



Disney BLACK BEAUTY

Original Movie Streaming Nov. 27, Only on Disney+

PRODUCTION NOTES

From Disney+, “Black Beauty” — the contemporary reimagining of Anna Sewell’s classic novel — follows the life of a wild mustang born free in the American West.

Beauty’s world is turned upside down when she is cruelly rounded up, taken from her home and sent to live in a dusty corral. However, Beauty’s fortune is destined to turn, when a quiet and gentle horse whisperer named John Manly arrives from New York and notices her fiery spirit.

Adopting Beauty for his training program at Birtwick Stables, John is unsure if she can ever be tamed. Beauty is heartbroken and angry over the loss of all she’s ever known and does not trust the presence of humans.

John’s world is upended when his niece, 17-year-old Jo Green, shows up on his doorstep. Similar to Beauty, Jo has just lost her parents and her spirit is close to breaking. It is through their profound connection that Jo and Beauty begin the process of healing.

The two forge an unbreakable bond that will last a lifetime, even after Beauty is taken away on a series of adventures with different owners. Through the seasons of her life, Beauty learns about joy, loss, heartbreak and the extraordinary power of love.

“Black Beauty” stars Academy Award®-winner Kate Winslet (“The Reader”, “Titanic”) as the voice of Black Beauty, Mackenzie Foy (“Interstellar,” “The Nutcracker and the Four Realms”) as Jo Green, Iain Glen (“Game of Thrones,” “Lara Croft: Tomb Raider”) as John Manly, Claire Forlani (“Meet Joe Black,” “In the Name of the King”) as Mrs. Winthrop, Calam Lynch (“Dunkirk,” “Mrs. Wilson”) as George Winthrop, and Fern Deacon (“Ackley Bridge,” “The Enfield Haunting”) as Georgina Winthrop.

The film is written and directed by Ashley Avis (“Adolescence,” “Deserted”), and produced by Jeremy Bolt (“Polar,” “Resident Evil” franchise) and Robert Kulzer (“The Silence,” “Resident Evil” franchise). Martin Moszkowicz, Edward Winters and Jon Brown served as executive producers. Dylan Tarason (“Polar,” “Hell or High Water”) was co-producer and Genevieve Hofmeyr (“Mad Max: Fury Road,” “Black Panther”) was producer in South Africa.



The creative team included director of photography David Procter (“The Innocents,” “Red Sands”), production designer Darryl Hammer (“The Widow,” “Black Butterflies”), costume designer Neil McClean (“Of Kings and Prophets,” “10,000 BC”) and composer Guillaume Roussel (“3 Days to Kill,” “Primal”). Horse master Elbrus Ourtaev (“10,000 BC,” “Grant”) trained the horses alongside liberty trainer Cody Rawson-Harris (“The Light Between Oceans,” “Knowing”).

Produced by Constantin Film and JB Pictures, “Black Beauty” premieres Friday, Nov. 27, streaming only on Disney+.

BACKING THE RIGHT HORSE

Finding the Right Filmmaker to Take the Reins of “Black Beauty”

Producer Jeremy Bolt recalls the genesis of “Black Beauty” nine years ago while making “The Three Musketeers,” which featured horses. “I was struck by how magnetic and majestic horses are on screen,” says Bolt, explaining it also took him back to childhood. “When I was growing up, my sister used to ride a horse and all of her friends were passionate about horses.”

“Jeremy and I talked about ‘Black Beauty’ for years,” confides producer Robert Kulzer. As one of the best-selling books of all time, at more than 50 million copies, we knew that the value of the property was enormous. The question was: ‘Who could adapt this classic story for a contemporary audience?’”

The answer would materialize during a general meeting Bolt took with filmmaker Ashley Avis. Avis recalls, “We spoke about what inspired us to be filmmakers, in terms of imagery, in terms of tone, and I mentioned that ‘The Black Stallion’ was a huge inspiration to me cinematically. The scene on the beach, where Alec and the Black ride together and bond together — it’s unspoken, set to score and Jeremy knew the scene very well.”

“We were looking for a filmmaker and writer who had the passion to pull this off,” shares Bolt. “Ashley has a very kind soul and there’s a very human, uplifting message in the movie.” He adds, “Taking a children’s book, as an adult, and making it into an authentic, uplifting and respectful movie is not so easy.”

“I was 6 when I read it and was captivated by Black Beauty’s story. It was the reason I began horse riding,” says Avis, who went on to become a competitive hunter jumper with dreams of becoming the first female Triple Crown-winning jockey. Ultimately, a growth spurt changed her trajectory and after attending Manhattan College, she developed a love for screenwriting, which led her to filmmaking.



Within a week of their initial meeting, Avis presented Bolt with the outline of her “Black Beauty” adaptation and within just two years, principal photography commenced. “I was very fortunate to find a huge champion in Jeremy in every way and it just came together very fast,” says Avis.

“We knew that there are equestrian enthusiasts around the globe who would absolutely want to see this movie,” says Kulzer, “but the challenge was how to expand the reach of the story and its characters. The goal was to take the audience on an epic journey of a young woman and a wild mustang who will help each other to overcome loss, grief, issues of alienation, coming of age and identity.”

“The producers’ vision was to modernize the story,” says Avis. “We looked for ways to include parallels of Anna’s story set in current time, while honoring the book and the original characters and locations, and the events and messages which I found really important.” Avis continues, “When I first met with Jeremy, he had felt strongly that Beauty’s modernized voice should be female. I really agreed with that direction. Not only is it timely, but there’s such a power to the relationship between a girl and her horse.”

“Anna Sewell wrote ‘Black Beauty’ in the late 19th century to try and draw public attention to the treatment of horses, which were the main mode of transport in that era,” explains Bolt. “After the publication of the book, such was the public outcry, there was an Act of Parliament and the very cruel bearing rein was made illegal.”

“Anna had a unique first-person perspective. She was crippled and was thus carried by horses her entire life,” says Avis. This allowed her to have a rare understanding of them, especially at a time when horses were work animals and often viewed as tools. Most people didn’t consider them capable of having emotions like empathy, love or the feelings of loss.”

The filmmakers honored Sewell’s original intent by choosing to highlight a current issue: the plight of wild horses in the American West. “We came up with Black Beauty being a wild mustang,” says Avis. “The element of wild introduced power, added tension and raised the stakes.”

Avis researched advocacy agencies, such as the American Wild Horse Campaign and Lifesavers World Horse Rescue, to fully understand why and how wild horses are being rounded up on public lands. Avis declares, “The issue needs to be better illuminated and I thought that our contemporaneous version could make a difference for wild horses.”

