

THE FIR TREE



**Little Boy Blue**



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## Introduction



Based on a true story that shocked a nation, this powerful four-part factual drama, from BAFTA winning writer and executive producer Jeff Pope (*Appropriate Adult*, *The Widower*), centres on the devastating impact on a city of an innocent child's murder amid a wave of gang violence.

Little Boy Blue focuses on the murder of 11-year-old Rhys Jones in Croxteth, Liverpool, in 2007. It explores Melanie's and Steve's ordeal, and tells the story of how Rhys's murderer and associates were eventually brought to justice.

Melanie and Steve Jones support the making of this drama, which is based on careful research.

Stephen Graham (*Taboo*, *This is England*) takes the role of Detective Superintendent Dave Kelly who led the investigation into Rhys's murder on behalf of Merseyside Police, while Sinead Keenan (*Being Human*) and Brían F. O'Byrne (*Million Dollar Baby*, *Prime Suspect*) play Melanie and Steve Jones.

Filmed on location in Liverpool and the North West, Little Boy Blue is produced by Kwadjo Dajan (*Cilla*, *Mrs Biggs*, *Appropriate Adult*) and directed by Paul Whittington (*The Moorside*, *Cilla*, *The Widower*, *Mrs Biggs*).

## Foreword by Melanie and Steve Jones

Our decision to get involved with 'Little Boy Blue' stemmed principally from a desire to honour our son, Rhys, whom we lost ten years ago this year. It is very important to us, and our other son, Owen, to keep his memory alive and for people to understand how important he was to us. But beyond this we saw this as an opportunity to let the public see what happens to a family like ours in a situation like this.

We wanted to show how the pressures we were placed under, the huge weight of grief thrust upon us, the endless waiting, not knowing if we would get justice for Rhys, can tear a family apart. We spoke very openly to the programme makers about what we went through because we wanted to let Sean Mercer and the others involved in Rhys's murder know that our sentence never ends.

Our pain will only fade, it will never go away. And that by trying to avoid the consequences of their actions they only increased that pain. We wanted them to know that there is no 'closure' for us - even from a guilty verdict, because it cannot give us what we want, our son back. But if we can get people to understand this, and if by showing what we went through we can help other people who might find themselves in the future put in the same, horrendous, position that we were, then this will have all been worthwhile.

Lastly, we would like people to know what a magnificent job our friend, retired Detective Superintendent Dave Kelly, and his whole team did with this complex and emotional investigation.

**Mel and Steve Jones**  
**April 2017**

## Production interview

# Q&A with Writer and Executive Producer Jeff Pope

### Q: How did Little Boy Blue come about?

“Our producer Kwadjo Dajan had pushed it consistently. The key for me was the moment when I realised we would be able to properly have access to Rhys’s parents Melanie and Steve. Then it opened out and became something different.

### Q: Why turn these events into a TV drama?

“I asked myself this question a couple of years ago. You can’t just barrel in and trample all over someone’s grief. The key to this type of drama is to set about it in the right way, take a responsible line and really look to try and understand what happened.

“The reason why I’ve explored factual dramas for so long now is because we’re constantly surprised by what happens in real life. Those little details. It sounds a cliché but you wouldn’t think to make them up. By going deeper and deeper and deeper into the DNA of what happened you find something that’s a truth for all of us.

“We get a lot of headlines in life, don’t we? ‘Boy Murdered In Car Park.’ And then ages later, ‘Kid Convicted Of Murder Of Boy In Car Park.’ But how did it happen? What was the impact?

“As a journalist, which in my heart is how I think of myself, you want to find out what happened and why it happened. Truth is very precious and it needs to be carefully guarded and preserved.”

### Q: What questions does this drama ask and what themes does it explore?

“The consequences of what Sean Mercer did that day were enormous. They ripple out. Obviously impacting on Rhys’s family, the community, city and lead detective Dave Kelly.

“The most important thing for me was that we take the story beyond the verdict. What this story does is it shows you what happens in situations like this. This little boy is murdered in a car park. What does that mean?

“What we tried to do was to show what happened to his family. It’s fascinating to have gone through the journey with Melanie and Steve. If you just took Melanie’s mood across the four episodes, she’s up when you think she would be down and down when you think she would be up.

“A really strong example of this is she was very buoyant, focused and together during the trial. Then there is a guilty verdict and you think there would be a massive emotional high. Just the opposite happened. She crashed because she suddenly didn’t have anything to grip on to in her life any more.

“She said to me, ‘People think there is closure with the court case and the verdict. But the opposite is true. Everyone else moves on but we never can.’ That’s one of the things we wanted to explore.”

## Production interview

### Q&A with Jeff Pope continued:

#### Q: How did you approach writing the scripts?

“There’s a trust part of the process. Melanie and Steve have to trust me to talk about really difficult, personal, intimate things. And they have to trust that I am going to deal with that material responsibly.

“So I spent a lot of time with Melanie and Steve. For them to talk about things they have never talked about before. The impact this had on their relationship. They wanted to understand that this was going to be a serious look at what happened. Not just going to rehash some headlines. But a serious look.

“Similarly with Dave Kelly, this was a case which consumed him. He identified so strongly with Melanie and Steve and with this little lad who had been murdered that he made everything secondary to getting a result.”

#### Q: It’s a matter of public record that some of the individuals involved in this case lied to the police.

“A completely innocent little boy was murdered. If you knew something about who might have been involved you needed to tell the truth. But it’s that twisted view of the world that some people have that by trying to make the person who did it face up to what he’s done, you’re a grass.

“That’s the interesting thing about Liverpool as a city. To begin with there was a fear with Dave Kelly and his team that maybe everyone would close ranks and they would get no information. But you see in this story that the city, in the end, did the right thing.”

#### Q: What hurdles did the police face?

“It was a very unusual case. The police knew very soon who had done it. And it was about trying to get evidence. That’s what caused a lot of the frustration and upset. They knew who was responsible and it was tantalising. But Dave Kelly was adamant that if you move too soon and the case against him wasn’t properly handled, he could walk. Dave wasn’t prepared to even entertain that.”

#### Q: Was it an advantage that Stephen Graham, who plays Dave Kelly, was born and raised in Liverpool?

“Absolutely. Stephen stayed with a relative in the city throughout filming. It was a massive part of it, the emotional experience of living and filming in the city.

“That Liverpool community was tested. You do have this image of Liverpool as a family city. That famously a Liverpool and Everton supporter can stand next to each other in a football stadium and there will not be violence. You don’t get that in Manchester or London. So you do have a feeling of a lot of warmth in Liverpool. And I think this crime sorely tested that.

## Production interview

### Q&A with Jeff Pope continued:

“It was so utterly shocking that a little boy on the way home from football training could be shot. I realised in the writing of it that you needed to have that. So people say in the first episode, ‘Shot?’ As if they can’t believe it. There was this feeling that if a little boy is murdered in this city, what’s going to happen? How is this city, as a family, going to react? The wonderful aspect of this story is that the city did the right thing.”

#### Q: How did you keep Rhys and his memory at the forefront of this drama?

“It was Melanie and Steve telling me about Rhys. For a long time Melanie set a place at the table for him. She kept a candle lit. She would go into his room and find things. He used to play football with rolled up socks and kick them around the room. Just little things. Again, it’s surprising. None of us, God-willing, will have to go through what Melanie went through. But it was really brave of her to tell me what happened, what the different stages of the grief process were.”

#### Q: How much time did you spend on set?

“I spent a lot of time on set. We tried to make it look as close to the real thing as possible. It was great to see Stephen at work as well. He took a very pro-active part on set and took his responsibilities very seriously. He was very good with other cast, especially with the young cast as well. There were a lot of young first-time actors.

“The filming at Goodison Park was an absolutely extraordinary day. Bill Kenwright and the Everton Board were brilliant. And so were the supporters. It was so humbling to see that no one left their seat at half time so we could film the scene. Everton could not have been more helpful.

