

JESSICA
RAINE

TOBIAS
MENZIES

GREG
WISE

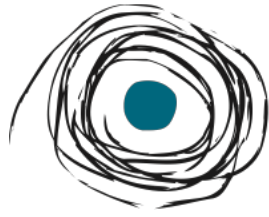
HANNAH
RAE

DEVIRIM
LINGNAU



A FILM BY
EMILY HARRIS

Carmilla



FILM MOVEMENT®

A FILM BY
EMILY HARRIS

Carmilla

**“A stunningly beautiful film...the first comparison that comes to mind is
Céline Sciamma’s *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*.”**

–Sarah Boslaugh, *The Arts STL*

**“Takes a story that is over a century old and gives it fresh blood...
has a decidedly modern, beautifully feminist, and feminine, edge.”**

–Miranda Riddle, *HorrorBuzz*

**United Kingdom | 2019 | English Language | 96 minutes
1.85:1 | Stereo 2.0 and 5.1. Surround Sound**

AVAILABLE ON VIRTUAL CINEMA BEGINNING JULY 17, 2020

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SYNOPSIS

Isolated from the outside world, fifteen-year-old Lara (Hannah Rae) lives in seclusion on a vast country estate with her father and strict governess Miss Fontaine (Jessica Raine). Late one evening, a mysterious carriage crash brings a young girl into their home to recuperate. Lara immediately becomes enchanted by this strange visitor who arouses her curiosity and awakens her burgeoning desires.

This atmospheric coming-of-age tale is inspired by the 1872 Gothic vampire novella by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu.



CAST

Lara.....Hannah Rae
Carmilla.....Devrim Lingnau
Doctor.....Tobias Menzies
Mr. Bauer.....Greg Wise
Miss Fontaine.....Jessica Raine
Old Man.....Colin Blumenau
Paul the Stableman.....Daniel Tuite
Margaret.....Lorna Gayle

CREW

Written and Directed by.....Emily Harris
Produced by.....Lizzie Brown & Emily Precious
Executive Producer.....Tilly Films
Co-Executive Producers.....Will Clarke, Andy Mason,
Mike Runagall, Ate de Jong,
James Spring
Director of Photography.....Michael Wood
Production Designer.....Alexandra Walker
Editor.....Rebecca Lloyd
Composer.....Philip Selway
Costume Designer.....John Bright
Hair and Make-Up Designer.....Julie Kendrick
Casting Director.....Lucy Rands





ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

Set in late 18th Century rural England, *Carmilla* is a tender and tragic love story between two young girls. Based on a seminal work of gothic literature, this tale of blossoming adolescent sexuality takes place at a time when religion, repression, fear and superstition ruled society. At its helm is writer-director Emily Harris, who set out to steer *Carmilla* away from traditional costume dramas. “I didn’t want to make a period film,” Harris states. “I wanted to make a film that was set in a period. That’s something quite different.”

With the project fully-funded by private equity finance, Harris joined forces with Lizzie Brown of Bird Flight Films and Emily Precious of Fred Films, who came on board as producers, alongside Executive Producer Tilly Films. For Harris, it was her first time taking a sole directorial credit, after co-directing *Love Is Thicker Than Water* (2016) with Ate de Jong. Across her work in the past she’s always been a collaborator, and found co-directing natural, but *Carmilla* felt different. “This one made a lot of sense to do it by myself.”



GOTHIC BEGINNINGS

Harris began writing the script after she came across *Carmilla*, a gothic novella by Irish writer Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu. First serialized in literary magazine *The Dark Blue* in 1871 and 1872, it's one of the earliest noted works of vampire fiction, pre-dating Bram Stoker's 1897 classic *Dracula* by 26 years. Set in Europe, the story is narrated by Laura, a teenage girl preyed upon by Carmilla, revealed to be the vampire Mircalla, Countess Karnstein.

