

**MDIA 419 Productions**

**Present**

## **TRAILERPARK**

**Based on the Book by Russell Banks**

### **CONTACT**

#### **MDIA 419 Productions**

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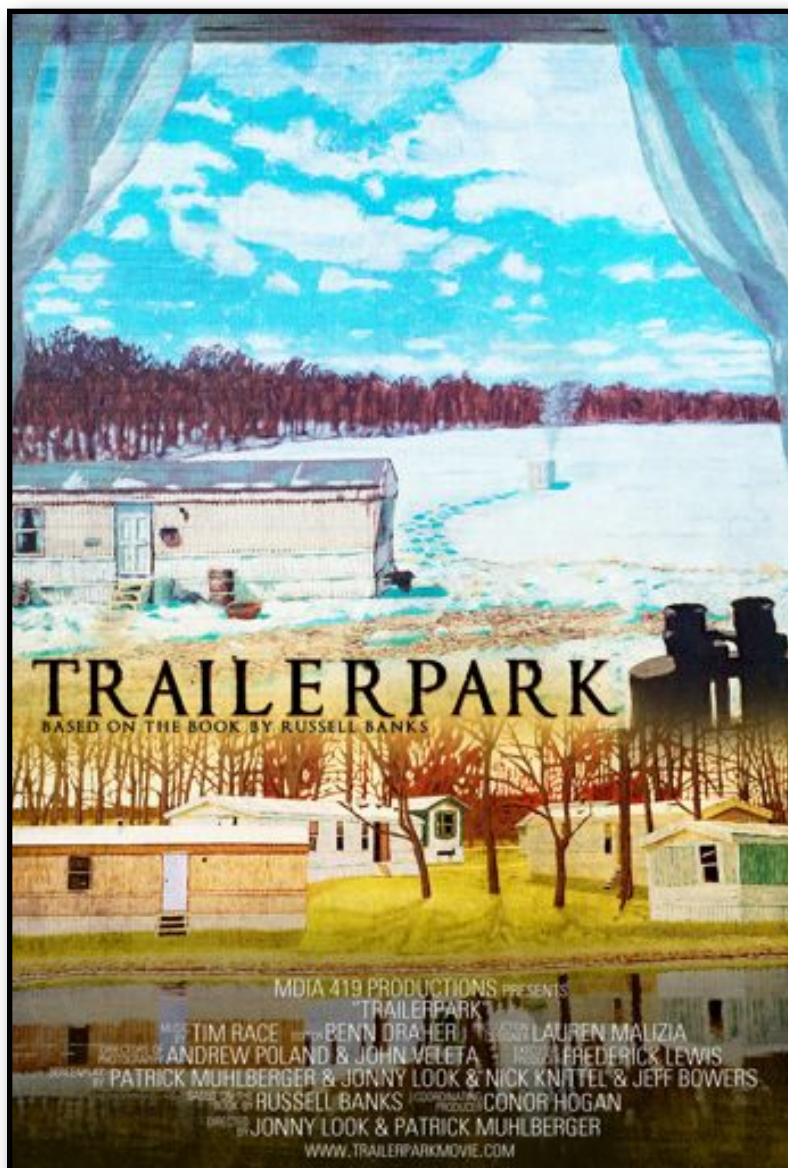
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### **FILM SPECS**

Running Time: 110 minutes  
Format: HD  
Aspect Ratio: 1.78:1  
2010, USA, Color



**PRESS KIT**

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Page 03 - Logline & Synopsis
Page 04 - Directors' Comments
Page 05 - Crew Biographies
Page 06 - Cast
Page 07 - Cast, CONT'D
Page 08 - Cast, CONT'D
Page 09 - The Script
Page 10 - Pre-production
Page 11 - Casting & Locations
Page 12 - Production
Page 13 - Post-production
Page 14 - Cast & Crew

## **LOGLINE & SYNOPSIS**

### **Logline**

It's the most eventful year in the most unlikely of places, as the eclectic residents of a small town trailer park are forced to interact under peculiar circumstances.

