

*Joan*  
and  
*Sadie*

**WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY  
RHONDA BUCKLEY**

**PRODUCED BY  
JILL KNOX-GOSSE**



Joan & Sadie are best friends,  
crossing highways, singing in bars,  
and signing national record deals.  
These two brash and fierce women  
from small-town Newfoundland  
take on the entertainment industry,  
where the only F word that comes  
across their lips isn't feminism.





# SYNOPSIS

Joan Morrissey and Sadie Thomas are best friends. They do everything together. They work together, with Joan singing and Sadie managing her career. They go on the road and sign record deals together. And together these two brash and fierce women from small-town Newfoundland take on the entertainment industry, where the only F word that comes across their lips isn't feminism.

Joan Morrissey lights up a room. Her powerful singing holds an audience in the palm of her hand with her rich, bold voice. Barrooms are filled with wall-to-wall men, but Joan is center stage, and she takes no lip.

Born in 1933 in downtown St. John's, Newfoundland, she started singing on the radio at seven. Joan got married,

had six kids, and juggled being a mother and homemaker while pursuing a successful singing career and becoming a rising star.

After selling over 50,000 records and being nominated for a Juno, Joan receives a cheque for \$38 from a Toronto record company. In response, Joan calls the company crooks on the front page of the local paper, takes them to court in a landmark case, and insists that artists must be paid.

Joan washes her children's clothes in a river yet still hosts TV shows for two local TV stations. She performs live on Canada AM with Newfoundland bravado and sings *Thank God We're Surrounded by Water*, to glowing reviews. Joan performs in Toronto and is invited to Nashville. At the same time, she continues to volunteer with the parent-teacher association, baking brownies. When other mothers tell her children she is a 'loose' woman performing in a bar, she says, *"To hell with what others have to say, you must always do what you think is right."*

Joan, on the outside, appears to have it all, a music career, family and friends, and a new home just like all the other homemakers. But Joan has also withstood a court case with a national record label, a jealous and abusive husband, and a heart surgery that leaves her with severe depression.

At 44 years of age, after singing *How Great Thou Art* to family and friends on New Year's Day, ten days later, Joan takes her life while her children are at school.

From Joan's point of view, *"I said I could do it, and that is why I can. It is no more than folding laundry or baking bread. I always knew I could do it, and so I do."* When asked to sing a song, Joan would quickly reply, *"Yes, My Dear, I will sing you a song."*

Joan's music is still heard on the radio in Australia, Europe, and North America.



## PRODUCER

Jill Knox-Gosse

**Odd Sock Films Inc.** is a Newfoundland-based award-winning company that creates and produces original content for film and television. Jill Knox-Gosse is the Founder and President of Odd Socks Films, with more than 15 years of experience producing national and international co-productions with partners in Canada and Ireland.

Knox-Gosse recently executive produced the environmental documentary *Hell or Clean Water*, which was selected for the prestigious 2021 Hot Docs Festival where it was named one of five winners of the Rogers Audience Award. In 2017 she produced the critically acclaimed *An Audience of Chairs* which received the Gordon Parsons Award for Best Atlantic Feature (2018) at the FIN International Atlantic Film Festival. At the festival, the movie also received awards for Best Director, Best Screenwriter and Best Musical Score. Knox-Gosse produced the hailed documentary *Atlantic* (2016) which was nominated for the Best Feature Documentary at the Irish Film and Television Awards. Her comedic feature *Relative Happiness* (2014) received the award for Best Actress at the Los Angeles

Comedy Festival, Best Picture at Screen Nova Scotia, and Best Actress at the Canadian Film Festival, as well as the Le Prix du Lions Club Award at the Festival du Canadien de Dieppe, the Competition Borosos Award at the Whistler International Film Festival and Directors Guild of Canada Team Award. *Relative Happiness* was also a hit with audiences across Canada hitting the Top Five Canadian Films at the Box Office. The movie has been sold in several countries including Australia, Spain, China, South Korea, Turkey, and the Philippines. Knox-Gosse produced the award-winning indie feature film *Grown Up Movie Star* (2009) starring internationally renowned actor Tatiana Maslany which premiered at the Sundance Film Festival (2010) and was winner of a Special Jury Prize. *Grown Up Movie Star* also received three esteemed Genie nominations. Knox-Gosse's notable credits also include having produced CBC's the Nature of Things documentary *White Wolves: Ghost of the Arctic* (2017), narrated by David Suzuki. She is a member of the Newfoundland Independent Filmmakers Cooperative (NIFCO), the Producers Association of Newfoundland (PAN), and the Canadian Media Producers Association (CMPA).