"It is one of those books that attracted the attention of all sorts of artists," says Harris. Indeed, from esteemed Danish director Carl Theodore Dreyer's *Vampyr* (1932) to Roger Vadim's *Blood and Roses* (1960), the Hammer-produced *The Vampire Lovers* (1970) and even the Japanese anime *Vampire Hunter D: Bloodlust* (2000), the array of filmmakers taking on Le Fanu's material is remarkable.

Harris was keen to remove the vampire thread to the story. "I was more interested in understanding the root of that literature. Why were people writing about that? What does it symbolize and signify and what's the human story underneath it? So peeling those layers off and getting into the psychology of that and making them real people was what I wanted to do."

Tapping into the story, Harris focused on the relationship between two young girls. Lara lives on her father's estate who her spiritual and academic welfare overseen by her governess, Miss Fontaine. But one day a nearby accident brings a mysterious young girl into the household. Unable to remember who she is, she takes the name Carmilla; soon, feelings develop between her and Lara.

"In effect it's a beautiful coming-of-age love story set within tapestry of religion and fear of the unknown," says Harris. "It's set at a time when people really believed if bad things happen it came from external influences." In this case, Carmilla is suspected by some to be an incarnation of the Devil. "It was a deep-rooted fear and I found that really, really interesting."

Another early decision was changing the setting. Originally a 19th century story that takes place in Austria, *Carmilla* was relocated to England in the 1780s. "This was the time when costumes didn't have powdered wigs and faces," says Emily Precious. Rather, the style of the era was plain and muted. "Emily Harris was very specific because she didn't want those period costumes to be distracting any way," adds Lizzie Brown.

The decision to locate the film in the late 18th Century was the idea of *Carmilla's* acclaimed costume designer, John Bright, a six-time Oscar-nominee who won the Academy Award for Best Costume Design for *A Room With A View* (1985). "He read quite an early draft and was hugely important in establishing when – not necessarily where – we were setting this film," says Harris. "He listened to what I was trying to do visually and then he was able to pinpoint exactly which time period would suit that look."

There was never any consideration about turning the book into a contemporary story. "It was really important that it was believably set in a time where you can't pull out your mobile phone, and you're disconnected from the outside world," says Harris. "The isolation is really, really important [for Lara]. She has no frame of reference with another girl. So that when Carmilla comes in, it's huge. So for that reason, it had to be set in that period and not now."

Also crucial to Harris' vision was Michael Wood, cinematographer on Ron Howard's Beatles documentary *Eight Days A Week*, as the second unit director of photography on Howard's dramatic features *Rush* and *In the Heart of the Sea*. "Michael and Emily Harris had such an amazing creative relationship," notes Brown. "They both were nurturing that and relishing the challenge."

Another key appointment was production designer Alexandra Walker, whose vast experience as art director on several *Harry Potter* films was brought to *Carmilla*. Harris notes just how well she dovetailed with both Walker and Wood. "It's a bit like music. Every note doesn't make much sense on its own but then it becomes this song. I feel like this is the case with the production designer and the cinematographer, and what they brought to it."





CASTING CARMILLA

The search for actresses to play Carmilla and Lara was always going to be fundamental to the success of the project. “I do remember that I honestly didn’t think we would make this film,” admits Harris. “I kept saying, ‘If we don’t find Carmilla and Lara, we don’t make this. There’s no way.’” Fortunately, the production had the help of casting director Lucy Rand, who met dozens of girls, filming them and sending the results to Harris and her producers.

Finding the actress to play Carmilla was a Eureka moment, after newcomer Devrim Lingnau sent in a series of self-taped auditions. “She was just one we couldn’t forget,” says Brown. “She’s mesmerizing.” Based in Germany, this young German-Turkish actress wasn’t able to meet the team for the first round of auditions. “So we sent her some feedback. And she sent some more self-tapes and then we flew her over to London and that was the first time she’d ever been to the UK.”

