

MY ALBION

To celebrate the launch of the MyAlbion+ membership this season, we will be interviewing fans and associates throughout the campaign to tell us about their love for the club. We continue with film director Elliott Hasler...

As regular readers of the matchday programme will already be aware, Albion fan Elliott Hasler is the UK's youngest feature film director.

At the tender age of 16, his first production – Charlie's Letters – was released to much critical acclaim and this year will be showcased at the esteemed Berlin Film Festival, which is second only to the glitz and glamour of Cannes.

Now aged 19, the Exeter University student is midway through shooting a new film, Vindication Swim, which will also feature a cameo role from Albion's assistant head coach, Billy Reid.

"Vindication Swim is fundamentally a Brighton story and as such I wanted the fabric of the film to involve as many Brighton and indeed Sussex people and places as I could," he says. "It's the true story of Mercedes Gleitze, the first English female to swim the English Channel, back in 1927."

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"In the shadow of WW1, Gleitze had to fight to overcome the patriarchal society of 1920s England, along with her troubled coach, to achieve her goal. However, after a rival comes forward claiming to have already accomplished the feat, Gleitze is forced to battle against the Channel Swimming Association in order to retain her record and her legacy.

"It's a story that really resonated with me and while I've had the idea to write the screenplay for some time, I actually put pen to paper over three months last year and we started filming the land scenes in and around Brighton last August.

"Kirsten Callaghan, a Brightonian, has the lead role and bears an uncanny resemblance to Mercedes. She has been fantastic to work with and even does all the swimming scenes herself. We'll finish them off this summer, when the sea is much warmer, and we hope to have the film in the can soon after."

Football and film have often crossed paths in the past and Elliott's inclusion of Reid stems from the management team's previous spell at Swedish club Ostersunds, when the squad utilised the stage as well as the training ground on occasions.

"The main cast is made up of actors who are mostly from Sussex and I wanted to involve extras from the area too," adds Elliott. "With regards to Billy, I was aware of the coaching staff's previous use of the arts and drama, as a method of personal development, and saw how open they seemed to be to try different things.

"I thought I would test the water and waited for the right opportunity, once he had settled into his new job and my script was finished.

"There is a scene involving a pub landlord and given Billy's looks and personality, he appeared to be a perfect fit. I wrote to him and he got back; we then met up, discussed the role and after an audition I offered him the part. I introduced him to the main cast last year too and we have since had regular dialogue, waiting for the best time to shoot the scene. Obviously we don't want to disrupt Billy's day job, certainly at such a crucial stage in the season."

Billy has already met the cast having appeared in a worldwide television feature for Premier League Productions alongside Elliott in September. The backdrop was the Cricketers pub in The Lanes and as you can see from the accompanying picture, he certainly looked the part!

"With Billy as the landlord and the venue being the oldest pub in Brighton, the two elements blend perfectly in what I am trying to achieve with this film," Elliott adds. "The club has also been very supportive – hence the PLP feature – and this has helped create wider interest."

"It was also a nice introduction to being in front of the cameras for Billy. He is in good company though as I have secured actors within this film who have appeared in The

Billy Reid shows off his acting talents while Elliott takes to the water off the Sussex coast



Darkest Hour, The Favourite, Pirates of the Caribbean, The Crown, Grange Hill and Call the Midwife, so he will have great support."

Elliott's growing reputation has certainly helped him assemble such a cast and he has even secured the services of Emmy award winner Daniel Clive McCallum, who is scoring the film.

It's all a far cry from his early days in Hove where he caught the bug having played a key production role in a primary school adaptation of The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe. From there, Elliott started making short movies of around 30 or 40 minutes at secondary school and would even host an 'Oscars Night' at the Hasler family home – complete with red carpet! – where the finished production would debut!

Charlie's Letters was, therefore, a natural progression and is based on the wartime experiences of his great grandfather, Charlie Standing, who was from Brighton. The film centred on his battle for survival, having gone on the run from a Prisoner of War camp in Italy for 18 months, evading capture and fighting with the underground resistance. The narrative also focuses on his wife Tup's ordeals back home.

"While I never met Charlie, his story was passed down by my grandfather and I just thought that given the depth of his story, it was something that could certainly lend itself to a feature-length film," recalls Elliott, who cites David Lean, Martin Scorsese, Christopher Nolan, Steven Spielberg and Johnny Depp as his inspirations. "I started working on the scripts at 14 and three years later it was released, although I did take six months out to concentrate on my GCSEs!"

The film premiered at the Brighton Fringe and also received excellent reviews at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe.

"That was fantastic and made all the hard work and sacrifice worthwhile. We had to add another four shows at Brighton due to popular demand and sold out six of the seven screenings. To then have it selected for the largest arts festival in the world, up at Edinburgh, was an honour and a privilege."

Elliott hopes Vindication Swim will enjoy similar success in the UK and, as he explains, further afield. "There has been tremendous interest from many sources for Vindication Swim and the ultimate objective is to feature



at the Cannes Film Festival in 2021, which coincides with me leaving university.

"The world premier has been booked in by the resort Soneva Jani in the Maldives, who have the first over-water cinema in the world.

"They flew me there in July for a week and have since confirmed they want me back to screen Vindication Swim for its first public screening. I look forward to bringing this onto the world stage afterwards."

In the meantime, he has one eye on the fortunes of the Albion, although his visits to the Amex have been somewhat fleeting given his film and university demands.

"Visits to the Amex have had to take a backseat for now," he admits. "When I'm not studying at uni, my time is taken up filming so it's been very difficult. I do want to get to a game before the end of the season, but

"We've definitely got enough quality to get over the line. I've got full confidence in the team and the coaching staff to get the job done"

fortunately I've been kept informed by my dad Simon, who is a regular.

"It's tight in the Premier League this season but we've definitely got enough quality to get over the line. I've got full confidence in the team and the coaching staff to get the job done."

• For more on Vindication Swim and Elliott's career, visit www.relsahproductions.co.uk

• If you have an interesting Seagulls-related tale which you would like to be considered for 'My Albion' in the matchday programme, please email media@bhafc.co.uk

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