

Persmap

JIMI: ALL IS BY MY SIDE



JIMI: ALL IS BY MY SIDE

Een film van John Ridley

Wanneer Jimi Hendrix (André Benjamin) in New York wordt ontdekt door model Linda Keith (Imogen Poots) neemt zijn leven een betekenisvolle wending. Zij haalt hem uit de nachtclubs van New York waar hij optreedt als 'Jimmy James and the Blue Flames'. Ze overtuigt hem naar Londen te gaan waar zij, als de vriendin van Keith Richards, in de muziekwereld belangrijke contacten heeft. Ook leent ze hem de gitaar van Keith Richards. Dit is het begin van zijn triomftocht als voorman van de 'Jimi Hendrix Experience'.

JIMI: ALL IS BY MY SIDE is een film van Oscarwinnaar John Ridley (scenarioschrijver van 12 YEARS A SLAVE) over het jaar dat Jimi Hendrix in Londen het fundament legde voor zijn latere wereldfaam. André Benjamin, ook wel bekend als André 3000 en Dre Benjamin - de zanger van Outcast, acteert geweldig in dit nog niet eerder vertelde verhaal over de legende Jimi Hendrix.



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Cast

Jimi Hendrix
Kathy
Linda
Ida
Bryan 'Chas' Chandler
Michael X
Noel Redding
John 'Mitch' Mitchell
Lithofayne 'Faye' Pridgeon
Roberta Goldstein
Mark Hoffman
Eric Clapton
Andrew Loog Oldham
Michael Jeffery
Keith Richards
Rita
Phoebe
Evans
Ted
Al Hendrix
Ginger Baker
Curtis Knight and the Squires

Blue Flames

Mr. Keith
George Bruno 'Zoot' Money
Terry McVay
Paula
Jenny
Terence
Nick
Molly
Mona
Femal Folk Singer
PC Clegg
PC Westerly
PC Potts
John
Waiter
Salon Manager
Irate Concert Goer 1
Irate Concert Goer 2
Ida's Friend

André Benjamin
Hayley Atwell
Imogen Poots
Ruth Negga
Andrew Buckley
Adrian Lester
Oliver Bennett
Tom Dunlea
Clare-Hope Ashitey
Jade Yourell
Lauterio Zamparelli
Danny McColgan
Robbie Jarvis-Dean
Burn GOrman
Ashley Charles
Aoibhinn McGinnity
Amy de Bhrún
Sean Duggan
Sam McGovern
Geoffrey Burton
John Arkell
The Hypnotic Brass Ensemble:
Uttama PotoIra Hubert
Seba Graves
Jafar Baji Graves
Gabriel Benyehudah Hubert
Joe Doyle
Martin Galbraith
Stephen O'Neill
Richard Lintern
Joe McKinney
Tristan McConnell
Alexina Davidson
Siobhan Cullen
Vincent Patrick
Shane Kennedy
Jenna Logan
Tara Lee
Niamh Farrell
Frank Laverty
Michael Bates
Barry Barnes
Laurence Kinlan
Stephen Russell
Gordon Mahn
Michael Hough
Robbie O'Connor
Sophie Scott

Crew

Written and directed by
Producers

John Ridley
Sean McKittrick
Jeff Culotta
Danny Bramson
Brandon Freeman
Anthony Burns
Tristan Orpen Lynch
Nigel Thomas
Edward H. Hamm, Jr.

Executive producers

John Ridley
André Benjamin
Tim Fleming, ISC
Paul Cross
Donna Eperon
Hank Cowin, A.C.E.
Leonie Prendergast
Waddy Wachtel
Danny Bramson
Chris Mollere
Glenn Freemantle
Dan Hubbard
Esthero
Darko Entertainment
Freeman Film
Matador pictures
Subotica

Co-producer
Director of photography
Production designer
Line producer
Film editor
Costume designer
Music by

Music supervisor
Sound design by
Casting
Associate Producer

In association with

Bord Scannán na Héireann / The Irish film board



The film



Described by writer-director John Ridley as one of the most rarely told stories in rock history, *JIMI: ALL IS BY MY SIDE* charts just over a year in a man's life. The year he blossomed and became Jimi Hendrix. The year he spent as a young musician trying to make it on the streets and in the clubs of London, England. The lovers, friends, and musical collaborators, who helped him get there.

Written and directed by John Ridley ("U-Turn", "Three Kings", "12 Years a Slave"), and starring André Benjamin ("Idlewild", "Smokin' Aces", "The Great Gatsby") as Jimi Hendrix. *JIMI: ALL IS BY MY SIDE* also stars Hayley Atwell ("Captain America: The First Avenger"), Imogen Poots ("28 Weeks Later"), Andrew Buckley ("Borgia"), and Ruth Negga ("World War Z").

JIMI: ALL IS BY MY SIDE is produced by Darko Entertainment's Sean McKittrick, Jeff Culotta, and Danny Bramson, Freeman Productions' Brandon Freeman and Anthony Burns, Subotica's

Tristen Orpen Lynch, and Nigel Thomas of Matador Pictures, with Edward H. Hamm, Jr. and John Ridley as executive producers.

Key crew includes director of photography Tim Fleming ("Once"), production designer Paul Cross ("The Expendables 2"), music producer Danny Bramson ("Almost Famous", "Austin Powers", "Jerry Maguire"), costume designer Leonie Pendergast ("What Richard Did"), editors Hank Corwin ("The Tree of Life") and Chris Gill ("28 Days Later"), and sound designer/supervising sound editor Glenn Freemantle (Academy Award-winner for "Gravity").

