



Presents

THE VISITOR

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THE VISITOR

SYNOPSIS

In a world of six billion people, it only takes one to change your life. In actor and filmmaker Tom McCarthy's follow-up to his award winning directorial debut *The Station Agent*, Richard Jenkins ("Six Feet Under") stars as a disillusioned Connecticut economics professor whose life is transformed by a chance encounter in New York City.

A poignant and often funny film about rediscovering joy in the most unexpected places, ***The Visitor*** boasts an international cast including Jenkins, Haaz Sleiman ("24"), Obie Award winner Danai Gurira and Hiam Abbass (*Munich*). McCarthy wrote and directed the film. Michael London (*Sideways*) and Mary Jane Skalski (*Mysterious Skin*) are the film's producers. Oliver Bokelberg (*Dark Matter*) is Director of Photography. Oscar[®] winner Jan A. P. Kaczmarek (*Finding Neverland*) composed the music. John Paino (*The Brothers Solomon*) is Production Designer. Costumes are by Melissa Toth (*Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*). The film is edited by Tom McArdle (*The Architect*).

Sixty-two-year-old Walter Vale (Jenkins) is sleepwalking through his life. Having lost his passion for teaching and writing, he fills the void by unsuccessfully trying to learn to play classical piano. When his college sends him to Manhattan to attend a conference, Walter is surprised to find a young couple has taken up residence in his apartment. Victims of a real estate scam, Tarek (Haaz Sleiman), a Syrian man, and Zainab (Danai Gurira), his Senegalese girlfriend, have nowhere else to go. In the first of a series of tests of the heart, Walter reluctantly allows the couple to stay with him.

Touched by his kindness, Tarek, a talented musician, insists on teaching the aging academic to play the African drum. The instrument's exuberant rhythms revitalize Walter's faltering spirit and open his eyes to a vibrant world of local jazz clubs and Central Park drum circles. As the friendship between the two men deepens, the differences in culture, age and temperament fall away.

After being stopped by police in the subway, Tarek is arrested as an undocumented citizen and held for deportation. As his situation turns desperate, Walter finds himself compelled to help

his new friend with a passion he thought he had long ago lost. When Tarek's beautiful mother Mouna (Hiam Abbass) arrives unexpectedly in search of her son, the professor's personal commitment develops into an unlikely romance.

It's through these newfound connections with three virtual strangers that Walter is awakened to a new world and a new life.

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

“It’s always difficult to point to the exact inspiration for a film,” says Tom McCarthy, director and writer of *The Visitor*. “I collect a lot of different ideas and keep them in one big file, and then I pull out the ones that are most resonant for me.”

McCarthy wowed Hollywood with his first project, *The Station Agent*, a low budget independent movie that made waves well beyond the indie film world. In fact, the U.S. State Department invited McCarthy to take it to the Middle East as part of a cultural outreach program. It was during that trip that McCarthy first started thinking about the deep chasm separating Americans from the inhabitants of much of the rest of the world.

“I was in Oman and in Lebanon, two amazing countries,” he says. “I was struck by how little I knew about the region, about the people, about the culture. Our country is so involved politically and militarily there, but with all the news and the headlines and the drama, we can forget that there are human beings on both sides of this. How can I eliminate that a little bit? That always is my call to arms.”

McCarthy was struck by the artists he met there and the passion they brought to their work. “I thought, ‘I want to capture this.’ That’s where I got the idea for the character of Tarek.”

At the same time, the filmmaker had been separately developing the character of an aging college professor who had lost his passion for his vocation. “Somewhere along the way, the two came together,” says McCarthy.

The Station Agent producer Mary Jane Skalski was one of the first to read the developing screenplay. “I had an idea of what he was writing and I’d read pages here and there,” she remembers. “But when I got the first full draft, I didn’t really know what to expect.”

Skalski was struck by the film’s humanity and its sense of hope. “It’s a story about four people and how their lives come together and are changed because of it. It’s about just going a little bit beyond yourself and how your life can change when you do that. Yes, it’s another opportunity to entertain people, but at the same time to encourage people to just be a little bit more.”

Little decisions, says McCarthy, sometimes make the biggest differences in life. “Many of the choices that send us in a completely different direction in life are arbitrary. I think that’s the magic of life, isn’t it? It makes us realize, as much as we like to imagine we have control over our fate and destiny, we really don’t.

“That’s something that happens in this movie,” adds the director. “Walter has no intention of going to New York. He does everything he can to get out of it. He makes a snap decision to help

two kids out of a jam, and in doing so he discovers a new musical life. Who could predict these things?”

While McCarthy and Skalski are adamant *The Visitor* is primarily about the characters, ultimately it also deals with issues surrounding the hot-button topic of immigration. After returning from the Middle East to his home base in New York, McCarthy began to spend time in the city’s vibrant Arab community. During his research, he heard the story of a young man who had been confined to a government detention center on immigration charges. McCarthy eventually began visiting detainees and learned that many of them didn’t have legal representation.

“We’re not standing on a soap box and saying this is right or this is wrong, but rather, let’s approach this situation with empathy and with understanding,” says the director. “We’re dealing with people, not just a cause.”

In addition to Mary Jane Skalski, McCarthy brought back a number of his collaborators from *The Station Agent* to work on *The Visitor*. “My cinematographer, Oliver Bokelberg, read a very early draft of this. Tom McArdle, my editor, and John Paino, my production designer, did as well. It’s a joy to be able to include these guys very early on because we share a common vision of the type of movies we want to make. We’ve even started to develop a shorthand for working with each other.