### **Short Synopsis**

When the newest resident of a small trailer park begins raising guinea pigs and the oldest resident wins the lottery, the tenants begin to take notice of their neighbors for the first time. Over the course of a year, their stories cross paths and merge, as gossip and jealousy bring out each character's wants, needs, and deepest insecurities. From dangerous transactions to heated affairs to the chirping of rodents, their lives are forever changed as they get to know the strangers living only a few feet away.

### **Long Synopsis**

When Flora Pease (Merri Biechler), the newest resident of Marcelle's (Shelley Delaney) trailer park, begins breeding and raising guinea pigs, she catches the attention of park watchdog, Captain Dewey Knox (Mark Mann). With word of Flora's endeavors spreading and a "no pet policy" in effect, the tenants suddenly begin to interact with one another for the first time in years.

Newlyweds Doreen and Sean (Dinah Berkley and John Atzberger) are struggling through their first year of marriage as the local handyman, Terry (Tyler Rollinson), watches from afar. A recent widow, Nancy (Janice Paxston Evans), and her daughter attempt to reach out to the community, while a depressed Tom (David Haugen), realizes his son has become his own worst nightmare. Finally, as the heat of summer picks up, the park's lovable stoner, Bruce (Stefan Kumor), becomes caught up in some dangerous business.

Meanwhile, the oldest resident, Merle Ring (Jon Farris), finds himself in contention to win \$50,000 in the local lottery. While he'd much rather be fishing, the prospect of future wealth soon sweeps the minds of the community and Merle joins Flora as the center of the park's attention. When he wins and decides to let the money sit unused, there is little Marcelle can do to protect Merle from the mob of jealous tenants. As snow falls and Flora slowly loses her mind to the chirping of guinea pigs, the residents are forced to confront themselves in the midst of a dramatic event which will change their lives forever.

## DIRECTORS' COMMENTS

Truth be told, we should not have directed this movie. *Trailerpark* was published in 1980, before either of us were born, and as two kids from suburbia, we had very little in common with the economic and social ideas the book holds at its surface. But as we began adapting, we realized that the real story isn't about living in a poor trailer park. The park was a vehicle to explore the residents and their themes; we discovered little bits of ourselves in Bank's characters. We could relate to their emotions – their feelings of loneliness, abandonment, eagerness, and their yearning for real human connections. We found ourselves attached to the material on the page, defensive of each character's actions, and forgiving of their poor decisions. Maybe we did have a shot of doing justice to the book.

Through the process of making this film we noticed that we weren't the only ones who had something in common with the park. We were a struggling crew of strangers who needed to learn each other's quirks and skills, and as production progressed we began to come together as our own community. We slept at the park, sometimes shooting for 24 hours, sometimes keeping our equipment safe and warm. Heat was insufficient. Food at times was not there. We were struggling together, united in search of the same starry-eyed goal.

Soon, the entire town seemed to be supporting us in our journey to complete this film. As each day of production ended and a new one began, we noticed ourselves changing as directors. We were no longer the same suburban public school kids who started this film. We were now demanding and confident. We had vision and presence. We became characters ourselves, a quirky duo and a driving force behind such a large and important project. Ultimately, we ended up so excited and invested in the project that when it was all said and done we realized we had become the right people to bring this film to the screen. So thank you to everyone who believed in this project and joined our little community, you truly made this film a possibility.

Jonny Look and Patrick Muhlberger

## CREW BIOGRAPHIES

### Russell Banks [Author]

Russell Banks is the award-winning author of the collection of short stories *Trailerpark*, on which the film is based. Two of his novels, *Affliction* and *The Sweet Hereafter*, have been made into critically acclaimed films. He is a co-founder of the Lake Placid Film Forum and Professor Emeritus at Princeton University.

### Frederick Lewis [Executive Producer]

Frederick Lewis is an associate professor in the **School of Media Arts & Studies** at Ohio University. He created the MDIA 419 advanced narrative production class in 2001. A documentary filmmaker, his work has aired on **PBS** stations across the country and screened at numerous universities and museums, including the **National Gallery of Art in D.C.**

### Patrick Muhlberger [Co-Director / Co-Writer]

Patrick Muhlberger recently finished up an internship at **Persistent Entertainment** in Los Angeles. Writer and director of numerous short films, *Trailerpark* marks his feature debut. He will be graduating Ohio University in the spring with a degree in Video Production. His previous works can be viewed at [www.patjm.com](http://www.patjm.com).