After filming a heartbreaking helicopter roundup in Nevada, Avis and her husband Edward Winters, executive producer on “Black Beauty,” adopted two of the mustangs. Having connected so strongly with the issue, the couple recently launched their own nonprofit, “The Wild Beauty Foundation,” which is dedicated to the protection of wild and domestic horses in North America through film, education, rescue and adoption.



"Our movie is not didactic," says Bolt, "but there is a message of hope that transcends Beauty's hardships and her journey. Our film is not a documentary — it's a piece of emotional entertainment — but there's no harm in shining a light on a very, very valid and important cause."

Iain Glen, who portrays horse whisperer John Manly says, "There are lots of place names, character names, thematically close to the original; but when you have the inspiration of something happening currently, it liberates the story and it resonates in today's world."

BACK IN THE SADDLE AGAIN **Reimagining a Classic Story for a New Generation**

Born into the world a free-roaming horse in the American West, Black Beauty's first life experiences are carefree, joyful and whimsical adventures with her mother and herd. The purple mountains of Wyoming, the gentle breeze and expansive fields are her magnificent kingdom.

When a helicopter carrying a band of lasso-swinging cowboys flies in to capture the wild horses, some are seized and some manage to flee. Black Beauty is separated from her family and sadly, it's the last time she will see her mother.

Held prisoner in a filthy, cramped corral, Black Beauty is robbed of her freedom and her fear turns to anger. As she kicks and rears, the cowboys can't get near her and don't believe they will be able to sell "the filly with a temper."

Drawn to the spirited animal, horse whisperer John Manly adopts Black Beauty and takes her across the country to Birtwick Stables in Montauk, New York. Although he's a kind, gentle man and has liberated Black Beauty, Manly cannot seem to find a way to connect with the temperamental horse.

This all changes when a social worker brings Manly's young teenage niece, Jo Green, to live with him. Having lost her parents in a fatal car accident, Jo is afraid and angry, and rejects her uncle's attempts to welcome and comfort her.

Both trauma survivors, Jo and Beauty share a silent understanding and steadily develop a connection that stuns and delights Manly and the crew at Birtwick Stables. Healing has begun and the girls' mutual trust extends to Manly, who models how to successfully partner with a horse. Jo and Beauty soon discover the pure joy of galloping together and the two forge an unbreakable bond.

Just as the tide turns for Beauty and Jo, Birtwick Stables, already struggling financially, is devastated by an accidental stable fire from which the horses narrowly escape. Birtwick is



visited by a wealthy family — including the uppity Mrs. Winthrop, her spoiled daughter Georgina and unaffected son George — who are intent on selecting a horse. Beauty is leased to the Winthorps and Jo accompanies as a groom, hopeful her summer earnings will enable her to buy Beauty and return to Birtwick Stables.

However, Birtwick Stables is forced to close and tragically, Beauty and Jo are separated. For the next seven years, Beauty experiences the varied sides of human nature — from kindness to cruelty — while assisting with mountain rescues in Utah alongside Terry (Hakeem Kae-Kazim), pulling an antiquated plow on a farm, serving as a carriage horse for a loving family and pulling carriages for a man who mistreats his horses.

Throughout, Beauty reminds herself that a mustang's spirit can never be broken and clings to Jo's promise that, one day, they will be reunited.

IF WISHES WERE HORSES **Assembling the Dream Cast for “Black Beauty”**

Black Beauty (voice of Kate Winslet)

As Avis was writing for the title character in “Black Beauty” — a spirited black mustang with a white star on her forehead a single white hoof — one iconic voice repeatedly popped in her head. “You try not write with anyone in mind because your heart gets broken quite quickly or something changes; but when I started writing the dialogue for Black Beauty, the only person I heard was Kate Winslet. As many people did, I grew up with her films,” says Avis.

Producer Jeremy Bolt sent the script to Winslet's UK agent, whom he knew, accompanied by a personal letter from Avis. “I spent hours on this one-page letter telling her why I was passionate about the film, what the messages were and why she was the only person I could possibly think of who can embody Black Beauty,” confides Avis. “She is everything I could have possibly imagined for the voice of Black Beauty. It was ridiculously special working with her.”

“There's no one more classy, exquisite, whimsical or strong than Kate,” adds Avis. “The day I got the call from my manager ... well, I thought I would run around in circles but I just actually sat there stunned.”

Executive producer Edward Winters adds, “When you have the caliber of someone like Kate Winslet come aboard, it's a validation of the screenplay and the project.”

Jo Green (Mackenzie Foy)



Mackenzie Foy was Avis' top choice to portray Jo Green, a 17-year-old girl who has recently lost her parents and been sent to live with her uncle, horse whisperer John Manly. Avis says casting the character was a challenge, "Jo is so specific and we see her as a 17-year-old and then later in her mid 20s, but we didn't want to split the casting in two ages." It was Mackenzie's performance in "Interstellar" that impassioned Avis. "She's an exquisite actress and she's got this inherent wisdom for one so young. I felt that she could have that come through in older Jo and that it could work; and it very much has."



Bolt recalls that Foy was on board immediately. "She is a fantastic young actress. There's an ethereal stillness to Mackenzie, so you really believe she can connect to a horse. The magic she and Beauty have between them will light up the screen. At its core, 'Black Beauty' is really a story of friendship between Jo and Beauty."

Foy remembers her excitement when she received the script, "When I finished reading it, I was just sobbing and knew I had to be a part of it. Along with the script, Ashley sent a letter telling me what the original book truly meant and how she wanted to incorporate it into the film adaptation." She adds, "'Black Beauty' was one of my absolute favorites as a kid. I read it until it fell apart. Jo is a dream part for a young actress."

"When Jo meets Beauty, who has also recently lost her family, they bond over the pain that they're both feeling and realize their souls are mirrored," says Foy. "Jo is up for anything, she doesn't mind falling off a horse or mucking out stables with hay in her hair; but at the same time, she is a young woman and has all this love and emotion inside of her that she's trying to figure out."

John Manly (Iain Glen)

Having worked with Iain Glen on numerous movies, Bolt immediately reached out to the actor to play John Manly, a character from the original book. "He's Mackenzie's uncle and teaches her how to work with horses, and how to connect with Beauty. He's our horse whisperer," says Bolt.

Glen recalls, "It was one of those lovely ones where an email came through with an accompanying letter from Ashley. It was such a lovely script, such a tender tale. Ashley writes in some ways like a novelist, so her stage directions are very beautifully put and so it was a very seductive read. I have to say that by the end of the script, I was hooked. The very kind, thoughtful and flattering letter accompanying the script was redundant because I was won over by the story."