“McArdle and I sat down a number of times before we shot the movie to talk through all the things we would usually talk through after we shot the movie,” he continues. “It’s a wonderful opportunity to do that with an editor you trust. What happens by the time you actually begin shooting or the design stage or the editing stage, is that you have a history with these people and the story has a history among you, which is crucial. They keep me on track and remind me of the vision we had when we started.”

McCarthy and Skalski were working with two new partners as well, the production companies Participant and Groundswell. McCarthy had previous experience working with both companies as an actor—in *Syriana* and *Good Night, and Good Luck* for Participant and in *The Guru* for Groundswell.

“Groundswell and Participant were two of the first companies we turned to when it was time to finance this film because of their commitment to telling original stories and their track records in making it happen,” says McCarthy. “They had a lot of input and a lot of ideas along the way, but they were also very committed to my vision of the film. We were all very clear about the type of movie we wanted to make.”

Authenticity was one of the most important elements for McCarthy throughout the making of this movie, says Skalski. “The movie hinges on people who are taking a leap of faith and therefore

the audience has to take that leap of faith, too. And how could they do that if a moment ever didn't feel true?"

McCarthy says that he didn't set out to make a political statement, but rather to reveal the human face on something that was quickly becoming a major issue. "The characters are embroiled in a situation that is very much in the national consciousness right now: immigration and detention. It may not change the world, but at the very least, it's reminding us of the human element and consequences to a very divisive issue. I guess, in some small way, I'm holding up the mirror up and saying, 'This is what's going on. Do we like it? Do we not? Is there room for debate?'"

Rather than providing answers, McCarthy sees the filmmakers' job as raising the questions—but never at the expense of telling a compelling story. "In the end, this is a love story, and a story of friendship. The story keeps evolving in a very simple way. There are funny moments, tragic moments, and even mundane moments. I think it's reflective of how life unfolds."

CASTING THE VISITOR

McCarthy was determined to make an unconventional casting choice for the leading role by selecting Richard Jenkins, a character actor best known for his supporting roles, to play Walter. “He gave a heartbreaking performance in *North Country*,” the director says of Jenkins. “Casting him was an essential element to setting the tone of the film. Walter is a character that I’ve had in mind for some time: an aging professor who is rudderless, void of passion or action. And Richard Jenkins is someone I really wanted to work with. He has such a wonderful Everyman quality about him.”

Jenkins, whose face is far more familiar than his name, has worked in dozens of movies and television shows with a who’s who of film directors from Woody Allen and Mike Nichols to the Coen brothers and the Farrelly brothers. He’s probably best known to fans of HBO’s acclaimed series “*Six Feet Under*” for his role as the sage and sardonic ghost of Nathaniel, the Fisher family patriarch.

“He’s an actor’s actor,” says McCarthy. “He’s been in so many movies and yet he always manages to create thoroughly original characters, disappearing into his roles.”

That quality made Jenkins a perfect fit for the role of Walter, says the director. “Let’s be honest, he’s not a classic leading man in many people’s eyes, but that is exactly what makes his performance so believable and so compelling.”

For his part, Jenkins jumped at the chance to pay such a rich and rewarding role. “I said this to Tom and it’s the truth: I have waited my entire professional career to be a part of something like this. When I first read the script, I saw a man alone, which is something that always has interested me. Somebody who’s thrown into a new situation and is emotionally not ready to handle it. I did see a lot of me in it. I’m a little timid about taking new steps, trying new things, so I found that aspect fascinating. And I found where he started compared to where he ended just amazing.”

Skalski says the decision to cast Jenkins came very early in the production process. “We knew that the other people in the cast were not going to be super recognizable faces,” says the producer. “And so, we wanted Walter to be someone that audiences were comfortable with. Richard Jenkins is such a great actor. He’s funny and he’s serious and he’s heartbreaking.”

For the character of Mouna, the Syrian widow whom Walter falls in love with, McCarthy also knew the actor he wanted from the get go. “I saw Hiam Abbass in a movie called *Satin Rouge* when I was in Beirut and I fell in love with her as an actress. I kept seeing her in all these movies: *Syrian Bride*, *Paradise Now*, and then finally *Munich*. I couldn’t get her out of my mind. “

He discovered that Abbass was living in Paris. While there working on the script, McCarthy set up a meeting with her. “I said I wanted to include her in this project. After meeting her and

seeing her work with the character, the role of Mouna became very clear to me. It's a much easier way to write, sort of a combination of having an image of a character and a sense of the actor."

Jenkins was impressed by his co-star's intellectual curiosity and instinct for dialogue, even in a language that was not her native tongue. "Hiam questions everything. This is the first part she'd ever played in English and there would be an American English phrase and she would ask Tom, 'Why am I saying this? I would never say this!' It was that kind of give and take for the entire time. It was beautiful."

To find the right actor to play Tarek, the young musician who teaches Walter to play the drum, the filmmakers conducted a large-scale search that stretched from Paris to London to New York City. Their quest eventually led them to Haaz Sleiman, whose credits include the TV series "24," "Navy NCIS" and "Veronica Mars" as well as in the films *American East* and *American Dreamz*.

"Authenticity is always very important to me," says McCarthy. "With Tarek's character, I was trying to come up with a young man who had come here with his mother after the death of his father and was searching for safe haven. Haaz is Lebanese, not Syrian, but he moved to Dearborn, Michigan, which is where, in the story, he and his mother go, and then to New York to become an actor. His journey was incredibly similar to that of the character. And I knew it could only feed his performance."

Sleiman was intrigued by the interplay between characters from entirely different worlds. "It's so unlikely for these people to actually be together," he observes. "Due to the circumstances, they are forced to have this connection and get to know one another. It's very true to the way people mix in the world that we live in."