“We also filmed in the same court at Liverpool Crown Court as used for the real trial. It really had an impact on everybody. That was one of the days when Rhys’s father Steve, and Melanie and Steve’s son, Owen, came to the set.

“They had a standing invitation to come and watch any of the filming. For obvious reasons it was very difficult for a lot of it. But they came out that day. Steve was back in the place where the trial had happened. Through our young actors we were able to show how the defendants had behaved in the dock and Steve said it was exactly as we portrayed.”

#### Q: What other elements did you want to include?

“What was interesting was telling this story from several different perspectives. It’s not just a detective story. It’s the story of the Jones family and how they cope. But also it’s the story of potential witnesses faced with these dilemmas. ‘What do I do? Do I do the right thing? My life would be much easier if I didn’t.’ It’s examining what happened in the hope that it never happens again.

“I think drama is very powerful if you can imagine yourself in the same situation. If we can imagine being Melanie or Steve thrust into the middle of this very tragic experience.

“When you present that dilemma, that’s where I think the power of factual drama resonates. When you are able to ask yourself, ‘What would I do?’”

## Production interview

# Q&A with Producer Kwadjo Dajan

### Q: How did this project originate?

“Coincidentally, I was developing another drama idea about teenage gangs on the day news broke about Rhys’s murder.”

“There was just something about this particular case that really got under my skin. I was used to hearing sad stories about kids getting caught up in gang culture, and winding up in violent situations that occasionally led to death. But the fact that this was an innocent boy, with absolutely no connection to any gangs, or any history of wrongdoing or criminality forced me to pay attention. Then as the days went by, and we all observed the dignified and composed way his family responded to their tragedy, it became impossible for it not to affect me. Rhys could have been anyone’s little boy or little brother, and that really cut deep.”

“I decided to make contact with Dave Kelly, the lead detective in the case, in March 2009 and we had an instant rapport. The more details he gave me about the case, the more intrigued I became. I subsequently met Rhys’s family and other people closely connected to the case, and it all evolved from there.

“In my first conversation with Dave, I told him I was interested in telling this story. But with any difficult subject like this, there needed to be a strong justification for doing so. It was never going to be enough to simply say, “this was an awful set of events, let’s show how it happened.” We had to take an honest look at the conditions that led to the events of that night, the fallout from it, the subsequent choices that those involved made, and the lessons that we as an audience could take away from it all.

“Dave and I had a series of meetings and over a period of time more and more details were uncovered. I then introduced him to our screenwriter, Jeff Pope, and over a long period of time, he also engaged in the process.”

### Q: You were the first to approach Melanie and Steve. How did you go about that?

“After establishing a relationship with Dave Kelly, it was clear that he was still in contact with Rhys’s family and there was a mutual warmth between them. Once I had earned Dave’s trust, he spoke to the family and vouched for me, which made my initial contact a lot easier. The first member of the family I met was Rhys’s dad, Steve Jones. I went to visit him, accompanied by another officer from Merseyside Police, Mark Guinness (who is featured in our drama). We spoke at length about the aspects of the story that had had the biggest impact on me, but I also made it clear that ‘we would only attempt to dramatize it if we had the full endorsement of Steve and his family. As dramatist we care passionately about telling what we deem to be important stories, but in cases like this, we also have a moral duty to consider the impact these dramas can have on those already dealing with the pain and injustice.



## Production interview

### Q&A with Kwadjo Dajan continued:

“In my initial conversation with Steve, I offered a few thoughts on the themes I thought we could explore in the drama, and I was heartened to hear him say that ‘these were all in line with what he felt was important to get across.’ For instance, there were numerous press reports throughout the investigation in which it was stated that ‘Rhys was in the wrong place at the wrong time,’ and like us Steve’s family were vehemently opposed to that idea because Rhys was exactly where he was supposed to be, doing exactly what any parent would want their child to be doing during the summer holidays.’

“Steve then said, ‘You’ve got my blessing to tell the story. But just do it honestly, accurately and in a way that is sensitive.’ As time went by we also had several meetings with Rhys’s mum, Melanie, and they have both been fully supportive and have provided us with some invaluable insights. This has enabled us to approach the story from a platform of truth and honesty. We’ve tried to look beyond the headlines and focus on the real life experiences of those who had to deal with the devastating consequences of that awful night in August 2007.

“Melanie and Steve guided us through the entire process. There were things in Jeff’s scripts that have never been publically revealed before. In the spirit of being truthful and open and telling a story that other’s in a similar position will relate to, they spoke without censorship.”

#### Q: Was there contact between the production and any of those convicted or their families?

“There was no contact with those individuals who were convicted, but in some cases, family members who were featured were notified. This story is not really from the perspective of the convicts. Our experience of those involved was very much through the experiences of Dave Kelly and Rhys’s family.”

#### Q: What were the main challenges you faced?

“When you are working on any drama, specifically factual drama, there is a big challenge in terms of trying to ensure the integrity of the piece – maintaining the accuracy. Making sure the creative aspirations and the factual integrity don’t collide. Fortunately, we’ve developed an approach to making these dramas that enables us to draw out the dramatic elements without compromising on truth. We also work with a wide group of like-minded creatives who share our dramatic aspirations, but buy into our determination to preserve the truth as well.”

“While we were in production in Liverpool the first question everybody asked was, ‘Are the parents involved? What do Melanie and Steve think about this?’ That was really special to see and hear. Everyone remains very protective of the family and the people of Liverpool genuinely view them as members of their own extended families. We gained a lot of goodwill once it became apparent the family were behind us, and this helped circumvent a lot of problems we otherwise might have had.

“Obviously, we also had to navigate our way through the usual challenges of drama production such as managing budgets, resources, people and locations, but we were blessed with a really experienced cast and crew who all bought into the project, and often went over and above the call of duty to help us reach our goal.”

## Production interview

### Q&A with Kwadjo Dajan continued:

#### Q: Tell us about filming at Goodison Park?

“There’s a sequence in the first episode where we film a minute’s applause for Rhys at Goodison Park, home of Everton Football Club. We advertised this in the week leading up to the shoot, and were stunned when all 39,000 in the crowd gave up their halftime break to participate in our film. They clapped us on to the pitch and perfectly observed the minute’s applause. And then applauded us going off the pitch. It was a truly special experience. I still get goosebumps thinking about it now.

“The level of support we had from the city was enormous. Everton were really supportive. Their publicity team and press office told us they would do everything in their power to help us, and were true to their word. They knew how much the club meant to Rhys and his family, and wanted to give something back.

“We only had four minutes to film the scene at half time. A lot of planning and rehearsal went into it with a limited crew. But the one thing you can’t prepare for is the reaction of the crowd. And they were magnificent. On the day Everton were playing West Ham and both sets of fans played their part and showed complete respect.

“After coming off the pitch I had a text from Rhys’s dad Steve to say well done. Rhys’s brother Owen was also in the crowd that day. I told him how classy the club had been, and by the end of the shoot half our crew had purchased some kind of Everton memorabilia... even one or two of the Reds fans.”

#### Q: How did you get permission to film in the same courtroom as used for the trial at Liverpool Crown Court?

“We went through the Ministry of Justice. We explained how Rhys’s family were on board, along with the lead the detective from the case, and talked them through our proposed sequence. Our starting point wasn’t, ‘Let’s get the exact court room where the original trial took place.’ The plan was to film within the court building. The specifics of the court sequence was always going to be based on the logistics of filming. It just so happened that when we turned up and looked around there was just something very characteristic about that particular courtroom. Just being there and knowing where the various individuals sat in 2008 and how they interacted, gave us something we just couldn’t cheat. So we made the official approach, and were extremely pleased when the permission was granted. I think it added another layer of authenticity to the overall film.

“Steve and Owen also came out to set while we were filming these sequences. Owen was seeing it for the first time. I can’t imagine what the experience would have been like for him sitting there. But there was a really touching moment when Steve turned around and said, ‘How you’ve set it up in this room, it brings it all back. It’s exactly how it was.’ That was quite humbling.”