JIMI: ALL IS BY MY SIDE was filmed on location around Dublin, Ireland.

The background

Some of the greatest journeys begin with a song. For director John Ridley, that song was Sending My Love to Linda, a rare outtake by the greatest rock guitarist of all time, Jimi Hendrix. Less than a year before his death, Hendrix laid down the instrumental at New York City's Record Plant. A mellow excursion compared to some of his better-known tracks, the tune is heartfelt and emotive.

As was always the case with Hendrix, it was utterly unique.

When director John Ridley first heard the track he was blown away. Here was an artist who could express more than mood through music. He could convey a story, a history, a person.

Ridley was compelled to know more. "He heard the song and went: 'Who the hell is Linda?'" says Jeff Culotta, producer at Darko Entertainment. "The song is so passionate and intense, so he started digging. What was her background? Why did she influence Jimi to write this song? That's when he started to uncover the real love story that's the undercurrent to this story. Before he wrote the script, he researched it for five years. John's a meticulous guy."

Ridley's research unearthed one of the most rarely told stories in rock history. In May 1966, a dark-haired beauty by the name of Linda Keith walked into the Cheetah Club in New York City. Twenty years old, and then the girlfriend of Rolling Stone guitarist Keith Richards, she was transfixed by the lanky guitarist in the back row of an R&B act: Jimi Hendrix, then known as Jimmy James.

While others barely noticed him, Linda immediately recognized his potential. Linda introduced Hendrix to "Chas" Chandler, who took the musician to London in 1966 to try and break him onto the scene there. Behind every man is a great woman, they say. Hendrix had a few of them.

When the producers at Darko received the script, they knew this was not a project of expediency. Rather, it would take time, care, and extensive research, to tell the story of Hendrix's pre-fame period in London.

"We received the script three years before production began," explains Sean McKittrick, producer at Darko Entertainment. "There wasn't really a development period. It was more a research period about how we go about making this movie. Although we are making a movie about a deceased public figure, we have to be authentic. There was a lot of research and a lot of discussion. How much money we needed to make it properly. Who we would work with. Where we should work. What kind of crew we needed. We meticulously figured out the best way to approach this."

Chief among Ridley's concerns was staying true to the spirit of Hendrix as a man. In many people's eyes he has been reduced to an image on a t-shirt; an icon, a pop culture cliché. But as well as a mind-blowing guitarist, he was a unique individual with a fascinating journey. "In our discussions with John, before we started to make this film, John would say: 'Almost forget he's Hendrix'," says Tristan Orpen Lynch, producer at Subotica. "He wants people to be emotionally moved by the end of this film. This is an emotional story."

JIMI: ALL IS BY MY SIDE is not a biopic. It is a year in a man's life. The year he blossomed and became Jimi Hendrix. The year he spent as a young musician trying to make it on the streets and in the clubs of London, England. This was what attracted André Benjamin to the role.

"That was very cool," says Benjamin. "When I was 23 or 24, I got a few scripts about Hendrix, but they were true biopics. I'm glad it took this long because this approach is a little more interesting. You kind of get a slice of his life. Sometimes it's hard to stuff someone's whole life into two hours."

Hayley Atwell, who plays Hendrix's London love interest Kathy Etchingham, concurs: "The fact the film does not set out to comment on Jimi's life or death, but rather captures the spirit of it, saves the story from becoming a run-of-the-mill biopic that fans will want to analyze to the nth degree for accuracy," she says. "This is an interpretation of a very exciting time in the history of music and pop culture of London's Swinging Sixties. Everyone involved in this movie approached the project with sensitivity and detail. I hope it will introduce Hendrix's music and genius to even more new fans. I've certainly become one."

Audiences for JIMI: ALL IS BY MY SIDE are not going on a journey with the flamboyant, crazy cat that pop culture feeds us. Instead, the Hendrix we meet is a shy, retiring type with a penchant for science fiction. This was the real Hendrix.

Tristan Orpen Lynch: "When they see Hendrix for the first time in this film, they're probably not going to recognize him."

Jeff Culotta: "They're not going to know this is the actual story. This is what really happened."

Sean McKittrick: "Danny [Bramson, producer and music supervisor] always said this isn't the super-glossy bullshit that everybody knows. There's no setting his guitar on fire."

The creators and curators of *JIMI: ALL IS BY MY SIDE* set out to avoid clichés, explains Culotta. People would ask, 'Oh, it's a movie about Jimi Hendrix, are you guys shooting Woodstock?' 'Are you going to show him burning the guitar?' Has it got Purple Haze in it?' The relieving thing after we read the script was there was none of that. It didn't need any of it. John had written a beautiful story that no one knew."

"I didn't know anything about Jimi Hendrix during the period that unfolds in this movie," says McKittrick. "I knew the songs he played, but I didn't know how he went from Jimmy James, back-up guitarist for acts in New York to Jimi Hendrix. In one year in London, he transformed into the Jimi Hendrix we know."

Tim Fleming, Director of Photography, continues: "I had never heard of Linda Keith or Kathy Etchingham. I had never heard of this love story. When I first heard about the project, I thought, Purple Haze, Hey Joe, Electric Ladyland, all that stuff. When I read the script I was pleasantly surprised that my expectation - a biopic and the myth of Hendrix - was not addressed at all. It's a fantastic story. I was more interested in it for that."