In order to learn firsthand what his character is going through, Sleiman spent time visiting with detainees. "It was profound and, for the work that I was doing for Tarek, it was necessary," he says. "A lot of them have been there for years. I mean, like three, four, five, 10 years. It breaks your heart."

For the role of Zainab, a struggling Senegalese jewelry maker and Tarek's girlfriend, the filmmakers cast Danai Gurira, who was born in the U.S. but raised in Zimbabwe. "Danai was the first person I saw come in and read for the role," says Mary Jane Skalski. "So the very first time I heard the words read by an actor it was Danai reading some of her scenes on auditions."

Although *The Visitor* is Gurira's film debut, McCarthy says the quality of the young actress' performance was on par with the more experienced players in the cast. "Danai is a rock," says the director. "She is just so strong. She didn't come to us with a tremendous body of work, so, just to watch her dailies and to watch the performance come together was really exciting."

Gurira says her background gives her special insight into her character. “My family is from a country that is not very openly welcomed into other parts of the world, so I've seen that struggle. I learned a lot about Senegalese women, and they are very proud women, very regal. They have a connection to who they are and what they are able to produce.”

She and Sleiman had an instant connection, says Gurira, even though they did not meet until casting was completed. “The Zainab-Tarek connection was just immediately felt,” she says. “There was always a comfort and ease around that which I think was formed during the rehearsal process.”

In part to foster just that kind of familiarity, McCarthy arranged for the actors to rehearse with him for nearly a month before shooting began. “I literally like to sit down with the actors and read through the script a bunch of times,” he says. “It gives me a chance to revise since I'm the writer, too. It becomes a way of deepening the work and of discovering new things and the actors can get under the skin of their characters and develop the relationships a little more deeply.”

Initially skeptical of the plan, actor Richard Jenkins says the time spent with McCarthy and his co-stars before shooting proved invaluable to the portrayal of his character. “I don't like film rehearsals usually but after about a week of rehearsal, I knew that Tom was interested in really following this guy's journey, not putting some kind of false sense of pace on the movie.”

STREET MUSIC IN A GLOBAL VILLAGE

The Visitor was shot on the biggest back lot in the world: New York City. Despite all the city's challenges and contradictions, both Tom McCarthy and Mary Jane Skalski agreed that it was the only place to shoot.

"New York's a character in the film and it's irreplaceable," says Skalski. "While it's a great place to shoot, it's also a hard place to shoot. When we were shooting the movie it was really busy here in town. It was difficult being a smaller film trying to move around among the bigger films."

"Shooting in New York is like living in New York," says McCarthy. "You have days where you feel like the luckiest man in the world, and you have days where you want to leave the city screaming. It can pick you up and beat you up simultaneously. It's why the insane people who move here and come to live here, not only from our country but from all over the world, choose this place. They know what they're getting into and there's a part of you that has to thrive on that."

It's that energy and vibrancy that works its magic on *The Visitor's* lead character, adds McCarthy. "I think if you're open to it and open to some sort of change in your life, even someone like Walter Vale can be nudged out of his shell and into a new place."

McCarthy believes New York is the perfect setting for a film about immigration. "This is where people landed for decades," he says. "Ellis Island was the place. I think it is, at the very least, ironic when we step back and say, wow, it used to be this way of inviting people into our country. How are we treating them now? How are we treating these huddled masses that arrive on our shore? Are these detention centers the new Ellis Island Isn't it sad that most of these immigrants, undocumented or not, don't have a chance to see the Statue of Liberty in the harbor?"

Just walking around the streets of New York provided plenty of inspiration for the writer and director. "There are guys in the subway, guys in the parks, guys on the streets, all making music," he marvels. "We kept stumbling on it in the research and writing stage, and even the shooting stage. We found a guy who plays the Erhu, an ancient Chinese two-stringed fiddle, in an Upper West Side subway and brought him down for a night to play for us. There's a haunting quality that you could never recreate any other way.

"We were drawing on sounds like kids playing buckets in the street or the guys who play drums in the park," he continues. "Tarek plays in a band, and we shot that live with some wonderful musicians. When I was doing my research, I read a book called The Prophet of Zongo Street, written by Mohammed Naseehu Ali. The back cover said that Mohammed lives in Brooklyn with his wife and two kids, and plays the djembe in a jazz band."

Knowing that the character of Tarek was going to play the djembe, McCarthy contacted Ali and arranged to take lessons from him. "Again, it's the kind of thing that would only happen in New

York: Within two days of reading this book, I was in a café talking to him and asking about taking djembe lessons. I thought, 'What better way than to experience it?' He became a great resource and a great friend in the process."

Sleiman spent eight weeks learning to play djembe from Ali. "I did certainly go through a boot camp, that's for sure. That was me drumming in the movie. I was drumming every day for like three hours, four hours. I practiced till my hands fell off.

"I'm a singer so I have a musical ear, which helped, I think. And then having rhythm, you just kind of, like, have the rhythm. But what was really challenging was playing with the band. The saxophone player and the bass player are both professional musicians."

Jenkins chose not to study drumming before the film. "It's really something his character stumbled into," says the director. "He wasn't looking for that. He wasn't looking to expand in any sense. He was very detached, but immediately found a connection with this young stranger through music. I think in many senses Tarek becomes the heart of the story. His ambition in life is quite pure: to live a good life and to play his music. It's something you would hope this country would afford a decent individual no matter where they're from or how they arrived, but I think the times and circumstances of this country have altered that reality."

Sleiman says that the music becomes the language in which Tarek and Walter communicate. "More than words, I think. If it hadn't been for the music, I don't think their friendship would have really been so profound."