## Production interview

### Q&A with Kwadjo Dajan continued:

**Q: You also filmed funeral scenes at Liverpool's Anglican Cathedral where the real funeral took place. That must have been very emotional?**

"There's something about that particular building that generates a certain energy. The sense of history and spirituality that has, and still exists there. Whether you are religious or not you can't help but feel something.

"Everyone there on that day felt some kind of emotional connection to the story. It was one of the few sequences I have filmed in my career where I turned around and I could see half of the crew sobbing all the way through. Regardless of whether this is a job or not, we all felt a genuine connection to this story. With this young football-mad boy. Even the tears of our cast were real."

**Q: You took the decision not to film at the Fir Tree pub car park where Rhys was shot, choosing another location. What was the thinking behind that?**

"When you're filming project like this, you have to go about your business in a sensitive and carefully thought out way. There would have been absolutely no value in recreating this sequence on the doorstep of where it happened. Apart from not wanting to stoke up any unnecessary attention, there was no way of knowing what kind of impact this would have had on Rhys's family, neighbours and friends. We didn't want to take it anywhere near the actual location, so we made a conscious decision to film those scenes outside of the city."

**Q: How did the local community in Liverpool react when you were filming?**

"There was initial discussion about whether or not it was right for us to be telling this story. But once we explained our reasons and the fact we had the endorsement of the family, all of that went away. As with other projects we've previously been involved in, some will always view it as an exercise in exploitation – using tragedy as entertainment.

"But from our standpoint these are important stories that should be told. The lessons and consequences of these events have far reaching implications for society at large. As long as you handle it with sensitivity and thought, and you avoid taking sensationalist routes, I think there is a need for these types of dramas. That was the reason why the family bought into it. That's why we had the endorsement of Dave Kelly. We all had a sense we were telling an important story."

**Q: What questions does this drama ask and what themes does it address?**

"It looks at a wide range of themes. One that stands out for me is the fact that everyone has choices in life. And the consequences of bad choices, the ramifications of events such as these can have a profound impact on those around you. In this case you have a group of disenfranchised youths involved in a gang feud. As abhorrent as their actions were, we have to accept that there were a series of circumstances and choices that resulted in them taking these sickening actions.

## Production interview

### Q&A with Kwadjo Dajan continued:

“There’s a theme throughout which centres around mothers and their children. The way in which some parents validate their children’s behaviours, the poor examples that others set, and the protective instinct that even lead to some covering up the bad actions of their offspring.’ It’s never our intention to cast judgment when telling these stories. The audience is left to draw their own conclusions. However, these things do occur everyday, and it’s left to the audience to decide how they feel about it, and what we as a society need to do to address it.

“We have to look at the environment that breeds the type of mentality that leads to the types of actions portrayed in our drama. This is not a typical drama where a crime is committed, an investigation takes place and a guilty verdict is given. Things happen beyond that.

“Throughout this story, Rhys’s parents talk about the lack of closure. You think you can move on once the killer has been brought to justice. But the impact is widespread. And the impact on the families of those who were drawn into this crime continues too. It was important to look at the broader picture. So many people are impacted by bad choices and we wanted to explore that.”

#### Q: What does the drama show about the police investigation?

“The thing that first struck me about Dave Kelly was just how human he was. How connected he was. He’s not someone who hid behind police jargon or anything like that. He was straight talking, and obviously felt an enormous connection to Rhys’s family.

“He had come from the same environment a lot of the characters in our drama had come from. And he had no doubt about the role families and the community as a whole could play in these incidents. It was something that got under his skin. This was his city. He had been there his whole life. He cared passionately about the people of Liverpool, and wanted to stand up for it.

“Also as a parent himself, Dave was able to take a firm stance on which side of the moral line he stood. For him, there was no confusion between right and wrong. He wore his heart on his sleeve. That’s something that guided him through the entire investigation.

“Lots of the people in Liverpool and in Merseyside Police took this case personally. But for the grace of God that could have been anybody’s child. Everyone can relate to the idea of their happy-go-lucky child going off to play football, but it’s hard to think he may not come home. Dave at the head of the investigation led by example. His views and his attitude filtered down to the rest of the team.”

#### Q: How did you approach working with the young actor who plays Rhys?

“It’s always challenging working with children on stories like this. But what was really helpful was the fact that he was a really intelligent young actor, with very supportive parents who chaperoned him throughout the whole process. He was only exposed to the things he needed to see whilst we were filming. The mechanics of what we were doing were explained to him at every step. Even when he was asked to wear prosthetic make-up, the ingredients used to make those bits of make-up were explained as he was taken through the process.

“We wanted to explain what was happening, as well as give him the space to wonder and be a child going through an unusual experience. Giving him regular breaks was also key.”

## Production interview

### Q&A with Kwadjo Dajan continued:

**Q: Was it an advantage that Stephen Graham was born and raised just down the road from Croxteth?**

“Absolutely. When you are born and raised in Liverpool there is an authenticity that can’t be faked. From the moment he met Dave Kelly, Stephen wholeheartedly embraced and embodied the role. Because he KNEW him, and lot’s of other men like him.”

**Q: Sinead Keenan and Brían F. O’Byrne must have faced particular challenges playing Melanie and Steve?**

“It’s never a case of trying to imitate the real people. It’s about taking something from the spirit of who they are, and interpreting that. In the case of Melanie and Steve, Sinead and Brían spent some time with them before filming, and I think that helped them nail the roles. In many of their scenes, they were not necessarily acting, they were simply “feeling” and transmitting that in the scenes. Presenting what their emotions were leading them to do.”

**Q: You also cast young people who had never acted before. How did that work?**

“We thought it was important to cast authentic native actors. People who understood the world we were trying to portray.

“Our casting director, Amy Hubbard did a lot of casting in boxing clubs and local youth clubs. We have two or three actors in this drama who are amongst the best young boxers in the country. They had never acted before but they were able to transform themselves into the characters from this story. They were brilliant. There is a certain energy that comes from being a native Scouser and knowing the world you’re recreating. These guys brought that. You can’t teach it. They impressed us so much. They brought so much to the roles.

“The court scenes were really difficult for those actors because all of them are really decent young men. They’ve all got a strong moral compass. They are all very respectful, very polite. You couldn’t find a nicer group of youngsters. So being asked to portray the type of abhorrent behaviour that took place in the dock was completely alien to them. Steve was there during filming, and afterwards he leant across to me and said, ‘That was really good. So accurate. What they were doing reminded me of the thing that most sticks in my mind about the real kids who were on trial. It was never reported at the time, but I’m glad it’s in the drama.’”

**Q: How do you reflect on the experience of working on Little Boy Blue?**

“We had to keep Rhys at the centre of this story. A bright young boy with an incredible future ahead of him. He was the life and soul of every environment he walked into. To be so cruelly killed in the way he was, that left a lasting impact on everyone. It’s impossible to tell this story well without keeping him at the heart of it. You spend time with the family, you look around their house and his images are everywhere.

“Little Boy Blue is ultimately about family, parenthood, love, loss and themes we can all relate to. This is a special project for all of us. It’s something we are all really proud of.”

## Production interview

# Q&A with Director Paul Whittington

### Q: When did you become involved with Little Boy Blue?

“Jeff and Kwadjo first started talking about it to me several years ago when we were working on Mrs Biggs. Jeff always has numerous projects in different stages of development, so we talked about it from quite an early stage.

### Q: Why tell this story in a TV drama?

“There is something fascinating about where a drama can go in terms of getting inside a story, particularly stories we think we are familiar with. A drama can get inside the story with all its complexities.

“It’s important that we look at these kind of events with different points of view, with hindsight, with an inside track to further our understanding of what happened and why it happened.