"Jimi is on a million different posters and a million different t-shirts - he's an iconic image," says Andrew Buckley, who plays Chas Chandler. "In fact, he was a very shy man. He was this quiet, reflective, dreamy sort of guy who loved nothing better than to play his guitar and read science fiction novels. It's nice to see that in these times of aggressive celebrity - a quiet, humble, reflective man. He was also flawed and made mistakes, and did some not so great things as well as wonderful things. I adored being part of this project."

As the research unfolded, John Ridley and the producers at Darko Entertainment scouted for locations. Ridley and McKittrick had visited London when producer Nigel Thomas of Matador Pictures suggested Dublin, Ireland as an alternative.

Tristan Orpen Lynch, of Irish production company Subotica, met the team in Los Angeles in 2011. In November that year, the filmmakers visited Dublin. "We realized Dublin is easier to shoot than the London of 1966/1967," says Lynch. "Everything went really quickly after that. In this part of the world, when someone makes a plan to shoot a film it usually takes a year for it to come together. This came together in a few months."

Freeman Productions also signed up. "We came on board a couple of months before pre-production," says Freeman producer Anthony Burns.

Authentically portraying this time in Hendrix's life was at the forefront of everyone's minds. Production designer Paul Cross had to capture the club scene in New York for the early scenes in the movie, as well as London in the late 1960's. The designer scoured books with photographs from the time, looked online and unearthed old magazines. Clubs featured in the movie include Cheetah's, Ondines, Cafe Wah, The Scotch and B&B Club.

"The research covers the short amount of time mentioned in the script," says Cross. "It's only a couple of years, yet we probably have over 1000 pictures throughout our research."

Cross visited Jimi Hendrix's original London apartment. "That was in Marylebone. We had a look at the front: the door handles. It's interesting to get the size and shape and proportion. You can see

what he sees from his windows and get a feel for the place. John Lennon used to live there. I think Ringo Starr lived there too. It was hired out by a manager in the music business."

Cinematographer Tim Fleming faced the challenge of reproducing live concerts. London was not the psychedelic oasis that San Francisco had become in 1967. "It was very rudimentary live performance back then. The big band circuit was slightly different but the rock circuit was still very uninvolved," he says.

As a writer, director, novelist, and radio commentator, John Ridley was accustomed to the creative tasks at hand. In his experience as a producer, he knew how films are made and put together.

"John is meticulous, incredibly bright, open and adaptable," says Orpen Lynch. "On some productions, there can be creative tension between the producers and director. John would never let that happen."

Fleming describes Ridley as "a genuinely warm and wonderful man. He knows the industry really well, writes wonderfully, and rolls with the punches. He's been very open, supporting, and receptive to ideas. I had four or five weeks with John before we started shooting. I had gotten to know the script, and all the beats he was looking for extremely well."

Not that the making of *JIMI: ALL IS BY MY SIDE* was a walk in the park.

"A few years from now it will be like remembering 'Nam," laughs Lynch.

McKittrick nods. "Yes, but sometimes that's what it takes to make a very special movie.

We would never have done it if it wasn't authentic," McKittrick continues. "Or if it was a nasty expose of the dark side of music. To us, it was very exciting to see the birth of someone who is considered the greatest guitarist of all time. For me, it was almost like a Rocky story. He was becoming something.

So often we see movies about someone's downfall, instead of someone becoming a legend. That's this movie. We see how he became Jimi Hendrix. That's way more exciting than how his story ended - how his life ended. Who wants to see that? Not me. I'm much more interested in seeing the peak."



The production

There is a line in John Ridley's screenplay for *JIMI: ALL IS BY MY SIDE* where Linda Keith asks, "How are you finding London?" To which Jimi Hendrix replies, "It rains all the time?"

As a downpour hits the catering bus on the set of *JIMI: ALL IS BY MY SIDE*, the production team agrees Ireland was a good choice of location. But it hasn't all been dark clouds. When the team first arrived in Ireland, there was a heat wave for a week and a half.

Rain or shine, the filmmakers were delighted with their predominantly Irish crew. The producers at Darko Entertainment and Freeman Productions came to Ireland from a shoot in New Orleans. "It was interesting looking at the cultural difference," says Irish producer Tristan Orpen Lynch. "They came from an American shoot and now they get to see how an Irish crew work. That was part of the fun."

Hayley Atwell (Kathy Etchingham) and Imogen Poots (Linda Keith) had both worked in Ireland before. "I think Irish crews are the best in the world, I really do," says Atwell. "They are just so friendly and easy to work with. Not to mention down to earth. I felt this character was a whole new undertaking for me. I needed to maintain a level of focus I never had on a set before. I was grateful that the crew just left me to it."

Poots adds: "The crew is one of the most spectacular bunch of people I've ever worked with. I felt kindness. Everyone else was saying that too. There's a real energy on the set. That sets the vibe for the whole shoot. Really good people."

Aside from a brief studio scene, the entire film was shot on location in Dublin and its surrounding areas. This posed a challenge for production designer Paul Cross, who had to transform existing venues into 1960's clubs, homes, and apartments. "We found places that didn't look like they were out of period and we nurtured them into period. Then we dressed them with one or two things. Everything is slightly underdressed rather than being overdressed. I prefer that look - it's less obvious," says Cross.

"There are so many locations in this script and it's so period-specific. To recreate 1966/1967 London is not easy," says Lynch.

While the filmmakers had to recreate 1960's airports, amongst other locations, the biggest challenge was shooting exteriors. "We found streets that didn't have many features to suggest we were out of period," says Cross. "We tended to mask modern features, by making them black, so your eye doesn't catch them. We'd often have one or two period cars in the street to add to the effect."

