

SPARKHOUSE

BY

Sally Wainwright

STARRING

Sarah Smart, Joe McFadden, Alun Armstrong, Celia Imrie, Nicholas Farrell, Richard Armitage, Camilla Power

DIRECTED BY

Robin Sheppard

PRODUCED BY

Derek Wax

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS

Nicola Shindler (Red Production Company)

Mike Dormer (BBC)

Co-Produced by: Sally Wainwright

Director of Photography

Cast List

Carol Bolton	Sarah Smart
Andrew Lawton	Joe McFadden
Richard Bolton	Alun Armstrong
Kate Lawton	Celia Imrie
Paul Lawton	Nick Farrell
John Standing	Richard Armitage
Becky Lawton	Camilla Power
Older Lisa	Holly Grainger
Younger Lisa	April James
Sue	Siobhan Finneran
Connor	Nicky Evans
Tessa	Jessica Harris

Production Credits

Written by	Sally Wainwright Older Lisa
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Introduction

'Oh God, it is unutterable! I cannot live without my life! I cannot live without my soul!'
Wuthering Heights

Carol Bolton is feisty, passionate and reckless. Life has dealt her a raw deal. She lives in poverty-stricken Sparkhouse Farm with a drunken father, Richard, but she is determined to protect those closest to her – younger sister Lisa and her soul mate since childhood, Andrew Lawton. Andrew and Carol's love is not a teenage crush. Their passion is urgent, powerful, enormous, like the landscape they share; the raw energy of the wind, the awesome loneliness of the moors. Yet all of this is in danger of being destroyed when a Pandora's Box of secrets and lies is forced open.

"The themes are perennial," says *Sparkhouse* producer Derek Wax. "The battle between passionate love and economic necessity; following your heart, or doing something expedient, or socially desirable. These questions are the same in the 21st century as they were in the 19th," he argues. "This is a story that's been inspired by *Wuthering Heights*, but the plot isn't the same – what you do have is two

“We were also very lucky to get actors of the calibre of Celia Imrie and Nicholas Farrell as Andrew’s parents – and, on the other side of the valley, Alun Armstrong was our first choice as the violent and alcoholic father! He didn’t even come in for an audition,” Robin laughs, “we just knew he’d do it brilliantly.”

But the Yorkshire landscape was almost an equal cast-member in this three-parter. “The right location was crucial and we had to make some brave decisions,” Derek reveals. “This is an epic love story and to do justice to that we had

Sparkhouse – The Cast

Sarah Smart plays Carol Bolton

“You betrayed your own heart. Nothing could have parted us, nothing anybody could inflict on us. You’ve broken your own heart – and you’ve broken mine doing it!”

Wild, reckless, violent – and misunderstood. Carol Bolton’s emotional landscape matches her stark surroundings as she battles to hang on to the one thing that gives her life meaning. But Fate seems determined to keep her from her one true love.

“She’s full of life, she’s wild and feisty, but caring and loving,” says Sarah Smart, springing loyally to Carol’s defence. “She goes through so much heartache and trouble and has such a hard existence – but she just gets on with her life. She doesn’t feel sorry for herself and that’s what I really like about her. She’s cool and she does things on the spur of the moment - if it was me I would probably have done myself in within the first two minutes of the film!”

Sarah is best known to viewers as the wilful lesbian daughter in

A less traumatic problem was the ins – and outs – of Carol’s hair. “I had to have hair extensions to make my hair long and flowing and farm-girlie, for the earlier scenes,” she explains. “At the beginning they took eight hours to put in.

“But, because it was shot out of sequence, I had to keep having them put in, then taken out for the scenes where I was supposed to be older. I loved the look though, so did my boyfriend – so I’m growing my hair now!”

The reflections of *Wuthering Heights* had echoes for Sarah – as did the influence of changed hairstyles! “I played Catherine Linton in a television version of *Wuthering Heights*,” she reveals. “I had to wear a big blonde curly wig that upstaged me a bit! So I knew the story and adored all that angst and romance.”

Joe McFadden plays Andrew Lawton

“Why can’t you understand? She’s part of me; I can’t breathe without her. I’d die; I’d shrivel up – I’m nothing without her!”

The roller-coaster love affair between doctor’s son Andrew Lawton and the wild and wilful Carol is passionate, turbulent and troubled. Her home may be within sight of his window but her lifestyle is worlds away.

the dramatic landscape it's impossible not to fall in love with it," he admits. "You just feel the power of the place and it works so well for this story, the heightened emotions; the love is the most profound, the violence is the most extreme and the countryside is the most dramatic. The characters are very connected to the landscape and Andrew has a very great love for where he's from. He goes off to university and it's only when he returns that he then realises how much he appreciates his roots in that place.