“We explore this story from a number of different points of view, seeing this terrible crime ‘in the round’; in the way such acts of violence impact the victims, the courage shown by those who came forward to speak out and the tenacity of a police force when they are faced with a crime that shatters a community.

“Everything that’s there in relation to the Jones family has come from Melanie and Steve. They have been incredibly courageous in terms of their openness and honesty about what they went through. Melanie and Steve’s story is about what’s happening behind closed doors. We’re familiar with them from the press conferences and other media appearances but what actually is happening to their lives and their relationship living through this horrific event?”

### Q: Is this also, in part, a story of how people grieve in different ways?

“It is. We talked a lot about that. What the story tracks is the fractures in their relationship after the tragedy and their inability to help each other and what that did to their relationship. I think that’s the value of drama, where you can get into the complexity and nuance of that kind of emotional story.

### Q: What is your prime job as the director?

“It’s to tell a story. That seems very obvious and fundamental but you are a storyteller. You have to interpret what’s on the page and deliver that to the screen.”

### Q: What were the challenges for you in telling this story?

“One of the challenges was how to successfully run those parallel and inter-connecting stories together and for them to feel as one whole story. They are separate elements of a whole and getting the right balance between those was vital.

“Another big challenge, particularly in terms of Melanie and Steve’s story, was getting somewhere close to an emotional truth of what it must be like to experience that kind of tragedy. We’re pretty unflinching in parts and capturing the truth of those moments was a challenge for all of us.”

## Production interview

# Q&A with Director Paul Whittington

### Q: Were there a number of first time actors among those cast in that young group?

“It was about 50-50. There’s a couple of experienced young actors in there and then other guys who have never acted before. We had an extensive casting process. Our casting director, Amy Hubbard was in Liverpool about three months before we’d even started pre-production scouring youth clubs and boxing clubs to see what talent was out there. She must have seen over 500 young people as part of that process and eventually found these guys who have a wonderful authenticity and naturalism about them. Casting them alongside more experienced actors became a perfect blend and as a group that worked very successfully.”

### Q: Did it help that Stephen Graham, who plays lead detective Dave Kelly, is from Liverpool?

“Stephen certainly responded to the story as a Liverpudlian. He felt it was an important story to tell about the city and how Liverpool as a community came together at that time to support the family. There was definitely a personal connection there for Stephen.

“He also invested a great deal in the young actors on the cast. He was a fantastic role model for them and was eager to get involved with me in terms of nurturing them through the process. He gave them a lot of advice and instilled a confidence in them that was instrumental in getting the best performances.”

### Q: How did you handle the scenes involving Sinead Keenan and Brían F. O’Byrne as Melanie and Steve?

“It was an emotional shoot. There are some unflinching scenes they had to tackle. We were all very aware of the sensitivity of what we were doing and the weight of responsibility telling a story about such a personal tragedy.”

### Q: You filmed at some of the real locations, including Liverpool’s Anglican Cathedral, Goodison Park and Liverpool Crown Court. What did that add?

“Just being in Liverpool itself was very important to us and to be in some of the places where these events actually took place definitely had an extra very powerful resonance.

“It feels like there is a tremendous sense of community in Liverpool. Never better illustrated for me than when we went to Goodison Park to shoot a sequence that encapsulated everything about the people of that city and how they come together.

“I felt all along that the only way to capture Melanie, Steve and Owen’s appearance at Goodison Park to pay tribute to Rhys was to film it for real. I felt strongly that the emotion of the event simply couldn’t be generated by CGI crowd replication. That said, in all honesty until we stepped out on to the turf at Goodison nobody was quite sure what we were going to get. We had made an appeal to ask people to stay in their seats at half time and explained what we were doing but until we got there we really didn’t know.

## Production interview

### Q&A with Director Paul Whittington

“We walked out on to the pitch, lined up on the touchline and it was a very moving experience. I looked around the stadium and it was incredible. 38,000 people had stayed in their seats to take part. There was a respectful silence as the crowd waited for us to call action. When the applause came it carried a wave of emotion for Melanie, Steve, Owen and for Rhys. It wasn't simply a crowd being asked to participate in a TV drama, there was a palpable emotional investment in the stadium that day.”

#### Q: Tell us about filming in the same courtroom as used for the real Liverpool Crown Court trial?

“It really did add an intensity to the atmosphere. What was striking about that courtroom for all of us was how small it is and consequently how close all the protagonists were to each other.”

#### Q: You were also able to show how defendants behaved in the dock?

“It was very shocking. Even when our actors were playing those scenes there was something very disturbing about it. Steve Jones was there on one of the days and said, ‘Yes, that’s what the experience was like.’”

#### Q: What hurdles did the police face in securing justice for Rhys?

“It’s another very interesting aspect of this story dramatically, that it was never really a ‘whodunit’. From very early on in the investigation the Police knew who the killer was and who else was implicated. The investigation became about building a case against not only the individual who pulled the trigger but those around who conspired in the cover up. That’s fascinating in itself - we know who committed the crime. Now how can we get justice?”

#### Q: What reaction did you get from people during filming?

“We filmed entirely on location, wherever we went we were very open with people about what we were doing and the response from the Merseyside public was tremendous. People were reassured by the fact that Melanie and Steve were supportive of the project and there was a strong sense that the city felt it was an important story to be told.”

#### Q: How did you ensure Rhys and his memory stayed at the forefront of this drama?

“Rhys informs every moment. As well as the story of Melanie and Steve’s pain and grief, Rhys is central to Dave Kelly’s experience leading this investigation. Dave was driven by a personal connection to the case, to a young boy he never met and a pledge to that family. Rhys was the ever-present subtext to every scene we played. We found emotional connections and motivations for characters across the piece that all came back to Rhys.”



## Production interview

# Q&A with Director Paul Whittington

### Q: How do you reflect on working on this project?

“It was very special. If you take on a story like this there is a sense of responsibility that comes with it that brings you together as a cast and crew. But it’s important to say that the responsibility is a positive thing to carry. We really came together as a family to tell this story and we all believed it was the right thing to do. Having Melanie and Steve’s support meant everything to us and we just wanted to get it right for them.”

## Production interview

# Q&A with Former Detective Superintendent Dave Kelly

### Q: What was your role with Merseyside Police in 2007 before the murder of Rhys Jones?

“I was a Detective Chief Inspector within the Major Incident Team. My responsibilities included investigating murders and serious and organised crime.”

### Q: How did you first hear about what had happened to Rhys?

“I had recently been made Acting Head of the Murder Investigation Team. So I was a temporary Detective Superintendent. I’d come home, was having a barbecue with the family, and I received a phone call to say an 11-year-old boy had been shot.

“I went to the scene, not thinking I was going to be the senior investigating officer but just to provide some support. I made various inquiries at the scene and then went back to Lower Lane Police Station and debriefed various officers about what statements, what accounts they had received. I then went to a meeting with Pat Gallan, who was the Assistant Chief Constable. And she made me the senior investigating officer.”

### Q: What were your initial thoughts when you got that call?

“When I heard it was an 11-year-old boy and it was Croxteth, reluctantly I was thinking, ‘God, what’s an 11-year-old kid being involved in gang crime?’ But as time evolved it became apparent that Rhys was an innocent young boy.”

### Q: What happened the next day?

“The following morning I went to Rhys’s post mortem, which was very disturbing. Even though I’d been to lots of post mortems before this was a very difficult one. Given the fact he was an 11-year-old boy in his football kit. You’re just thinking, ‘Why has this happened?’

“It was the day after that I went to see his parents Melanie and Steve at their home. It soon became apparent to me they were genuine, decent people. Basically I just wanted to do what we could for them. Melanie, understandably, was quite emotional. As I was about to go she was touching my hand. I looked at her then and I thought, ‘Whatever pressure you’re going to get internally and externally, she inadvertently had just piled much more pressure on me.

“So I was determined to bring those responsible to justice and anyone else involved and put them before the courts. It was going to be difficult because right at the outset there was little or no forensic evidence at the scene. That brought its own problems. We had eyewitnesses but nobody could see the face of, as it transpired, Sean Mercer. It wasn’t going to be an easy investigation from the start.”

