PRESS NOTES

As of August 31, 2018

Niijang Xyaalas Productions
presents

SGAAWAAY K'UUNA
EDGE OF THE KNIFE

A Film By
Hluugitgaa Gwaai Edenshaw
Jaada Yahlangnaay Helen Haig-Brown

http://www.isuma.tv/haida

Directors	Hluugitgaa Gwaai Edenshaw, Jaada Yahlangnaay Helen Haig-Brown
Screenplay	Jalaan Edenshaw, Gwaai Edenshaw, Graham Richard, Leonie Sandercock
Producers	Jonathan Frantz, Stephen Grosse
Director of Photography	Jonathan Frantz
Production Design	Sandy Cochrane
Costume Design	Athena Theny
Editing	Sarah Hedar
Music	Kinnie Starr
Executive Producer	Zacharias Kunuk

Starring
Tyler York as Adiits'ii
William Russ as Kwa
Adeana Young as Hlaaya

Running time: 100 minutes DCP – Dolby 5.1

They say a fire calls you into the forest. The cold will make you desperate to catch the fire; but no matter how long you run, you cannot catch the fire. You run and run until your mind is sick and the spirits take you over. You become wild. You become Gaagiixid.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Haida Gwaii, 1800's. At a seasonal fishing camp two families endure conflict between the nobleman Adiits'ii and his best friend Kwa. After Adiits'ii causes the accidental death of Kwa's son, he flees into the rainforest, descending into madness and transforming into Gaagiixid – "the Wildman." When the families return in the spring, they discover Adiits'ii has survived the winter. Can he be rescued and returned to his humanity? Meanwhile, Kwa wrestles with his deepest desire – revenge.

LONG SYNOPSIS

Set in the mid-1800's on the remote islands of Haida Gwaii. The Gaaxuustaa people from the north join the TildaGawaay people at their summer camp to put food up for the winter. The families work together, just as they have for generations. Adiits'ii welcomes the TildaGawaay as they arrive in their canoe. The honoured young mother Hlaaya, his best friend Kwa and their favoured son, Gaas, have arrived.

The families clean and dry halibut and harvest mussels and clams from the rocky shoreline. All the while they chatter and reaffirm the deep bonds between their families. When enough food has been put up, they celebrate their last dinner together.

The season is drawing to a close, but young Gaas still hopes to paddle offshore to catch his favourite food, black cod. Adiits'ii is eager to take Gaas, but Kwa warns that the weather is turning. Gaas will have to wait until next year.

The next morning Hlaayaa and Kwa wake to find their son has gone. Kwa is furious and sets out to follow Adiits'ii and Gaas in his canoe; but Hlaayaa convinces him that Adiits'ii knows what he is doing. They return to camp to pack as winds begin to blow.

Hours later, as weather worsens, Adiits'ii and Gaas have yet to return. Hlaayaa spots a beached canoe at the end of the bay and runs out to find her son's lifeless body. Devastated, Hlaaya and Kwa bring Gaas' body to the house, to the mournful wails of their families.

As morning arrives the Gaaxuustaa are still searching for his best friend Adiits'ii. Never the less, Kwa is determined leave them before strong winds return. With burnt hair and ashen face, Hlaayaa appears exhausted as the family sets off to the south.

When Adiits'ii wakes and finds himself abandoned, an elusive flickering flame appears deep in the forest. Craving warmth and human company, he chases the fire deeper and deeper into the rainforest. Exhausted, he collapses in the hollow of an ancient tree. As he sleeps, supernaturals enter his soul and he transforms into Gaagiixid.

Imbued with newfound supernatural energy and strength, Adiits'ii is driven to frantically forage food through the winter. In spring the families return to discover signs of Adiits'ii's

supernatural survival. They set out to capture him; and must discover whether they can drive out the supernatural power so that Adiits'ii can rejoin the community.