Lingnau, who makes her feature film debut with *Carmilla*, transfixed everyone she met on the production. “Everybody else connected with Lara,” says Precious. “They had a sense of Carmilla but it felt like they had a sense of her from Lara’s point of view of her, whereas Devrim just embodied Carmilla. She said, ‘I’m just so fascinated by this character that nobody knows anything about.’”

It was clear that Lingnau instinctively understood the character. “She came in and described Carmilla as a splinter in this family,” says Brown. “It doesn’t cause any damage but it’s irritating everybody and they’re trying to get rid of it.” Harris was similarly taken with Lingnau, a former dancer and figure-skater. “Once she appeared it definitely felt like we might actually make this.”

By this point the production had already met British actress Hannah Rae for the key role of Lara. Rae, who featured in the TV drama *Broadchurch*, was bowled over by Harris’s script. “The way that it’s written was stunning,” she says. “With all the references to nature and insects, I visualized it in my head straight away. I could imagine this being filmed in a beautifully artistic way. And so that’s what attracted me initially.”

Among other things, Rae was appearing at the Royal Court Theatre in London in Vivienne Franzmann’s play *Bodies*, which allowed Harris and co. an ideal opportunity to see her in action. Yet casting was very much about finding the right chemistry between the young actresses playing Carmilla and Lara. Part of the process involved testing potential cast members together.

“It’s so much about the connection between two people,” says Harris. “Hannah is a great actress and we tried her against some other people, but couldn’t be convinced that she was the one until she was matched with the right person. So she wasn’t actually cast until she and Devrim were in a room together. They were it. It was obvious.” It was the first and only time Lingnau was paired with anyone.

According to Rae, Lara’s cocooned upbringing, controlled by Miss Fontaine, has left her lacking crucial human contact. “She hasn’t had that interaction with other kids her age...when Carmilla comes along, she completely gives herself to this person. She’s completely in awe of her, and [thinks] she’s beautiful and amazing and fun and interesting! She’s a bit bored of Miss Fontaine, I think! It’s the excitement of this new person.”

The search for an actress to play Lara’s governess, Miss Fontaine, was more traditional. British star Jessica Raine, best known as Jenny in the BBC series *Call the Midwife*, was met very early on. Harris knew her from her theatre work, specifically Alistair McDowall’s claustrophobic sci-fi play *X*, staged at London’s Royal Court. “Whoever took that part is a brave actress,” comments Harris, “so I knew she had these qualities to find the depths and the darkness.”

Raine was immediately taken with the script. “I loved the atmosphere and that three women with very different motivations were at the centre of it. Then when I met Emily Harris, we had a really good chat about how we both saw it and I knew she had a very strong visual aesthetic for *Carmilla*. That there were so many women behind the camera and in production gave this film an extra element that made it very appealing. The whole thing just emanated good vibrations so I was very happy to jump on board.”

When it came to assessing Miss Fontaine, Raine calls her “a deeply controlling woman”, adding: “She believes deeply in the Devil and in the folklore surrounding the land, so she is a woman whose life is based on fear and repressing any sinful thoughts or actions. With all that repression, she’s like a kettle not being allowed to boil, just simmering away and the steam has to escape somehow.”

Noting that governesses are often women of little means, Raine believes that Miss Fontaine is terrified of Lara growing up, as it would leave her without a job. “But obviously Lara has to grow up, and with growing up comes sexuality, which Fontaine is desperate to repress on any level. What happens in the film is Fontaine’s worst nightmare, and that is what drives her to make the decisions she does, horrific though they are.”

When it came to the cast’s male contingent, British actor Tobias Menzies – most recently seen as Prince Philip in the third season of *The Crown* – was approached to play Doctor Renquist, the medic who attends to Carmilla when she first arrives at the house. “He was the first person we went to,” says Precious. “He came back wanting to meet Emily. They’d met socially before and he was really interested in working with her. They got on like a house on fire.”