Cast and crew enjoyed working in Dublin. Ruth Negga (who plays Ida) is Irish, but the majority of her work is outside the country. "It was strange," says Negga. "I've made TV shows in Ireland but I've never made a film here. It's lovely being in Dublin because it's so much smaller than London. It's easier to maneuver. We were staying at the Shelbourne Hotel and you'd get home and you'd have Dublin on your doorstep to do whatever you wanted. You'd go for a walk in the park. In the evening, André went out exploring Dublin."

The costume department played a crucial role in *JIMI: ALL IS BY MY SIDE*. Hendrix is known for his outrageous dress sense, but in the early stages of his career he wore a plain trench coat. His famous coat was a British Royal Veterinary jacket that he found in a second hand store.



Costume designer Leonie Pendergast's care and attention is reflected in all the characters, explains Atwell. "Leonie went to great lengths to ensure the costumes of these characters reflected their personalities," says the actress. "For example, Linda often looks very chic and polished whereas Kathy is seen in bright, bold and garish attire with her staple white go-go boots. Many of the clothes were sourced from private collectors of 60's clothing that had been looked after with great care. I was greeted every morning with a great big splash of colour hanging up in my trailer. Unapologetic: just like how I saw Kathy."

Poots continues: "Leonie's amazing. The skirts got shorter and shorter as the days went on. It was very exciting. They're fab. Just gorgeous. They completely take you through that decade. You inhabit the character via the clothing. It's key. Even the haircut - my Mod bob, dyed black. All of that is completely essential to becoming the character."

Pendergast loved working with 1960's costume. "London in the mid 1960's was a dynamic time," says the costume designer. "Rock n roll was in place and the pop era was coming into play. [Designer] Mary Quant was changing fashion. We wanted a specific London look. The story starts in New York, which was a little more 1950's influenced at the time. When Jimi comes to London, it's more about high fashion and mini skirts."

The costume and make-up team had plenty to do - concert scenes required hundreds of extras. Many of these extras turned up in period garb and had hair fit for the occasion. Andrew Buckley (Chas Chandler) laughs at the memory: "The extras were fabulous. They completely embraced it and completely gave it their all. Those big scenes at nightclubs had a lot of energy."

"There's a lot of energy in this film, full stop."

The characters



André Benjamin on Jimi Hendrix

“Hendrix to me is the greatest performer that ever lived, not just in rock, but period. He’s the greatest performer and artist that walked the planet. Since he stepped on the planet, until now, there’s no one who has trumped what he has done. He threw his whole self into what he was doing.

People don’t just come out of the sky and be Hendrix. Hendrix would sit on the side of the stage and watch other people do things. All the tricks Hendrix did - the teeth, the guitar - other

guitarists had done that before him. Chuck Berry and all those guys. He was a kid when he was doing it, but he knew how to soak up everything and make it his own. Nobody on this planet is an island. Everyone is influenced by somebody but Hendrix put it all together: musicianship, passion, style, sexuality. The women loved him. It was everything. As an artist, that’s what you dream of. You dream of being a great writer, you dream of being a great musician, you dream of attracting the people you want to attract.

That’s what you dream of. And he was that.”

Hayley Atwell on Kathy Etchingham

“She was Jimi’s long term girlfriend. He once described her as his Yoko Ono. He wrote The Wind Cries Mary after her and they were together for three years - arguably the love of his life. Despite that, their relationship was tempestuous.

Kathy wrote an autobiography, *Through Gypsy Eyes*, some time after Hendrix’s death. It was invaluable to me and I took it with me wherever I went. Kathy appeared in all her press interviews as a remarkably open and frank woman with no hidden agenda or self-deprecation. She talked about things confidently, and as she saw them: the ugly parts and the pretty parts. Because of this, I felt she was not glamourizing her time with Jimi nor was she with him for any other reason than simply having been attracted to a stranger in a club, gotten to know him and ended up having a hell of a lot of fun. He just so happened to be this gifted musician who achieved great things.

There was so much from the book that was helpful and freed me creatively to improvise some dialogue, taking words and references straight from the book.”

Imogen Poots on Linda Keith

“Linda first encounters Jimi in the Cheetah nightclub, New York, in May 1966. In our film, it’s a moment of recognizing an extraordinary talent on stage that is essentially blending into a crowd. For her, he’s a light that stands out.

Jimi was quite shy and there’s a line in the film where Linda says, “You stumble along thinking genius is enough to win the day for you”. She urges him on. One of the most frustrating things in life is there are people who never really push themselves. Maybe they don’t want to, but they’re hindered by the lack of self-belief or procrastination.

Lynda’s relationship with Jimi is very different to Kathy’s relationship with him. It wasn’t a purely sexual relationship. There’s this idea in our film that Linda is unobtainable. She and Jimi are drawn together by curiosity and excitement and this platonic - make of that what you will - love of what they had to do in the short time they had. She was maternal and cared about him. Kathy cared about him too. Perhaps it was harder for Linda to let him go.

She really fought and worked hard on Jimi's behalf. I think that elevates her to a place beyond the role of a groupie. She was totally part of the scene - the people she knew, the types she had access to. Her ex-boyfriend was Keith Richards. There's no denying she was a mover and a shaker."

Ruth Negga on Ida

"Ida is based on a real person called Devon Wilson, one of Jimi's girlfriends. I suppose she was a groupie. She was quite happy to describe herself as that. She was actually a super groupie. There's not much written about her - she's a very elusive character. But there is an interview where she talks about how cool it is that she hangs out with all these top musicians. She was quite proud of it. She attached herself to that scene. At that time, groupies had a different sort of image. They stuck to musicians when they were on tour and provided a pleasurable refuge. They had a different image from modern day groupies, which have a seedy ridiculed image.

