**BRIE LARSON IS MA IN *ROOM***

For the lucky few who have already seen early screenings of *Room* the film has had a huge impact. Critically praised, it has touched people in many different ways, says Brie Larson, whose brilliant performance as a young woman imprisoned in a tiny room with her young son has already created a huge awards buzz.

Directed by Lenny Abrahamson, with a screenplay by Emma Donoghue from her own best selling novel, *Room* received glowing reviews when it premiered at the Telluride Film Festival before screening at both Toronto and London Film Festivals.

Ms Larson is Ma who was kidnapped by a man she calls ‘Old Nick’ seven years earlier and held in an 11 x 11 garden shed. Her son, five-year-old Jack (Jacob Tremblay) knows nothing of the outside world and indeed of the details of the terrible ordeal that his mother has suffered.

Both a riveting thriller – Ma meticulously plans an escape that will save their lives – and an uplifting story about the incredible bond between a mother and her son, *Room* was initially inspired by the Josef Fritzl case in Austria. Fritzl imprisoned one of his daughters for 24 years in a basement dungeon where she bore him seven children.

The author herself has said that, at its heart, her story was about motherhood but she is delighted that readers have taken many different meanings from it themselves. And Ms Larson agrees – the film has spoken to its audience in different ways, too. After Ma and Jack escape, they must adjust to the outside world that Jack has never known while a voracious media wants to know all about their story.

“People see it as a love story, a bond between a mother and a son; love conquers all. Some people talk about how much it hit them that they had a depressed parent or a suicidal parent,” she says.

“Some people watched it entirely as a meditation on depression. I’ve had some people saying that the moment where Jack meets his friend is what the movie is all about – about friendship and closeness and it reminded them of being a kid and finally connecting with the world for the first time.

“A lot of birth and womb like references because of the room and outside of the room where it’s like a second birth in a way. And then there’s the metaphor of it all and the mythological references and some people strongly get the Plato references or Bluebird.

“Some people see it as a full crime story and some journalists really focus on the interview sequences being the most important aspects of it and feel uncomfortable interviewing me after seeing that.

“So it really depends on your background and what it is that you are looking for. And you know, I think it says a lot about the power of this story because it does touch people in so many different ways.”

Ms Larson read the novel soon after it was first published in 2010. “I absolutely loved it and devoured it in a day and it was the first time I’d cried while reading a novel since reading *Where The Red Fern Grows* (by Wilson Rawls) in the fourth grade,” she says.

“I fell in love with these people, Ma and Jack. And then I found out that there was a film happening. It was like, ‘this is a very special project and you will never be cast in it,’” she laughs.

“But I ended up working as hard as I possibly could, first in my meeting with Lenny, which was supposed to be a 15 minute coffee meeting and turned into a four hour talkathon and by the end of it I felt one step closer to really falling head over heels for it. Sometime later Lenny asked any girl who was interested in the project to audition and I auditioned and I got it.”

To prepare for the role, she met trauma specialists and to try and imagine what it would be like to be trapped in a small room, decided to stay inside her apartment, alone, for a month, with minimum contact with the outside world.

“The whole thing that my character is going through is not anything you would normally know how to tackle. It’s not a typical story so I had to reach out and find specialists in these fields to try and help me figure this out because you can’t just Google ‘what does it feel like to be trapped in a room for seven years?’

“You have to talk with somebody who has dealt with it. So I spoke with a trauma specialist for many hours over many days talking about the mental things that would happen to somebody after you had been stuck in this room for seven years.”

Her self-imposed month alone brought back memories of her own childhood, she says. And, perhaps, provided a clue as to why she was so drawn to the role of Ma.

“I wanted to see what would happen and some very interesting things happened to me while I was doing that. A lot of old memories resurfaced; I remembered a lot about my childhood that I forgot about.

“And one thing in particular that I remembered stayed with me. I was born in Sacramento and I moved to Los Angeles with my Mom and my little sister when I was 7 and my sister was like 3 or 4 and we moved into a studio apartment that was a little bit bigger than room and we also had a door to a toilet so there was a little bit of separation there.

“But the bed came out of the wall – it was a ‘room.’ And I had about two pairs of jeans and a couple of shirts and a pair of shoes, my sister the same and my Mom the same and we had maybe a handful of toys, not much.

“My Mom couldn’t even afford happy meals at that time. And I remember that time as being one of the greatest times of my life. I was so happy. My Mom has this incredible imagination and she instilled so much life in that space that I never felt that I was lacking and I didn’t realise that we didn’t have anything.

“And then there was one moment that I also remembered in this silence that really struck me and moved me very deeply – I remembered where we would all three sleep in that same bed that came out from the wall.