## DIRECTOR

Rhonda Buckley

**Rhonda Buckley** is a Newfoundland filmmaker who makes films with a feminist point of view. Buckley is the writer and director of the feature film *Joan and Sadie* (Telefilm Canada) produced by Jill Knox Gosse, scheduled to go to production in the fall of 2023. Rhonda is also the screenwriter of the feature films *Heart Troubles*, *Sparkle and Shine* and *Elfreda* (Canada Council). Buckley is an award-winning filmmaker of the short film *Surrounded by Water*, on music legend Joan Morrissey, that was shortlisted for the Yorkton Film Festival Awards and airs on CBC Gem. *Terranova Matadora* (BravoFact) based on a Newfoundland woman bullfighter screened at Hot Docs 2016 and *Avon Ladies Rural Style* also screened nationally. Rhonda was selected to TIFF Producer Talent Lab with films she produced by writer/director Sherry White including the Genie nominated feature film *Crackie* (2010). Rhonda has also made five other short films and documentaries for broadcast.





## CASTING Joan



Sarah Power





**CASTING**  
**Sadie**



Kate Corbett





CASTING  
**Tom**



Peter Mooney





# DIRECTOR'S VISION

*Joan and Sadie* is a feature film that is authentic and raw. Family emotion and the raw human condition are a modern and universal story with family sacrifice, where the central character is propelled forward by wanting to succeed against all odds. These themes are common to all audiences. Through a 'look and feel' that is provocative and intimate, *Joan and Sadie* is a narrative spearheaded by a strong-minded and talented woman in the entertainment industry.

My films have always been about women facing adversity who have the tenacity to rise above their circumstances, often excelling in implausible careers. I have consistently been drawn to portray storylines that show women who have chosen a rigorous or unlikely path in life while maintaining their daily home life and raising children. Some other films that I have made on these themes include: *Elfreda*, *Surrounded by Water*, *Terranova Matadora*, *The Real Matriarch* and *Avon Ladies Rural Style*.

To maintain the intimacy and authenticity in the feature *Joan and Sadie*, the script revolves around Joan and Sadie's relationship, their kindred spirit, and how the duo took on the entertainment industry in the '60s when a woman was expected to stay at home.



# ARTISTIC VISION

*Joan and Sadie* production design will be 1960's time period, and it will also be raw in its look and texture. The particular landscape of Newfoundland will play a pivotal role as in the films *Maudie*, directed by Aisling Walsh and *Crackie*, directed by Sherry White.