There's not much known about her. No one knows when she was born. She's from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and ran away from home in her early teens. I think she was on the streets for a while. She's a tough kid.

John helped me a lot because he interviewed Kathy and asked her about Devon. Everyone thought she was a hard-nosed, manipulative ex street kid. Involved in prostitution. John didn't want it to come across solely as that. Kathy said she was quite funny. I don't think Jimi would have fallen for someone who was just hard. He wanted her to come across as charming and fun and easy-going. I get the impression she wasn't needy. She wasn't going to be a drag.

I've played quite a few real characters and there's always a feeling of being responsible and truthful. Truthful to the essence of who they were. I felt deeply sorry for her. Being so alone. When her time passed, there was no one to catch her. She got heavily involved in drugs and died so young. I felt a responsibility not to portray her as a one-sided version."

Andrew Buckley on Chas Chandler

"When you watch documentary footage of Chas Chandler, you get the impression that he saw Jimi could be this breakthrough watershed artist. I found, through my own research, Chas pretty much bankrupted himself. He sold his guitars, borrowed and stole money to pay for studio time to get the first album recorded. It's nice to do that research and have the script validated. John got the relationships and stories completely bang on. JIMI: ALL IS BY MY SIDE, in terms of Jimi's relationship with Chas, is a bit like Rocky. There's this guy who's ready to quit and he's got a prodigy who is worthwhile, having one last shot at the title. He trains him up, gives him the support. Eventually, the prodigy is able to take out the big guy, be it either Apollo Creed or Eric Clapton."



Oliver Bennett on Noel Redding

"Noel was such a unique bass player. He played quite far down on the strings, nodding his head. He was ready to pack it all in. He didn't have any money. He was in it for a laugh, but there's also an edge to him. He won't take shit. You can't walk all over him. It's a musician thing. He had a real chip on his shoulder toward the end, but when he's a young groovy chap I didn't exaggerate that too much.

His style was crucial to the Experience. Hendrix and Mitch Mitchell were quite loose players so he kept the time. Usually the drummer does all that. He described playing with the Experience as walking a tightrope between two vortexes. Two wild players and he kept it steady. He quickly got assigned roles that people do when they're being groomed. He was the quiet steady one."

Tom Dunlea on Mitch Mitchell

"When Mitch first joins the band, he and Jimi don't gel. At the time, Jimi Hendrix was nothing at all. Mitch Mitchell was better known. He played with The Who on occasion. He was a bit like, 'Who's this random American guy trying to come over here and audition me? I don't need this job'. There's a crazy solo in our first scene in the film, totally crossing all the beats and really annoying everyone else. Kathy objects to Mitch's presence. The whole way through he's a bit cocky."

The casting

From the beginning, it was always going to be André Benjamin. John Ridley insisted that it was **André** when he first brought the project to Darko.

Benjamin had long admired Hendrix. This influence fed into the work of OutKast, the Atlanta-based hip hop duo Benjamin fronted with Antwan "Big Boi" Patton. "OutKast's *Bombs over Baghdad* video was totally influenced by Hendrix," says Benjamin. "Even the guitar solo in it."

Ever since Benjamin started acting in films like *Hollywood Homicide* (2003), rumours had circulated about a big screen version of Hendrix's life. "I heard Eddie Murphy was trying to do it at one point in time. Laurence Fishburne. Even Will Smith," says Benjamin. "I read about five Hendrix scripts. Someone asked me to play Hendrix. I'm like 'Yeah, sure. He's a hero, sure I'll do it'. For some reason it just never happened."

Fate had something else in mind. Benjamin met Ridley through a mutual friend. "John came down to Atlanta. We had lunch and he told me about this movie and said he wanted me to play Hendrix."

Imogen Poots (Linda Keith) and Hayley Atwell (Kathy Etchingham) soon followed. "It's testament to how good the script is," says Jeff Culotta, producer. "Imogen and Hayley read it, fell in love with it and stayed on board for 18 to 20 months while we continued to put the pieces together. They never left. When they finished other products, they would check back in, see where we were, make sure we had an idea of when it was going to shoot."

"I met with John about a year and a half before we made this film," says Poots. "We sat down and spoke about the story. The main aspect of that conversation was the idea that you send a person into the world and you're alone while they're off doing their thing. It happens a lot in this [filmmaking] industry too."

Atwell received the script a year before principal photography began. "I thought the script was vivid and intelligent," she says. "Upon meeting director and writer, John Ridley, I felt he was too. I was initially looking at the part of Linda Keith but Ridley offered me Kathy after I impersonated some people I went to school with and revealed my Northern [England] roots. He felt I came across far differently from any part he had seen me play. He thought I was more carefree and sprightly than my other characters. He wanted to tap into that: something deeper and more challenging for me. I respected him for it and rose to the challenge."

"Imogen and Hayley were perfect for the characters," says Anthony Burns, producer. "They were uncanny in how they transformed into the two women. There was great chemistry."

Irish actress Ruth Negga landed the role of Afro-American activist, and Hendrix's other girlfriend, Ida. "Ruth is fantastic," remarks Tristan Orpen Lynch, Subotica producer. Sean McKittrick, producer at Darko Entertainment, continues: "The character of Ida was really important to our story. Jimi didn't

really want to deal with race. He wanted to deal with music. He always talked about how he sees the world in colours, but not colour. She was that perspective. She gave a different perspective of how things were in 1966."

Negga also appears in the film *12 Years a Slave*, written by John Ridley and credits them with "a brilliant, strange sort of connection."

