



Title: Long Live My Happy Head
Duration: 89'
Format: HD, 2K DCP
Directors: Austen McCowan and Will Hewitt
Producer: Austen McCowan

Trailer: <https://vimeo.com/610566791>

Logline:

A touching and unexpectedly uplifting love story about a Scottish comic book artist with a brain tumour, who uses his art to communicate his experience of cancer.

Long Synopsis:

What would you do if you were told you had a dramatically life-shortening illness when you were 32 years old? Start making comic books about it of course! Well, that's what Gordon did anyway.

Gordon is a Scottish comic book artist with a big bushy beard, very expressive eyebrows - oh, and an inoperable, incurable brain tumour. By making autobiographical comics about his experience, he is able to communicate his thoughts and reactions to cancer in a medium and a language that is disarming, accessible and inviting.

Approaching his 40th birthday, Gordon has found the love of his life, Shawn - a warm-hearted and protective American man who lives in Bath County, Virginia. Their relationship may be long-distance, but they talk on the phone everyday they're not together and visit each other as often as possible. Although his previous comics looked at his own personal experience, for his next book Gordon has chosen to focus on the people who look after people with cancer - the carers. His tumour is growing again though, and he's on chemotherapy whilst meeting and interviewing people who have cared for and lost their dearest loved ones.

LONG LIVE MY HAPPY HEAD is a film about cancer and comic books, but it's fundamentally a love story. We journey with Gordon and Shawn through one of the most difficult times of their lives only to see them emerge from the other side even stronger than before. Through intimately captured observational footage and video diary, stylized key interviews and animations created from Gordon's comic illustrations, this film immerses the audience in Gordon's world, and

reveals how art, love and a sense of humour can soothe our deepest fears of mortality and losing the people we care most about.

Directors' Statement:

We first met Gordon in 2018 when we bought one of the first copies of his book *Bittersweet* at the Edinburgh comic art fair. We were immediately struck by both the vulnerability and openness of his storytelling, and the humility and charm of his personality. It was only a few months later that we first turned on the camera and began to make this film.

We knew from the outset that there was a lot of uncertainty around what could happen with Gordon's health, but nothing could have prepared us for the global health crisis that gripped the planet, and the impact that would have on Gordon and Shawn. It could very easily have put a halt to production, but we continued filming and, as a result, we became incredibly close. We were there with them through the highs and lows of this surreal and unprecedented time, isolating ourselves for two weeks prior to key moments like their reunion after lockdown, their intimate conversations with each other about cancer and caring and even keeping Gordon's surprise birthday zoom a secret whilst managing to capture it from outside his window.

We always hoped that, despite the heavy subject matter, this film would be a positive story about optimism and creativity in the face of adversity - and that is what we have made. There are certainly some heart-wrenching moments, but what emerges from them is a testament to the power of art, love and humour to soothe our deepest fears of mortality and losing the people we care about most. It's a message that we feel will have even more universality now, when audiences can really identify with the challenges Gordon and Shawn must overcome as they too have felt that same anxiety, fear and uncertainty as we've all tried to make sense of the past year and a half.

Funders:

Long Live My Happy Head is a Melt the Fly production, funded by Creative Scotland and BBC Scotland in partnership with The Open University. Carers' stories and the artworks they inspired will be available to view on bbc.co.uk/HappyHead by following links to The Open University.

Contact and Social Media handles:

Website	longlivemyhappyhead.com
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Twitter	@HappyHeadFilm
Instagram	@LongLiveMyHappyHead
Facebook	fb.com/LongLiveMyHappyHead

Film Stills available here:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1hiPUYwZDskBFKY9yjsTuOtOiYfCvZK_-?usp=sharing

Crew Bios:

Directors' Bios:

Austen McCowan and Will Hewitt are an emerging directing duo based in Edinburgh. They have a collaborative relationship spanning 12 years, and as co-founders of their production company Melt the Fly they have developed a reputation for creating distinctive documentaries that shine a light on subcultures of Scottish society, with international appeal.

Will and Austen's previous films are *Sink or Skim* (2019), a 29' film commissioned by BBC Scotland commission which then aired on BBC One, Scottish BAFTA winning short documentary *Harmonic Spectrum*, co-produced with the Scottish Documentary Institute and their debut feature doc *Long Live My Happy Head*, official selection for Thessaloniki Documentary Festival and BFI Flare.

