

# JOAN and Sadie

*a deeply moving examination of a cultural icon  
fighting to change an industry built to exploit her*

**PRODUCED BY** RHONDA BUCKLEY

**WRITTEN BY** RHONDA BUCKLEY

**DIRECTED BY** RHONDA BUCKLEY

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. POSITIONING STATEMENT
2. MARQUEE VALUE
3. MARKETING ELEMENTS
4. DISTRIBUTION PLATFORMS
5. FESTIVAL CIRCUIT
6. THE STORY
7. WRITING PROCESS
8. SOCIAL RELEVANCE
9. BIOS, CAST and TEAM
10. TARGET AUDIENCES



***Joan and Sadie are best friends,  
they work together, go on the road together,  
and sign record deals together.***

***These two brash women  
from small-town Newfoundland  
take on the entertainment industry,  
where the only F word  
that comes across their lips  
isn't feminism.***

*Joan and Sadie* is inspired by the life of Joan Morrissey, a national singing legend in the 70's. It is a '*Loretta and Patsy*' kind of story, with two brash women who take on the entertainment industry. This feature film storyline has proven itself to attract audiences, but a similar film has not been made in Canada. *Joan and Sadie* is a 'deeply moving examination of a cultural icon fighting to change an industry built to exploit her.'



# POSITIONING STATEMENT

## WOMEN BREAKING BARRIERS

Barrooms are filled wall-to-wall with men, but Joan Morrissey is center stage and she takes no lip. After selling over 50,000 records and a Juno nomination, when a Toronto record company sends her a cheque for \$38, she takes them to court and insists that artists must be paid. From Joan's point of view, "I said I could do it and that is why I can. It is no more than folding laundry or baking bread. I always knew I could do it and so I do."

*Joan and Sadie* is about more than the music she sings. This story speaks to all women performers who choose to create their art against the practicality of daily life or family demands. Not unlike the film *Maudie* (2016), women who have harsh and overwhelming domestic lives still trudge forward because as in Joan's case, *it's who she is and it's in her to perform*.

## SPEAKS TO ALL WOMEN PERFORMERS

Joan had the same concerns as young women musicians have today about being paid, as a professional artist and making sure businessmen didn't take advantage of her financially or otherwise. She was raised to be a housewife and yet she fought the music industry in Canada at a time when many were being taken for a ride.

This story speaks to all women performers trying to make their way in a profession ruled by men, especially those who have been taken for a ride in Showbiz. Through Joan's death by suicide, we witness the hardships Joan endured. She became a legend and influenced and inspired other women singers and musicians for generations to come and still to this day.



# MARQUEE VALUE

- Picture NL Film Development Corporation Funding
- Telefilm Canada Funding
- Harold Greenberg Funding
- Award Winning CAST International Appeal  
JOAN - Sarah Power, SADIE - Kate Corbett, TOM - Peter Mooney
- Rhonda Buckley, Director and Writer, award-winning filmmaker
- US Distributor on board, Morris Ruskin, SHORELINE/ MoJo Film Inc: *"I love Joan and Sadie. It's an amazing script, with rich characters, strong themes, and an incredible story."*

# MARKETABLE ELEMENTS

## **WOMAN who FIGHTS the MUSIC INDUSTRY and WINS**

After selling over 50,000 records and being nominated for a Juno, Joan receives a cheque for \$38 from a Toronto record company. Joan calls out the company on the front page of the local paper with the headline 'Die Hard Crooks' and takes them to court in a landmark case insisting that artists must be paid. Joan gives a voice to all musicians who have been taken for a ride at that time, and she wins! She shows the record label, and the court room, *this* housewife who can sing up a storm does not back down.

## **STORY with PROVEN AUDIENCE APPEAL ... A FIRST IN CANADA**

It is a '*Loretta and Patsy*' kind of story, with two brash women who take on the entertainment industry. This feature film storyline has proven itself to attract audiences, but a similar film has not been made in Canada.

## **STORY WAITING TO BE TOLD FOR 40 YEARS**

Joan Morrissey was celebrated throughout her life and revered since her death in 1978. For over 40 years people have wanted to see a film made about Joan, and I have been encouraged to pursue this film project. I will create a feature that is all-encompassing, compelling, and timely.