## Production interview

### Q&A with Dave Kelly continued:

#### Q: What impact did the murder of Rhys Jones have on the local community and Liverpool?

“It had a massive impact. Everybody was shocked such a thing could happen. People in the locality of the murder had had enough by then. If you look at the two gangs involved - the Norris Green and the Croxteth Crew - it was basically kids with guns. They weren’t organised criminals. They were just kids and they had access to firearms which made it even worse than it could have been. And something needed doing about it.

“In fairness to Merseyside Police, they were tackling gun crime and doing their best. But I think this tipped it over the edge and there was that much more effort put into it.

“It was just ridiculous the way these kids were going around firing guns, and there were obvious concerns for people in the area. We were doing something about it, but we had to step it up to another level.”

#### Q: Why were you determined everyone involved should face justice when it might have been easier to seek fewer prosecutions?

“For Melanie and Steve more than anything. Also from a professional perspective, it was important we sent out a message to these kids and the community. That this wouldn’t be tolerated. You’ve gone too far now and we’re going to do something about it. It was important to send out that message to them, their families and to the local people. To say, ‘We will do something about this. You give us the support. We will back you up and look to take people out who are involved in this sort of crime.’ And that’s what we did.”

#### Q: You’ve mentioned the pressure the police were under. Perhaps some in the local community didn’t appreciate the need to collect enough good evidence to secure convictions in court?

“It was frustrating that we couldn’t tell the public everything we knew. I can understand that would be frustrating for some people because they would be thinking, ‘What’s going on? Why aren’t they doing this? Why aren’t they doing that?’ But behind the scenes, slowly but surely, we were building up a picture, putting the pieces of the jigsaw into place. With the ultimate goal of bringing those involved to justice. And that’s what we did.”

#### Q: Did the huge media and international interest in the case add any pressure?

“Not to me. Once you’re involved in a murder inquiry you’re just engrossed inside. Albeit you’ve got to go out and face the media now and again, you tend to try and ignore the outside influences.”

## Production interview

### Q&A with Dave Kelly continued:

#### Q: How were you first approached about the possibility of making a TV drama?

“I’d only just retired in March 2009 and the producer Kwadjo Dajan rang me. He was just putting out feelers at that time. I said to him, ‘Look, I’m interested in maybe doing something whenever. But I won’t do anything without the permission of Melanie and Steve and if they’re not up for it then neither am I.’

“Kwadjo had obviously done his research and knew a lot about it. I’m not your normal run-of-the-mill cop. I’m down to earth, say it as I see it. There’s no frills about me. And I think Kwadjo liked that, he could see some kind of story within the story, going forward.

“Then as time went on I got to know and trust Kwadjo more. He had spoken to Melanie and Steve and eventually it got to the point where we decided to go ahead with it. Then I got to do a lot of work with Jeff Pope. Once he gets into something he gets into it. And the story he has portrayed is accurate. Obviously there is some dramatic license in there but overall it does tell a story of everything that went on.”

#### Q: Was it difficult re-visiting some of these events for Little Boy Blue?

“Yes, it was. I’m an emotional person anyway. Revisiting some of the events was very difficult. And that was for me so God knows what it was like for Melanie and Steve. At the end of the day, you say we’re professionals. But I’m a human being. I’ve got kids myself. It wasn’t easy.”

#### Q: This was your community?

“I was born in Everton. I moved from there when I was about six or seven up to Halewood. Myself and my brother were brought up on a council estate. I joined the police, got married and had kids. So, as I say, there’s no frills to me. I am what I am and I make no apology for that. I think that’s what Melanie and Steve saw in me - a guy who knew what he was doing.

“I said to them: ‘There will be stuff I’ll tell you, if I can. There’ll be stuff I won’t tell you. And there will be a reason for that. But at the end of all this you will know everything and I’ll be able to tell you everything. But there are some things we do that have to remain confidential.’ I think I gained their trust right from the start. Which was important for me. Because if you haven’t got the trust of those two people, who you are serving in essence, then you might as well pack up and go.”

#### Q: What did you make of the casting of Stephen Graham as you?

“He’s a nice fella. More importantly he’s a Scouser and an accomplished actor and he knows what he’s doing.

“When I first met him he was asking, ‘Where do you get your suits from, what aftershave do you wear?’ He just wanted every detail to understand my character and portray me to the best of his ability.”

## Production interview

### Q&A with Dave Kelly continued:

#### Q: Tell us about the pickaxe handle Stephen uses in the drama?

“The Persuader. I used to take it into morning briefings and put some people on the spot. I didn’t brandish it or anything but I would have it by my side. Then when Stephen came to the house I showed him it and he loved it. So he borrowed it for the filming. But I’ve got it back now.”

#### Q: Football plays a part in this story because of Rhys’s love of the game and the circumstances of his death.

“The response of the fans at the funeral in different shirts was fantastic. That was very emotional. It took a lot of effort to keep myself together. I’m not a praying man but I prayed that day.

“It was nice to see the response from the people of the city. And from people outside of Liverpool. That support for the family. Let’s not forget the family went to hell and back. What they went through I couldn’t begin to imagine.”

#### Q: Do you feel anything today about Mercer and the rest who you and your team helped convict?

“I never ever felt anything aggressively or otherwise towards him. I disliked him. I disliked what they’d done. But I managed to keep myself professional. It’s important. Because if we do anything wrong on this case, a massive case as it was, then someone would jump on that and turn that against it. So I ensured we played it straight down the middle. There was going to come a time when appeals would come in if we got a conviction, which we did. In my mind that was never in any doubt. And we stood up to the appeals.

“The end of the case sent out a powerful message. And what came back to me and others loud and clear was, ‘Thanks for doing this.’ We got a lot of letters afterwards from people. That was touching. And there was a drop in crime in Croxteth and Norris Green.

“People were genuinely pleased and happy something was being done against this sort of criminality. That’s why it was important not just to get Mercer but to get them all.”

#### Q: These events showed the worst of a community and also the best?

“I’d agree with that. You look at the people who came forward to give evidence. That takes some bottle. And without that evidence we would have struggled. It did bring out the best in people eventually. It shows you people do care.”

#### Q: Had Rhys lived he would be aged 21 today.

“The manager of Rhys’s football team had a son who was in the same team. I bumped into him three or four years ago and then saw him refereeing a football match. I looked at him and thought, ‘Rhys could be that age. He could have this life.’ That’s been taken from him.”

## Production interview

### Q&A with Dave Kelly continued:

#### Q: What are your thoughts about the making Little Boy Blue?

“The making of this drama has undoubtedly affected me because you’re revisiting the past. But it’s good to remember Rhys and his life. I’ve got a lot of time for Melanie and Steve.

“It’s important to tell this story in a TV drama. In August 2017 it will be 10 years since Rhys was shot and killed. I think it’s important to let people know about a little boy who was on his way home from playing football and for the act of some hooligan who wanted to fire a gun at some other jobs, he’s caught in the middle of it and has lost his life.

“There was a saying in the press that Rhys was in the wrong place at the wrong time. Melanie and Steve took exception to that. As did I. Rhys wasn’t in the wrong place at the wrong time. He was doing what he should be doing on a nice summer’s evening, minding his own business coming home from football practice, and this terrible act occurs.”

## Cast interviews

### Q&A with Stephen Graham – DS Dave Kelly



#### Q: How did you become involved in Little Boy Blue?

“My agent sent it to me. She said, ‘I think you would like this project.’ I read it and I literally couldn’t stop crying. I thought it was amazing and felt Jeff Pope had handled the sensitivity of the story incredibly well.

“Then I went to meet Jeff, the producer Kwadjo Dajan and the director Paul Whittington. I knew straight away I wanted to be a part of it. I was born in Kirkby, which is 10 minutes down the road from where little Rhys lived. I remember when the shooting happened. I haven’t lived in Liverpool for over 20 years but I remember the impact it had on the city.