Co-Director / Editor - Will Hewitt

Will Hewitt is a Scottish BAFTA winning documentary director and editor. He is co-founder of Melt the Fly, where he has been a driving force behind the emerging production company's recent success. Will directed and edited their Scottish BAFTA winning short, Harmonic Spectrum, as well as his first feature, Long Live My Happy Head, collaborating with acclaimed editor Barbara Toennieshen. Will's films have been supported by the BBC, Scottish Documentary Institute and Creative Scotland, as well as the Open University.

Co-Director / Producer - Austen McCowan

Austen McCowan is a Scottish BAFTA winning producer and director based in Edinburgh. As co-founder of Melt the Fly he is passionate about unearthing stories that give audiences an alternative perspective on the world. He has produced and directed films with support from BBC Scotland, Creative Scotland and the Scottish Documentary Institute, and his debut feature, Long Live My Happy Head was an official selection for BFI Flare and the Thessaloniki Documentary Festival in 2022.

Editor - Barbara Toennieshen

Barbara discovered her passion for editing during her film studies and has been fascinated by the possibilities of cinematic storytelling ever since. She looks for the story behind the plot, for vertical narratives and opportunities for projection, but above all for people and not clichés. Her work has been awarded at the Berlinale, IDFA, Sundance and Hot Docs, with her most recent documentary, The Wall of Shadows winning almost 30 prizes. Based in Berlin, Barbara is a member of the German and European Film Academies and also DOK:SCHNITT:ZUKUNFT, a collective of well known editors that campaigns for better conditions in documentary filmmaking.

Original Artwork - Gordon Shawn

Gordon is an illustrator and comics creator who is captivated by the magic that comic panels hold. He can find inspiration anywhere, whether in bridges like Brooklyn, Forth, or Jeff; or in smaller things like the geosanders in the local river, there for but a few months. "We're friends now", he says, "they bring joy and whimsy to this face, mind and heart." Gordon's book, BITTERSWEET looked at his own personal experience with cancer, but he is currently working on a graphic novel that gives unpaid carers space to tell us their stories. You can find his work on the Brain Tumour Research UK recommended reading list and at his online shop.

Executive Producer - Geoffrey Smith

Geoffrey Smith is a double Emmy award-winning director who was at the BBC in London for over 13 years. He has made 24 films for all the major UK broadcasters, won over 40 International awards, was listed in the 2009 NY Times Best Films list for the "The English Surgeon". Geoffrey is currently developing several feature documentaries and is in demand as a consultant and script editor on a range of international projects. He is passionate about getting documentaries out into the wider community and for the last 5 years curated and ran the Castlemaine Documentary Film Festival in Victoria, Australia.

Executive Producer - Amy Hardie

Amy Hardie is a multi-award winning documentary filmmaker. She graduated from NFTS in 1990 with the BP Expo Prize for best student documentary, Kafi's Story. Her film The Edge of Dreaming was the first Scottish feature documentary in competition at IDFA in 2009 and her most recent feature Seven Songs for a Long Life was shown in over 100 UK cinemas before international festival screenings including SxSW and Margaret Mead. It's now the first documentary in the UK to be 'prescribed' by doctors in over 240 GP centres. Amy is currently directing the feature documentary The Sniper's Wife, funded by BFI and Creative Scotland.

Animation Art Director - Ross Hogg

Ross Hogg is an award-winning animation filmmaker based in Edinburgh, who focuses on creating dexterous, hand-crafted animation using a variety of materials. His work celebrates the vibrancy and physicality of the medium and has screened internationally at prestigious festivals. Ross has received seven BAFTA Scotland nominations, winning the BAFTA Scotland New Talent Award for Animation in 2014, the award for Short Film in 2016, and for Animation in 2017. Ross currently works on a range of exciting animation projects whilst teaching on the Undergraduate and Masters Programmes at The Glasgow School of Art.

Composer - Alexandra Hamilton-Ayres:

Alexandra is a British-Belgian film composer, rising in the neoclassical scene as one of the UK's upcoming artists. Her work blends sound worlds with her love for the piano, orchestrated into a rich palette of electronica and classical music. Alexandra's critically-acclaimed debut album *2 Years Stranger* was described by BBC Radio 6's Mary Anne Hobbes as "hauntingly beautiful". Merging her film scores and artist work is fundamental to Alexandra's love of story-telling through music and her most recent film collaborations include creating scores for *Long Live My Happy Head* and BAFTA Scotland-winning director, Emma Davie's, *The Oil Machine*.