The evolution of Walter ultimately takes place through music, according to McCarthy. "The movie deals with how music transcends boundaries and transcends cultural divides. It's something that unites us all. There's something very elemental and powerful about the release that one can find in music. There's a reason that music can make us so emotional: because it's pure. I think that's something Walter discovers in the course of the film."

ABOUT THE CAST

RICHARD JENKINS (Walter Vale) is one of the most in-demand character actors in Hollywood. His memorable performance alongside Ben Stiller in *Flirting with Disaster* (1996) netted him an Independent Spirit Award nomination for Best Supporting Male. He recently wrapped production on *The Broken*, a horror film in which he stars opposite Lena Headley, and *Burn After Reading*, a comedic drama starring George Clooney and directed by the Coen Brothers. He co-stars in Adam McKay's *Step Brothers*, a comedic re-teaming of Will Ferrell and John C. Reilly (*Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby*) scheduled for 2008 release.

Prior to his film work, the actor developed a long and distinguished regional theater career, most notably a 15-year stint at Rhode Island's Trinity Repertory Theater, where he served as artistic director for four years. After a small role in the Lawrence Kasdan film *Silverado* (1985), Jenkins found himself working regularly. Supporting parts in such films as Ken Harrison's *On Valentine's Day* (1986), *Hannah And Her Sisters* (1986), *The Witches of Eastwick* (1987), and *Sea Of Love* (1989) followed. Jenkins spent the early '90s specializing in made-for-TV movies, including HBO's Emmy® Award winning adaptation of Randy Shilts' bestseller about the discovery of the AIDS virus, "And the Band Played On" (1993).

Later in the decade, Jenkins gained wider appreciation, especially as he indulged his talent for comedy. His appearance as an uptight gay FBI agent who is accidentally drugged was one of the highlights of David O. Russell's *Flirting with Disaster* (1996). Working again with Ben Stiller, Jenkins appeared as a psychiatrist in *There's Something about Mary* (1998), which launched a relationship with directors Peter and Bobby Farrelly. Jenkins also appeared in the Farrelly-produced *Outside Providence* (1999) and *Say It Ain't So* (2001), as well as in the Farrelly-directed *Me, Myself And Irene* (2000). The actor then shifted over to another pair of movie-making brothers to portray the father of Scarlet Johansson's character in Joel and Ethan Coen's noir *The Man Who Wasn't There* (2001). That same year, Jenkins appeared in the first season of HBO's "Six Feet Under" as Nathaniel Fisher Sr., the wry funeral home director whom his family members recall as an impenetrable mystery, frugal with his praise and emotions. Most recently, Jenkins has appeared in *Intolerable Cruelty* (2003), *Cheaper By The Dozen* (2003), *I Heart Huckabees* (2004), *Shall We Dance* (2004), *North Country* (2005), *Fun With Dick And Jane* (2005) and *Rumor Has It* (2005).

HAAZ SLEIMAN (Tarek) appeared in a three-episode arc on Fox's Emmy winning series "24" as a detained terrorism suspect. Sleiman has also guest starred on such television shows as "Navy NCIS" and "Veronica Mars."

In 2006, Sleiman completed the indie film *AmericanEast*, directed by Hesham Issawi and written by Sayed Badreya and Issawi. Sleiman co-stars in this film about a family man (Badreya)

who opens a Middle Eastern restaurant with his Jewish best friend (played by “Monk” star and three-time Emmy winner Tony Shalhoub).

Sleiman also co-stars in the Universal feature *American Dreamz*, directed by Paul Weitz (*American Pie*, *In Good Company*) with Hugh Grant, Dennis Quaid, Marcia Gay Harden and Willem Dafoe. Other film credits include *Offside: The Price of Dreams*, directed by Erik Laibe, where he played a hit man; *The Ski Trip*, helmed by Maurice Jamal, and *What Goes Around*, directed by Korna Stonz, where he played an ethnically mixed drug dealer from Brooklyn.

The actor also appeared on the television show “ER,” played an American soldier in Iraq. He was cast in a recurring role for the CBS pilot “Company Town,” where he played an influential Arab billionaire pursued by government agents. Another television credit was a supporting role as the slave of the Persian king in the Discovery Channel special “Battle Ground: Alexander,” about the life of Alexander the Great.

Sleiman played an Iranian soldier in the off Broadway play “Joys of Lipstick” in New York City. The play revolves around an Iranian family that moves to the U.S. and battles to hold onto their own culture.

He currently resides in Los Angeles.

DANAI GURIRA (Zainab) was born in the United States and raised in Zimbabwe. She received her M.F.A. in acting from New York University, where she appeared as Juliet in “Romeo and Juliet” and Ruby in “King Hedley II.” She is a recipient of a 2006 OBIE Award and a 2006 John Gassner Outer Critics Award and has been honored by the Theatre Hall of Fame. In 2007, Gurira won the Helen Hayes Award for Best Actress in a Play for “In the Continuum,” which she co-wrote. Her television credits include “Law and Order: Criminal Intent.” She also appeared in film *Ghost Town*.

HIAM ABBASS (Mouna) was born in Nazareth. She studied photography in Haïfa and theatre in Jerusalem where she worked mainly on stage with different theatre troupes until she left her country in 1988. After a stay in London she settled in Paris, where her acting career in cinema began. She worked early on in French and Middle Eastern movies.