“And I remember waking up in the middle of the night with my Mom with her hands over her mouth trying to be quiet but just sobbing uncontrollably – convulsions, sobbing, shaking – and I didn’t know why and I remembered thinking, ‘it’s like when my toy is taken away from me.’

“And I didn’t realise until many years later that my father had asked for a divorce and that’s why we had moved to Los Angeles and she was dealing with it completely alone but I had created this world of imagination with me and my sister.

“Sometimes you never fully understand why you are attracted to a project until you get deeper into it and that for me - and it’s giving me chills talking about it – was such a huge part of my life and something so palpable to me to bring to this film.”

Both on screen and off, she developed a deep bond with Jacob Tremblay, who plays her son Jack.

“I think all the adults had this understanding that the main core of the movie was that love between mother and son and that was the necessary momentum that was going to keep the story moving and believable.

“But how we were going to get that between myself and Jacob was not anything we really planned because you can’t. It’s a natural thing that happens when you meet a person, some people you get on with and others you don’t.

“Jacob was 7 when I met him and it wouldn’t be right to push me or anything on him. It had to always be his choice, his decision and on his terms. So the only thing that we talked about was having a lunch where it would be me and him and his Mom and Lenny and the producers.

“It would be more of a group setting so it didn’t have to feel like this intimidating one-on-one first meeting and it allowed Jacob and I to interact a little bit but also interact with others so the focus wasn’t on us and that was kind of how it all began.

“It was putting us in situations like the production designer has got all this trash and all the tools that we would have had in the room and allowed to build the toys in the room.

“It was things like that where we could play quietly but maybe every now and then we could talk and connect with one another and use our imaginations together. And that became the way we could slowly get to know each other in a way that wasn’t forced or manipulated.”

Ms Larson is an actress and musician. Her films include *Sleepover, Hoot, Remember The Daze, Greenberg, Scott Pilgrim vs. the World, The Trouble With Bliss, Rampart, Treatment, 21 Jump Street, Don Jon, Short Term 12* and *The Gambler.*

**Q&A**

**Q: What’s it feel like now the film is out in the world and it’s had such a great reception at Telluride, Toronto and London?**

A: It’s been really fun talking about it. When people talk about the movie it seems to hit everybody in a visceral way but not for the same reasons. So the conversation is ever changing because each person who watches it thinks that’s the way they saw it and feels that’s the only way that the movie can be seen and felt. So I’ve seen it from a 100 different angles at this point.

**Q: That’s interesting that people are getting different things from it…**

A: Yeah, it says something about how we are as humans, it’s like ‘well, this is obviously the only way for life to be...’ But there are a lot of ways to look at it. People see it as a love story, a bond between a mother and a son; love conquers all. Some people talk about how much it hit them that they had a depressed parent or a suicidal parent. Some people watched it entirely as a meditation on depression. I’ve had some people saying that the moment where Jack meets his friend is what the movie is all about – about friendship and closeness and it reminded them of being a kid and finally connecting with the world for the first time. A lot of birth and womb like references because of the room and outside of the room where it’s like a second birth in a way. And then there’s the metaphor of it all and the mythological references and some people strongly get the Plato references or Bluebird. Some people see it as a full crime story and some journalists really focus on the interview sequences being the most important aspects of it and feel uncomfortable interviewing me after seeing that. So it really depends on your background and what it is that you are looking for. And you know, I think it says a lot about the power of this story because it does touch people in so many different ways.

**Q: So what were the themes that struck you?**

A: I read the book just because I like to read and it was a book that recommended to me that people loved – everybody was like ‘yeah, you have to read this.’ and passed their copy around to other people. Originally when I read the book I was struck by the mythology that was in it, by the Plato’s cave set up and I saw it as an amazing opportunity to show how small our perceptions are and how difficult it is to let go of them and see a wider, being more complicated world. And I do think there is a very simple thread through it, which is like our journey on this planet through to adulthood. We are a Jack, we see infinite possibilities, we see very little of the darkness, it’s not a frequency that reaches us at all. And then as we grow up the world can be a very scary and fearful place and we grow into our teenage years and hormones take over and we sort of reject our surroundings and everything around us and we can become quite serious and jaded and we lose that playful child that we were. And then from those teenage years up until your time is up here you are just trying to get back to that kid. And that’s what I think Ma’s journey is as well in two hours basically.

**Q: It does start from a point that is all too terribly recognisable from stories that we have read in the news, a woman held captive…**

A: I mean really that crime aspect of it is a way in, it’s a way into the same story that is Rapunzel or Bluebird, it’s any tale you have heard where the woman gets taken and locked away and must be rescued by some other force. In this case, we have had some stories in the news that are physical representations of the story in *Room.* I think from my conversations with Emma, where she was coming from with the book and later the screenplay, was recognising the parallels between childhood and motherhood as being sort of similar in this womb like small room space. And that it can feel like a prison for both. But that space can also be closeness; it’s the place where love develops.