THE HAIDA WORLD

SGaawaay K'uuna Edge of the Knife was filmed in Haida Gwaii, an archipelago in Haida territory in the Pacific. The film is based on Haida story-telling elements and inspired by the lands and waters where Haida thrive. Haida people are the rightful Title-holders to Haida Gwaii, where they have lived since at least the end of the Last Ice Age, over 12,000 years ago.

Haida preserve knowledge intergenerationally by meticulously reciting a canon of oral histories called K'aygang.nga. These stories carry us back across time to the moment Taadll cried out for the fate of the supernatural beings, who lay stretched out across the surface of the formless expanse. Nang Kildlaas Hll.nga shaped the cosmos, providing the supernatural beings with places to settle. Thereafter Haida emerged into the world singing and dancing alongside our coastal neighbours.

Since then K'aygang.nga have inspired us to strive for excellence in weaving and building, carving and painting, singing and dancing. Despite the hardships of colonization Haida continue to excel in all things. Today tremendous monuments of cedar, life-like masks of alder, delicate clothes of spruce, and soft dishes of stone remind Haida of their supernatural origins, and enrich public and private collections throughout the world. In Haida Gwaii we bring all these living beings together through 'waahlGahl, our coastal legal system, where guests gather to witness K'aygang.nga enacted.

Today we are grateful to you, our witness, as we embark into a medium new to us. As our story unfolds, we hope you will find traces of the excellence, diligence, and sincerity that characterize the works of our ancestors. Haawa, haawa, haawa.

DIRECTORS NOTES – GWAAI EDENSHAW AND HELEN HAIG-BROWN

Before the coasts took their form; before the glaciers disappeared; before trees grew; Haida ancestors lived amongst the SGaana (supernatural beings) in Haida Gwaii. Since then generations of kuuniisii (Haida ancestors) have memorized and recited a canon of oral histories called K'aygang.nga. These describe how supernaturals established themselves in the forms of plants, animals, reefs, rivers and mountains. And they describe how some others have yet to settle, passing through the Islands and into humans weakened by isolation. Some such people transform into Gaagiixid, a being woven into the fabric of Haida history for millennia.

SGaawaay K'uuna shows Gaagiixid as it has appeared in Haida society for millennia. In our story, friends Adiits'ii and Kwa come from intertwined families, who have worked as partners in everything for generations. However, they have conflicting ideas about parenting their

young ward, Gaas. When their conflict causes unbearable loss, the community begins to journey through grief, and towards redemption.

Having survived decades of hardship and cultural genocide, Haida today are reclaiming their language with hard work and dedication. A nation-wide effort strives to advance Haida language on all fronts: in public schools; with college-education; through mentor-apprenticeship efforts; using Haida immersion programs; and much more. As individuals and as a nation, we are working hard to ensure our children speak the language of our ancestors.

SGaawaay K'uuna is just a part of the inspirational legacy our elders and ancestors have entrusted to the current generation. Fluent elders carefully translated our script into three Haida dialects. In telling our story we recognize that our inheritance includes many dialects that are rooted deep in history.

Our fully-Haida cast trained rigorously with dedicated fluent speakers, who coached them in memorizing, pronouncing, and expressing their lines. We worked with expert weavers and professional costume designers to provide audiences with an accurate view of our people as they appeared before Haayhiilas, the smallpox genocides of 1862. A team assembled a set of historically accurate tools and technology. Some are new creations, and others are centuries-old objects our ancestors passed down to us.

Many accomplished language champions, carvers, and weavers appear in the film wearing the clothes and using the items they created themselves. We hope our joint effort will allow audiences to peer into the lives of our ancestors, who lived amongst the beautiful objects that reflect their dignity and excellence.

From the moment our team wrote the first words of the script, our sincerest hope has been to find our voice within this new medium. This voice is what we want to share with the world. We hope that as you look into the world of our ancestors, SGaawaay K'uuna will provide you with a portion of their sincerity, distinction, and pride.

