

# Wendy and Lucy:

## A sweet tale simply told

**Sam Levy loved the independent feature *Old Joy*, directed by Kelly Reichardt. When executive producer Phil Morrison called to ask if he was interested in shooting Reichardt's next project, *Wendy and Lucy*, Levy jumped at the chance before even reading the script or meeting her.**

"I thought that highly of *Old Joy*," says Levy. "Reading the script for *Wendy and Lucy* confirmed my instincts, and I told producers Phil Morrison and Neil Kopp, 'Just so you know, I'd cut off my pinkie finger to shoot this movie.'" Luckily, self-mutilation wasn't necessary. Levy and Reichardt immediately began scouting locations in the Portland, Oregon, area.

The film follows Wendy (Michelle Williams), a down-on-her-luck girl who's hoping to turn things around for herself with a summer job in Alaska. She decides to drive from Indiana to Alaska in her beat-up car, accompanied only by her dog Lucy. When her car breaks down in a small Oregon town, Wendy is forced to rely upon the kindness of strangers to resolve her plight.

"Kelly was very clear and confident in describing her vision, with no confusion about how we were to go about making this film," says Levy. "She's very sophisticated technically, but knows enough to not let technical things get in the way of the story."

*Old Joy* had been produced in the Super 16mm format coupled with digital intermediate post-production and released theatrically in 35 mm film format. A similar production/post-production path was planned for *Wendy and Lucy*.

"After testing, I decided to shoot the entire movie on KODAK VISION2 Expression 500T 7229 film," says Levy. "This was a really lean and mean production, and Portland can be a tricky place to shoot because of the weather. With a small crew, a tight schedule and many day exteriors, I thought it would be best to use a single film stock, both aesthetically and logistically."

"The '29 is relatively muted, and it seemed to fit the story and the feeling that Kelly described," says Levy. "The range and latitude of the stock came in handy on night exteriors and in situations where we had to work quickly."

Reichardt described an "unlit" feeling for the images. She wanted a quiet and uncluttered set without a lot of lighting instruments. The "smaller is better" aesthetic extended to the crew.

"Our gaffer and grip Efram Peter was phenomenal," says Levy. "Working as a one-person grip and electric department, he stayed laser-focused and understood exactly what Kelly and I wanted. Our camera team, first assistant cameraman T.G. Firestone and second AC Eliza Plumlee, shared the same zeal."

The ARRI SR3 camera was provided by Koerner Camera in Portland. Lenses included a set of Super 16 Zeiss Superspeed T1.3 primes and a Super 16 Canon 11-165 zoom. D. I. timing was done at Hollywood Intermediate/Wildfire Studios.

"Kelly and I were not sure at first if we were definitely going to do a D.I.," says Levy. "We thought we might do an old-fashioned blow-up to 35mm with no D.I. In prep, I tested the 7229 stock using an optical blow-up to 35mm and analyzed exposures from this optically-struck 35mm print. During the course of filming, however, it became clear that a D.I. would be the best way to time the film. We ended up having more control over the image and were fortunate to work with the very talented colorist Will Harris to boot.

"Shooting film as opposed to video definitely gave us more latitude and a bigger range to color correct scenes where we were intercutting between one shot that is sunny and another that is overcast, or in some cases, even raining," he describes. "You just don't have as much room with electronic HD images. Will Harris, the colorist, was integral to the overall palette and look of this film."

Reichardt and Levy accompanied *Wendy and Lucy* to the Cannes Film Festival, where it screened as part of Un Certain Regard. It was Levy's first time at the festival.

"It was a great experience," he says. "I was able to do a check screening of the 35mm print the morning of the premiere, and the technicians were very caring and respectful. The film was very well-received you could sense it in the auditorium."

"I'd say that Kelly is totally unique in cinema right now," says Levy. "I have a profound respect for her as a filmmaker. She has a great eye, yet she understands that the photography of a film must serve its story, not overshadow it. *Wendy and Lucy* is the kind of movie I really love, and working on it was a special experience for me."