"The first time Iain Glen popped up on our Skype call, it was just uncanny because he's John," says Avis. "He's incredibly kind and it's in a lot of the other roles he's played — intelligent and elegant — and he's got this mischievous glint that comes across so well. Having worked with Iain so many times, Jeremy told me that Iain would respond to the things that were important to me, showing authentic horse whispering on camera, which we were able to capture."

Employed by Birtwick Stables, Manly rescues and trains mustangs, treating them with respect and striving to adopt out several each year. "What the film suggests is partnering to try to save them and giving them an alternate life to what might happen to them if they're corralled in these vast holdings in Western America. The horses can be made use of and domesticated in a humane way," says Glen.

Mrs. Winthrop (Claire Forlani)

Claire Forlani was cast as the snobbish Mrs. Winthrop, owner of the opulent Earshall Park and mother to George and Georgina. Avis says, "It's the way that this project has come together. The actors who were exactly right for the story are those who we were fortunate to cast. Claire was passionate about the material and responded to the wild horse messages. She has friends who run a sanctuary in the states. She is also the perfect Mrs. Winthrop and her comedic timing is really funny."

"I loved Ashley's passion and understanding of horses and the fact that this story is about love and kindness and loyalty, and all these beautiful qualities these narratives can give you," says Forlani. "'Black Beauty' is one of these stories that you've grown up with, like Peter Pan and Beatrix Potter. I have a young child and these stories are part of the magic of childhood."

Forlani explores her wicked character by explaining, "She loves her husband and her children and basically nobody else. Everything else is 'to be dealt with.' Jo comes from working class, as did Mrs. Winthrop, so in Jo's character, I recognize myself and, of course, I don't want that for my son. I have a lot of conflict with Mackenzie's character and I try to stop my son from going in the direction of falling in love with Jo."

George Winthrop (Calam Lynch)

Calam Lynch plays George Winthrop, the 18-year-old son of Mrs. Winthrop who shows a genuine interest in horses — and in Jo. "The minute I saw Calam's audition tape, I knew he was perfect," says Avis. "He and Mackenzie had a beautiful energy together, portraying romance of that age range. I wanted it to have this innocence to it and they balance it perfectly."

Lynch recalls having seen a version of the film and read the book when he was about 11. "I hadn't done much horse riding before this movie but I've always loved horses. It was



incredibly exciting for me, as an actor, to play George,” says Lynch. “He’s loving and respectful of animals; the opposite of his sister Georgina, a spoilt brat.”

Lynch continues, “The Winthorps are very wealthy and my mother and sister are stuck-up; the antithesis of Jo, who is sweet and lovely, and doesn’t come from means. Unlike them, George is a pretty nice guy and from the word go, he is interested in Jo. For both of them, it’s a first love/puppy love aspect.”

Georgina Winthorp (Fern Deacon)

Sixteen-year-old Georgina Winthorp, George’s overindulged, petulant sister, is portrayed by Fern Deacon. “She is such an unpleasant girl; she can’t bond with her horse,” says Deacon, “She’s an annoying redhead, posh girl who’s highly energized and highly strung in contrast to her gentle brother, George, who is very much the perfect child. Georgina lives in his shadow constantly and really wants to impress her family but isn’t very skilled with horses.”

“She can’t live up to her perfect brother and she wants her mother’s approval. She looks at horses like objects, which is why she doesn’t connect with them, but she hasn’t figured that out yet,” says Avis. “Fern is just the sweetest young woman and she had so much fun playing a role very different than her real personality.”

South African Talent

“There was a lot of crying in the casting process,” says casting agent Bonnie Bouman, who cast the South African actors. “The characters, whom we need to be sympathetic to, break our hearts. I cried throughout the entire first read of the script. It was an incredibly moving and well-written script and a story we all know, and if not, are going to be reminded.”

Bouman adds, “From the onset of casting the film, except for one or two roles, Ashley agreed we could cast South African artists in every single role. There is a pool of really gifted local talent and it’s rare for a filmmaker to acknowledge local cast. She wanted to elevate that.”

According to Avis, “We have great actors in Los Angeles, London and New York but there are great actors in South Africa. Some of them beat out the ones in London, which just goes to show there’s extraordinary talent in all parts of the world. Especially the kids, they’re just magic. There’s one little girl who plays Anna at the very end. It’s an acknowledgement of Anna Sewell. The little girl is on crutches and she made me cry in her audition. ‘Black Beauty’ is her first film experience.”



HORSEPLAY

Training the Equine Cast to Play the Iconic Black Beauty



To manage the monumental task of training horses on the set of “Black Beauty,” filmmakers recruited horse master Elbrus Ourtaev. Born in Russia’s North Ossetia, home to the original Cossack riders, Ourtaev went on to join the Moscow State Circus and travel worldwide, finally settling in South Africa where he established a horse stunt academy. Known as a leading horse master in all genres, from war to action to adventure, he says, “I feel blessed to be part of a classic story like this with Black Beauty as the star.”

“For film work, you need special liberty work and it’s very technical,” explains Ourtaev. A liberty horse is a horse that works freely and is able to respond without restraints. When Ourtaev saw Avis’ vision for the film, he knew how demanding the horse work would be and invited liberty horse trainer Cody Rawson-Harris from Australia to work with him.

Rawson-Harris is a second-generation horse trainer who followed in the footsteps of his father, Heath Harris, whose string of film credits include “Gallipoli.” “I was only about seven pages into reading the script and already getting goose bumps thinking about the possibilities of how we might film all these horses; and with Black Beauty being such an iconic story, I was hooked,” says Rawson-Harris.

The horse training team was tasked with casting over 20 horses to represent Beauty, from birth through adulthood. According to Avis, “Casting Beauty was as specific as casting the actors; finding the right horses that don’t just look the part but have the right temperament and the right mentality to pull off stunts for the scenes I wrote in the movie.”

“They ended up sourcing four off-the-track thoroughbreds that play Beauty at her main age, with two — Jenny and Spirit — most heavily featured,” says Avis. “The horses were so intelligent, so willing, so giving and it was through Cody’s liberty work that he prepared them in just 10 weeks.”

“They react to phonetic and visual cues,” explains Rawson-Harris. “When they give you what you need, you release the pressure. It’s called shaping their behavior.” He adds, “You have to learn what motivates them to have their attention on you and most of it comes down to having a halter on the horse and they understand to come to pressure and then release.”



Rawson-Harris believes that getting the performance you need from a horse comes down to good horsemanship, and Avis strongly agrees. “Elbrus and Cody are so kind and so excellent. They always have the horse in mind first,” says Avis. “Just as Jo says in the movie, it’s about partnering with your horse. There’s a mutual respect.”