With Daniel Tuite and Lorna Gayle rounding out the cast as, respectively, Paul the Stableman and housekeeper Margaret, the last person to come on board was Greg Wise, playing the small but potent role of Lara’s father Mr. Bauer. “He’s got a very gentle fatherly quality,” notes Brown. “We kept saying we just want somebody with kind eyes. We also said we wanted someone you want a hug from. They have to have this gentleness and softness and yet he still has to preserve authority over everyone. It’s a difficult role because he’s absent for most of the film. But he was great.”



HEADING TO PLUMPTON

In September 2017, the production decamped to the Plumpton Place in East Sussex, a Grade II listed Elizabethan manor house that would form the base for the shoot. Not only providing the film's main location, it would also serve as both accommodation for some crew members and even a rehearsal space. Harris was particularly keen on spending time with her cast rehearsing before the shoot began. "I think it's invaluable. I think it would be terrifying to show up on set without that."

Partly, Harris was able to fine-tune the script whilst working with the actors. "I'm very free with the writing throughout production," she says. "We re-wrote a lot while we were on set and the actors brought a lot to that. I think that's important, because an actor has to own the part. You can help direct them and feed into it, but we're all working towards a unified vision."

The rehearsal period was particularly useful for Rae. "I found just being in the manor house and being around the grounds and exploring them, in the way my character Lara would, really helped me a lot," she says. "Looking at all of the letters that Lara was writing, trying to figure out her handwriting, trying to even write with my left hand...I just got into the character really slowly and it didn't really feel like an effort. I progressed into it, which I thought was really lovely."

Other preparation included dyeing her blonde hair to black. “When I looked in the mirror, I didn’t see Hannah anymore, I saw someone different. It was such a massive change and I found that massively helpful as well.” Rae was also able to speak to the props team “about what things Lara would have in her bedroom and the pictures she’d drawn”, all part of the collaborative nature of the shoot. “It wasn’t an effort. It was nice and seamless.”

The breakneck shoot took place over twenty-two days. “All the crew were living nearby,” says Brown. “We had a small crew but it was a very tight crew.” With everyone committing to intensive eleven-hour days, it meant a lot of dedication. “For me, that was the hardest thing,” adds Brown, “because we were aware of just how much we were asking people – when our production designer is still stapling curtains at three in the morning!”

Yet all the crew pooled together, going above and beyond. Take Julie Kendrick, the hair-and-makeup designer. Harris praises the way Kendrick helped her young actors before they went on camera. “They were young girls, they were probably quite nervous and I know Julie was great at talking to them: ‘Do you know what scene you’re doing next? Do you know what comes before it? Do you know what comes after it?’ So we all just became this team.”

For Jessica Raine, the shoot came as part of a very busy working period, with projects either side of *Carmilla*. “That didn’t afford me as much time as I’d usually like to prep. But I think that actually helped. I didn’t over think it, and those three weeks were a bubble of intense filmmaking that I found very creatively satisfying. I just threw myself in to it. More than anything I had images in my mind: Hammershøi paintings, the mother in the film *Carrie*, a hug that’s too overbearing.”

Working with Harris was a particular highlight for Raine. “I loved that she had a clear vision but was also a collaborator, very open to ideas and incredibly respectful of an actor’s process. But what I got most from her was an infectious enjoyment of the process. I think she would have been on set working 24 hours a day if she could. She also seemed unflappable; I’m sure there were lots of panicky moments that she protected us from so we could be free creatively.”

With the principal cast all staying in nearby cottages, camaraderie kicked in. “We felt like a band of brothers – or sisters! – all in it together,” says Raine. Furthering their bond, Rae and Lingnau shared accommodation. “We were getting to know each other as Carmilla and Lara were getting to know each other,” says Rae. “So it was really lovely to get to know her like that and we came away and spoke as Devrim and Hannah and then came back to the house and were Lara and Carmilla.”