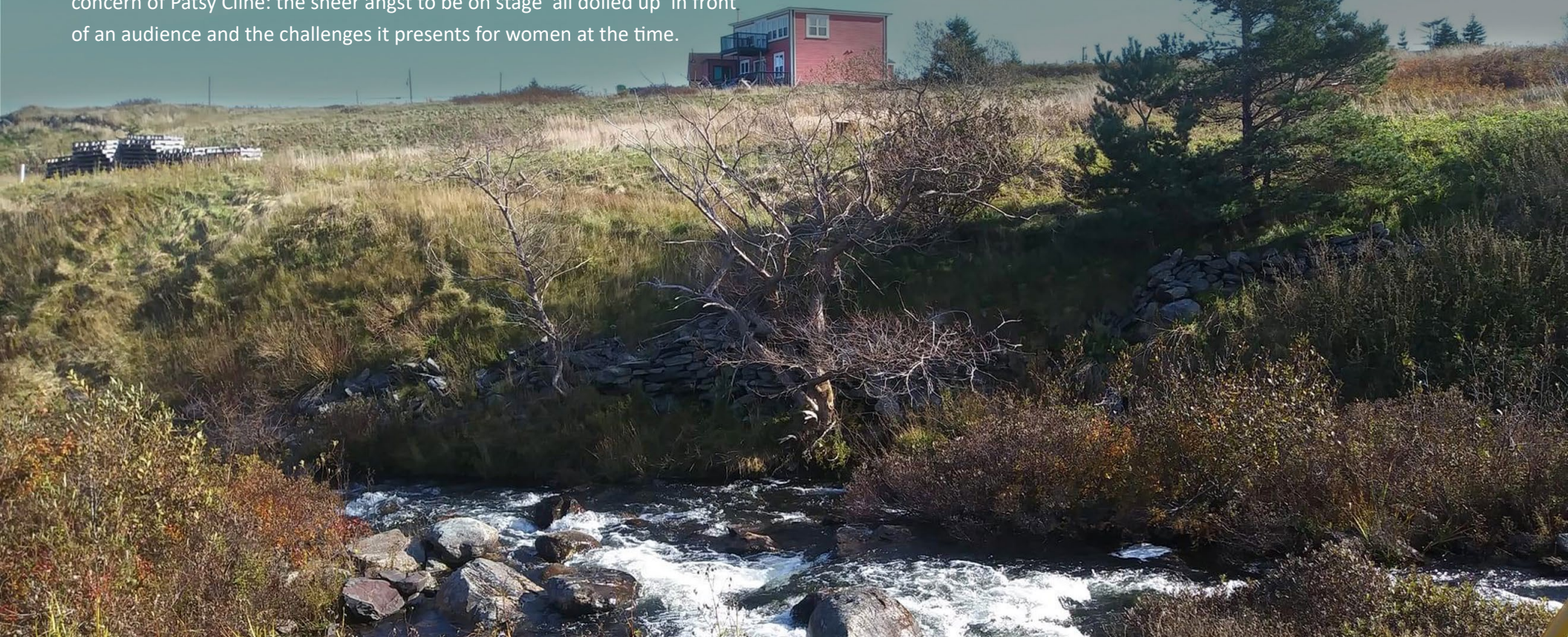
Joan has a kindred spirit with the outdoors and at times was more comfortable at the cabin than performing on stage. I will show moments of Joan outside of her home where she is in nature and how it contrasts to Joan performing on stage, wearing her costumes and makeup that make her look and feel like a star.

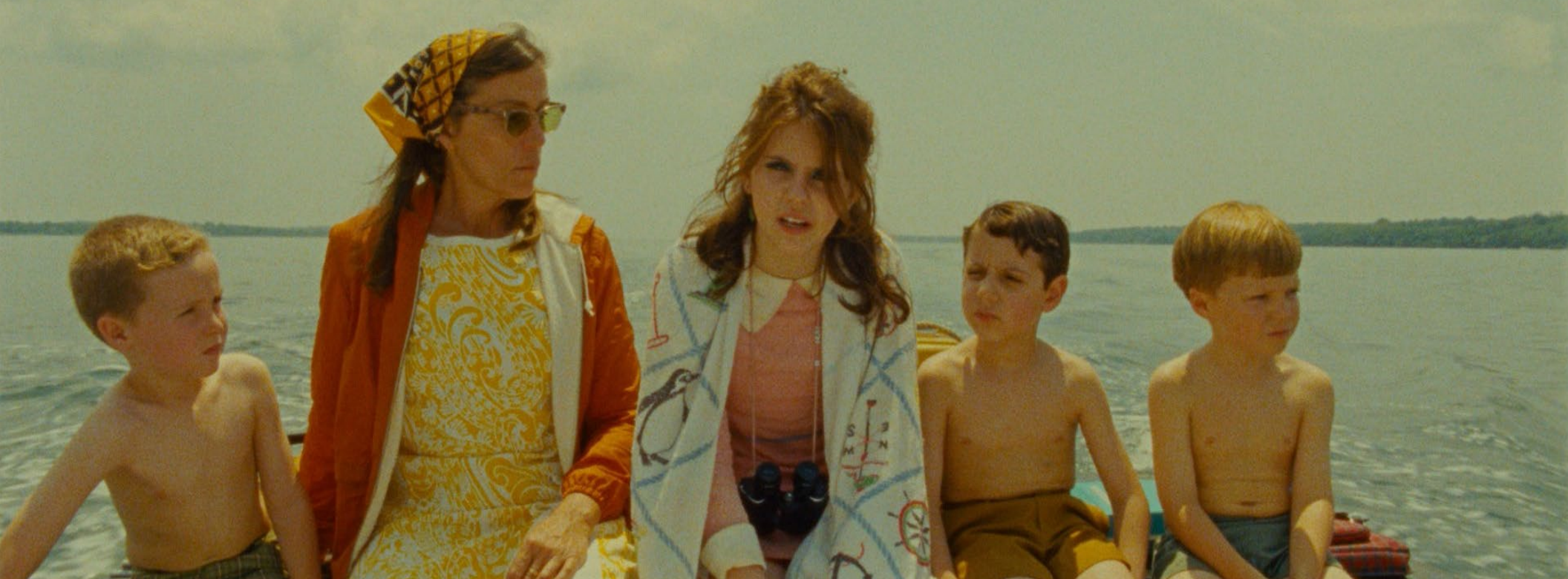
Joan worked against the grain of motherhood by becoming a singer when she was expected to fulfill the traditional roles of a woman and a wife at that time. In the film *Patsy and Loretta* (2019), Loretta Lynn shares the same concern of Patsy Cline: the sheer angst to be on stage 'all dolled up' in front of an audience and the challenges it presents for women at the time.