“This story is not just specific to Liverpool. It’s universal. The incident happened in Liverpool so it’s about that togetherness and coming together as a community and as people. But these kind of things were happening in London, in Birmingham, Manchester.

“At that time it was like a post code war. That gang mentality. That someone was in the ‘wrong’ place trespassing on other people’s territory. Which, to us, is ridiculous, but to those people involved that was everything to them. It’s moronic. I can’t understand it and I’ll never be able to understand it.”

## Cast interviews

### Q&A with Stephen Graham continued:

#### Q: Did you meet Dave Kelly?

“Kwadjo asked me if I would like to meet Dave Kelly and I said, ‘Of course, I’d love to.’ Just to meet the man and shake his hand. Because I think his dedication, conviction and willingness to want to get to the truth and make these people be responsible for what they had done was amazing.

“We went to his house and had a cup of tea. What I wanted to know was why this meant so much to him? What was it about this that gave him that desire and drive to wake up every morning and just keep going? No matter what barriers were in his way he just kept on going.

“That tenacity I found astonishing. For someone to have that much conviction. To want to not just do the right thing but want everybody to pay for what they had done.

“I asked him, ‘What was it that drove you?’ For me the key point in the script was the moment when he saw little Rhys’s body at the post mortem in the pathology lab. I asked him about that. That’s when I saw the chink in Dave’s armour and the tears that came there. That’s when he showed me what it was that truly drove him. The fact this young boy was dead for no reason at all.”

#### Q: What pressures were the police under?

“It’s the pressure you are under, not just within the community but also within the police force itself. You have to answer to somebody else. It’s how that pressure can come down on this one person. Dave didn’t let that affect him or force him to take his eyes off what he needed to do.

“The people above him were under immense pressure as well. It went from being a local incident to something of global interest. It was on television in America and all across the world. Because of the fact it was such a young boy, a child innocently walking home from football. Completely shocking.

“These things happen every single day in the world and we go, ‘Oh, isn’t that terrible?’ But it really hits home when it’s actually on your doorstep. It shouldn’t happen anywhere. A child who has his life in front of him. A young boy or a young girl. We shouldn’t be that breed of human beings for this kind of thing to happen.”

#### Q: There is always a responsibility when you are playing a real person, especially one who is still alive?

“You do have an obligation. You want to serve this man to the best of your intentions. You also want to serve the story. The thing with Dave is that drive and conviction throughout his story and his journey. I so admired that. It was an honour to meet a man who had really stood by what he believed in.



## Cast interviews

### Q&A with Stephen Graham continued:

“It became personal for him. Dave himself was born 20 minutes away from where this incident happened. He’s walked these streets as a copper on the beat. This is where he lives, where his wife and children live and where his mum and dad have lived before him. He felt there was a responsibility to get justice.”

#### Q: What are your thoughts about those involved in the shooting?

“What I tried to do was not to chastise these young people. This drama makes a great social comment. Why is this happening? And if it is a generational thing, don’t we have an obligation to look at the backgrounds of these children and where they’re from? And look at why these things are happening? It’s very easy to chastise. Well, I’m from that area but I hope I turned out OK. You can’t just paint everything with the one colour. You have to look at it socially.

“I was lucky when I was a kid. We had the youth centres and football clubs. But predominantly it was the youth centre which was the core for us. That’s where we all used to go. I’d come home, do my homework, have my tea, watch Neighbours and I’d be in the youth club for ten past six. Then I’d be there until 9pm and then I’d go home.

“It was a place where young people could talk to somebody if they found they couldn’t talk to their parents. There were people there who you could communicate with and you could explain what was going on in your head. Because it’s not easy growing up at times. There are things you need to talk about. And, for me, that was the hub of where I grew up. It wasn’t gangs for us.

“We had hope. And the fact I used to go to the Everyman Theatre and I was getting into the acting. All right, there were a lot of lads who used to go, ‘What are you doing that acting thing for? But they understood it was something I wanted to do.

“My mother and father and all of my family gave me that support. I’m not lucky. It’s just the way I was raised and where I was from. But there were kids who were going down a certain route and the youth centre kept them on the straight and narrow.”

#### Q: It is shocking to learn just how many lies the parents of some of the gang members were prepared to tell after the murder of a young boy?

“If you were in that position, how far would you go to protect your child? I’d like to think I have a decent moral compass and I would be able to do the right thing. But it’s their child. And where they come from they felt that was the right thing for them to do. But it was completely the wrong thing to do.

“We have to look at it in a social context. What makes them believe that is the right thing to do? What kind of society are we creating where that is seen as the right thing to do? What kind of society are we creating where a 16-year-old lad goes and gets a gun and can shoot aimlessly at somebody else and kill an innocent child?”

## Cast interviews

### Q&A with Stephen Graham continued:

**Q: Do you think the lines of what is right and wrong in society have become blurred? Some people have lost that moral compass?**

“Yeah. I completely agree with that. I think they really have in many ways. One of the kids involved was from a decent home. A good family. But he was pulled into it through pure fear. Because these are the kind of people, if they phone you and say, ‘Right, come here,’ you don’t hesitate. You go. Because the outcome could be horrific. Dave saw there was a goodness in this boy and that he could tell right from wrong. Again, it’s not casting everyone in the same colour straight away.”

**Q: One boy involved is told by a prison warden it is good to tell the truth. There is a real sense he has never been told that before?**

“Because he comes from a family where he’s been taught from an early age you look after your own. You stick together. And you’re taught everyone else is against you and don’t tell them anything. It’s making them become these people so when they grow up they’re not going to tell the truth.”

**Q: As Dave Kelly, you carry a pickaxe handle into police briefings in the incident room. What’s the story behind that?**

“It was Dave’s pickaxe handle called ‘The Persuader’ and during filming I used the actual one he had. He kept hold of it and that became his thing. It’s still in his front room. So when I saw it I asked Dave if I could use it and he said yes.”

**Q: Little Boy Blue was filmed at some of the original locations. That must have been emotional at times?**

“We filmed Rhys’s funeral at Liverpool Cathedral, where it actually took place. It was a big day. A very heavy day. The coffin was a replica of the actual coffin.

“I’m a firm believer in truth. As actors, we have to put ourselves in that situation. To the best of our ability. I use my children in those circumstances. Hopefully it’s something that would never happen. But you have to be able to put your mind in that position and you have to go to those places in yourself to try and pull out the truth in the scene.

“For me, it was the poem that was read out at the funeral that got me. I said to Jeff, ‘That poem you’ve written was amazing. I just couldn’t stop crying.’ And Jeff said, ‘I’d love to take the credit for that. But I can’t. They were Steve’s actual words.’ Which then made it hit home even more.”

**Q: Football fans showed their support for the family by wearing ‘Liverpool United’ shirts, as well as those from many different teams?**

“There’s a togetherness. That says a lot about the community. Not just the people from Liverpool. It’s not about what team you support. It’s showing support and solidarity for the parents of the child.

## Cast interviews

### Q&A with Stephen Graham continued:

“There were Liverpool shirts, Celtic, Barcelona, Arsenal, Tottenham, Man United and so on. Whatever club you followed you could relate to it in some way because it was what the boy was doing. Every kid should be able to play football and go home safely after having a kick about. Every child.”

#### Q: You filmed the trial scenes at Liverpool Crown Court?

“It was the actual same courtroom as used for the trial. In certain ways that elevates it in a way. It resonates in a different way because it’s real. And you think, ‘I might be sitting in the exact same chair he sat in.’

“The behaviour of the lads at the court was disgusting. We’ve had an opportunity to show that. It’s not just being made up for dramatic sense of, ‘Look at these bad lads from Liverpool.’ That’s how they behaved there. It’s great to be able to show that.

“Rhys’s dad Steve came in for the court filming and sat in the public gallery. We show the complete disregard those boys had for justice. For the judge, for anybody.”