Her feature credits include, *Azur Et Asmar*, *Free Zone* (co-starring with Natalie Portman), *Désengagement* (with Juliette Binoche), *Aime Ton Père* (with Gérard Depardieu), *Haïfa* (with Mohammed Bakri), *Dialogue Avec Mon Jardinier* (with Daniel Auteuil), *Vivre Au Paradis*, *L'Ange Du Goudron* by the Quebequois Denis Chouinard, *Satin Rouge*, *The Syrian Bride* by Eran Riklis, for which she was nominated for a European Film Award, *Munich*, *The Nativity Story*, and the Golden Globe winner and Oscar nominee *Paradise Now*. Soon, she'll be seen in Eran Riklis' *Lemon Tree*, *La Fabrique Des Sentiments* (with Elsa Zylberstein), *Un Roman Policier* (with Olivier

Marshal), and *Kandisha* (with David Carradine and Saïd Tagmaoui). She just finished shooting Rie Rasmussen's movie *Romance In The Dark*.

She worked as an acting coach on *Munich*, *Babel* by Alejandro Gonzales Innaritu, *The Nativity Story*, *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* by Julian Schnabel, often helping children and other first-time actors to access their emotions for the camera.

Abbass has also written and directed two short films, *Le Pain* (2000) and *La Danse Eternelle* (2003).

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

TOM MCCARTHY (Writer and Director) wrote and directed the critically acclaimed film *The Station Agent*, released in 2003 by Miramax Films. *The Station Agent* premiered at the Sundance Film Festival, where it was awarded the Audience Award and the Waldo Salt Screenwriting Award. The film was also awarded the BAFTA for Best Original Screenplay and two Independent Spirit Awards, including the John Cassavetes Award (given to the best feature made for \$500,000 or less). The National Board of Review named it third on their list of the Ten Best Films of the Year. It was nominated for three SAG Awards, including Best Ensemble, and was also nominated by the WGA for Best Original Screenplay. The film won awards at many film festivals, including San Sebastian, Stockholm, Mexico City and Aspen.

As an actor, some of McCarthy's feature credits include *Flags of our Fathers*, *Syriana*, *Good Night and Good Luck*, *Year of the Dog* and *Meet the Parents*. He will also be featured in the final season of HBO's critically acclaimed series "The Wire." He recently completed filming Peter Jackson's *The Lovely Bones* and is currently working on *Mammoth*, a drama starring Gael Garcia Bernal and Michelle Williams, with Lukas Moodysson directing.

MARY JANE SKALSKI (Producer) is a producer based in New York City whose films have consistently been critically acclaimed and commercially successful. She has also been highlighted as one of *Variety's* "Producers to Watch."

Skalski produced Gregg Araki's *Mysterious Skin*, which premiered at the 2004 Venice Film Festival and screened at the Toronto, Sundance and London film festivals. It was cited on over 70 Ten Best lists in the U.S. (including the *New York Times* and the *L.A. Times*) and received a Gotham Award nomination for Joseph Gordon-Levitt's breakout performance and a Spirit Award nomination for Best Director. The film was adapted from the novel by Scott Heim and stars Gordon-Levitt, Brady Corbet, Michelle Trachtenberg and Elisabeth Shue.

Skalski's previous collaboration with director Tom McCarthy is *The Station Agent*. The film premiered in the Dramatic Competition at the 2003 Sundance Film Festival and received the Audience Award, the Waldo Salt Screenwriting Award and a special acting award for Patricia Clarkson. Its European premiere was at the San Sebastian Film Festival, where it was awarded the Special Jury Prize. The film was cited on numerous Ten Best lists, including the National Board of Review's. It received three Screen Actors Guild nominations, three Independent Spirit Awards and won a BAFTA (Best Screenplay).

Skalski also produced *The Hawk is Dying*, directed by Julian Goldberger and starring Paul Giamatti, Michelle Williams and Michael Pitt. The film premiered at the Sundance Film Festival and was immediately invited to screen at the Cannes Film Festival later that year. For Steven

Shainberg's *Fur: An Imaginary Portrait of Diane Arbus*, Skalski served as a co-producer. The film starred Nicole Kidman and Robert Downey Jr. and opened the inaugural Rome Film Festival in 2006. Skalski also produced Jem Cohen's *Chain*, which premiered at the Berlin Film Festival (Forum Section) in 2004. The film is a hybrid documentary-narrative starring Mira Bilotte and Miho Nikaido. Cohen was awarded the IFP "Someone to Watch" Spirit Award.

Skalski produced *The Jimmy Show*, directed by Frank Whaley, which premiered at the Toronto Film Festival and also screened at the Sundance Film Festival. The film stars Whaley, Ethan Hawke and Carla Gugino. She also received a producer credit for Bart Freundlich's *The Myth of Fingerprints*, starring Noah Wyle, Roy Scheider and Julianne Moore, which premiered at the Sundance Film Festival and won the audience award at the Deauville Film Festival. Roy Scheider's performance was also nominated for an IFP Spirit Award.

Wonderland, a Skalski-produced non-fiction film directed by John O'Hagan and co-produced by Skalski, received the Cable Ace Award for Best Historical Documentary and was nominated for the Directors Guild Award for Best Documentary Director. O'Hagan was also nominated for the Open Palm Award.

Skalski was an executive producer of *Jim Fall's Trick*. The film premiered at the Sundance Film Festival and screened at the Berlin Film Festival, where it was awarded the Reader's Jury Prize. She was also an executive producer of David Schisgall's *The Lifestyle*.

As an associate producer, Skalski was involved with Edward Burns' *The Brothers McMullen*, which premiered at the Sundance Film Festival and was awarded the Grand Jury Prize. The film also received an IFP Spirit Award for Best First Feature and a special jury prize at the Deauville Film Festival.

In addition to feature films, Skalski has also produced the shorts *Gina, an Actress Age 29* (directed by Paul Harrill), which was awarded the Grand Jury Prize in Short Film at the 2001 Sundance Film Festival, and Noah Baumbach's *Conrad & Butler Take a Vacation*, which is currently available as part of the Criterion Collection. For television, she produced "Dear Doughboy," a pilot short for the WB created by Hopwood Depree and directed by Penelope Spheeris.