In *Joan and Sadie*, Joan's worlds show her being a great mother, baking and keeping a good house, and the gusto of her on the road with Sadie where they are as brazen as brass tacks, determined to keep performing.

Joan suffers from being mistreated by her husband, Tom, and tries to sidetrack his controlling ways and the inner emotional fallout she feels as a result. Joan is role-playing to keep her life going in all her personas, although always showing heartfelt warmth and love for her children. Eventually, the many faces of Joan come to a head, and through serious heart surgery and depression, Joan takes her life.

Ultimately, these challenges compounded by Joan's depression led her to take her life. The ending of the film *Joan and Sadie* emphasizes not what we have lost by Joan's untimely death but the courage she had to withstand a complex entertainment business and an abusive husband. With Sadie by her side, Joan is a star, even after her tragic death.





# DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

*Joan and Sadie* is a journey of Sadie and Joan together. Sadie, Joan's best friend and confidante, is a prominent character. They travel together like schoolgirls across the Island, take chances in business in Toronto with record companies, and take care of Joan's children together. Sadie is Joan's business partner and protector against Tom. She gives dimension to Joan's in-depth emotions and relations and her struggle with depression. Sadie was the only person Joan talked with about her depression, and Sadie tried to help her through it.

The feature film script, *Joan and Sadie*, has been through many versions. At the beginning of the writing process, I tried to tell too many stories and had numerous storylines, including Joan growing up as a girl. I attempted to develop a storyline that is not just a biopic but focuses on Joan and Sadie, their ambitions, fun adventures, and a friendship that saw each other through thick and thin. Sadie is more than enamoured with Joan and indeed appears to love Joan.

Joan and Sadie are a love story. I think it's ambiguous whether Sadie loves Joan intimately, but others reading the script say she is in love with Joan, romantically. I am aware of and comfortable with these interpretations. Their love story, for me, represents all women trying to get through in a world and be counted when they are easily pushed down and pushed out. I believe the storylines heighten the intimacy and vulnerability of Joan through her relationship with Sadie. We cheer them on as a duo and are proud of Joan's successes while knowing she is a woman who was forced to make hard choices that eventually cost her life.

The storyline of Sadie and Joan shows them going up against the many challenges in the music industry, taking a record company to court and calling out homemakers who tried to belittle Joan. Sadie keeps an eye on Tom (Joan's husband) and tries to protect her in a difficult marriage, which is a rigorous and contemptuous battle between Tom and Sadie.

The ending of the film *Joan and Sadie* emphasizes not what we have lost by Joan's untimely death but the courage she had to withstand a complex entertainment business and an abusive husband. With Sadie by her side, Joan is a star, even after her tragic death.

I have chosen a poetic ending for Joan and Sadie's journey with the following vignettes: Joan and Sadie's daily chat on the phone, Joan's sold-out signage for her shows, Joan and Sadie playfully swimming at a hotel pool, and Joan and Sadie driving off down the highway with the top of the car down and their scarves blowing in the wind laughing.

We know Joan's memory will live on. A montage of Joan performing in Nashville also shows Joan's legacy as a stellar performer in the music industry, and a dream within her grasp. In this country in the 60's, while raising six children, Joan achieved an impossible feat, even by today's standards. Joan was the first lady of song, exuding courage and gumption.