"I spent about a week with John, talking about what he wanted from me and what I could expect from our working relationship," says Negga. "Film rehearsals are vastly different from stage rehearsals. You never get to rehearse on a set. It's a chemical reaction that you want to happen when you're shooting, not before. It's like alchemy. You do the groundwork: learn your lines, prepare the character, but the important stuff happens between 'action', 'cut', and 'go again'."

For the peripheral characters, particularly Hendrix's band, the producers cast actors who were also musicians.

Tom Dunlea (who plays drummer Mitch Mitchell) started drumming when he was 10 years old, playing a succession of "teenage angst" music, dubstep, drum and bass and, after leaving drama school, segued into musical theatre. "I was brought up on Jimi Hendrix. I've loved Jimi Hendrix all my life. In a way Mitch Mitchell was one of the reasons why I became a drummer in the first place," he says.

Oliver Bennett (who plays bassist Noel Redding) trained as an actor, but always played music. In the theatrical play *Backbeat*, he played the Beatles former drummer Pete Best, "set not long before the time of *JIMI: ALL IS BY MY SIDE*. Noel Redding did all the tours the Beatles did early on."

Andrew Buckley landed the role of Hendrix manager Chas Chandler. At the casting session, he read a scene for Ridley. "We had a chat about Chandler's Newcastle accent, then started talking about the music and the time. I found myself having a long conversation with John about that. It wasn't one of those castings where it felt as though he was looking at his watch and wanted me out of the room. It turned into a nice chat."



Becoming Hendrix

A few days into the shoot of *JIMI: ALL IS BY MY SIDE*, André Benjamin was sitting on a stool, playing guitar as Jimi Hendrix. That's when everyone lost it.

Sean McKittrick: *"It was a piece [music supervisor] Danny Bramson had worked with musicians in Los Angeles to create."*

Tristan Orpen Lynch: *"We turn around and people are in floods of tears."*

McKittrick: *"Everyone in hair and make-up, wardrobe. All crying."*

Lynch: *"It was incredible. Like Jimi was reborn in the room."*

Benjamin's transformation into the legendary guitar player was complete. But this did not come without a lot of work and preparation. He spent a few intensive months preparing before filming started. "That entailed guitar practice, weight training, weight loss, voice coaching," says Benjamin. "Just sitting and talking with John. John was more interested in our conversation about scenes. We would go back and forth about what each scene meant."

According to producer Jeff Culotta, the physical transformation process was like a "boot camp." Sean McKittrick agrees: "André was a very athletically built guy and Jimi was almost emaciated. André spent months with a nutritionist yoga to shape himself into Hendrix, on top of guitar lesson after guitar lesson, dialect coaching and so on. The work he put into it dwarfs what anyone else has done,"

Benjamin started to get to know Hendrix the man, beyond the icon, beyond the photograph on the t-shirt. He got a feel for the person. "I did a lot of research," says Benjamin. "As a music artist I read about Hendrix years before, so I knew him in a way. Or I thought I knew him. There were way more things I didn't know. I did a lot of reading. It helped put in my mind what Hendrix may have said or what may have felt at a certain time. Certain expressions. I listened to hours of interviews. I watched films; watched his mannerisms."

Hendrix was left-handed, so Benjamin had to learn how to play the guitar left-handed, or at least maintain the illusion he was playing left-handed.

Andrew Rollins, guitar supervisor, had the task of teaching the actor. "It was a case of breaking down the music, phrase by phrase," says Rollins. "We broke it down like a dancer teaching somebody steps: third fret, fifth fret, sixth fret. André was really passionate about this film and wanted it to be perfect. We worked eight hours a day for two and a half months, seven days a week."

Jimi Hendrix is one of the few characters in popular culture that is instantly recognisable from his silhouette. Benjamin wanted his hair to be as equally recognisable. Luckily, his natural afro rose to the challenge.

According to Kenneth Walker, Benjamin's hair stylist on the project, Hendrix's hair is almost part of his character arc in the story. "Initially, when you first meet him, you'll see him with straight hair when he's singing along with a group called The Squires. Noel Redding was his inspiration to have this curly hair. As first it's just a fro, then it starts to get a little curly and it gets bigger. André used his real hair, no question. That's not a wig on his head."

Rollins saw a transformation in Benjamin over the weeks and months: "He evolved. When he started to let his hair go out and he'd start to talk like Jimmy, I saw this remarkable transformation. I'd walk out of the room, see this silhouette and think, Wow!"

When production began, people wondered if Benjamin could pull it off. They were pleasantly surprised. "It's incredible - the way he speaks, how he looks, the way he channels Hendrix. It's a love letter to him," says Culotta.

"There's a lot of clumsiness about Jimi early on," explains Andrew Buckley, who plays Hendrix's manager Chas Chandler. "A lot of insecurity about his skin, his playing, and his singing voice. André nailed it. That journey we see Jimi go on, from a shy, quiet reserved guy in private who exploded once he was on stage. It's the kind of acting I particularly admire and aspire to. Quiet, underplayed moments. André completely got that."

André Benjamin's complete devotion to the role made it easier for the other actors to slip into their own characters. "André was very kind to me and I had tremendous respect for him as an actor and artist," says Hayley Atwell (Kathy Etchingham). "He really could not have been a lovelier person to work with and I will treasure our experience together."

Imogen Poots (Linda Keith) continues: "It always would have been easy with André because he's lovely. I met him in the rehearsal room and we sat alongside each other. We were wearing the same shoes. There was synchronicity."