**Q: Were you reassured that Emma had written the screenplay from her own novel?**

A: Yes. The fact that Emma wrote the screenplay was the first clue that this was going to be in good hands and the second one was Lenny directing it. The first conversation I ever had with anyone about this was with Lenny and after five minutes of speaking with him and understanding his point of view and knowing that he saw the same mythological references that I did and is also a loving father and husband, I knew that if I did get this job I would be going down a path with somebody who was coming from a place of sensitivity and not from a place of pessimism and melodrama. And that’s what we needed.

**Q: How did you feel about taking on the challenge of this role? Excited? Intimidated?**

A: Yeah, all of those things. I think you have to have the combination of intimidation and excitement in order to sign on to something. It has to feel a little over your head; like you are in a little over your head, because that’s what fuels you to keep searching. And it’s not just the preparation you do before making the movie, but every day on set. For the 12 hours you are on set you are still constantly trying to find ‘it’ whatever it is. And it’s constantly showing itself and then hiding again so it becomes a very long game of hide and seek as you are making the movie.

**Q: How did you prepare? I read that you met with trauma counsellors…**

A: The whole thing that my character is going through is not anything you would normally know how to tackle. It’s not a typical story so I had to reach out and find specialists in these fields to try and help me figure this out because you can’t just Google ‘what does it feel like to be trapped in a room for seven years?’ You have to talk with somebody who has dealt with it. So I spoke with a trauma specialist for many hours over many days talking about the mental things that would happen to somebody after you had been stuck in this room for seven years.

**Q: And you spent some time on your own in you apartment in preparing for the role? What was that like?**

**A: I**t’s an interesting space to imagine yourself being in that place for seven years. If it was that she had been in there for a week, you could imagine that there would have been this constant intensity but after seven years there are some interesting things that happen where the brain sort of learns to shut off awareness to certain things so that it can cope because the body just wants to survive, it wants to find the good in whatever it has in front of it. So yeah, I did spend some time, about a month, at home on my own. I read a bunch about, and I had some friends, that went to these silent retreats, which includes no eye contact because that’s also considered a form of communication. And a lot of them didn’t make it through. They got like three days in. So I wanted to see what would happen and some very interesting things happened to me while I was doing that. A lot of old memories resurfaced; I remembered a lot about my childhood that I forgot about. And one thing in particular that I remembered was, I was born in Sacramento and I moved to Los Angeles with my Mom and my little sister when I was 7 and my sister was like 3 or 4 and we moved into a studio apartment that was a little bit bigger than room and we also had a door to a toilet so there was a little bit of separation there. But the bed came out of the wall – it was a ‘room.’ And I had about two pairs of jeans and a couple of shirts and a pair of shoes, my sister the same and my Mom the same and we had maybe a handful of toys, not much. My Mom couldn’t even afford happy meals at that time. And I remember that time as being one of the greatest times of my life. I was so happy. My Mom has this incredible imagination and she instilled so much life in that space that I never felt that I was lacking and I didn’t realise that we didn’t have anything. And then there was one moment that I also remembered in this silence that really struck me and moved me very deeply where we would all three sleep in that same bed that came out from the wall and I remember waking up in the middle of the night with my Mom with her hands over her mouth trying to be quiet but just sobbing uncontrollably – convulsions, sobbing, shaking – and I didn’t know why and I remembered thinking, ‘it’s like when my toy is taken away from me.’ And I didn’t realise until many years later that my father had asked for a divorce and that’s why we had moved to Los Angeles and she was dealing with it completely alone but I had created this world of imagination with me and my sister. Sometimes you never fully understand why you are attracted to a project until you get deeper into it and that for me - and it’s giving me chills talking about it – was such a huge part of my life and something so palpable to me to bring to this film.

**Q: Did you talk to Lenny about how you would bond with Jacob? Because it was crucial that you had that bond by the time you started filming...**

A: We didn’t. I think all the adults had this understanding that the main core of the movie was that love between mother and son and that was the necessary momentum that was going to keep the story moving and believable. But how we were going to get that between myself and Jacob was not anything we really planned because you can’t. It’s a natural thing that happens when you meet a person, some people you get on with and others you don’t. Jacob was 7 when I met him and it wouldn’t be right to push me on him. It had to always be his choice, his decision and on his terms. So the only thing that we talked about was having a lunch where it would be me and him and his Mom and Lenny and the producers and it would be more of a group setting so it didn’t have to feel like this intimidating one-on-one first meeting and it allowed Jacob and I to interact a little bit but also interact with others so the focus wasn’t on us and that was kind of how it all began. It was putting us in situations like the production designer has got all this trash and all the tools that we would have had in the room and allowed to build the toys in the room. It was things like that where we could play quietly but maybe every now and then we could talk and connect with one another and use our imaginations together. And that became the way we could slowly get to know each other in a way that wasn’t forced or manipulated.