#### Q: What was it like working with Sinead Keenan and Brían F. O’Byrne who portray Melanie and Steve?

“It’s been an honour and a privilege. Sinead is a fantastic actress and her performance as Melanie is powerful. Brían has also been a joy to work with. Such a beautiful man. It’s a really difficult role he’s had to play.

“Being a part of this has been a remarkable experience for me. What I have admired with every single actor that’s come on this piece, whether it be a small role or a big role or whatever, is the lack of ego that’s been around. That is a major credit to our director, Paul Whittington.

“It has been an immensely special, experience. It’s been probably the most collaborative piece I’ve ever worked on in my life. The cast has been magnificent. I’ve enjoyed working with every single person on this piece. And each relationship has been different.”

#### Q: As an actor, what is it about Jeff’s writing that attracts you?

“It’s so real, so natural. When I looked at it I thought, ‘there’s too much to learn.’ But as I read it through a couple of times it just locked in my head. The language is so truthful and real. It comes from a point of truth and reality. That’s why it’s so easy to learn. That’s also why it reads beautifully. Extremely poetic.”

#### Q: What difference does a director like Paul Whittington make?

“Paul is so brilliant. He understands the story inside out and back to front. He has so much passion for what he’s doing. In elements he reminds me of Dave Kelly in that respect. In his conviction to it.

## Cast interviews

### Q&A with Stephen Graham continued:

“What I love about how Paul works, no matter how big or how small your role, is he takes the time to talk you through it, to express his faith and belief in you. He also makes sure you understand the back-story of where you’ve been and what’s happening at this moment in time now for the character and for the situation. I’ve never worked with a director that has been so detailed in his explanations with people before we begin the scene.

“He treats everybody equally. And I really admire that. But he is a man who has no ego. He believes in the project and I’d love to work with him for many years to come.”

#### Q: What do you think the audience will take away from this story?

“We have a duty to honour the spirit and memory of Rhys. As a society we should never let this happen again. Hopefully Little Boy Blue will make people stop and think for a little bit. The only way things are going to change is if we make changes ourselves.”

## Cast Interviews

### Q&A with Sinead Keenan - Melanie Jones



#### Q: What were your initial thoughts about Little Boy Blue?

"I remembered the events so clearly. Rhys was only 11 when he was shot and killed. It was horrific. There's no other word for it.

"There is always a certain amount of trepidation when you are asked to play a real person who is still alive. It was a bit daunting. You have to be very respectful of the fact this is somebody's life and their very worst and darkest moments. You just hope to God you get it right for them.

"Brián and I went to Melanie and Steve's house and spent a couple of hours with them. They are lovely people caught up in something horrific. This is about somebody's life. About a family. So it is more than an acting job."

#### Q: What did you think of Jeff Pope's scripts?

"There was a lot of crying when I read them. It is such a compelling story. I hate to use that word 'story' because it's not a story. It's somebody's life. His scripts are very compelling. Even more so because it is something that happened to Rhys, Melanie, Steve and Owen.

"It was an ordinary August evening and Rhys was coming home from football practice to watch an England match on the television. But he never came back. He was an innocent young boy, caught in a petty gangland dispute. Somebody was on somebody else's turf, shots were fired from a gun and one of them hit Rhys. A life lost. And for what?"

## Cast Interviews

### Q&A with Sinead Keenan continued:

**Q: It in no way, of course, compares to the real events. But it must have been tough filming some of the scenes?**

“They are tough scenes to film. But then I’m also very cognisant of the fact I’m just pretending. That this is somebody else’s nightmare.”

**Q: How would you describe the relationship between the senior investigating police officer Dave Kelly and the family?**

“As far as I’m aware, and certainly in our script, Dave was a rock for Melanie and Steve throughout the whole process.

“Because it was such a shocking thing to happen, it grabbed people’s attention throughout the UK. Dave Kelly was under an awful lot of pressure to very quickly get these guys, get them arrested, get them locked up and to solve the case.

“But he, quite rightly, took the time to make sure everything was done by the book. Because he knew once the case went to trial, if there was any margin of error the whole investigation could collapse. So he very much put himself on the line in the way he dealt with it.”

**Q: The drama shows how people cope with grief in different ways?**

“It’s so sad what happened to Melanie and Steve. They were perfectly content. Two sons. A lovely normal life and then this happened. And they can’t help each other through it. They just can’t. They cope with it so very differently. At different times you can see them both trying, in their own ways, but failing to explain to the other how they are feeling.

“Possibly it is a male, female thing. But in this story Steve is very much practical. He wants to focus on something. Whereas it’s just all consuming for Melanie.”

**Q: The people of Liverpool showed great support for Melanie, Steve and their family.**

“I’d never been to Liverpool before filming this. It reminds me of Dublin. It reminds me of home. I don’t know whether it’s the Irishness of Liverpool but there is very much that sense of, ‘You stick together.’ That whole ‘Liverpool United’ thing was very moving.

“I don’t know how Melanie and Steve put one foot in front of the other to get to Goodison Park on the Saturday after Rhys was shot on the Wednesday when police made an appeal about the murder. But that reception for them at that Everton match was wonderful. As it was when they went to Liverpool’s ground Anfield.

“When we went to film that scene at Goodison Park, we had no idea how the fans would react. Everton Football Club were absolutely extraordinary. They gave us incredible access and were so generous. We knew we had three minutes to recreate the moment of appeal, which is nothing. But we thought ‘we’ll give it a go’, thinking some of the fans might stay in their seats at half time.

## Cast Interviews

### Q&A with Sinead Keenan continued:

“As it turned out, it was extraordinary. There was no acting required whatsoever that day standing on the side of that pitch. The goodwill...they all stayed. West Ham fans as well. It was so moving.”

#### Q: What was it like filming at Liverpool Crown Court where the actual trial was held?

“Filming in the actual same courtroom was extraordinary. The young defendants’ behaviour in the dock during the trial was shocking. I watched one of the interviews Melanie and Steve gave very soon after the trial when the verdict had come in and they were saying how the accused were behaving in court was like they were up for petty theft. It’s a very difficult mindset to try and understand. As a human being how do you get to that point? How Melanie and Steve coped, I don’t know.”

#### Q: The trial was another ordeal for Melanie and Steve to endure.

“I think for anyone who loses a loved one there is no closure. You learn over time to cope. But there’s never closure. To have your child die before you, not from an illness, not from some awful, tragic accident but from something that absolutely could have been prevented. A child ripped from your world. You don’t get close to closure after that. You can’t.”

#### Q: What do you hope viewers will take away from this production?

“To respect what the family went through. The horrible nightmare they have been through. And that it doesn’t end with a guilty verdict. It has a catastrophic lifetime effect on the family as a whole. And the individuals in that family trying to deal with that grief on their own and together. And make that family work again. It doesn’t bear thinking about.

“Melanie and Steve have been involved with Little Boy Blue from day one and want this story to be told.”

## Cast interviews

### Q&A with Brían F. O’Byrne - Steve Jones



#### Q: Have you met Rhys’s parents Melanie and Steve?

“I was very fortunate to meet them. I wanted them to feel secure and to know we were approaching this work with respect. To ease their worries in some ways. It was important for them to understand we were not going to sensationalise anything and that we all wanted to do justice to their story.

“Certainly there’s a way of looking at grief in this story in a way we’re not aware of in some ways. That people grieve in different ways and it’s an individual journey you go on. And this has an effect, just in the process of grieving, on relationships. That’s something I hadn’t thought about a lot.”

#### Q: The drama highlights the way others supported Rhys’s family?

“There are these unsung heroes. The first responders, the people at the scene, the people in the hospital, the pathologist, who all looked after Rhys. It is a job they do but because it was a young boy and such a shocking event, it had an impact on everyone. It may be a Liverpool thing. Certainly the sense of community I found being in Liverpool was astonishing.”