Rae also pays tribute to Raine, who took her younger co-stars under her wing. “I got on really well with Jess. It was quite funny. It is like a love triangle really: the relationship between Fontaine and Lara, and then Lara and Carmilla and then Carmilla and Miss Fontaine. That’s another thing that drew me to the project. This jealousy that Miss Fontaine appears to have, it really affects her. Even from the beginning, she completely doesn’t want Carmilla there.”

While the shoot was divided into eleven-day fortnights, it was an intense and demanding period for the actors. “It’s weird getting into the times of filming,” says Rae. “One minute, you’d get up at 5 o’clock in the morning and finish at 4 o’clock in the afternoon, and then another time, you’d be getting up at 10 o’clock, then come back at midnight. So your whole body clock changes. But I didn’t mind. By 5am, I was up and raring to go.”

For Harris, she was initially keen to shoot *Carmilla* on film, but came to the conclusion that it would be more cost-effective to film on digital. “So what we did was investigated a lot of vintage lenses.” Michael Wood, the film’s cinematographer, sourced a series of vintage lenses. “We did tests, screened them all and chose these ones from the 1950s in Russia, which gave that lovely look and that flare,” adds Harris. “Because it’s digital, you can actually get a lot more out of the darkness.”

The exterior scenes, with Lara outside the house, also meant Harris and Wood had a chance to film the natural world. “Nature is a tricky one to capture,” Harris adds. “You are at the mercy of the seasons. It was always inherent in the script and important to me that it was depicted. Partly because I feel that’s what the story is about. There is something inherently beautiful, scary, destructive and creative about nature, and I think the story was everything to do with that.”



FINE TUNING

When the shoot finished, Emily Harris set to work with her editor Rebecca Lloyd on cutting the film together. Lloyd's impressive CV includes working as first assistant editor on Andrea Arnold's *Fish Tank* and *American Honey*, and David Mackenzie's *Perfect Sense*. While this was their first collaboration, coincidentally, the two had corresponded previously about working on a film installation by Harris as part of her role in the theatre performance department at London's V&A Museum.

While Harris has experience editing, she felt it was important to find another voice in the cutting room. "I don't think it's a good idea to edit your own work," she notes. "I think it would be quite damaging to do it for yourself because you've already been telling that story. You're writing it, you're working with all the actors, you do need someone to bounce things off of...you need that person."

When it came to choosing a composer to score *Carmilla*, Emily Precious hit on the brilliant notion of recruiting Philip Selway. The British musician – best known as the drummer for the band Radiohead – already has two solo albums to his name, as well as the score for Polly Steele's 2017 film, *Let Me Go*. Precious contacted Selway's agent, Mary Rodford. "She read the script and she said 'I think Philip is going to love this.' He read it and loved it."

By coincidence, Selway had already worked with both *Carmilla's* cinematographer Michael Wood and production designer Alexandra Walker on *Let Me Go*. He'd also played in the band 'The Weird Sisters' featured in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, upon which Walker worked as art director. When the notion of hiring Selway was floated, Harris was immediately hooked. "I thought it was a brilliant idea," she says.

Selway was entranced when he first read the script. "It left an awful lot of scope," he remembers. "It felt like a very visceral script. Emily makes lots of references throughout the script to the tactile side of things, the textured sounds that make up the environment. And that's what drew me in first." Details like the crackle of fire and the sound of falling rain fired him up. "It felt percussive."

Attempting to characterize the house as well as the protagonists via music, Selway was drawn to deploying various instruments – notably the contrabass flute. "For me, it was trying to find an instrument to anchor everything around," says Selway, who had to put a call out to the few flautists in the country capable of playing this "beast" of a woodwind instrument. He eventually found Gareth McLearnon, an internationally renowned flautist and composer.

"With the contrabass flute, Gareth was doing these amazing percussive flourishes and sound effects," recalls Selway. "It all felt very appropriate to the sound of nature. There are points when you hear the flute and it merges in with all those macro pictures and sounds of bugs and insects and everything. That felt like a good anchor for writing and building around that."