### Jonny Look [Co-Director / Co-Writer]

*Trailerpark* is the first feature film for writer/director Jonny Look. He is a recent graduate of Ohio University's Video Production program. His previous works include several shorts, usually ending with little or no solution. He is an advocate of contradiction and a lover of candy and sugars. He cannot finish a banana split from Dairy Queen in one sitting.

### Conor Hogan [Coordinating Producer]

Conor recently interned in Los Angeles with **Heyday Films** and also spent time working on the television series *Modern Family*. *Trailerpark* marks his first time producing for a feature-length film. A native of Columbus, OH, Conor will be a 2010 graduate of Ohio University with a degree in Video Production. He plans to move to Los Angeles and work in the television industry upon graduation.

## CAST

### Merri Biechler [Flora Pease]

Merri Biechler received her MFA in playwriting from Ohio University. Her plays have been read, work shopped, and produced around the country including New York City, Los Angeles, and Chicago. As a professional actor, Merri has appeared Off-Broadway, in films, and in guest-starring roles on *E.R.*, *Judging Amy*, and *Murphy Brown*.

### Jon Farris [Merle Ring]

Mr. Farris recently retired from Denison University, where he held the **Reynolds Distinguished Chair in Theatre** and served as Chair of the Department of Theatre from 1981 until 2003. As a professional actor, Mr. Farris has performed leading roles at major regional theatres across the country, including the Utah Shakespearean Festival, the Illinois Shakespeare Festival, Milwaukee Repertory Theatre, and the Indiana Repertory Theatre, where he appeared last winter in the title role of *Tuesdays with Morrie*. Closer to home, Mr. Farris has performed often in Columbus at the Contemporary American Theatre. His roles at CATCO include Wilhelm Furtwangler in *Taking Sides*, Richard Nixon in *Nixon s Nixon*, Andrew Wythe in *Sleuth*, Lady Bracknell in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, and eleven different characters in *Greater Tuna* and *A Tuna Christmas*.

### Shelley Delaney [Marcelle Chagnon]

A proud member of Screen Actors Guild and Actors' Equity Association, Shelley will be appearing in *Jane Eyre* at Pittsburgh Irish and Classical Theater this November and December. Her film credits include *Radio Days*, *Hero Tomorrow*, and *Relative Obscurity*. She has worked at a wide range of regional and New York City theaters including The Public Theater, La Mama, McCarter Theater Center, Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park, The Cleveland Playhouse, Bay Street Theater and Victory Gardens. She is currently Head of Performance at the Ohio University School of Theater

### Tyler Jacob Rollinson [Terry Constant]

Currently working at Actors Theatre of Louisville, Tyler a member of their Acting Apprentice Company. His stage credits include Melchior Gabor in *Spring Awakening*, Jimmy Lunceford in *Knock Me a Kiss*, and Christopher (Stranger) Davis in *Southbridge* for Ohio University's School of Theater. Tyler will be appearing in *A Christmas Carol* at Actors Theatre this winter.

### Mark Mann [Captain Dewey Knox]

A familiar face in Central Ohio theatre for nearly 20 years and 90 productions, Mark has received Central Ohio Critics Circle Best Actor Awards for his roles in such plays as *The Lion In Winter*, *Dr. Faustus*, *Richard III*, *I Hate Hamlet*, and *Childe Byron*, which Columbus Alive cited as the Performance of the Decade. Mark has also received awards for his directing, and was the 2004 recipient of the Greater Columbus Arts Council Playwriting Fellowship for his contribution to the CATCO Shorts Festival 2004, entitled *The Orgy in 414*. He lives in Grove City with his dearest friend (and wife) Danielle.

