

Brian Mason

Production company(ies)

Mason Films

Short biography of producer(s)

Brian Mason is a Toronto-based Producer with a focus on feature films. Brian started working in features in 2021 with JoBro Productions on North of Normal, which premiered at TIFF 2022. In 2022, he returned to his birthplace of Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island to line produce Who's Yer Father?, which was nominated for 3 Canadian Screen Awards. Most recently, Brian was the lead producer on Drive Back Home, starring Alan Cumming.

Brian has an extensive history of working in television finance, where he learned from world-class Canadian producers. A CPA, CA trained in the technology, media & telecommunications group at KPMG Toronto, Brian began his career in television at Epitome Pictures and DHX Studios Toronto (now Wildbrain) as the Production Controller, working on Deglassi and a variety of live action youth programming.

Brian then became the Executive in Charge of Finance at Architect Films (now Nikki Ray Media Agency), running the television production finance function for over 10 different series across multiple seasons for HGTV, Food Network, Discovery & Blue Ant.

Filmography of applicant(s) - include title and year and/or a link to your IMDb page

Drive Back Home - Producer - 2024

Who's Yer Father? - Line Producer - 2023

North of Normal - Associate Producer - 2022

<https://www.imdb.com/name/nm11266692/>

Title of qualifying feature film

Drive Back Home

Expected release date in 2024:

September 2024

Through which distribution model is your qualifying film expected to be released:

Festival

Name of theatrical distributor, film festival or streaming service releasing or exhibiting qualifying film:

TIFF is still holding that this is in consideration, which is why this submission is so late. So I will send a follow up on exact film festival release. The film's domestic theatrical distributor is Photon Films and will be streamed on Crave after theatrical release.

Film synopsis

In the winter of 1970, a cantankerous, small town plumber from rural New Brunswick, must drive his beat-up work truck 1000 miles to Toronto to get his estranged, gay brother out of jail after being arrested for having sex in a public park. The two men are then forced to drive back home together at the behest of their hard-nosed mother before they kill each other. Inspired by a true story.

The inspiration: why was this an important film to make?

The film's writer/director, Michael Clowater was inspired by true events that happened to his grandfather and great uncle. As in the movie, the only time Michael's grandfather had ever left New Brunswick was to help his brother, who had been arrested for having sex with a man. Throughout the film, Michael wanted to reflect upon the challenges that people in the LGBTQ+ community may have in connecting to previous generations of their community. We wanted to be able to represent what it would be like to be a gay man in earlier parts of the 20th century.

In the current cultural zeitgeist of Canada, we are battling with all the different elements of our history and who we truly are as a country. This film, through a remarkable performance by Alan Cumming, shines a light on a darker side of this history, where to be gay in the mid-20th century was a crime. This story gives us a look at how our society might have treated a person like Perley Hinson, both through the childhood flashback and in his adulthood in 1970. The ending of the film reflects a goal that we as Canadians should continue to strive towards - the two brothers, who might not quite agree, choose to work together to grow their understanding of each other and connect on a deeper level.

To me, the film is important because I was born in raised in Prince Edward Island and I left for Ontario. I am acutely aware of the dynamics of the changes that happen when some family and friends move away, and others stay home. I see in characters the rift that grows as the realities of life set in and people move along different paths. In that way, for my whole life I have been surrounded by modern Weldons and Perleys. Beyond the thematic importance, I love seeing Canada represented on film, especially the very route I have driven many times from Toronto to the East Coast.

The making-of: how did this film come together? What were the highlights/challenges of producing this film?

After working with Jonathan Bronfman on North of Normal, he put me in touch with Will Woods. Will and I immediately agreed we would like to find a project to take on together, and while we reviewed several options, ultimately Drive Back Home caught our eye. Michael had already spoken to several actors, including Alan Cumming, who we promptly attached to the project. As The King Tide was Will's primary production for the next year, I took on the project as the lead producer, under his mentorship and support. By summer 2022, we had raised most of the funding and could start building up the project for a shoot in 2023. We added Maddy Falle to our producing team, who primarily took on the line producer role.

