

# Jane Treays - “Director, Producer and Storyteller Extraordinary”

Jane Treays, British documentary Director and Producer, turns down projects if they can't be shot on film. “I love the grain, the depth, the texture and its capacity to deal with low light levels. I like to interview people on the move, so I have to deal with huge contrasts of light and depth. Film handles that brilliantly.”

In 1981 Jane became a Researcher in the Current Affairs Department at the BBC and worked on several major series including **Soldiers**, a 13-part flagship series fronted by Frederick Forsyth. “At 24 years of age I was picked to interview 120 war veterans around the world. It was an incredibly difficult task because for many of them, particularly the Vietnam war veterans, war experience was still fresh. It was doubted I'd stay the entire course, but stay the course I did. In fact I developed an absolute relish for asking questions that nobody else would dare ask and the directors used to tell me afterwards that they'd sit with their hearts in their mouths waiting for the answers.”

“When I decided I was fed up with researching and handed in my notice to the BBC, I was told that I couldn't leave until I'd made a film.” Jane admits that after being ‘pushed’ into producing a Time Watch programme for BBC 2, she became

addicted. “I absolutely loved it. The film won a BBC award for first time Director and it launched me, I suppose. I've been very lucky – people have believed in me far more than I've believed in myself.”

Jane has produced and directed 19 full-length documentaries for the

“My job (is) a complete arterial route into many people's lives.”

BBC, three high profile single documentaries for ITV and is currently working on three commissions for Granada TV. “I'm commissioned across all the channels now and my work tends to be a marriage of what the channels are interested in and what I like. I stick to quite unusual tabloid-type stories to which I give a real twist and lots of depth and layers because I don't believe anything's black-and-white.”

“I meet all sorts of bizarre people, from serial killers and prostitutes, to terrorists and polygamists and most of my shooting is on a knife-edge. There are times when I feel very threatened and at almost every interview, I'm plumbing



▲ Director and Producer Jane Treays

incredible depths. The films are very intimate and I'm challenging decisions these people have made in life or talking to them about tragedies that are often quite heartrending.

“I work a lot on my own and travel alone on recces. My friends are my crew and my film stock and I've only ever used Kodak. It casts a magic spell over what's already there and doesn't gloss. It gives me complete freedom and captures atmosphere brilliantly. To me, atmosphere is so important. I'm obsessed with the way people tell their stories and how the light falls on their faces. I don't like artificial lights and that's another important thing about film, it allows natural light to settle on a subject with great warmth and subtlety,” says Jane.

Her crew knows that she frequently changes her mind during filming and can launch off in any direction if something interesting catches her eye. “My ideas can be set in stone but often they're not; the cameramen have to be prepared for anything – even shooting walking backwards.” DP Steve Robinson, who is presently working with Jane, shot **Rolling Stones – Bridges to Babylon** with her. “Jane knows exactly what she wants,” he replies. “She has guts and confidence and her questions are completely off-the-cuff; they reveal such interesting




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aspects about her subjects. She asked Keith Richards of the Rolling Stones what books he was reading – one was about Napoleon – then she started a whole conversation and revealed a completely fresh side to his character.”

Chris Cox, another DP with whom she has worked, is equally enthusiastic. “Jane knows what is good visually and trusts her crew. There’s an easy atmosphere when you’re working with her. She’s so good in quirky situations and handles her subjects with a touch of subtlety, never mocking.”

Jane builds up relationships with her subjects off camera and achieves a great deal of groundwork by the time the camera comes in. Whilst shooting **Painted Babies**, a startling story of young children taking part in American beauty pageants, she lived with the family of one of the ‘painted babies’. “That’s the fantastic thing about my job,” she enthuses, “it’s a complete arterial route into many people’s lives.”

Jane’s latest production, **Men in the Woods**, is a 76-minute film for Channel 4. Scheduled to air in June, it is about random indecent assaults upon children and for the first time she is on the other side – talking to, or beyond, the camera. “I suffered twice when I was a child, once when I was six and again when I was 12 and I wanted to go back to the places where it happened to try to find out more about the type of man who does it.”

Has there ever been a moment, you may ask, when this remarkable lady of questions was lost for words herself? “One day Mick Jagger rang me up out of the blue. He was in a taxi in London and I was in the desert in Utah filming a polygamist contemplating marriage to a sixth wife. Mick asked me to spend four weeks with him shooting the Rolling Stones: Bridges to Babylon tour. I just couldn’t believe it!” 

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## Data File

### Jane Treays’ Credits Include:

**One Man, Six Wives and Twenty-Nine Children**

**Public Enemy: Mother and Son** (story of Sante and Kenneth Kimes, alleged con-artist team)

**Agas and Their Owners**

**What Sort of Gentleman Are You After?**

**Painted Babies**

**An Everyday Story of Country Life**

**Miracle Babies – The Story of the Dionne Quintuplets**

**Ken and Me** (film portrait of Ken Barlow of Coronation Street)

*She is currently working on:*

**Men in the Woods**

Post-production on **Rolling Stones: Bridges to Babylon**  
And a three-part series for Channel 4

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