Hair designer Kenneth Walker saw Hendrix perform live in Los Angeles and can confirm André's transformation was authentic. "André has embraced him. It's a transition. He has totally engulfed this man: he's totally Jimi Hendrix. From the walk, voice, attitude, hair, wardrobe. Everybody on this show has done such an incredible job in creating him. He *IS* Jimi Hendrix."



The music

Featured songs in JIMI: ALL IS BY MY SIDE include:

Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band Hendrix first played the song live in London in June 1967, only days after the song was released on The Beatles' landmark album. Performing at London's Saville Theatre, before members of The Beatles themselves.

Wild Thing written by Chip Taylor, Jimi Hendrix performed the song regularly in concert.

Mannish Boy This Muddy Waters' blues classic was played often in concert and later recorded.

Bleeding Heart Originally written and recorded by Blues legend Elmore James, Hendrix regularly performed the song in concert. Hendrix frequently cited James as one of his musical influences.

Driving South Penned by Curtis Knight, this blues jam was part of Hendrix's earlier live performances.

Future Trip Curtis Knight & The Squires' hit single featuring Jimmy James on lead guitar.

Hound Dog The Lieber & Stoller classic that Hendrix played in concert, but never officially recorded.

Grammy Award winning producer Danny Bramson, who worked with writer-director John Ridley, serves as both film and music producer was the driving force behind the music design.

A music industry legend, Bramson has worked on more than forty feature films as a leading music, record, and film producer. Bramson is a creative partner with the filmmakers he works with. Frequent collaborators include Cameron Crowe, Peter Jackson, Paul Thomas Anderson, Sean Penn, Jay Roach, and James L. Brooks.

In addition to his film work, he has served as President of the Soundtrack Division for Time Warner's WMG (Warner Music Group), a collective group of recording labels including Warner Bros. Records, Atlantic Records, and Elektra Records. Prior to Warner Bros. Records, at the age of 25, Bramson was the founder and President of Backstreet/MCA Records. The artists he signed include Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers, Nils Lofgren and Men Without Hats, as well as producing soundtracks by Neil Young, Ry Cooder, and David Bowie. The soundtracks Bramson produced include the Grammy winning ALMOST FAMOUS, the 10 Times Platinum CITY OF ANGELS, the multi-Grammy Awards and Academy Awards winning LORD OF THE RINGS Trilogy, the multi-platinum AUSTIN POWERS series, JERRY MAGUIRE, the grunge defining SINGLES, and VANILLA SKY featuring the award winning and Oscar nominated Title Song by Paul McCartney and original music by Radiohead and Sigur Ros. Bramson has worked with Hendrix's recordings and songs for over 30 years, starting in 1980 with both All Along the Watchtower and Purple Haze on his Soundtrack for Hunter S. Thompson's WHERE THE BUFFALO ROAM. He re-introduced Hendrix to the Generation-X grunge era with May This Be Love on his multi-platinum and award-winning Soundtrack to 1992's SINGLES. Bramson then went on to create two of the most iconic and best selling Soundtracks of all time by including Voodoo Child on the Oscar winning film and Grammy winning Soundtrack for ALMOST FAMOUS, and Red House on the 10 Times Platinum and Grammy Award winning Soundtrack for CITY OF ANGELS.

He is also the founding Executive Director of the world famous Universal Amphitheatre and under his own MCA Concerts, Inc. banner produced over 1,000 concerts with artists varying from Frank Sinatra to Bob Dylan to David Bowie's legendary Diamond Dogs Tour.

Working with Bramson intrinsic to the success of JIMI: ALL IS BY MY SIDE, according to the producers. "He's a hurricane of talent," laughs Sean McKittrick, producer for Darko Entertainment. "There's no way we could have pulled this off without Danny."

"There were a couple of things along the way that were super tricky," says Tristan Orpen Lynch, producer for Subotica. "Practical, legal, problematic things. Danny's attitude was, 'Oh brilliant, fantastic. I love this!'"

Bramson also assembled an impressive line up of musicians to perform the film's soundtrack during the pre-production phase in Los Angeles. Guitar supervisor Andrew Rollins came up with an instrumental reminiscent of Hendrix. "When we started working with André, about four months before we came to Dublin," says Rollins, "John asked me to write something from the deepest part of my soul. 'I just want it to be emotional', he said. So I wrote this piece. He sent me back an email with just two words: 'I'm crying'."



"Future Trip"

Performed by Waddy Wachtel
Vocal by Arnold McCullen
Written by Ed Dantes
Courtesy of PPX International

"Leopard-Skin Pill-Box Hat"

Performed by Bob Dylan
Written by Bob Dylan
Courtesy of Columbia Records
By arrangement with Sony Music Licensing

"Acid"

Performed by Robin Baynton
Written by Robin Baynton
Courtesy of Robin Baynton

"The Sun Went Down"

Performed by T-Bone Walker
Written by Boyd Lewis
Courtesy of Capitol Records, LLC
Under license from Universal Music Enterprises

"Reed Streams, For Reed Organ: Dorian Reeds"

Performed by Terry Riley

Written by Terry Mitchell Riley

Courtesy of Elision Fields

"Out Of Sight"

Performed by Buddy Guy

Written by James Brown

Courtesy of BMG Rights Management (US) LLC and Carlin America, Inc.

"Lacrimosa Dies Illa"

Performed by Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra and Chorus

Written by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart Courtesy of Naxos of America, Inc.