Getting to work with Alan Cumming was a highlight of the experience. I have been a fan of his ever since seeing him in Goldeneye and X2 as a young boy. It made it that much more amazing that he was extremely professional and easy to work with. The scene where we shot the Saint-Louis-du-Ha!-Ha! bar sequence was a particularly memorable day. His acting was incredible, despite being under considerable bladder duress from having to drink so many fake beers (actually tea)! Alan has been involved in many genres of movies, on Broadway, in scripted TV and most recently in reality TV as a host. Because of his vast experience, I felt extremely lucky to produce a project starring him.

Overall, we had cast and crew with very distinct, creative and industrious personalities that I had the pleasure of working with. They made Drive Back Home an unforgettable project. It gave me the opportunity to expand my network and meet production and post-production crew that I look forward to working with again.

I have a long history of understanding the financials and business aspects of television, but this project really tested my ability to match that understanding up against producing a movie with great creative. COVID was still an issue during production, and we ran into substantial inflationary pressures compared to when we had initially pitched financing the project. Even with so much understanding and knowledge to avoid "stealing from post", it still resulted in some tricky post-production scenarios. Fortunately, we had great partners from Urban Post, Alter Ego, and Long Division, who were able to pull off what this film required.

As an emerging producer, this movie developed my abilities to manage people with very different interests. Trying to handle the reality of running a business against the competing goals of multiple partners and crew members was something that was heightened, given the budget. In the end, we delivered a film that will be very worth it for the audience.

National pride: describe what uniquely defines you as a Canadian producer.

I have always loved this country. Growing up in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, Canada was everywhere. The tourism slogan is even "The Birthplace of Confederation". When the Confederation Bridge was built, I remember feeling a strong connection to the rest of the country. In the 00s, the Canada Day celebrations in Charlottetown (via the Festival of the Lights) were the biggest in the country, short of Ottawa. My parents are proud Canadians who support local and national musicians, and we regularly watched Canadian film and TV. I grew up without cable, which resulted in watching only CBC or CTV. Very occasionally, and depending on the weather, the antenna would pick up Global. After a childhood diet of Mr. Dressup, Fred Penner, Sharon, Lois and Bram, and Sesame Park, I regularly watched Due South, Power Play or North of 60 with my parents, and I loved Royal Canadian Air Farce so much that I used to rent the highlight VHSs from our local video rental store.

It goes without saying that Canada has (and had) its faults- Drive Back Home explores some of them. But I still believe there is so much good in this country. It is a truly beautiful place that is home to some truly incredible people. What I think uniquely defines me as a Canadian, is that I believe we can create amazing homegrown projects that will truly resonate world-wide.

How will this film further your career as a producer?

This film shows my talent at getting a project from script to screen. I have significant experience in Canadian TV, but with some support from my co-producer Will Woods, I was able to quickly understand how to produce a smaller Canadian feature film. We were very fortunate to have an amazing star in Alan Cumming and produce a movie that showed care to a sensitive subject. This project shows a piece of how we can continue to grow the Canadian feature film industry.

What is your next step as a Canadian independent producer?

There are two ways I can see myself moving forward. First, I will make more feature films. I started in features coming over from TV, thinking it would be temporary, but I can see a path where this could be where I mainly work. I have started pitching my next feature project called Closed for the Apocalypse, a romantic comedy set at the end of the world. This movie could be another step towards my goal of more commercial Canadian features. My second path could be to return to TV at some stage. I have had this persistent dream of creating a young adult TV series set in Prince Edward Island called Changing Tides based on a (very) dramatized version about growing up in Charlottetown. My fiancé (wife by the time of AIFF) had a painting done for me of what the main characters would look like, which hangs on the wall of my office. I look at that as my north star to keep on hustling and producing.