

CDG PRIDE MONTH - Interview with the casting team behind IT'S A SIN.



The cast of IT'S A SIN.

What initially drew you to the project? Were there any aspects of It's a Sin that particularly excited you?

Andy Pryor (Casting Director): I've worked with Russell for many years and love his writing and particularly how every single one of his characters is there for a reason, with no opportunity wasted, including the smallest roles. That's a brilliant thing for actors. As a gay man who moved to London when the AIDS epidemic had really taken hold, It's a Sin resonated with me hugely from the start. I lost people to AIDs and came out at a time when it didn't feel particularly safe to be a gay man. On the other hand, it was also a joyous time when if you did feel comfortable enough to be out, there was a great sense of solidarity. My first Pride marches were fantastic at a time when they felt like campaigning as much as they were about partying. Russell captures all of that brilliantly in the show.

Ri McDaid-Wren (Casting Associate): Russell! Queers! No but really, we've been lucky enough to work on several projects with Russell T Davies and as well as his writing being so wonderful, there is always a really joyful and inclusive vibe throughout the process which really trickles down from him. Also, as a queer Casting Director it feels really special to be a part of bringing that representation to the screen.

Ray Böhm (Casting Assistant): I think it has to be the scripts; every great project begins with a writer, Russell's a genius! He has this brilliant ability to create realistic, and human characters that a lot of people can identify with; no matter how big or small, his characters radiate truth. To me, each character represented thousands of untold stories during this time, which is one of things that excited me about the project; its history, it makes you want to research more about the time period, SO MANY UNTOLD STORIES! I also think we are so used to watching shows from our American friends across the pond, that the topic of AIDS in TV/Film feels very Americanised. It's a Sin is a reminder that injustice happened to all these boys on our doorstep. It's a reminder as people to be better and do better, let's not forget one of the show's key themes is this wonderful friendship between 5 friends.

The friendships feel extremely authentic in It's a Sin - can you talk about the casting process of curating that group dynamic?

AP: The honest answer is that we were lucky! We managed to find a group of brilliant actors who bonded and gelled in a way none of us could predict. What we did know from their auditions was that all of them were fearless, loved their characters and took direction brilliantly. They were also all lovely people, so we didn't think any of them would be hard to get along with. We didn't actually do any chemistry reads. I'm not the greatest believer in them anyway because I think believable relationships only properly happen when actors are allowed to get to know each other, rehearse and work properly together.

RM: Again I'd have to say Russell is key to this because the way he writes is so specific, the rhythms are so genuine and alive, that when you find the actors who completely embody that it's almost inevitable that they will have chemistry with each other. At the same time both he and Nicola Shindler are both so open to us bringing them completely unknown talent it really opens up possibilities.

Were there conversations about historical context and the 1980s AIDS epidemic involved in the casting process?

AP: Yes, very much so. All of our lead cast are too young to have been around at the time the show was set. Most of them weren't even born. So there were a lot of conversations about what that time was like and what people had to go through. Also, all of the main cast spent a lot of time on research once they were cast.

RM: Yes, I think one of the key things was how difficult it was to access information pre-internet. These characters were so in the dark about what was happening to them, and that's such a different experience to where we are now.

RB: Yes, It was vital that the team had these conversations with our actors as a lot of them were not old enough to be around during that period. Our main cast were also very happy to do their own research, which is brilliant. It's also amazing to see lot of our main cast continuing to promote and be ambassadors for this cause.



Ri McDaid-Wren, Andy Pryor and Ray Böhm

Jill is a really vital character in terms of holding the group together and creating that unique sense of family we see - can you expand on how you approached casting Jill?

AP: In many ways, Jill is the heart of the story. She's our way in to this group of friends. Russell didn't write a 2 dimensional "best friend to the gays", she's a fully rounded character in her own right, based on a great friend of Russell's Jill Nalder, who plays Jill's (Lydia West) mum in the show. We needed someone with great heart but also great strength. When we cast Lydia we didn't have the later episodes but knew to some degree what Jill was building towards. Lydia is very kind and sweet but she's also very wise and has that great quality of watchfulness. You really notice her listening, which is an important trait for any actor but particularly important for Jill. We'd worked with Lydia on Russell's previous show Years and Years and knew she was great but she took things to another level with Jill.

RM: We saw a lot of people for Jill. She could be from anywhere and look any way, the most important thing was that she felt both incredibly loveable and warm but with a quiet, powerful strength. Lydia absolutely radiates these qualities.

There are quite a few TV newcomers in the cast - how did you work with these actors throughout the casting process?

AP: All of them were experienced in theatre and I don't think there's too much of a difference nowadays in the audition process. There are technical differences of course but with a good director these things aren't difficult to learn. What we found with Omari, Callum and Nathaniel was that their instincts were great anyway and they had a really strong grasp of the material. We made sure they had plenty of time in their auditions to explore the scenes we read and then did the same for their recalls. I always think it's important to let actors ask as many questions as they need to (or to ask none if they want to just leap straight in.). There were some really great people that auditioned for these roles but as with all casting, you know who feels like the right fit, even though that can sometimes be difficult to articulate.

RM: It wasn't hugely different than any other casting process as those boys just came in and were the characters! They were all so ready to fly.

It's a Sin exhibits an array of characters who represent the prevalent homophobia during the 1980s. How did you approach casting these characters?

AP: Seeing these characters is a vital part of Russell's story. And it's not a thing of the past either. LGBTQ+ people still face a great deal of prejudice, bigotry and worse. Like every part, you just set out to find the best actors you can. One great thing about this industry is that there is a great deal of acceptance compared to some industries and most actors know a fair bit about the lives of LGBTQ+ people and our history. With writing this good, we found that people were only too happy to come in for the roles. There was one actor who wasn't comfortable with the idea of playing a particularly unpleasant homophobe, which I completely respected. I think almost everyone who read the scripts knew it was going to be something special and wanted to be a part of it.

RM: Russell writes in a way that every character, big or small, nice or nasty, feels like a real rounded person, which really makes the casting process so enjoyable for every last role. Homophobia was (and is) very real, and I think all the actors in those roles brought an important truth to them.

RB: I think this one goes to Russell's writing again! There's just so much truth to his pen, and when you have brilliant writing like this, it's very easy to be bombarded with suggestions, it's like being a kid in a candy store, surrounded by choice. Sadly, Homophobia is still around today, and like most unfairness in this world, racism, sexism etc it's something you can't evade but hope will change, it's in our laws, the language people choose to use and so much more. I think it's very easy for actors to create and research characters like this when we live in a world with characters like this.

Finally, not a question...La!

AP: La!

RM: La!

RB: La!



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