ABOUT THE DIRECTORS

Hluugitgaa Gwaai Edenshaw - Director, Writer

GWAAI EDENSHAW is a contemporary artist whose work can be found in private collections and museums around the world. As a pole carver, he has worked on nine poles to date. One of his most recent, The Two Brothers, stands 43 feet tall at the train station in Jasper, Alberta. Gwaai is also a classically trained jeweler, apprenticing under renowned Haida master carvers Gidansda Guujaaw, and the late Iihljiwaas Bill Reid. He holds deep respect for Haida Gwaii's plants, and helped develop protocols to protect them with the Council of the Haida Nation's Forest Guardians and as Chair of the Haida elder group Daamaan Xil Taking Care of The Plants. As one of the creative directors of k'aalts'idaa k'ah laughing crow story telling society, Gwaai uses gifts inherited from his people to explore ongoing narratives

and the intersection of stories, language, politics, and aesthetics. "SGaawaay K'uuna Edge of The Knife" is his directorial debut.

Jaada Yahlangnaay Helen Haig-Brown - Director

HELEN HAIG-BROWN is an award-winning Tsilhqot'in filmmaker. Her diverse body of work includes the 2009 short film "?E?Anx (The Cave)", a Sci-Fi adaptation of a true Tsilhqot'in oral story, which was named to Canada's Top Ten Shorts by TIFF and was an Official Selection at the 2011 Sundance Film Festival. Her feature documentary "My Legacy" (2014), winner of best documentary at 2014 imagineNATIVE Media & Arts Festival, focuses on transformation and healing of inter-generational trauma caused by Residential Schools. Her work has aired on APTN, CBC, and has been showcased at film festivals around the world. Her experience co-directing "SGaawaay K'uuna Edge of the Knife" has strengthened her commitment to community-based creative expression and using narrative film as a vehicle for language and cultural regeneration. She is currently developing a new narrative feature on the Tsilhqot'in War, the most significant armed conflict between Indigenous peoples and the British west of the Canadian Rockies.

SGAAWAAY K'UUNA XAAD KIL LANGUAGE SUPPORTERS

Translators, Mentors, Volunteers

Making SGaawaay K'uuna would have been absolutely impossible without the support and tireless work of Elders and volunteers. The opportunity to work with three dialects of our rich language was a wonderful undertaking. SGaawaay K'uuna brought our diverse lineages together so we could all learn from one another. Our teachers showed great patience and dedication, travelling to a Haida Language Boot Camp at Hl'yaalan (Hiellen). Teachers guided learners on their way through intensive lessons in grammar and pronunciation to discover our language's gorgeous cadence. We want to show our elders, champions and learners honour and respect.

K'íis Xaad Kil Champions

Relatives from southeast Alaska travelled farthest to attend. K'ujuuhl Jane Kristovich, Ilskyalas Delores Churchill, Skil Jaadei Linda Schrak and K'uyáang Benjamin Young; haawa. Our community is so blessed that you are so generous with your knowledge and your time. Your willingness to travel added so much love and beauty to SGaawaay K'uuna. This important part of our language would have been impossible to capture without you.

Gaw Xaad Kil Champions

Relatives from Gaw worked with dedication to ensure actors could speak our language in the best way possible. HlGawangdlii Skilaa Lawrence Bell, Jaskwaan Amanda Bedard, Gulkiihlgad Marianne Ignace, Sdaahl K'awaas Lucille Bell, Oot Iiwaans Leo Gagnon and Hak'wanan Jay Bellis; haawa. Your translations and mentorship are appreciated and deeply valued. You brought spiritual inspiration and support for our team. Your hard work sets a perfect example for learners.