Each of the horses was cast for specific behaviors, which the trainers would focus on developing. Jenny, for example, has a quiet, whimsical nature and is most often seen bonding with Foy in the film. According to Rawson-Harris, “Jenny does all the work with the actor. She is required to do short calls, lay downs, head nods, looks left and right, pull faces, prick her ears and a bit of a rear.”

Spirit, the other horse heavily featured in “Black Beauty” was often used for scenes with long-distance running. “Spirit, who is my personal favorite, plays Black Beauty when she’s wild,” says Avis, “and as her name suggests, she’s very spirited.” This created a challenge when attempting to film a scene in which Beauty gallops through a canola field filled with vibrant yellow flowers. “Spirit galloped so fast; the drone literally couldn’t keep up with her. It took us a number of takes to get the shot because Spirit was racing at a speed nobody expected,” says Avis.

Perhaps the most challenging behaviors to capture were the subtle movements, which convey the emotional bond between human and horse. Rawson-Harris says, “For this kind of work, the animation of the face is extremely important because it’s accompanied with a voice-over; and if you have the right animation, then the voice is going to suit the look.”

However, that emotional bond was not a stretch for the actors who grew close to their equine co-stars. “I’ve really enjoyed getting to know Jenny’s sweet personality,” confesses Foy. “They’re like people, every horse is different. You learn that one likes sugar cubes; one prefers carrots; one doesn’t like its head being touched; or when you go to cuddle them, one may prefer to be stroked on the neck and the other on the chest.”

Avis was delighted that Foy began riding several months in advance to prepare for the film and arrived in South Africa weeks before production began to train with Rawson-Harris. “She really wanted to learn more about the liberty work and she spent a lot of time at the stable with Cody learning about the different stunts she would be able to safely do.” Avis reveals her favorite scene with Foy, “Jo naming Beauty was shot in the most beautiful light through the trees and their connection was genuine and spectacular.”

Ourtaev was also impressed with Foy’s level of commitment. “She came with riding experience; and while she is a talented rider, she’s always listening how to do things. She’s up for anything and it’s such a blessing to work with an actor who is confident and likes to give anything a go.”



Glen had experience riding horses from productions, such as “Game of Thrones,” but even he was challenged on the set of “Black Beauty.” “This horse riding is different to what I’ve previously done. In this film, where I’m a trainer, more is required of me. There is intimate detail on how you train the horses and it’s such a bonus when you’re asked to develop a skill you don’t have,” says Glen. “I’m very lucky to have Cody as my right-hand man. He has a real film eye and is very sharp about what’s required in a specific shot with the actors. My lovely horse Captain [played by Magnum] flatters me by not misbehaving, and allows me to look like I know what I’m doing.”

“Another actor might not be as excited to put himself into a training pen with a half-wild horse,” says Avis. “Iain really immersed himself in the experience and learned all about the different movements a trainer would make. When Iain kneeled down and this wild horse came right up to him, put his muzzle in his face and touched his hands, Cody walked out of the training ring with tears streaming down his face. It reminded him of when he first partnered a wild horse.”

Winters adds, “Ashley has found a lot of inspiration from Cody. His terminology has influenced the script and some of John Manly’s dialogue is straight from Cody’s training sessions. It’s a beautiful melding of the dialogue and the training. It’s all coming together to form the character.”

Avis credits Ourtaev and Rawson-Harris for the performance of the horses, as well as capturing the hearts of the human cast and crew. “Cody is inherently kind and does not force the horse. It’s a newer way of approaching training — kinder and rewarding versus trying to break a horse. It comes completely naturally to him and it’s remarkable to watch him deal with a horse that’s stressed. He just places his hands on the animal.”

Avis continues, “Our trainers are like horse whisperers, they understand that communication on a deeper level. In every which way, Cody will protect our horses and make sure that they’re safe at all times. This was very important to me because we have a lot of horses and very complicated sequences, and we needed a partner who would be on the same page all the time. If it’s too dangerous, we don’t do it. It’s not worth the shot to put anyone at risk, especially one of these creatures.”

THE MANE ATTRACTION

Going to Great Lengths to Capture the Overall Look and Feel of “Black Beauty”

“Black Beauty” was filmed in and around Cape Town, the capital of South Africa. The city consistently ranks among the most beautiful in the world and its topography is remarkably similar to that of the United States. “There are such diverse landscapes. I was convinced we could double America here,” says Bolt. “I’ve made a number of films here and I’m very aware of the exceptional crew expertise.”



Avis has a very personal connection to the city. “I absolutely love Cape Town. I've been there a number of times and I got engaged to my now husband down there. It's always been a city that's very special to us.” She adds, “Cape Town has a romance of an older time to it inherently and I loved all of the textures it offers.”

Avis credits the location team for helping pinpoint the ideal settings for the wide variety of scenes written into the “Black Beauty” script. “Before I even got here, I'd already gone through thousands of location photos and narrowed it down,” says Avis.

For Birtwick Stables, an iconic location in both Sewell's novel and the film, the team selected the Pearl Valley Equestrian Centre at Val de Vie Estate, 20 miles from Cape Town. The estate is famed for both The Pearl Valley Jack Nicklaus Signature Golf Course and its picturesque setting in a valley surrounded by three magnificent mountain ranges.

Val de Vie Estate is home to an equestrian academy and polo tournaments, and filmmakers utilized its existing paddocks for numerous scenes. In addition, production designer Darryl Hammer and team built stables and John Manly's cottage on site. “I felt like a little kid when I stepped into it on the first day. It was like walking into a fairy tale,” recalls Avis. “The art department has been unbelievable and transformed Birtwick into a homey, nostalgic place.”

“When we left our last day of filming at Birtwick, it was really emotional because that symbolized the heart of ‘Black Beauty.’” admits Avis. “We did a lot of work to the building itself to transform it into Birtwick; and instead of taking all of that away and rebuilding John's cottage, they kept all of it. They loved it. I'm so excited one day to go back.”

The Winthorp's annual Earlshall Classic, an extravagant event comprised of horse competitions and races, was filmed at Lourensford Estate, a beautiful, world-class fruit farm and wine estate one hour from Cape Town. Earlshall Manor and its stables were intended to be a distinct departure from Birtwick Stables. “We went with a very clean, modern establishment with an interior riding ring that's so flawless, you could eat off those floors. It's a nice juxtaposition with the quaint Birtwick,” says Avis.





Avis felt that the scenes in which Beauty pulls a carriage in New York are a meaningful way of paying homage to the novel. Showcasing Central Park in the height of fall and in winter — which is specifically outlined in the original script — is quite the complicated task when it's summertime in South Africa. Yet the filmmakers pressed on. "I feel like there's a spirit to the change of seasons that parallels the seasons of Beauty's life. I felt like we would suffer a huge loss if we didn't see that passage of time," says Avis.