Selway began writing the score at his home studio before taking it to Evolution Studios in Oxford, working with producer and musician Nick Moorbath. It quickly became clear that the score for *Carmilla* wasn't going to be a traditional period movie score. "At the heart of it, you have this very powerful relationship between these two teenage girls," says Selway. "So you don't want something that's nice and floral and ornate; there's real passion, excitement and genuine distress in the film."

As the score began to take shape, Selway was keen to plug into three specific characters: Lara, Carmilla and Miss Fontaine. "The first scene I went to was the love scene between Lara and Carmilla, where Miss Fontaine

catches them. That's where I started. You start building up this framework and from that you extrapolate out all the other scenes really. There is something very intense about that scene, so I really concentrated on the scenes where there was intensity to the emotion in there."

While he scored the music to picture, Selway was involved much earlier, even visiting the shoot in Sussex. His very first task was to pen music for the traditional song that Lara sings as she plays with flowers. He then had to teach Rae the melody before they shot the scene. "Hannah was very game. We had this Skype conversation. She didn't need any teaching on it – she had it nailed anyway – but a good way to meet somebody."

During post-production, Selway watched several cuts of the film and was present during the sound mix, overseen by supervising sound editor Joe Beal. "It was a very collaborative atmosphere," says Selway, echoing feelings of everybody who worked on *Carmilla*. "Nobody was trying to stamp their ego over it. It was all towards realizing this film and Emily's vision, bringing out the best in the drama...it's been a very inclusive process."



SELECT PRESS QUOTES

“[A] complex, enchanting mystery which draws you in and leaves you obsessing over every last detail.”

–Bianca Garner, *Filmotomy*

“Lingnau and Rae create plenty of heat in their scenes together, nicely balanced by the chill of [Jessica] Raine’s performance.”

–Amber Wilkinson, *Eye For Film*

“Alternating between candle-lit interiors and sun-dappled gardens, *Carmilla* perfects the experience not just of first love, but of the heady excitement of being completely bewitched by someone new.”

–Sarah Ward, *Screen Daily*

“DoP Michael Wood makes glorious use of a summery English scenery and candlelit interiors for the beguiling sapphic ‘love story’ that certainly has its moments delicately evoked by the infatuated duo.”

–Meredith Taylor, *Filmuforia*

“Aesthetically, *Carmilla* is gorgeous, Blood reds on pale backgrounds are used to great effect, and the candlelit cinematography controls exactly what one can see – and what one thinks might be lurking in the shadows....”

–Carmen Paddock, *One Room with a View*

“Stemming directly from the original text and thriving in its gloomy setting is Emily Harris’ 2019 adaptation, a wistful yet sensuous debut feature by the British director. *Carmilla* proves to be a successful adaptation that will appeal to anyone looking for some unearthly shivers, or a coming-of-age story where being conscious of one’s own sexuality takes centre stage.”

–Serena Scateni, *Vague Visages*

“It feels like it’s been a few years since we had a good old fashioned Victorian horror film.... So the moody, intelligent *Carmilla* (inspired by the gothic novel by Sheridan Le Fanu) is a welcome addition to the genre – not to mention a queer one!”

–Justin Lockwood, *Geeks Out*



ABOUT FILM MOVEMENT

Founded in 2002, Film Movement is a North American distributor of award-winning independent and foreign films based in New York City. It has released more than 250 feature films and shorts culled from prestigious film festivals worldwide. Its catalog includes titles by directors such as Hirokazu Kore-eda, Maren Ade, Jessica Hausner, Andrei Konchalovsky, Andrzej Wajda, Diane Kurys, Ciro Guerra and Melanie Laurent. In 2015, Film Movement launched its reissue label Film Movement Classics, featuring new restorations released theatrically as well as on Blu-ray and DVD, including films by such noted directors as Eric Rohmer, Peter Greenaway, Bille August, Marleen Gorris, Takeshi Kitano, Arturo Ripstein, Sergio Corbucci and Ettore Scola. For more information, visit www.filmmovement.com.

