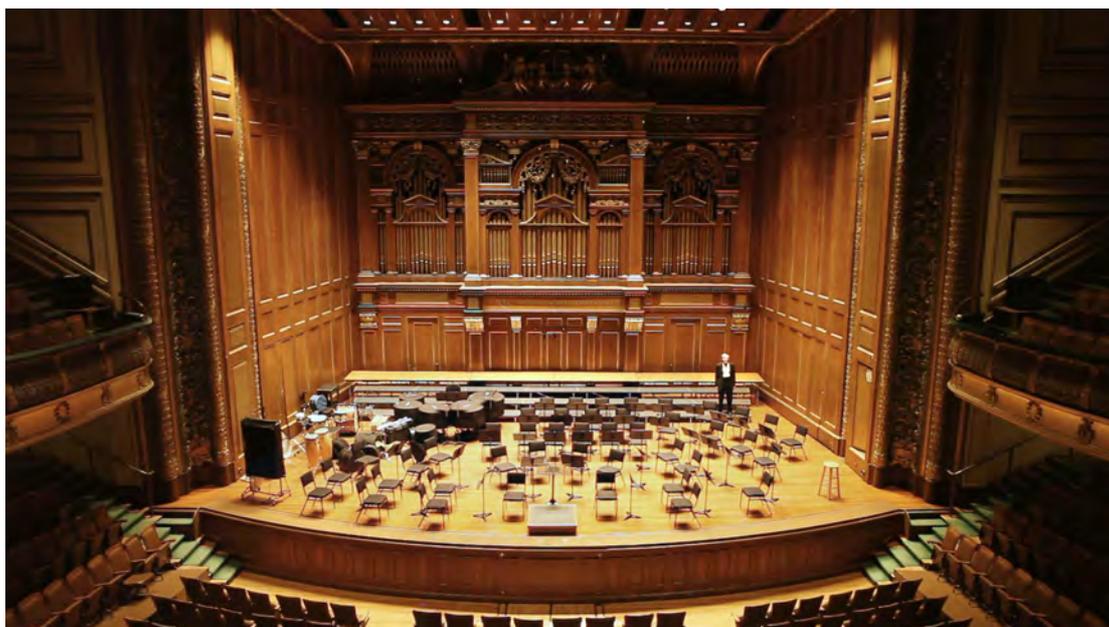
Credits

Cast

John Lawson
Alan Lawson
Bob Lawson
Mary Beth Tabacco
Nel Lawson
Dick Lawson

Crew

Director/producer /Director of photography/editor	Cindy Jansen
Supervising editor	Katharina Wartena
Music	Metropole Chorale of Brookline
Colour Grading	Laurent Fluttert
Sound Design and Mixage	Bart Jilesen
Graphic Design	Yvo Zijlstra



Technical details

Original format	HD
Screening Format	DCP
Length	00:48:08
Language	English
Subtitles	English
Sound	Dolby SR



44th International Film Festival Rotterdam

Reviews on *Auld Lang Syne* in the Daily Tiger #1, Thursday 22 January 2015

TAKE 3

If IFFR director Rutger Wolfson was able to go to his own festival today as a guest, these programme components would be on his list.

‘If I discover that my time is limited, I would go with a mid-length film: *Auld Lang Syne*, about two brothers who, after a close relationship in their youth, went in opposite directions. Most festival visitors are so focused on long films, that they sometimes overlook the shorter gems. Outrageous! The med-length films are lovely, and the tickets are less expensive.’

The happy medium

There is a world of difference between short and long. Each day IFFR shows a variety of mid-length films from 45 minutes to 65 minutes. Even the price is less: just eight Euros, five with a discount. A good start to the festival day, an intriguing ‘snack’ or a relaxing end to a marathon session. These films have one other thing in common next to their length: the present directors are put through the wringer during the Q&A by Maaïke Gouwenberg, our own Miss Mid-Length.

Maaïke Gouwenberg: ‘*Auld Lang Syne* has its world premier at the festival. It is an interesting portrait of two brothers who differ only fourteen months in age. They grow up as if they are twins. But one is always very cheerful, the other serious. They complement each other perfectly. During their studies their lives turn in very different directions. One works with discipline on his career whilst the other plunges into the party world. The flamboyant brother ends up in Paris, where filmmaker Cindy Jansen meets him eventually. Jansen, who studied fine arts and photography in Arnhem and Milan, became so intrigued by his story that she decided to visit his brother. *Auld Lang Syne* displays beautifully these very different lives, with interviews and archived footage. The filming is pleasant and restful. It raises a number of life questions, without being heavy handed.

During the Q&A after the film, I am going to ask Cindy why the movie has this title. I know it is a Scottish poem by Robert Burns, but it is not clear to me how this relates to the film. I am also curious about how she met the brother in Paris, and how she came to be included in the intimate family atmosphere.’