# DISTRIBUTION PLATFORM

## **MORRIS RUSKIN, SHORELINE, MoJo Global Films**

In 2019, Morris launched a new production and management company called MoJo Global Arts. The management division represents writers and directors from all over the world, with a strong emphasis on Latin America. MoJo is simultaneously producing movies and TV shows. Morris established his own production company, Shoreline Entertainment, in 1992, which expanded to include a sales and distribution arm in 1997 and a management arm in 2009. Shoreline has arranged distribution for hundreds of films, many of which have also been recognized in major film festivals around the world.

*The Swearing Jar* premiered at TIFF in 2022, and *Night of the Hunted* is in post. Morris and Joseph executive produced *Ladies in Black*, directed by Bruce Beresford, and released worldwide by Sony. MoJo's management division represents writers, directors, actors, and production companies from all over the world, including Latin America, Africa, the U.K., Canada, Spain, France, and of course the US.

Morris is also active in supporting up-and-coming filmmakers in the industry; prominent contributions include being an industry guest at the co-production forum at the Venice Film Festival, holding round tables at The Cannes Film Festival, and hosting an industry panel at the SXSW Film Festival.

Morris Ruskin

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# FESTIVAL CIRCUIT

The FILM FESTIVAL circuit is the platform for the film *Joan and Sadie*, a unique and individual story with incredible production design and cinematic detail. Audience value is based on stories with family emotion and the raw human spirit, a modern and universal story with family sacrifice, where the central character is propelled forward by 'wanting to succeed' against all odds. *Joan and Sadie* will be promoted as a narrative spearheaded by a strong-minded and talented woman in the entertainment industry. This film is a unique Canadian story, with a proven track record for sales. Comparative films showcased at festivals and box office success include *Wild Rose*, *Loretta and Patsy*, *A Star is Born*, *The High Note*, among others.

FESTIVALS include TIFF, St. John's Women's Film Festival, AFF-FIN, Venice Film Festival, Berlin Film Festival, Cannes Film Festival, Palm Springs International Film Festival, and all Canadian film festivals.

## FESTIVAL CIRCUIT INCLUDES:



SUNDANCE  
FILM FESTIVAL



Internationale  
Filmfestspiele  
Berlin



FESTIVAL DE CANNES

## THE STORY

Joan Morrissey, a singer from a young age born in 1935 in St. John's, recorded four albums singing in bars in Newfoundland and Toronto, all the while raising six children. When other mothers said she was a 'loose' woman performing in nightclubs, Joan said, "To hell with what others have to say, you must always do what's right for you."

## ARTISITIC VISION

*Joan and Sadie* production design will be 1970's time period, and it will also be raw in its look and texture. Landscape will play a pivotal role as in the films *Maudie*, directed by Aisling Walsh and *Crackie*, directed by Sherry White. Joan has a kindred spirit with the outdoors and at times was more comfortable at the cabin than performing on stage. I will show moments of Joan outside of her home where she is in nature, and how it contrasts to Joan performing on stage wearing her costumes and makeup that make her look and feel like a star.

## TONE

The feature *Joan and Sadie* showcases humour in the face of absolute tragedy, where the characters experience is unique and challenging. It mirrors the necessity in everyday life to find inner strength through humour, even when it seems impossible to carry on through the most difficult of life's challenges. Many smaller towns and, in particular, Newfoundland and Labrador, adhere to this humour persevering despite adversity and darkness.



## CINEMATIC POTENTIAL

Super 8 film will be used to film some musical scenes when actors perform on location. Locations include Legion Pleasantville, Spirit of Newfoundland, and Ryan Mansion, a 1970's style home interior and exterior. Super 8 style of filming is used to enhance the archival characteristics of the film with Joan at the microphone singing center stage in the '70s.

I will also use original footage of Joan Morrissey, including individual performances *Annie Get Your Gun* and *All Around the Circle*. This unique approach to use archival footage and Super 8 to film a drama is whimsical, visceral, and it works well for a softer lyrical feel in filmmaking that I have used in my short films. Footage will also be shot on HD with the expertise of cinematographer Stephen Reizes.

## PERSONAL INSPIRATION

*Joan and Sadie* is a film that I am supposed to make. I have pursued this project with passion and a strategic commitment. I have written and accomplished rewrites of *Joan and Sadie*, the feature film script, with vigor and detail and I have and will continue to use the resources allotted to develop a tangible artistic vision.

I have put in the work, and I will continue to put in the work to nail the production elements necessary for this film. I have written, directed, and produced five short films for festivals and broadcast and two long-form documentaries. It is now time that I direct a feature film to advance my career, and the structural elements of *Joan and Sadie* are an attainable goal.