#### Q: Tell us about the scene you filmed at Everton’s ground Goodison Park?

“In the days after Rhys’s death his parents and older brother Owen lined up on the pitch to pay tribute to him. The fans had been asked to help recreate that moment for our film by staying in their seats at half time in a match between Everton and West Ham.



## Cast interviews

### Q&A with Brían F. O’Byrne continued:

“We knew we had three minutes to film it. But we didn’t know if people would stay in their seats at half time. Steve Jones recorded a video appeal, which went out to Everton fans in the week before the match. In a day and a half a quarter of a million people had looked at the video.

“It was an extraordinary day at Goodison Park. We walked out on to the pitch and both Everton and West Ham supporters stayed. But the largest applause appeared to be when we were leaving the pitch.

“The fans had done the respectful applause for the filming but as we left the applause built and it was like, ‘Well done for doing this.’ Which was for the director, the producers and everybody. It seemed they wanted this story told as well. That wasn’t something I was expecting.”

#### Q: You filmed in some of the real locations?

“We filmed in the same courtroom as the one used for the trial at Liverpool Crown Court. Steve was there that day and so was Melanie and Steve’s son Owen. I wasn’t sure about acting a scene in front of somebody you are playing. As an actor you’re used to being judged anyway but this was obviously a little different.

“The young actors who play the accused in the dock are spectacular. They are remarkable actors. Steve and Owen came in and sat behind the cameras. In front of them were the barristers, the judge, us, and other members of the families and a public gallery.”

#### Q: Police investigating the murder faced many challenges to get to the truth of what happened?

“I think most of us do want to tell the truth but we’ve been conditioned in certain ways. Certainly in this story and for those involved, it’s passed down. In this story somebody has to leave their past life behind and move away because of just telling the truth. A person who wasn’t really involved. But they told the truth at huge cost to themselves.

“That’s an extraordinary thing to do as well. What would you do to tell the truth? As a young man would you give up your family? Would you be told you’re going to leave home and everything you know? There are a lot of different heroes in this. Would you do that? I’d like to think I would.”

#### Q: Steve wrote a poem for his son which was read out at Rhys’s funeral?

“He wrote it himself. He feels strong enough to let that out there. There’s a certain poetic side to the man and he got his release through writing that in some way. What I love about that is he doesn’t judge himself in any way for doing that. I found Liverpool men, those I’ve met and have talked to, are very open. I didn’t anticipate it. But there’s an openness to talking about their feelings.”

#### Q: Gang culture led to the shooting.

“There’s a line in the script where Dave Kelly said it was basically all about a post code. And when you reduce it to that, from the outside it seems ridiculous.

## Cast interviews

### Q&A with Brían F. O’Byrne continued:

“I live in Los Angeles and I’ve been around different areas in the States working with cops. If your post code is your life and if you know you’re never going to get out of that post code, it appears to become something hugely important.”

#### Q: What is it about Jeff Pope’s scripts that attract you?

“They seem real. People behave and speak like people actually do. And they’re not resolved. That’s great for an actor. You’re not trying to shoehorn some story in. And when you play the scene, every single scene has played even better than it is on the page if that’s possible.”

#### Q: And working with the director Paul Whittington.

“I’ve had the best experience with Paul. He’s a very sensitive guy striving to tell the truth of the story. He’s brought that notion of respect to the story. He lets actors do their thing and then has great suggestions. He’s also incredibly well prepared.”

## Synopsis

### Episode one

It's August 2007. 11-year-old Rhys Jones (Sonny Beyga) is walking home from football practice when he is struck in the neck by a stray bullet fired by teenage thug Sean Mercer (Paddy Rowan). Mercer's bullet was intended for a rival gang member, but he missed, striking Rhys instead.

As Rhys's parents, Melanie and Steve (Sinead Keenan and Brían F. O'Byrne), pray for a miracle, Detective Superintendent Dave Kelly (Stephen Graham) is summoned to the scene of the crime. Whilst there, he receives confirmation of Rhys' death and is informed he is to lead the investigation.

Across town, 16-year-old Kevin Moody (Michael Moran) is summoned to the home of Jordan Olszen (Nathan Clark Smith), an emotionally vulnerable fifteen-year-old, whose bedroom is being used by Mercer and his gang to plan a cover-up. Moody is bullied into hiding the gun used in the murder. Afraid to say "no" he hides the gun in his dog kennel.

Within hours, the police hotlines are flooded with anonymous calls naming Mercer as the shooter, along with James Yates (James Nelson-Joyce) as the supplier of the gun, and other gang members who helped get rid of evidence. This is all good intelligence, but without solid evidence, it is unlikely to help bring about charges.

When Rhys's killing makes national headlines, the Merseyside Police hierarchy come under pressure from the government to make swift arrests to alleviate public concerns. But Kelly is determined to trust his own instincts and secure the strongest possible convictions however long it takes, to fulfill a promise made to Rhys's family.

As Melanie and Steve struggle to come to terms with their son's murder, they are asked to make an appeal at Goodison Park, home of Rhys's beloved Everton Football Club. They are overwhelmed by emotion as an impeccably observed minute's applause rings out in honor of their son.

Meanwhile, across town, a terrified Moody departs for a family holiday as the police question Mercer and his gang. With little evidence, and a stream of "no-comment" responses, they are each released without charge. But unbeknown to gun supplier James Yates, his house has now been fitted with bugging devices and the police are listening to private conversations in which he confesses to his role in the crime.

## Cast and Production Credits

### Cast Credits

Detective Superintendent Dave Kelly .....	STEPHEN GRAHAM
Melanie Jones.....	SINEAD KEENAN
Steve Jones.....	BRÍÁN F. O'BYRNE
Rhys Jones.....	SONNY BEYGA
Owen Jones.....	MATTHEW ROBERTS
DCI Mark Guinness.....	STEPHEN WALTERS
WDC Jackie Carter.....	JODIE MCNEE
DC Danny Jones.....	ROBBIE O'NEILL
DC Matt Parry.....	DEREK BARR
Assistant Chief Constable Pat Gallan.....	SARA POWELL
Kevin Moody.....	MICHAEL MORAN
Sam Moody.....	MICHAEL BAKER
Vida Moody.....	HEATHER BLEASDALE
Claire Olssen.....	FAYE MCKEEVER
Jordan Olssen.....	NATHAN CLARK SMITH
Janice Olssen.....	SYLVIE GATRILL
Nathan Quinn.....	JACK CORRIE
James Yates.....	JAMES NELSON-JOYCE
Marie Yates.....	LIZZIE HOPLEY
Frank Yates.....	JACK LAMB
Sandra Oxley.....	KERRIE HAYES
Debra Taylor.....	ELIZABETH BERRINGTON
Carly Ellis.....	ALICIA BROCKENBROW
Neil Jones.....	NEIL FITZMAURICE
Sean Mercer.....	PADDY ROWAN

## Cast and Production Credits

### Production Credits

Executive Producer and Writer.....	JEFF POPE
Director.....	PAUL WHITTINGTON
Producer.....	KWADJO DAJAN
Line Producer.....	JONATHAN LEATHER
Cinematographer.....	ADAM GILLHAM
Casting.....	AMY HUBBARD
.....	FLORENCE IZEN-TAYLOR
Costume Designer.....	JOHN KRAUSA
Make Up Designer.....	JANET HORSFIELD
Production Designer.....	ANNA HIGGINSON
Art Director.....	STEPHANIE NICOLLE
Sound Recordist.....	GRANT BRIDGEMAN
Script Supervisor.....	KAREN EVERSON
Editor... ..	BEN YEATES
First Assistant Director.....	MARK FENN
Second Assistant Director.....	SUSAN TURNELL
Location Manager.....	KEVIN JACKSON
Production Co-ordinator.....	JENNY SIMMONDS



End

If you are to use any material from the Little Boy Blue production notes, please include a full credit for the drama: Monday April 24<sup>th</sup> at 9pm, ITV.