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[The Boys Are Back](#), an indie film which opens today in New York and L.A., features a Clive Owen we haven't seen lately: he plays a sensitive type, a sportswriter whose wife dies, leaving him to raise their young son alone. The dynamic gets even more complicated when his teenaged son from a previous marriage joins their estrogen-free brood. We talked to Scott Hicks, the film's director (who first struck gold with [Shine](#) in 1996) about Owen, the best way to cast a 6-year-old and the movie's cool soundtrack. These are the highlights of what we learned.

**1. Clive's sexy, brutish role in *Closer* convinced Hicks he was the right choice to play a loving father.** Owen played one of the leads in 2004's [Closer](#), a film about intimacy by way of lying and cheating. Owen's also known for action roles, like his turn as a corporate spy in [Duplicity](#). ]But talent transcends genre, and after seeing *Closer*, Hicks was struck by Owen's tough exterior persona, his great stillness and his intensity, all of which he still manages to wear lightly. "You see life turning on in his eyes," Hicks told us. We're guessing he's a fan.

**2. For the role of Artie, the younger son, Hicks wanted a boy who couldn't act.** And that's what he got. [Nicholas McAnulty](#) had never been in front of a camera before filming his first role in *The Boys Are Back*. He was 6 at the time, which Hicks is also glad about, because he didn't want to have an ancient-by-comparison 8-year-old chewing the scenery all over the place in imitation of a real 6-year-old. After seeing hundreds of kids all over Australia, Hicks settled on McAnulty because he had that extra something: a sense of himself and the fact that was a real kid who could believe rather than act. McAnulty is 7 these days, so we hope the profession hasn't hardened him.

**3. The casting was kismet.** Though *The Boys Are Back* is based on a [memoir by Simon Carr](#), most of the actors didn't meet their real-life counterparts until well into filming. But according to Hicks, there were spooky parallels anyway. Carr's sons, now adults in their twenties, came to set one day to meet the actors playing them in the movie. Despite their age differences, both older boys stood off to the side politely, while the younger, wilder boys acted like their typical whirling dervish selves. Even casting the house for the movie was beshert. People asked Hicks if he based the movie house on the real one the Carrs lived in, but the French doors and layout he settled on were purely coincidental.

**4. He didn't want a score that would tell the audience when to feel and how to feel it.** Hicks enlisted [Hal Lindes](#), who composed the music for *Shine*, to compose *The Boys Are Back*'s music. He also threw in a little Sigur Ros.

**5. This movie is a homecoming for him.** The story was originally set in Queensland, which Hicks told us is Australia's version of Florida. At the last minute, he was able to move the set to South Australia, where he lives, and incidentally, where he shot *Shine*. As a result, he was able to film the movie in a landscape he loves and understands. We asked him if that informed the scene where Clive Owen lets Artie drive on the beach, but apparently that came straight out of the memoir, and Carr has said that even when he's on his deathbed, it's a moment he look back on with joy. How's that for personal?