Through a considerable, concerted effort, the team managed to pull it off. "It was a mixture of filming pieces of certain scenes in parks in Cape Town and then we shot Beauty and the carriages on stage with blue screen," says Avis. "We had a unit in New York and together we picked the sections of the park that we were going to marry with the blue screen that we shot. It was all specifically planned and extremely technical."

The scenes in which wild Beauty is seen among her herd in the plains of Wyoming were crafted uniquely as well. "I really wanted to root Beauty in the American West and tie her to real, wild horses, which have a very different look and spirit than domestic horses," explains Avis.

Avis and her husband, executive producer Edward Winters, traveled to the American West to film the famous Onaqui herd in Utah, wild horses in Wyoming's White Mountain and a real roundup in Nevada. In the editing process, Avis was able to seamlessly cut footage of Beauty as a foal, which had been filmed in Piketberg, South Africa, with footage of the Onaqui herd in Utah. "Even the grass in Piketberg, which is supposed to double for Wyoming, is similar to what we captured in Utah. It's remarkable," says Avis.

Avis' favorite scene in "Black Beauty" is when Jo and Beauty gallop together on the beach — a moment of healing, peace and joy for the soulmates. With just one scheduled day at the beach and a mere 40 minutes of perfect, pre-dawn light, Avis proposed to film the scene with two units on two different stretches of beach. Drones captured wide shots of Foy's double on a private beach and Foy was filmed on a public beach that allowed tracking vehicles. Despite a weak drone signal and lack of communication between the units, both due to the remote location, the team successfully pulled off one of the film's most breathtaking scenes.

"Jo and Beauty ride on the beach and she releases the reins and puts her arms up like she can fly," recalls Avis. "The moment of nervousness but then the complete exhilaration and joy that comes across her face is just so real." She adds, "To get to watch that from video village as that was happening ... I mean, the whole tent jumped up and just erupted with laughter and joy and clapping!"

Avis considers "Black Beauty" production as a group collaboration and takes every opportunity to compliment the numerous professionals who supported her vision and helped to create the film's stunning look and feel. She recalls her early conversations with cinematographer David Procter, "We talked about how we wanted to capture Beauty; and if



we're cutting to a close-up of the actor, we should be covering Beauty just like a human." She adds, "He's very brilliant visually but he's also incredibly intelligent and super technical. It's a rare combination."

Avis also enjoyed her creative discussions with costume designer Neil McClean, which often focused on color symbolism and how they could use color and texture to influence the audience's emotions. For example, cerulean blue is Jo's color, which can be seen in her scarf worn in Central Park, inside Beauty's stall, on Jo's new Birtwick Stables sign and dotted throughout the film.

"Neil did such a beautiful job. You see that in the world of Earlsheal and at the Classic with all the pastels and muted tones ... it came off almost like a Kentucky Derby party meets a wedding," says Avis. Even the most understated clothing made a statement. "As Jo is coming out of her shell and John is connecting with his niece, their wardrobe suddenly becomes brighter and their colors start to merge with one another," reveals Avis.

Music was essential to the emotional story of "Black Beauty" and Avis collaborated with composer Guillaume Roussel on the creation of the musical score for over a year. The pair discussed using different instruments to represent the film's characters, with wind instruments and nature-based sounds backing Beauty and the piano associated with Jo.

"There are a lot of themes that have been constructed so brilliantly by Guillaume throughout the movie that musically bind the relationship between Beauty and Jo," discloses Avis. "There's a particular melody — a separation theme, so to speak — when Beauty and Jo are no longer with one another, but Jo is thinking of Beauty or Beauty is thinking of Jo."

Avis describes the deep connections made on the set of "Black Beauty," "To be living in this world for the past few months, to work in magnificent locations and to take in these scenes of this stunning black horse following a girl, and the healing power they have for one another, has unlocked things for a lot of people in ways they didn't expect."

WILD HORSES COULDN'T DRAG ME AWAY

Reflecting on the "Black Beauty" Experience for Cast, Crew and Audiences

"It is good people who make good places."

"This quote from the novel truly embodies how I feel about this film and all of you; beautiful people who made a beautiful film, and I am so grateful to each and every one of you."

— an excerpt from director Ashley Avis' letter to the film crew



"You draw on personal things in everything you write but this is most definitely the most personal screenplay I've written," reflects Avis. "I feel a lot of Jo in me and I think a lot of girls and young women will identify in the same way, whether you were fortunate enough to have a horse of your own when you were younger or you just hoped for that beautiful experience and that sense of joy and freedom. Jo is a beautiful embodiment. She's a great role model, kind and fiercely loyal, someone I think little girls will look up to."

Winters offers, "This project is such an interesting culmination of something that started with Ashley's interest in horses — reading 'Black Beauty' at a very young age — and now as a filmmaker, she gets to remake it and it's come full circle."

According to Bolt, "Ashley has an emotional intelligence and her deep care for animals has reminded me that emotion ultimately sells a scene. If you can connect to it emotionally, then the scene will have resonance, and if it's just spectacle, it'll be empty. We have a director who passionately brings an emotional dimension to every scene."

"The way Ashley combines her poetic writing style and the way she directs and delegates every little part of the scene in creating these beautiful, whimsical moments with the horses and the actors has been amazing. I'm so happy to have been able to see a strong woman direct," say Foy. "What I hope audiences take away from this film is to love all creatures. Every single creature in this world has a heart and a soul, and should be respected as such."

"It takes a look at how we act in life, how we treat other people and how we treat animals," says Rawson-Harris. "Audiences will love Beauty's philosophy on life and the connection that Jo has with the horse."

"The film is not shaking a fist at the plight of mustangs in America. It's basically telling a tender story; and if you're affected by the story and touched by the characters and the animals, then hopefully you'll be affected by the underlying message within the film," acknowledges Glen. "We must always be careful of how we try and dominate the other animals we share the planet with. This is intrinsic to the story we're telling."

"The story has a real heart to it," shares Deacon. "You really go on a journey with the horses and you learn to understand them. It's the kind of narrative where you really empathize and at the end of it, you'll leave feeling happy and warm."

Regarding Avis' hope for audiences, "At the end, I hope people have felt the joy that Jo gets to experience. I hope they get to live through her and they get to feel the exhilaration of riding Beauty on the beach; but they also get to feel the hardships that Beauty experiences and connect with what those might be for real horses. That was the whole point of Anna Sewell writing the novel. It was to make people understand that horses and all animals can feel emotions."