She is a consultant for Fortissimo Film Sales and is an assistant adjunct faculty member in Columbia University's Graduate Film Department. From 1993 to 1999, Skalski was part of the New York-based production company Good Machine, where she acted in various capacities including VP of Creative Affairs.

In 2004, Skalski was awarded the IFP Producer Award.

MICHAEL LONDON (Producer) is an Academy Award® nominated producer as well as the founder and CEO of Groundswell Productions, a Beverly Hills-based independent financing and

production company that he launched in February 2006. London has produced a variety of acclaimed films, including *King of California* (starring Michael Douglas), *The Illusionist*, *The Family Stone*, *Sideways* (which garnered him an Oscar nomination as producer when the film was nominated for Best Picture), *House of Sand and Fog*, *Thirteen*, *The Guru* and *40 Days and 40 Nights*. London was a senior production executive at Twentieth Century Fox for ten years before leaving to become an independent producer.

OMAR AMANAT (Executive Producer) is a philanthropist and entrepreneur. Named one of Wall Street's "Top Ten Most Influential Technologists," Amanat was a pioneer in the electronic brokerage industry. He began his entrepreneurial career at Datek Online, one of the trailblazers in online brokerage services, which was sold to Ameritrade for \$1.3 billion. He left Datek to co-found CyberBlock and co-designed the trading platform CyberTrader, which was acquired by Charles Schwab in 2000 for \$488 million.

Most recently, he was the founder, CEO and majority shareholder of Tradescape Corporation, which was one of the largest electronic brokerage firms in the United States (by trading volume) in 2002 when he sold it to E*Trade for \$280 million, becoming E*Trade's largest shareholder.

Amanat is a recipient of the prestigious Albert P. Einstein Technology award for outstanding corporate citizenship and sits on numerous boards, including the Board of Trustees for the Harlem Youth Development Foundation, Human Rights Watch, and The Rubin Museum of Art. He is co-founder of the Alliance of Civilizations Media Fund, a term member of the Council on Foreign Relations, a Trustee of the Democratic National Committee and was recently the Vice Chairman of the Acumen Fund, named one of the "Five Charities Changing the Face of Global Philanthropy" by Barron's.

Amanat recently began to explore using the power of film to achieve social change. In 2005, he became Co-Founder and the Founding Chairman of Groundswell Productions, a \$200 million feature film production company. He is also a Founding Board Member of Summit Entertainment, a domestic and international film studio that recently raised \$1 billion from Merrill Lynch. In the last two years, Amanat has been an executive producer of several motion pictures including *Darfur Now*, *The Mysteries of Pittsburgh* and the upcoming Miramax release *Smart People*. He is also the co-founder of a \$1.3 billion hedge fund based in New York and Greenwich, CT.

JEFF SKOLL (Executive Producer) founded Participant Productions in January 2004 and serves as its Chairman. Skoll's vision for Participant is to create an independent global media company focused on long-term benefits to society. Citing classic films such as *To Kill a*

Mockingbird, *Gandhi* and *Erin Brockovich* as examples, Skoll most recently served as executive producer on Participant's films *Good Night, and Good Luck*, *North Country*, *Syriana*, *American Gun*, *An Inconvenient Truth*, *The World According to Sesame Street*, *Fast Food Nation*, *Angels in the Dust*, *Jimmy Carter Man from Plains*, *Darfur Now*, *The Kite Runner*, *Charlie Wilson's War* and the upcoming *Chicago 10* and *Standard Operating Procedure*.

Skoll has been a leader in technology and philanthropy for many years. In 1996, Skoll joined eBay as its first President and first full-time employee, developing the company's business plan. After helping to bring CEO Meg Whitman to the company in 1998, Skoll became the VP of Strategic Planning and Analysis at eBay and led the company's acquisition, community development and new business efforts through 2001. In the months before eBay went public in 1998, Skoll led the company's effort to give back to the community, creating the eBay Foundation through an allocation of pre-IPO shares. It was an innovation that inspired a wave of similar commitments nationwide.

But Skoll didn't stop there. In 1999, he launched his own philanthropic organization, the [Skoll Foundation](#), for which he serves as founder and chairman. He created the foundation in alignment with his core belief that it is in everyone's interest to shift the overwhelming imbalance between the "haves" and "have-nots." The foundation takes up this challenge by focusing on social entrepreneurs, people who couple innovative ideas with extraordinary determination to tackle the world's toughest problems and make things better for us all. In five short years, Skoll and the foundation have emerged as social sector leaders. In 2002 through 2005, Skoll was recognized as one of today's most innovative philanthropists by *Business Week* and he is frequently cited for his leadership in advancing the work and field of social entrepreneurship.

His recent honors and awards include *Time Magazine's* 100 People of the Year (2006), *Wired Magazine's* Rave Award (2006), the National Leadership Award for Commonwealth Club Silicon Valley (2004), the Outstanding Philanthropist Award from the International Association of Fundraising Professionals (2003) and the Outstanding Philanthropist Award from the Silicon Valley chapter of the Association of Fundraising Professionals (2002). In addition, in 2003 Skoll was awarded an honorary Doctor of Laws degree from the University of Toronto.

In April 2005, Skoll launched The Gandhi Project, in partnership with Silicon Valley entrepreneur Kamran Elahian. Working with Palestinian voice actors and artists, an award-winning director dubbed *Gandhi*, the epic 1982 film starring Ben Kingsley, into Arabic. It is being screened throughout Palestine in order to advance civil society goals of peaceful resistance, self-reliance, economic development and local empowerment. Plans are underway to expand screenings throughout the Arab world.