Joan gave back in spades to her fans and friends by performing. We see the love and courage of Joan and Sadie, having lived a life on the road, touring, and taking down many barriers for women to continue to work in the music industry.



# Joan and Sadie

**Why this film? Why now?** *Joan and Sadie* is timely.

It would be in fact timely every year since Joan performed in the '60s. Women who are singers and musicians have always been challenged in the entertainment industry. If you are a wife and a mother, the scrutiny is heightened. Your talent is often counteracted and questioned: *"You should be home raising your kids, what's she doing in a bar performing every night? Look what she's wearing. Who does she think she is?"*

Joan Morrissey performed in the '60s to great success while raising six children, enduring an abusive alcoholic husband, heart disease, and taking a record company to court. Joan's success and the challenges she faced is unprecedented and have inspired many women to work harder and go farther to achieve success. This film will inspire women for generations to come. It is the first film of its kind in Canada, *Wild Rose* set in Glasgow and *Patsy and Loretta* in the U.S., among many others, have debuted around the world.

Joan and Sadie are best friends, they work together, go on the road together, and sign record deals together. Sadie and Joan knew they were changing the course of women performing in the music industry and when all the other housewives ridiculed them, they were not fazed in the least. Besides Joan kept a tidy house, made a great 'loaf', and was 'Brown Owl' for the kids at school. When other women called her out, she would put them in their place, but she also made sure to say, *"I'll get you my recipe"* before they stormed off.

Women taking on the music industry, performing, and conquering the challenges is as important today as it was in the '60s. *Joan and Sadie* is a film to inspire women and audiences to pursue their dreams and career goals until we finally come to a time when a mother and performer's support is commonplace in the entertainment industry.



## Joan and Sadie

*A deeply moving  
examination  
of a cultural  
icon fighting  
to change an  
industry built to  
exploit her.*





## VISUAL STYLE

### Locations

*Joan and Sadie* is the first feature film I will direct. The structural elements of production are vast, and once I go to production, I must be ready. I am aware of the financial and crew obligations, and that is why I would like to create a concrete artistic vision and focus on a lookbook, shot list, casting, and locations well in advance. Joan loved the outdoors and was more comfortable at the cabin than performing on stage. I will show moments of Joan outside of her home in the landscape, where she is in contrast to Joan performing on stage wearing costumes and makeup.



# VISUAL STYLE

## Locations





**VISUAL STYLE**  
**Locations**





**VISUAL STYLE**  
**Locations**





## VISUAL STYLE & TONE

In the film *Tully* (2018), the lead Marlo, played by Charlize Theron, juggles the complexities of motherhood and emotional regrets. The art direction in this film uses a muted and gritty palette that I am interested in using in *Joan and Sadie* to show Joan's inner conflict that she feels trying to juggle her family life and keep depression at bay. I will use rustic and toned down colours for these scenes. By contrast, when Joan performs on stage wearing brighter colours and makeup, she shows her outward personality and confidence for her audiences.





## VISUAL STYLE

### Super 8 filming of music sequences

The Super 8 film shoot includes the musical scenes when actors perform on location. Locations include: Legion Pleasantville, Spirit of Newfoundland, and Ryan Mansion, a 1970's style home interior and exterior. Super 8 style of filming is used to enhance the archival characteristics of the film with Joan at the microphone singing center stage, from the '60s and '70s.

Footage will also be shot on HD using archival quality in the film shoot. I will also use original footage of Joan Morrissey, including individual performances, *Annie Get Your Gun*, and *All Around the Circle*. Using archival footage and Super 8 to film a drama is a whimsical, visceral, and fluid method, and it works well for a softer lyrical feel in filmmaking that I have used in three of my short films.