STRAIGHT FROM THE HORSE'S MOUTH

"Black Beauty" Fun Facts From the Director

- U Many of the horses playing Black Beauty were, in fact, not black. Horse-safe henna dye was used to replicate Beauty's signature black color and a white star was hand painted onto each horse's forehead.
- U After experiencing connectivity issues while attempting to record in the basement of her home, Kate Winslet and family moved the recording equipment to a barn on property where, fittingly, her entire voiceover for "Black Beauty" was recorded.
- U Just for fun, the daily call sheet included a horse pun, with "Nightmare" being one of Avis' favorites. It references a long night of production when the crew readied their cameras and waited for hours, hoping to capture a live foal birth. It turned out to be a false alarm.
- U Ultimately, the two local mares, which veterinarians predicted would give birth during the production window, did not. However, word spread and filmmakers were notified when another foal was born — a beautiful black colt with a perfect white star on its head and a single white sock! The film features precious footage of the wobbly legged foal bonding with its mother; and the colt's owner chose to name him Black Beauty.
- U Max Raphael, who portrays a Birtwick Stables groom named James, was eager to perform his own stunts, which included running from wild Beauty and diving through the fence surrounding the paddock. Avis exclaims, "Oh gosh, I bet he did that two dozen times that first day ... he's such a team player!"
- U When Beauty is seen actively galloping towards James within frame, James is played by stuntman Arian Ourtaev, son of horse master Elbrus Ourtaev. He doubles for countless actors in the film, even donning a red wig and makeup to become Georgina during her terrible tumble at the Earls Hall Classic.
- U Early on in production, liberty trainer Cody Rawson-Harris was standing in a round pen with one of the horses when he told Avis, "The goal through this work is to help each horse find his peace." That line was immediately added to John Manly's speech in the round pen.
- U Cody Rawson-Harris was touched by Iain Glen's desire to learn liberty training and do real horse whispering in the film. As a gift, Cody presented Iain with a personal item he always wore on his belt — a handmade leather pouch that houses a utility knife. Glen wears it in the film as John Manly.
- U Upon completion of filming, Mackenzie Foy gave Avis a gift of a silver horse necklace, featuring Ashley's favorite Black Beauty, Spirit.



- U Glen and Calam Lynch worked together previously, starring as Alexander Wilson and Gordon Wilson, respectively, in the 2019 “Masterpiece” miniseries “Mrs. Wilson.”
- U Avis honored several of her collaborators by slipping their names into “Black Beauty.” For example, the author of “The Art of the Horse” — the book John gifts to Jo — is Elbrus Rawson, a nod to horse whisperers Elbrus Ourtaev and Cody Rawson-Harris.
- U Viewers can catch a quick glimpse of Jo’s poetry book as she sits beneath a tree at Birtwick Stables. The author is Frederika Felix, an amalgam of producer Jeremy Bolt’s twins’ first names.
- U The idea for Beauty to become a mountain rescue horse was conceived while Avis was chatting with her parents over the 2018 holidays. In turn, Avis gifted Beauty’s partner with her father’s middle name, Terry.
- U Dr. Woods, the veterinarian who treats Beauty’s wounded knees after her fall during the Earlshall Classic, was named after Avis’ mother, Victoria Woods.
- U Avis could be considered a triple threat: She wrote, directed and edited “Black Beauty.”
- U Avis kept the new Birtwick Stables sign, featured at the end of the film, as a souvenir. She hopes that one day she’ll open a horse sanctuary, just as Jo does in “Black Beauty,” and the sign will greet guests upon arrival.

ABOUT THE CAST

KATE WINSLET (voice of Black Beauty) is an Academy Award® winner and seven-time nominee who has brought to life some of cinema’s most captivating and memorable roles. Her resumé consists of critically and commercially acclaimed work as well as a span of awards and honors that illustrate Winslet’s talent and solidify her a permanent place in cinema history.

Upcoming, Kate will star alongside Saoirse Ronan in Francis Lee’s “Ammonite.” The story, which explores the life of fossil hunter Mary Anning (Winslet), will be released by Neon on November 13, 2020. The film was selected for the Cannes Film Festival and was also chosen to screen at the Telluride Film Festival. “Ammonite” received its world premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival, for which Kate was awarded TIFF’s Tribute Actor Award. The film is also set to be screened at several film festivals including Deauville, Hamptons, Mill Valley, Newfest, Ghent, London, Chicago and Montclair.

Also this year, Kate will lend her voice to the titular character of “Black Beauty,” Ashley Avis’ adaptation of the classic story, which will be released by Disney+ on November 27, 2020. In 2021, Kate will lead a stellar cast as Mare Sheehan and executively produce the limited



series “Mare of Easttown” for HBO, created by Brad Ingelsby. She will play a small-town Pennsylvania detective whose life crumbles around her as she investigates a local murder. The series is being directed by Gavin O’Connor (“The Accountant”). Additionally, Winslet will star as Ronal in James Cameron’s sequel to “Avatar,” alongside Zoe Saldana and Sam Worthington. Disney will release the film on December 16, 2022.

Winslet won her first Academy Award®, after a stunning past five nominations, for her role as Hannah Schmitz in Stephen Daldry’s 2008 “The Reader.” Winslet also won a Golden Globe®, Screen Actors Guild® Award, BAFTA, and Critics’ Choice Award, among many others, for the role. She also starred that year in “Revolutionary Road,” directed by Sam Mendes, which reteamed her with “Titanic” co-star Leonardo DiCaprio. Winslet won a Golden Globe® and received many nominations for her portrayal of April Wheeler.

At the age of 17, Kate made an international name for herself in Peter Jackson’s feature film “Heavenly Creatures.” She followed that in 1995 with her role as Marianne Dashwood in Ang Lee’s “Sense and Sensibility.” Winslet received her first Academy Award® nomination for this performance and was also nominated for a Golden Globe®. She then went on to win the BAFTA and the SAG® Award.

Winslet co-starred with Christopher Eccleston in Michael Winterbottom’s “Jude,” and then as Ophelia in Kenneth Branagh’s “Hamlet.” She appeared as the iconic survivor, Rose, in James Cameron’s “Titanic” opposite Leonardo DiCaprio. At the age of 22, Winslet received her second Academy Award® nomination for this role and the honor of being the youngest actress ever to be nominated for two Academy Awards®.

In 1997, Winslet starred as Julia in “Hideous Kinky,” directed by Gillies McKinnon; and in 1998, co-starred with Harvey Keitel in Jane Campion’s comedic drama “Holy Smoke.” She also starred in Philip Kaufman’s period drama “Quills” along with Geoffrey Rush, Joaquin Phoenix and Michael Caine.