Skoll holds a Bachelors degree in Electrical Engineering from the University of Toronto and an M.B.A. from the Stanford Graduate School of Business.

RICKY STRAUSS (Executive Producer) is a long-time motion picture production and marketing executive who joined Participant Productions in March 2005 as its President. In this post, he presides over all of Participant's feature film production, acquisition and marketing efforts, as well as its newly formed television division.

In his first year at the company, Participant's debut slate of releases—*Good Night, and Good Luck*, *Murderball*, *North Country* and *Syriana*—received a total of 11 Academy Award nominations and an Oscar for George Clooney.

In 2006, Participant's groundbreaking documentary *An Inconvenient Truth* won two Academy Awards and achieved worldwide box-office success. It has since gone on to become one of the highest-grossing documentaries of all time. Later that year, Participant released *Fast Food Nation*, followed in 2007 by *Angels in the Dust*, *Jimmy Carter Man from Plains*, *Darfur Now*, *The Kite Runner* and *Charlie Wilson's War*.

Participant currently has Brett Morgen's *Chicago 10* and Errol Morris' *Standard Operating Procedure* scheduled for 2008.

Prior to joining Participant, Strauss ran his own film and television production company, Ricochet Entertainment. There, he executive produced *The Sweetest Thing*, starring Cameron Diaz, among other projects. In addition to producing for Ricochet, he served as a marketing consultant for Revolution Studios and Sony Pictures Entertainment, creating ad campaigns for *Maid in Manhattan* and *Mona Lisa Smile*.

Strauss previously served as Senior Vice President of Production at Sony, where he developed and supervised such film projects as *Go*, directed by Doug Liman. From 1988 to 1997, he served as an advertising executive at Columbia Pictures, creating campaigns for such films as *Sleepless in Seattle*, *Jumanji* and *My Best Friend's Wedding*.

A longtime supporter of social issues and community service, Strauss served on the Board of Directors for Project Angel Food, the Los Angeles-based non-profit organization that delivers hot meals to homebound persons with AIDS and other serious illnesses. He is currently Vice Chairman of The Trevor Project, which operates the only 24-hour national suicide hotline for troubled gay youth, and is a filmmaker mentor for Project: Involved, a fellowship program sponsored by Film Independent, a non-profit organization dedicated to helping independent filmmakers.

Strauss attended the University of Vermont, graduating Phi Beta Kappa cum laude with a B.A. in English and Theatre.

CHRIS SALVATERRA (Executive Producer) is currently Executive Vice President for Nickelodeon Movies, based at Paramount. He was Executive Vice President of Creative Affairs and Production for Participant Productions from 2004-2007. The head of narrative features, he

oversaw production on *Good Night, and Good Luck*, *Syriana*, *North Country*, *Fast Food Nation*, *The Kite Runner* and *The Visitor*. For *Good Night, and Good Luck*, *Syriana*, and *North Country*, Participant received 10 Academy Award nominations in 2006.

Prior to joining Participant, Salvaterra was Executive Vice President at Casey Silver Productions, where he associate-produced *Hidalgo* and co-produced *Ladder 49*. Salvaterra was previously an executive at Universal Pictures, where he helped oversee *One True Thing* and *American Pie*.

Salvaterra received his B.A. from Harvard University.

OLIVER BOKELBERG (Director of Photography) has lensed a number of feature films, including *Dark Matter*, starring Meryl Streep and Aidan Quinn; *Strangers With Candy*, with Amy Sedaris, Phillip Seymour Hoffman, Sarah Jessica Parker, and Matthew Broderick; *Loggerheads*, with Bonnie Hunt, Tess Harper, and Kip Pardue; *The Station Agent*, featuring Patricia Clarkson, Peter Dinklage, Michelle Williams and Bobby Cannavale; and *The Citizen*, starring Najwa Nimri, Andrea diStefano and Thomas McCarthy.

Bokelberg was awarded the Kodak Vision Award in 2000 for his work on *The Citizen*. Also for director Jay Anania, Bokelberg shot *Long Time Since*, starring Paulina Porizkova and Julian Sands. The latter film premiered at the 1998 Toronto Film Festival. He also shot a pair of films directed by P.J. Posner: *The Next Big Thing*, which starred Chris Eigeman, Jamie Harris and Farley Granger, and *Lifebreath*, with Francie Swift, Luke Perry and Gia Carrides. Bokelberg also served as D.P. on *Cash Crop*, with Mary McCormack, John Slattery and James van der Beek, directed by Stuart Burkin. Bokelberg's European works include two films directed by Michael Kreihsl: *Heimkehr Der Jaeger*, which starred Ulrich Tukur and screened in the 2000 Berlin Film Festival, and *Charms Incidents*, recipient of the Caligari Award at the 1996 Berlin Film Festival.

Bokelberg's documentary credits include *Beautopia*, which premiered at the 1998 Sundance Festival, and *The Need For Speed*, both directed by Katharina Otto. Bokelberg has helmed the camera for music videos by artists such as LL Cool J, B.B. King, Christina Aguilera, Run DMC and Terrence Blanchard.

Bokelberg is a 1988 graduate of the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University and lives in New York City.