HlGaagilda Xaayda Kil Champions

S.H.I.P. depends on a group of very dedicated Elders who speak HlGaagilda Xaayda kil (Haida southern dialect) fluently. Elders attend S.H.I.P. five days a week, ten months of the year, to record, preserve, and revitalize Xaayda kil. We wish to show deep gratitude to Gaaying.uuhlas Roy Jones Sr., Yang K'aalas Grace Jones, SGaana Jaads K'yaa Ga Xiigangs Kathleen 'Golie' Hans, GwaaGanad Diane Brown, Niis Waan Harvey Williams, Taalgyaa'adad Betty Richardson, Taawa K'aawas Patricia Gellerman, Iljuuxiilaay Isabel Brillon, Ildagwaay Bea Harley, Kii'iljuus Barb Wilson, Tawguulat Bernice Lewis, Gidahljuus Eddy Hans, Yaahldaajii Gary Russ Sr, Sgaamsgid Harold Williams Sr and Sing.giduu Laura Jormanainnen. We love you all. To the families of K'inwas Jackie Casey and Gwaanjuu Jaad Doreen Mearns, we are grateful to have had the opportunity to preserve a small portion of the tremendous knowledge these elders left to our nation. SGaawaay K'uuna will preserve a part of their legacy. Haawa also to Luu Gaahlandaay Kevin Borserio, Siina Cindy Williams, T'aawgiiwad Vonnie Hutchingson, Stlaakam Jadaa Joan Hart, Nang 'Yuwans K'uujuus Robert A Young, Daall Jaad Melody Gravelle, Jaad Tl'aaw Paula Varnell, Skaanas Denver Cross, Aay Aay Albert Hans, Gidin Jaad Erica Jean Ryan, Kihlgula Gaay-ya Severn Cullis-Suzuki, and Yaahl K'anggwdangaa Jordan Lachler.

Many Haida are involved with two or more dialects, and their roots grow deep within two or more communities. For your work in bringing our language champions together; haawa. We want to ensure we acknowledge your unique gift that made this enormous project so much smoother. Together we share the goal of restoring Xaad Kil to its place as our primary language in our households and throughout our beautiful Islands. Together we will ensure that future generations of Haida will be able to pass our language on to their children.

On Set Language Mentors

K'uyáang Benjamin Young

K'uyáang (Benjamin Young) was raised in Hydaburg, Alaska. He is Raven of the Yahgw'láanaas clan. K'uyáang learned Xaad Kíl from his grandfather Claude Morrison, Kúng Skíis, a respected Haida elder who lived to the age of 100, and taught his first language classes as a teenager. K'uyáang has worked with elders and fluent Haida speakers Woodrow Morrison, Alma Cook, Annie Peele and Erma Lawrence. He has played many roles in language revitalization, working as language mentor, researcher and curriculum developer. He holds a degree in secondary education and began teaching in 2014. He currently is preparing to open and facilitate a Haida Language Immersion Preschool in Hydaburg, Alaska.

Jaskwaan Amanda Bedard

Jaskwaan is a language champion of Gaw Xaad Kil (Haida northern dialect). She seeks to revitalize Haida language as a learner, teacher, and resource developer. She holds an M.A. in Indigenous Governance and a B.A in History and Indigenous Studies from the University of Victoria; as well as a teaching degree from Simon Fraser University. She has completed a three-year Language Mentor Apprentice Program through the First Peoples' Cultural

Council, learning X̲aad Kil from Elder Primrose Adams. Jask̲waan is committed to teaching her three children the language of her ancestors, and envisions a time where once again X̲aad Kil is spoken freely in her community.

Gidin Jaad
Gidin Jaad (Erica Jean Ryan) is born to the Naay 'Yuwans X̲aaydaga (Big House People) of HlG̲aagilda (Skidegate). She is mother of two small children, her daughter Xaay.ya and son Taajuu. Her pregnancy with her daughter inspired her to study the Haida language and pursue her education and passion for teaching. She teaches Haida at a local independent school, while studying and running her own business. Gidin Jaad is a proud indigenous woman who cares deeply for her children, family, community and nation. She believes wholeheartedly in the healing power of learning the Haida language and what it means to be a true Haida.

SOURCE

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