"Of course there is a resonance of *Wuthering Heights*; there is a similar dynamic between the families where Carol is working class and she's not 'good enough' for me. But people shouldn't watch it expecting *Wuthering Heights*," he stresses. "They are going to get something a lot more relevant and current that they can relate to."

Joe, who has also starred in *The Glass*, *Bumping The Odds*, *Dad Savage*

One take Alun was not so sure about was a little more personal. “You see me sitting on the bog with my trousers down round my ankles,” he reveals. “It did make me think, ‘Is this any good for my image?’”

“But, once I got over the first embarrassment, it was okay. After all, the only thing you see is my knees. Even so, there is something very vulnerable about being seen in that position! More seriously though – sitting on the bog, playing a really horrible character - all these things would be difficult if you thought you were involved with something you weren’t proud of,” he says thoughtfully. “*Sparkhouse* is dramatically honest and lifelike, so it is worth playing the roles with unsavoury associations because the end justifies the means.”

Alun admits that, although his face is his fortune, he does tend to get cast in a certain way. “I’m a bit bald for romantic leads now,” he laughs. “But after *Sparkhouse* I did go on to play the polar opposite of Richard. I was in Andy Hamilton’s *Bedtime* with Sheila Hancock, Tim West and Kevin McNally. I play a widower with a difficult adolescent son who is sensitive and thoughtful and caring; a very upstanding, wholesome parent. In both cases it’s wonderful to act with young people who are so brilliant at that age and you can learn a lot from them too.”

In a long and distinguished career, Alun highlights playing in Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible* and *Death of a Salesman* in the theatre, the film *Strictly Sinatra*, *Goodbye Cruel World* and *This is Personal*, the *Hunt for the Yorkshire Ripper* on television. “I was also in the BBC’s *Messiah 2: Vengeance is Mine*, which is quite gory and graphic. But it was great fun, we had a ball making it – we laughed from beginning to end – as indeed we did on *Sparkhouse*. You often find that the more gruesome the situations you’re acting, the more fun people have to counterbalance the negativity of the characters.”

As a complete contrast to his recent roles, Alun decided to get away from it all – big time. “I’ve just been trekking in the high Andes with my wife and some friends,” he reveals. “It was difficult to sleep with the altitude, but gradually you adapt to it. The whole thing was quite a challenge, but a terrific experience. The views were stunning and the Andean people have a really fascinating culture. On top of that,” he adds with a grin, “you feel very fit at the end of it.”

Nicholas Farrell plays Paul Lawton

Can the end ever justify the means? That is the question Dr Paul Lawton has to ask himself as he wrestles with the guilt of his malicious interference between two young lovers. His excuse – one of them is his son and the other is a unruly child from the wrong side of the tracks.

“He could be viewed as Public Enemy Number One – the prime mover and instigator of what happens,” admits Nicholas Farrell. “But, on another level, I can relate to him as not an unreasonable man because, superficially, Carol *is* a real handful, from an appalling family. What he’s trying to do is what we all want to do, the best for our children. I think he’s in an incredibly unhappy marriage – the only reason they’re still together is that they have made one of those agreements that they’ll stay together for the child. Paul and his wife are so miserable they produce a really bad effect on one another. The scenes between Paul and Kate are not without humour, but it’s barbed and it’s at the expense of others.”

Nicholas has an interesting take on the differences – and, more importantly – the similarities between these two warring families. “They are both dysfunctional,” he argues. “One of them is what would be

classically looked on as the working class dysfunctional family with a child-abusing alcoholic parent.

Celia, who has recently celebrated her 50th

The Production Team

Sally Wainwright – Writer

Sally Wainwright is one of television's finest writers of drama. Earlier this year she was nominated along with Andrew Davies and Stephen Poliakoff as best writer in the 2002 RTS awards.

Most recently known for her award-winning hit *At Home With The Braithwaites* starring Amanda Redman and Peter Davison, Sally also wrote three episodes of BBC ONE's BAFTA-nominated second series of *Playing The Field*. Between 1994 and 1997 she wrote over 50 episodes of

the BBC Choice series

The seven-part *Clocking Off II* began transmission in March 2001 and *Clocking Off III* transmitted on BBC ONE in January 2002, once again to rave reviews. The fourth series has just gone into production, for transmission later this year. *Linda Green*, a ten-part comedy drama by Paul Abbott and starring Liza Tarbuck transmitted on BBC ONE in Autumn 2001 and has also gone into production with a second series.

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