JOHN PAINO (Production Designer) has a long list of feature film credits that include production designer for *Preaching To The Choir*; Bob Odenkirk's *Let's Go To Prison* and *Brothers Solomon*; Official Sundance 2001 Selection *Jump Tomorrow*, for director Joel Hopkins; *Jump*, for director Justin McCarthy; Kelly Anderson's *Shift*, for the ITVS and PBS; the New York unit of *Barcelona*, for director Whit Stillman; and *Dirty Laundry*, for directors Mike Norman & Rob

Sherman. Paino previously worked with Tom McCarthy on *The Station Agent*. Paino was also production designer for the critically acclaimed series “Queer Eye for the Straight Guy” on Bravo. His music video work includes LL Cool J’s “Mama Said Knock You Out!,” which was nominated for MTV’s Best Art Direction and Best Rap Video as well as Billboard’s Best Rap Video; and Live’s “I Alone,” which was nominated for MTV’s Best Art Direction and Best Music Video.

TOM MCARDLE (Editor) edited the feature films *The Architect*, a drama with Anthony LaPaglia, Isabella Rossellini and Viola Davis; *Duane Hopwood*, a drama starring David Schwimmer, Judah Friedlander, Steven Schirripa and Janeane Garofalo; Tom McCarthy’s *The Station Agent*; and *Poor White Trash*, a comedy with William Devane, Jaime Pressly, Sean Young, Jason London, and M. Emmet Walsh.

Other film credits include *Handgun* (directed by Whitney Ransick), *The Keeper* and *The Killing Zone* (both directed by Joe Brewster), *Heckler* (a documentary directed by Michael Addis), *Star Maps* (directed by Miguel Arteta), *Hi-Life* (directed by Roger Hedden), *Laws of Gravity* (directed by Nick Gomez), and *Loving Jezebel* (directed by Kwyn Bader), which received the audience award at the South by Southwest Film Festival in 2000.

He has also edited “The Skateboard Show,” a 30-minute comedy/skateboarding pilot from executive producer Tom Green; “Charles & Marion’s Winter Exchange,” a 30-minute comedy for the Winter Olympics that was directed by Jay Chandrasekhar for stars Charles Barkley and Marion Jones; “Nazis: The Occult Conspiracy,” a documentary hosted by Malcolm McDowell for The Discovery Channel and “Hole In The Head,” a Learning Channel documentary about people who drill holes in their foreheads.

Academy Award® Winner **JAN A.P. KACZMAREK (Composer)** has written the scores for over 30 feature films and documentaries including *Total Eclipse*, *Bliss*, *Washington Square*, *Aimee and Jaguar*, *The Third Miracle*, *Lost Souls*, *Edges of the Lord*, and *Unfaithful*. His upcoming projects include *Hania*, directed by Janusz Kaminski, and the French miniseries “War and Peace.”

He began touring Europe in the 1970s with The Orchestra of the Eighth Day. In 1982, Kaczmarek recorded his debut album, titled *Music for the End*. He relocated to America in 1989 and began composing for theatre, winning two New York theatre awards in 1992. After his success for the stage, he returned to film composition. In 2005, he won his first Oscar for *Finding Neverland*, as well as The National Board of Review’s award for Best Score. He was nominated for a Golden Globe and BAFTA’s Anthony Asquith Award for Achievement in Film Music.

Currently, he is establishing the Rozbitek Institute in his native Poland. The Institute will serve as a European center encouraging creative work in film, theatre, music, and new media.

About Groundswell Films

Groundswell Films is an independent financing and production company founded by Michael London in February 2006 and headquartered in Beverly Hills. In January 2008, the company begins production in San Francisco on *Milk* (with director Gus Van Sant and stars Sean Penn, Emile Hirsch and James Franco), to be released by Focus Features. Films in post-production include *Appaloosa* (directed by Ed Harris, who also stars opposite Renee Zellweger and Viggo Mortensen), which New Line will release, and *The Marc Pease Experience* (directed by Todd Louiso and starring Jason Schwartzman and Ben Stiller), to be released by Paramount Vantage. Groundswell Films has completed production on *The Mysteries of Pittsburgh*, written and directed by Rawson Marshall Thurber (based on the Michael Chabon novel) and starring Sienna Miller, Peter Sarsgaard, Mena Suvari, Nick Nolte, and Jon Foster, as well as *Smart People* (directed by Noam Murro and starring Dennis Quaid, Thomas Haden Church, Sarah Jessica Parker and Ellen Page), which Miramax Films will release in 2008. Both *The Mysteries of Pittsburgh* and *Smart People* will premiere at the 2008 Sundance Film Festival. Upcoming from Groundswell Films is Tom McCarthy's *The Visitor*, which premiered at the 2007 Toronto Film Festival and will screen at Sundance. Overture will release *The Visitor* in the spring of 2008. London, who serves as the company's CEO, is an Academy-Award nominated producer who has produced such films as *King of California*, *The Illusionist*, *The Family Stone*, *Sideways*, *House of Sand and Fog*, *Thirteen*, *The Guru* and *40 Days and 40 Nights*.

About Participant Productions

Participant Productions is a Los Angeles-based production company that focuses on socially relevant, commercially viable feature films and documentaries. Participant's films have been chosen to awaken, inspire and empower audiences to take action and create change. The company is headed by CEO Jim Berk and President Ricky Strauss. Participant was founded by philanthropist Jeff Skoll, who serves as Chairman.

Upcoming releases include Mike Nichols' *Charlie Wilson's War*, Marc Forster's *The Kite Runner*, *Darfur Now*, starring and produced by Don Cheadle, Errol Morris' *Standard Operating Procedure*, Brett Morgen's *Chicago 10*, Louise Hogarth's documentary *Angels in the Dust* and Jonathan Demme's *Jimmy Carter Man from Plains*.

Participant's past successes include *An Inconvenient Truth*, Davis Guggenheim's documentary about Al Gore's campaign to raise awareness of the issue of global warming, which won Academy Awards for Best Documentary and Best Original Song and became the third-highest grossing documentary in history.