**Q: Did you enjoy making it?**

A: Yes, it was a lot of hard work but it’s the definition of a labour of love.

**Q: And Emma Donoghue was on set, I understand. Was that helpful?**

A: Yes. She is so wise and so loving and she was this supportive presence and while we were shooting she never said to me there was something I should do. Ma never needed to be a certain way for her. She never told me that I had to do it this way or the book said it like that or she envisaged Ma a certain way. I auditioned and I think she saw my audition and agreed with Lenny so by the time I was working on the project she allowed me to discover Ma on my own terms.

**Q: Tell me about Lenny and what he’s like on set?**

A: He’s very funny. So his major presence on set is that he’s making people laugh which on a film like this is vital. It was vital to be able to have the sense of play that was around all the time so there was never a sense of dragging tension while we were shooting. It was always light.

**Q: Was the room on set the same dimensions it was in the story?**

A: It was 11 by 11 in the book and in the movie we did 11 x 15 to accommodate the crew but it still wasn’t a lot of space.

**Q: You filmed in sequence, which is rare, and how did that help the process?**

A: We filmed almost entirely in sequence and that’s very rare. But it was essential because there were just too many factors that we couldn’t fully understand until we went on the journey with it and it allowed so much room for us to feel where the movie needed to go instead of anticipate it. At first we really needed to know room very well in order to figure out how the rest was going to play out and how Jacob and I were going to react to the outside world and the beautiful thing about shooting in order in that way was that it allowed us to be continually surprised in our reactions to what came up and which way the story had to go. So you never had to worry about maybe a scene feeling awkward or wrong, but you know you have shot everything that comes, everything that comes after it and before it. Doing it this way it gave us the space to become intimate and close with the story in a way that we could always have the freedom to move it in a different direction if we needed it to. And I think that’s where it gets the tone that it has. If we start shooting and the direction starts getting heavy then you know that we need to start bringing in another texture and you can see it clearer than when it’s a bunch of pieces that are separate and our later assembled.

**Q: You started acting when you were very young..**

A: Yes, I was 7.

**Q: Where did that come from?**

A: I don’t know. Do you remember what you were doing at 7? (laughs). Me neither! I don’t know. There’s no one in my family that is in the entertainment industry so I have no idea. But it is a gift when you know what you want to do in life.

**Q: You’ve spoken before about how you had hard times as a young actress. Does it make it sweeter when success arrives?**

A: Yes, times were hard the whole time. And it’s still hard now but in a completely different way. I don’t have to audition every day and I don’t have to spend every hour of each day memorising lines and driving across town and trying to express myself to somebody who doesn’t know me. You have to put in so much more work into an audition because you have to be more than 100 per cent; you have to be able to read minds in some ways. It’s a completely different skill set, to be able to audition, that to be on set. So there was an interesting thing that happened when *Short Term 12* came out and people really responded to it, where the amount of time I had to spend on auditions decreased significantly. And then I felt this sense of absolute freedom because instead of trying to audition for three things in a day and putting as much time as I could into that, I was able to put more into maybe one (audition) and I wasn’t walking into a room where someone is going ‘who are you?’ I was walking in and they were going ‘I’ve seen that movie, I know some of what you can do, let’s see if we can work on this together.’ It changes the conversation slightly. However, I will say that 10 years of thousands and thousands of ‘Nos’ I would not trade for anything.

**Q: Why? Because it’s made you the actress you are now?**

A: Of course. All of those ‘Nos’ are actually a ‘Yes’ to something else. You just don’t know what it is yet. It’s very hard to trust that and to go down that path but it is. And I wouldn’t have been able to do *Short Term 12* had I not experienced pain and sorrow and loss in my own life. It’s my rich experience in life that makes me able to play a complex character like Ma in Room. If it had always been easy for me that’s the not the human experience; that’s not how it goes and that’s not what we even need to see as being a real human experience. So however long it took was a perfect amount of time.

**Q: What’s happening with your music?**

A: I’m always writing stuff.

**Q: Do you write in other forms, too? Do you write a journal?**

A: Yes, I do all of it – I write a journal every day, I’m always writing songs. A lot of the time I’m writing little songs to remind myself of things. Like I have certain songs that are my own little reference point if I’m feeling down or if I want to remember a lesson that I already learned because one of the frustrating aspects of my own human experience is you have to re-learn a lesson so many times so end up almost creating like a jingle for certain things and it’s like, ‘oh I know this one already.’ I try and stay creative all of the time because then you never have to be afraid of it. If you are always curious and you are always creating then it doesn’t become scary, it’s just the way your life goes.

**ENDS**