"Zadok The Priest, HWV 258 (Coronation Anthem #1)"

Performed by Apollo's Fire Baroque Orchestra, Jeannette Sorrell, conductor

Written by George Frideric Handel

Courtesy of Apollo's Fire: The Cleveland Baroque Orchestra

"My Heart is Bleedin'" a/k/a "My Bleedin' Heart"

Performed by Waddy Wachtel

Vocal by André Benjamin

Written by Elmore James and Marshall Sehorn

Courtesy of BMG Rights Management (US) LLC and Rhinelander Music, Inc.

"It Always Happens That Way"

Performed by The Shadows Of Knight

Written by Warren Rogers and James Alan Sohns

Courtesy of Dunwich Records and Music Supervisor Inc.

"You Don't Know Better"

Performed by Saturday's Children

Written by Geoff Bryan and Ron Holder

Courtesy of Dunwich Records and Music Supervisor Inc.

"Wha Shuffle"

Performed by Waddy Wachtel, Leland Sklar, Kenny Aronoff

Written by Waddy Wachtel and Danny Bramson

Courtesy of Kala Productions Inc.

"House Of The Rising Sun"

Performed by The Animals

Written by Traditional, Alan Price

Courtesy of ABKCO Records

"Waddania"

Performed by Waddy Wachtel, Leland Sklar and Kenny Aronoff

Written by Waddy Wachtel and Danny Bramson

Courtesy of Kala Productions Inc.

"Space Out"

Performed by Robin Baynton
Written by Robin Baynton
Courtesy of Robin Baynton

"Try Me One Time"
Performed by Dolores Johnson
Written by Ben E. King
Courtesy of Westwood Music Group

"Headlight"
Performed by Niamh Farrell
Written by Niamh Farrell

"Obviously Five Believers"
Performed by Bob Dylan
Written by Bob Dylan
Courtesy of Columbia Records
By arrangement with Sony Music Licensing

"Hound Dog"
Performed by Waddy Wachtel
Vocal by André Benjamin
Written by Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller
Courtesy of Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC, Universal Music Corporation,
and WB Music Corporation

"Scotch Solo"
Performed by Waddy Wachtel
Written by Waddy Wachtel and Danny Bramson
Courtesy of Kala Productions Inc.

"Little Games"
Performed by The Yardbirds
Written by Harold Spiro and Phillip Wainman
Courtesy of Capitol Records, LLC
Under license from Universal Music Enterprises

"Love You To Know"
Performed by The Loving Awareness
Written by Charlie Charles, Mick Gallagher, John Turnbull and Norman Watt-Roy
Courtesy of The Loving Awareness

"Train To Nowhere"
Performed by Savoy Brown
Written by Kim Simmonds and Chris Youlden
Courtesy of The Secret
Under license from Universal Music Enterprises

"Linda's Gift"
Performed by Waddy Wachtel
Written by Andrew Rollins and Danny Bramson
Courtesy of Kala Productions Inc.

"Hunting Song"

Performed by Pentangle
Written by Terence Cox, Herbert Jansch, Jaqueline McShee,
John Renbourn and Daniel Thompson
Courtesy of Sanctuary Records Group Ltd.
Under license from Universal Music Enterprises

"I Had A Little Dog"
Performed by Big Jack Reynolds
Written by Jack Reynolds
Courtesy of Westwood Music Group

"Warm Milk"
Performed by Waddy Wachtel, Leland Sklar and Kenny Aronoff
Written by Waddy Wachtel and Danny Bramson
Courtesy of Kala Productions Inc.

"Manish Boy" a/k/a "Mannish Boy"
Performed by Waddy Wachtel, Leland Sklar and Kenny Aronoff
Written by Melvin London, Ellas McDaniel and McKinley Morganfield
Courtesy of BMG Rights Management (US) LLC

"The Lord Is My Shepherd"
Performed by The Salvation Army Band of Belfast, Ireland
Written By Traditional

"Spread A Little Treacle On Your Plate Mary Ann"
Performed by Tommy Pudding
Written By Traditional

"Itchycoo Park"
Performed by The Small Faces
Written by Ronald Lane and Steve Marriott
Courtesy of Sanctuary Records Group Ltd.
Under license from Universal Music Enterprises

"Birdland"
Performed by Waddy Wachtel, Leland Sklar and Kenny Aronoff
Written by Waddy Wachtel and Danny Bramson
Courtesy of Kala Productions Inc.

"Through My Eyes"
Performed by The Creation
Written by Robert Garner and Edwin Phillips
Courtesy of Demon Music Group

"Gimme Some Lovin'"
Performed by Steve Winwood
Written by Spencer Davis, Muff Winwood and Steve Winwood
Courtesy of Steve Winwood

"All Your Love (I Miss Loving)"

Performed by Otis Rush
Written by Otis Rush
Courtesy of Bellaphon Records GMBH, Germany

"Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band"
Performed by Waddy Wachtel, Bob Glaub and Kenny Aronoff
Vocal by André Benjamin
Written by John Lennon and Paul McCartney
Courtesy of Sony/ATV Tunes LLC

"Tom Tom"
Performed by The Creation
Written by Robert Garner and Edwin Phillips
Courtesy of Demon Music Group

"Can't Seem To Make You Mine"
Performed by The Seeds
Written by Sky Saxon
Courtesy of GNP Crescendo Records
By arrangement with Ocean Park Music Group

"Our Good Days Are Gone"
Performed by Yellowbirds
Written by Samuel Benjamin Cohen
Courtesy of The Royal Potato Family & Yellowbirds

"Wild Thing"
Performed by Waddy Wachtel, Leland Sklar and Kenny Aronoff
Vocal by André Benjamin
Written by Chip Taylor
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