## STAGE PRESENCE

"Joan Morrissey understood the importance of laughter. She kept her audience spellbound when she sang but whether or not the song was happy or sad she kept on smiling. I will always smile when I think of her."

*Sandy Morris, Joan Morrissey band member and award-winning musician*



# WRITING PROCESS

*Joan and Sadie*, the feature, is much more intimate than the short film I created and there is an emotional return with the characters and Joan's relationships. I have done this by choosing Joan's best friend in real life and producer with Canada AM, Sadie, as a key storyline. Joan's best friend and manager, Sadie, has become a consistent character in the feature, and Joan's journey is that of Sadie and Joan together. They travel together like schoolgirls across the Island, take chances in business in Toronto with record companies. Sadie plays a prominent role as Joan's friend, confidant and business partner. Sadie gives dimension to the in-depth emotions and relations with Joan and her struggle with depression. Sadie was the only person Joan talked with about her depression and Sadie tries to help her through it.

The writing process of *Joan and Sadie* feature film script has been through many versions. At the beginning, I tried to tell too many stories and had numerous storylines, including Joan growing up as a girl. I have developed a storyline now that is not just a biopic but focuses on Joan and Sadie, their ambitions, fun adventures, and a friendship that gets each other through thick and thin. *Joan and Sadie* is intimate, raw, and cinematic.

I believe the storylines heighten the intimacy and vulnerability of Joan and her relationship with Sadie. We cheer them on as a duo and are proud of Joan's successes while knowing she is a woman who made unlikely and hard choices that eventually cost her life.



# SOCIAL RELEVANCE

***Joan and Sadie*** is about more than the music she has created.

This story speaks to all women performers who choose to create their art against the practicality of daily life or family demands. Women with overwhelming domestic lives who still trudge forward because as in Joan's case, *it's who she is and it's in her to perform*. It is an important dramatic narrative that unfolds in a riveting and thought-provoking way.

Sadie and Joan knew they were changing the course of women performing in the music industry and when all the other housewives ridiculed them, they were not fazed in the least. Besides Joan kept a tidy house, made a great 'loaf' and was 'Brown Owl' for the kids at school. When other women called her out, she would put them in their place, but she also made sure to say, "I'll get you my recipe" before they stormed off.

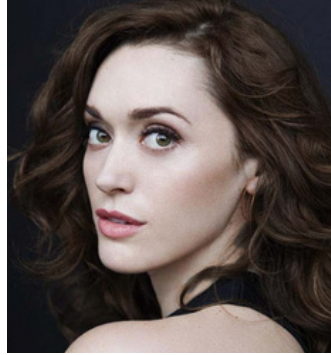
*Joan and Sadie* is timely and has been timely since Joan performed in the '60s. Women who are singers and musicians have always been challenged in the entertainment industry. If you are a wife and a mother, the scrutiny is heightened. Your talent is often counteracted and questioned: "*You should be home raising your kids, what's she doing in a bar performing every night? Look what she's wearing. Who does she think she is?*"

***Joan and Sadie*** is a film to inspire women and audiences to pursue their dreams and career goals until we finally come to a time when support for a woman performer, and a mother, is commonplace.



# BIOS: CAST

SARAH POWER  
as *Joan*



**Sarah Power** is well known to television and film audiences world wide for her long run on the successful series *The Good Witch*, opposite Catherine Bell. Sarah, a native Newfoundlander, is also known for her roles on *Schitt's Creek* and *Killjoys*. She has also filmed three successful Hallmark Christmas films, and starred in the films *Saw*, *American Pie Beta House* among other indie films. Sarah has performed in theatres across Canada and attended Ryerson Theatre School.

KATE CORBETT  
as *Sadie*



**Kate Corbett** was nominated for a Canadian Screen Award in 2022 for her work in Mark O'Brien's feature, *The Righteous*. She played a lead role in the Incendo Productions thriller *Rule of 3* (currently airing on Crave Canada). She played a recurring integral character in Season 4 of *Coroner* currently airing on CW and CBC. She also spent three seasons on *Good Witch* (Hallmark) playing a supporting role. She starred in the ensemble comedy *The Steps* which was an official 2015 TIFF selection.

PETER MOONEY  
as *Tom*



**Peter Mooney** starred in *Rookie Blue* and also starred in the Starz TV series *Camelot* and has made recent guest appearances on *Heroes Reborn*, *Republic of Doyle*, *Heartland*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Played* and *CSI: Miami*. He was featured in *The Tower* and *ZOS – Zone of Separation* and starred on *Falcon Beach* for two seasons. Peter starred in the film *We Were Wolves*, which premiered at the 2014 Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF). Recent film credits include the independent films *Blowback*, *Paseo*, *Keely & Du*, *Must Kill Karl* and most recently in the Nicholas McCarthy horror-thriller *Prodigy*.

