

THE RIDER – TAUSTATIETOA ELOKUVASTA

(LÄHDE: SONY PICTURES CLASSICS)

While making her first film “Songs My Brothers Taught Me” on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in 2013, Chloé Zhao got to know a group of Lakota cowboys. Despite the fair complexion some of them have, they were born and raised on the reservation and are both Oglala Lakota Sioux and bonafide cowboys. They wear feathers in their hats to honor their Lakota ancestry - Indian cowboy - a true American contradiction. Chloé was fascinated with them and ended up casting some of them as supporting actors in the film.

In 2015, while visiting a ranch on Pine Ridge Reservation, Chloé met a twenty-year old Lakota cowboy named Brady Jandreau. Brady is a member of the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe and currently resides on Pine Ridge. He is a saddle bronc rider and a horse trainer, who lives like a man of the land. He hunts on horseback, fishes in the white river, spends most of his days working with wild horses, breaking and training them until they're fit for selling. Like a fish to water, Brady seems to understand every movement of the horse, as if they are locked in some kind of telepathic dance routine. One giving way to the other, until slowly and gently, a trust is formed. He's been doing it since he was eight years old, and it's miraculous to observe. Chloé was immediately drawn to him and she started to gather ideas for a film about Brady.

On April 1st, 2016, Brady entered the PRCE rodeo in Fargo, North Dakota. He was to compete in the 'Saddle Bronc' section and felt confident after a string of successful rides during the season. But that night Brady was thrown off. The bucking horse stomped on his head and near fatally crashed his skull. Brady's brain bled internally. He had a seizure and fell into a three day coma.

Brady now has a metal plate in his head, and suffers from other health issues associated with a severe traumatic brain injury. The doctors advised him to never ride again. If he hits his head again, it could be fatal. But Brady was back breaking wild horses in no time. Chloé visited him and they talked about why he is risking his life.

“Last month, we had to shoot Apollo (a horse Brady was training) because his leg got cut badly by barbed wire.” Brady told Chloé. “If an animal around here gets hurt like I did, they'll get put down. I was only kept alive because I'm human and that's not enough. I'm useless if I can't do what I was born to do.”

Beyond the financial hardships that came with the injury, Brady's response made Chloé think about the psychological impact these injuries have on young men like him - what it must be like to live in the heartland of America, unable to match up to the ideal image of a cowboy, an image these young men have tried to live up to their whole lives. Chloé decided to make a film about Brady's struggles, both physically and emotionally, as he comes to terms with his injury.

As Chloé listened to Brady reflecting on the first few months of his life after the injury, she cast Brady, his family and friends to play the fictionalized versions of themselves. Everyone in the film came from in and around the reservation. This includes Brady's father, Tim, an old school cowboy who taught Brady all he knows. His bright and spirited little sister, Lilly, who has Asperger's Syndrome, and expressed herself completely free of inhibitions. His rodeo friends, all sharing in Brady's hopes, fears and dreams, and one of his best-friends Lane, who is completely paralyzed after an accident that ended his promising bull riding career.

“Working with Brady and Lane in a scene was one of the most humbling and inspiring moments of my life.” Chloé reflects, “We started production on September 3rd, 2016. The five-week filming mainly took place on the reservation and in the surrounding Badlands. Brady, who works as a professional horse trainer, trained

horses for the first half of each day in order to have them ready for a horse sale. So we were able to capture a lot of authentic footage of Brady training and interacting with horses, while fully taking advantage of the magical South Dakota sunset. We worked with a small crew, filming in people's homes, real locations and events. This is my second collaboration with cinematographer Joshua James Richards. We strived to capture moments in an organic yet cinematic way in order to further integrate a complete sense of reality into the narrative. Through Brady's journey, both on and off screen, I hope to explore our culture of masculinity and to offer a more nuanced version of the classic American cowboy. I also want to offer an authentic portrait of the rough, honest and beautiful American heartland that I deeply love and respect."