# VISUAL STYLE

## Colour Palette



# MARKETING NOTES

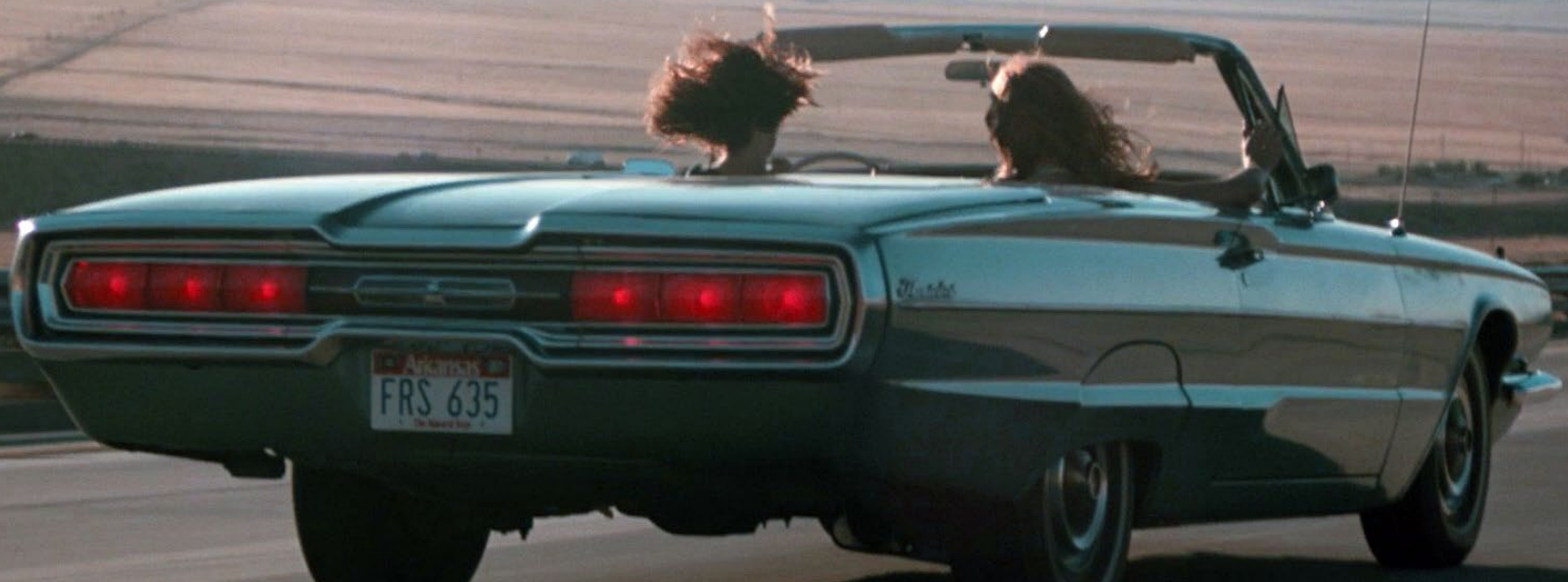
Audience value is based on stories with family emotion and the raw human spirit, a modern and universal story with family sacrifice, where the central character is propelled forward by ‘wanting to succeed’ against all odds. These themes are common to all audiences. Through a ‘look and feel’ that is provocative and intimate, *Joan and Sadie* will be promoted as a narrative spearheaded by a strong-minded and talented woman in the entertainment industry.

Marketers now have more touch points with consumers through digital channels than ever before. Digital marketing makes it possible to reach consumers in new ways, with social media that has two-way communication in it, marketers can also see and understand more about its online consumers. The industry is on the cusp of the “biggest shift” worldwide. First, the business model is moving from third-party distribution and single-ticket sales towards owned distribution and recurring revenue. This is seen by investments in SVoD services, where a single movie or TV series is rarely a profit driver; rather, recurring subscriptions (and, in some cases, advertising revenue) produce value.

As a result, media companies no longer optimize releases for fixed schedules, primetime TV slots, or popular holiday weekends. Instead, the goal is increased engagement, thereby improving user retention and data on content popularity. The corollary is an expansion of demand for proprietary content.

The theme of *Joan and Sadie*, a woman singer, faced with a harsh domestic life, has been proven as a film success story. *Patsy and Loretta* in (U.S.), *Wild Rose* (Glasgow, Scotland), among many others, have debuted around the world. *Joan and Sadie* is the first of its kind in Canada, and will inspire women for generations to come.

*Joan and Sadie* is a celebration of a love story of Joan and Sadie’s relationship. We cheer them on as a duo, on the road fighting the music industry, with fashion, flare, and humour. We are proud of Joan’s successes while knowing she is a woman who was forced to make hard choices. We see the love and courage of Joan and Sadie, having lived a life on the road, touring, and taking down many barriers for women to continue to work in the music industry for years to come.





**DIRECTOR'S PITCH VIDEO** <https://vimeo.com/673383623>

*Joan  
and  
Sadie*

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