# BIOS: TEAM

## DIRECTOR Rhonda Buckley

Rhonda is also the screenwriter of the feature films *InLine*, *Steps and Stones* and *Elfreda*. Buckley is an award-winning filmmaker of the short film *Surrounded by Water*, on music legend Joan Morrissey, that was shortlisted for the Yorkton Film Festival Awards and airs on CBC Gem. *Terranova Matadora* (BravoFact) based on a Newfoundland woman bullfighter screened at Hot Docs 2016 and *Avon Ladies Rural Style* also screened nationally. Rhonda was selected to TIFF Producer Talent Lab with films she produced by writer/director Sherry White including the Genie nominated feature film *Crackie* (2010). Rhonda has also made five other short films and documentaries for broadcast. Rhonda Buckley is a Newfoundland filmmaker who makes films with a feminist point of view.

## PRODUCTION DESIGNER Sean Breagh

Sean Breagh has designed character based and environment-driven stories for over 30 years. Trained at the University of Toronto and the National Theatre School of Canada, he began designing sets and costumes at the Stratford Festival, Shaw Festival and major theatres. Quickly growing into extensive work in Feature films and Television, his production designs have collaborated with a wide variety of Canadian and American directors and producers. Projects have taken him throughout Canada, England and Central Europe. He has been honored with a DGC Award, with further nominations for a Canadian Screen Award, four more DGC Awards and two Sterling Awards. [www.seanbreagh.com](http://www.seanbreagh.com)

## CINEMATOGRAPHER Stephen Reizes

Stephen Reizes csc is a Toronto-based cinematographer with decades of experience in film and digital production. Initially a passionate young cinephile with a background in traditional photography, Reizes progressed as an award-winning graduate in Film Production at Concordia University. Reizes then honed his craft shooting shorts and indie features while gaining invaluable experience working as an electric, grip and camera assistant. Working in television Reizes has shot everything from police and hospital dramas to comedy and period pieces. He lensed the acclaimed *Little Criminals* as well as the breakout series *Flashpoint* where he transitioned the show from 35mm to digital. While fascinated by the technical aspects of cameras and optics, it is ultimately the expressive, emotive and poetic power of moving picture imagery that drives Reizes's work.

# TARGET AUDIENCES

Audiences are built through social media platforms and then we need to deliver our media to them. Certainly, the Canadian film theatrical release format has been suggesting this to us for years. The co-existence of TV, streaming platforms, and theatrical release, make us look at which should be considered the primary release date; theatres or streaming devices to build an audience base for cinema releases. Social media as the release platform has shown it can fuel a higher box office return in theatrical release, as opposed to operating solely as a promotional tool.

***Joan and Sadie*** has a timely connection to a contemporary culture based on popular themes: family, ambition, adversity, tenacity, and love. Similar themes of everyday life create dramatic and eventful stories that showcase a character's sadness and humour and that can also make relevant and comical films out of these events. Audiences are drawn to character-driven roles with depth and an appeal to a broader audience base. Dramatic feature film user markets enjoy interacting with films that give people a sense of power and excitement, allowing them in some way to live vicariously through the film experience. Films with authenticity and depth of character and sadness are at the forefront of our audience base. Dramatic TV series and features thematically show that audiences are drawn to this content. Young adult, adult, and senior audience groups will be drawn to the film, *Joan and Sadie*.

**Janet Brown**, from Canada, joined Tribeca from BBC Studios (Deadline July 2026). She is an entrepreneurial and growth-focused exec, having worked with some of the most fearless and enterprising entertainment companies in the business, with fully cross-functional expertise, strategy, and marketing, to tech and operations) and deep team/culture building experience. She also led the sale of FilmBuff ([www.filmbuff.com](http://www.filmbuff.com)) to Gunpowder & Sky, a digital studio, including international sales and licensing for features, episodic series, and shorts to theatrical buyers, broadcasters, and Telco's worldwide. Janet Brown's perspective on the American buyer's market in a recent phone conversation; "We tend to develop original TV series, not 3rd party content and popular culture that is loud and very well known. More than 80 of our biggest films that experience a growth area have gone to Amazon and YouTube, and surpassed theatrical box office."

Rhonda Buckley TONE REEL Joan and Sadie 30 sec  
<https://vimeo.com/673383623>

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