In 2001, Winslet starred in the Richard Eyre production of “Iris,” playing the young Iris Murdoch to Judi Dench’s older Iris and received Golden Globe® and Oscar® nominations. She next starred in Michael Apted’s “Enigma,” a spy drama about code breakers during WWII, and “The Life of David Gale.” She then went on to star as Clementine in “Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind,” for which she received Academy Award®, Golden Globe® and BAFTA nominations for best actress. She then went on to star opposite Johnny Depp in “Finding Neverland,” which was named the 2004 best film by the National Board of Review.

In 2006, Winslet was seen in “All the King’s Men,” with Jude Law and Sean Penn, directed by Steven Zaillian. She then extended her voice to the animated feature “Flushed Away” and finished the year in the romantic comedy “The Holiday,” opposite Cameron Diaz, Jude Law, and Jack Black. She starred opposite Patrick Wilson and Jennifer Connelly in Todd Field’s



"Little Children" for which she received her fifth Academy Award® nomination for best actress.

Winslet played the title role in HBO's multi award-winning, five-part mini-series "Mildred Pierce" for which she won Emmy®, Golden Globe® and SAG Awards as best actress in 2010. She joined the ensemble cast of Steven Soderbergh's "Contagion" and starred in Roman Polanski's "Carnage," which premiered in competition at the 2011 Venice Film Festival.

2014 saw Kate co-star with Josh Brolin in director Jason Reitman's "Labor Day." The film premiered at the 2013 Toronto Film Festival and earned Winslet a Golden Globe® nomination for best actress. That same year, Kate starred alongside Shailene Woodley in director Neil Burger's "Divergent," a film based on the best-selling Veronica Roth novel of the same name.

February 2015 saw Kate reprise her role in "Insurgent," the second film in Veronica Roth's book series. Kate also starred in "A Little Chaos," a film directed by Alan Rickman and written by Allison Deegan. The film also starred Alan Rickman and Stanley Tucci. November of the same year saw Kate star in the lead role of Jocelyn Moorhouse's "The Dressmaker," based on the novel by Rosalie Ham. Kate starred opposite Liam Hemsworth and Judy Davis, and the role gained her a best actress AACTA Award. In the same month, Kate also starred in "Steve Jobs" alongside Michael Fassbender. The critically acclaimed role won her a Golden Globe® and a BAFTA, along with a SAG® and her seventh Academy Award® nomination.

March 2016 saw the release of "Triple Nine" in which Kate starred opposite Chiwetel Ejiofor, Casey Affleck and Aaron Paul. She was also seen in "Collateral Beauty" alongside Will Smith, Helen Mirren and Keira Knightley.

2017 saw Kate star opposite Idris Elba in "The Mountain Between Us," a Hany Abu-Assad film adaptation of Charles Martin's novel. She was also seen in "Wonder Wheel" with Justin Timberlake and Juno Temple.

Most recently, she was seen starring in Roger Michell's "Blackbird," a remake of the 2014 Danish film "Silent Heart." Bex Taylor-Klaus, Susan Sarandon, Sam Neill and Mia Wasikowska also starred.

In 2013, Winslet was awarded the CBE, which she received from HM Queen Elizabeth II in a ceremony at Buckingham Palace. She was also awarded a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in March 2014, cementing her status amongst the stars of Hollywood. She was also the recipient of The Dilys Powell Award for Excellence in Film at the 38th London Critics' Circle Film Awards in January 2018.



MACKENZIE FOY (Jo Green) has quickly emerged as one of Hollywood's most exciting young actresses. With a breakout role in the one of the biggest movie franchises of all time, Mackenzie's body of work continues to evolve with exciting and challenging projects.

Mackenzie next stars as Jo in the feature "Black Beauty." The film is based on Anna Sewell's best-selling novel, and features the deep and enduring bond between a 17-year-old girl and the wild horse who helps her overcome trauma after the loss of her parents. Kate Winslet will voice Beauty. She recently starred as Clara in the Disney live-action film "The Nutcracker and the Four Realms." The film is based on the 1816 story "The Nutcracker and the Mouse King" by E.T.A. Hoffmann in which Clara (played by Mackenzie) is charged by her parents with taking care of a Christmas toy nutcracker doll, which comes to life. Mackenzie leads the film and stars alongside Keira Knightley, Morgan Freeman, Helen Mirren and ballerina Misty Copeland.

Mackenzie voiced the little girl who befriends an eccentric neighbor (voiced by Jeff Bridges) in the animated film "The Little Prince," which premiered at the 2015 Cannes Film Festival. It is a film adaptation of the popular book, which was first published in 1943 and is the most famous work of the French aristocrat, writer, poet and pioneering aviator, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. The novella is both the most-read and third most-translated book in the world. Other actors voicing characters in the film include Rachel McAdams, Marion Cotillard, James Franco and Benicio Del Toro.

One of her most notable roles, Mackenzie starred alongside an all-star cast in the Paramount film "Interstellar." Directed by Christopher Nolan, the film also stars Academy Award® winners Matthew McConaughey, Jessica Chastain and Anne Hathaway. Critics have called her performance in the film "superb," "outstanding" and "impressive." She won a Saturn Award and was nominated for a Critics Choice Award and Teen Choice Award for her performance in the film.

Mackenzie garnered worldwide attention when she was cast in Summit Entertainment's "The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn," directed by Bill Condon ("Dreamgirls"). She plays Renesmee, the half-vampire daughter of Bella Swan (Kristen Stewart) and Edward Cullen (Robert Pattinson), whom they must protect from the evil Volturi.

Her other film credits include the thriller "The Conjuring," opposite Patrick Wilson and Vera Farmiga and directed by James Wan ("Saw," "Insidious"), which is about real-life paranormal investigators Ed and Lorraine Warren, who work to help a family terrorized by a dark presence in their farmhouse; and "Wish You Well," about a young girl and her brother who come of age at their great grandmother's (Ellen Burstyn) house in Virginia during the 1940s. Mackenzie also voices Celestine in the English version of the Oscar®-nominated French film "Ernest & Celestine," a sweet story of an unlikely friendship between a bear, Ernest (voiced by Forest Whitaker), and a young mouse named Celestine.



Mackenzie made her television debut when she was 8 years old on the Fox sitcom “Til Death” and has guest starred on “Hawaii Five-0” and the season finale of “R.L. Stine’s The Haunting Hour,” a fantasy-horror anthology series, similar to the TV series “Goosebumps.”

Mackenzie began her career at the age of 3 in commercials and print, starring in national spots for Pantene, Mattel and Burger King, and in fashion campaigns for Gap, Ralph Lauren, Guess, J.Crew, H&M and Estée Lauder, among others. In addition to acting, Mackenzie enjoys drawing, roller-skating and has a black belt in tae kwon do.

IAIN GLEN (John Manly) left the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in 1985, having won the prestigious Bancroft Gold Medal. Iain immediately rose to prominence with his acclaimed performance as a charismatic gang leader in “The Fear” by Euston Films. Followed by his multi-award-winning tour de force as imprisoned Scottish poet Larry Winters in “Silent Screams,” he was set for a rich and varied career. More recently, Iain appeared in “Uncle Vanya” and “The Crucible” in London’s West End, which both won a host of awards.

Stage credits include: “The Crucible” (RSC), resulting in an Olivier Award nomination for best actor; “Uncle Vanya” (Print Room); “Streetcar Named Desire” (The National); “The Blue Room” (Donmar/ Broadway), earning an Olivier Award nomination for best actor and winning a Drama League Award; “Hedda Gabler” (The Almeida); “Henry V” (RSC); “Macbeth” (The Tron); “Road” (The Royal Court); “Martin Guerre” (West End), receiving an Olivier Award nomination for best actor in a musical; and “Hamlet” (Bristol Old Vic), earning an Ian Charleson Award.

Television credits include: “Game of Thrones,” resulting in several SAG Award® nominations; “Downton Abbey,” receiving a SAG Award® for outstanding performance by an ensemble in a drama series; “Jack Taylor”; “Delicious”; “Cleverman”; “The Diary of Anne Frank”; “Into The Storm”; “Wives and Daughters”; “Kidnapped”; “Glasgow Kiss”; “Anchor Me”; “Adam Bede”; and “The Fear.”

Film credits include: “Small Engine Repair”; “Harry Brown”; “Lara Croft: Tomb Raider”; three films in the “Resident Evil” franchise; “Song for a Raggy Boy”; “Mountains of the Moon”; “Silent Screams,” earning an Evening Standard Award for best actor and a Silver Bear award for best actor at the Berlin International Film Festival; “Eye In The Sky”; “My Cousin Rachel”; “The Bad Education Movie”; and “Fools of Fortune,” winning an Evening Standard Award for best actor.

CALAM LYNCH (George Winthorp) has just wrapped on Terence Davies’ latest feature, “Benediction,” playing Stephen Tennant. Prior to that, he was George Winthorp in the upcoming feature film “Black Beauty,” playing the romantic lead opposite Mackenzie Foy — also starring Kate Winslet and Iain Glen — which will be released on Disney+ on November 27. He was also recently in the critically acclaimed play “Wife” at the Kiln, directed by Indhu



Rubasingham. On television, he was in “Mrs. Wilson” for the BBC, opposite Ruth Wilson, and in series two of “Derry Girls” as John Paul.

CLAIRE FORLANI (Mrs. Winthrop) filmed a new feature adaptation of “Black Beauty” last year, with Kate Winslet and Mackenzie Foy, which shall air on Disney+. She has just wrapped a leading role in the Fifty Fathoms/Sky Atlantic series “Domina,” opposite Liam Cunningham and Isabella Rossellini.

She recently starred in the Canadian/UK six-part series, “Departure,” opposite Archie Panjabi and Christopher Plummer. She can be seen playing the role of Cole Sprouse’s mother in the CBS Films feature “Five Feet Apart,” directed by Justin Baldoni. Claire can also be seen on “Hawaii Five-0,” opposite Alex O’Loughlin and Scott Caan, and as the lead in Max Adams’s “Precious Cargo,” opposite Bruce Willis.

Among other credits, Claire starred opposite Sophie Turner in “Another Me,” directed by the Spanish director Isabel Coixet, and in “Hallam Foe” with Jamie Bell, directed by David Mackenzie. She also played Queen Igraine in the Starz drama series “Camelot,” for Chris Chibnall and Michael Hirst, and had recurring roles in “NCIS: Los Angeles” and “CSI: NY.” She was in MGM’s “Antitrust,” directed by Peter Howitt, alongside Tim Robbins and Ryan Phillippe; the Miramax feature “Boys and Girls”; Universal’s “Mystery Men,” opposite Ben Stiller; and in “The Rock,” directed by Michael Bay with Sean Connery and Nicholas Cage. She portrayed artist Jean-Michel Basquiat’s girlfriend Gina in “Basquiat” with Jeffrey Wright, directed by Julian Schnabel; Shannon Dunham in “Green Street Hooligans” with Elijah Wood and Charlie Hunnam; and Susan Parrish opposite Brad Pitt and Anthony Hopkins in “Meet Joe Black.”

ABOUT THE DIRECTOR

ASHLEY AVIS (Writer/Director) Ashley Avis is a filmmaker and passionate, longtime equestrian. She is the writer, director and editor of the upcoming “Black Beauty” for Disney+, starring Oscar® winner Kate Winslet as the voice of Beauty, Mackenzie Foy as Jo Green, and Iain Glen as John Manly.

“Black Beauty” will mark Ashley’s fourth feature film, in addition to directing hundreds of commercials and branded content to date. Her first independent films were “Deserted” and “Adolescence.”

Upcoming projects include writing and show running the television series “Breyer Hollow” for Imagine Entertainment’s Executive Producers Ron Howard, Brian Grazer and Stephanie Sperber; as well as directing and producing the documentary “Wild Beauty: Mustang Spirit of the West.”



Commercially, Ashley is known for the elegance and storytelling found in her short-form work. In 2016, she won the Mercedes-Benz Award for her auto-fashion fusion spot “Bespoke;” and in 2019, she directed as well as edited Chevrolet’s 14-part “Goalkeepers” campaign, featuring Olympians Mia Hamm, Hilary Knight, and Laurie Hernandez — encouraging young girls to stay in sports.

An editor of over a decade, she cuts the majority of her own work — and is the co-founder of Winterstone Pictures, a boutique production company in Marina del Rey, California.

Ashley’s visual style has been called “timelessly romantic” (White Lies Magazine).

In the fall of 2020, Ashley founded and launched The Wild Beauty Foundation — a new organization that hopes to illuminate key issues wild and domestic horses are facing today through entertainment, youth-focused educational programs and on-the-ground rescue efforts.

Ashley lives near the ocean with her husband and producing partner Edward Winters. Ashley and Ed recently adopted two wild horses of her own — rescuing them from holding pens in Nevada after witnessing a helicopter roundup in 2019. The horses are called Zephyra (goddess of the West wind) and Zion (sun). To date, Ashley has personally rescued over 20 horses and several burros, adopting them out to new homes.