## **CAST [CONT'D]**

### **Nathan Bigger [Leon LaRoche]**

Nate is a graduate of the Ohio University School of Theater's BFA Acting program. He currently resides in Cleveland where he was most recently seen as Beethoven in Fourth Wall Productions' ***Dog Sees God: Confessions of a Teenage Blockhead***. Also with Fourth Wall, he earned a Times Newspaper Theatre Tribute award for outstanding performance in Matthew Sprosty's ***Malicious Bunny***. Other credits include Feste in ***Twelfth Night***, Mortimer in ***Arsenic and Old Lace***, JM Barrie in ***Peter Pan***, and a number of used car commercials which he is particularly proud of.

### **Dinah Berkeley [Doreen Tiede]**

Dinah Berkeley is currently completing her final year of undergrad at Ohio University. She'll graduate with a BFA in Performance and is ecstatic to begin working professionally. Outside of her theatre and film work, she is a certified yoga instructor and enjoys dallying in dance, music and all other forms of artistic expression.

### **John Atzberger [Sean Tiede]**

John Atzberger is a Los Angeles based actor, playwright and musician. Recent works include ***Lefties***, ***Camino Real***, and a reading of ***Smith Unearthed***, a new play by Eric Ramsey. John's plays have been produced in New York at the West End Theater as well as in Columbus, Ohio at Madlab. John's moniker as a musician is Olentangy John, and he won the Williamsburg (Brooklyn) Live Songwriter's Competition in 2007. He has also acted in three short films that garnered Regional Emmys.

### **Janice Paxson Evans [Nancy Hubner]**

Janice recently moved to Ohio from Mississippi, where she performed the roles of Titania in ***A Midsummer Night's Dream*** and Ruth in ***Pirates of Penzance*** for the Oxford Shakespeare Festival. In Los Angeles, favorite roles include Rose/Sheila in Elephant Stageworks' production of ***7 Redneck Cheerleaders***, Nessa in ***Goodbye Freddie*** at the Hollywood Actors Theatre and Gertrude in ***Fortinbras*** at the Stella Adler Theatre. Janice played Chick Boyle in ***Crimes of the Heart*** at the Barn Theatre in Michigan, and Mommy in ***The American Dream*** in San Jose, California. Film credits include ***Urban Pill*** and ***Bad Audition***. Janice is a founding member of the newly formed Brick Monkey Theater Ensemble, Southeast Ohio's Professional Theater Company.

### **Lily Herold [Maureen Hubner]**

Lily Herold enjoys soccer, drawing and dancing. Her favorite animals are cats and chickens and her favorite insect is a dragonfly. She would like to write books when she is older.

## **CAST [CONT'D]**

### **David Haugen [Tom Smith]**

David Haugen has been working as an actor and educator for many years. His film work includes; *Vision Quest* and *The Curious Profession of Jonathan Hoag*. He has appeared on the television series; *Law & Order*, *Law & Order SVU*, and *Ed*. He has also acted on stages in New York and around the country. David currently teaches at Ohio University.

### **Terry Hoge [Buddy Smith]**

Terry Hoge is a Pittsburgh native and a Ohio University graduate. Terry was recently featured in Phase3Production's *Miss Julie* as John, and Charley in the independent film *Potholes*.

### **Stefan Kumor [Bruce Severance]**

Stefan Kumor recently completed a Senior B.F.A. in Ohio University's School of Theater. He has been in several onstage productions including: Victor in *Four Dogs and a Bone*, Bruno in *Annika Gold* and Floyd Knowles in *The Grapes of Wrath*. He has also starred in several award winning short films.

## THE SCRIPT

*Trailerpark* was released as a collection of short stories in 1980. While it received critical acclaim, it never achieved the same level of awareness as Banks' novels. It did however catch the attention of executive producer Frederick Lewis, then a graduate student at Brown University. After the success of the film adaptations of Banks' other works, *The Sweet Hereafter* and *Affliction*, there was talk of adapting *Trailerpark*. Atom Egoyan toyed with the concept and HBO optioned the material and commissioned Banks to write the first episode of what was to be a miniseries. By the time the project was put into turnaround, Lewis and Banks had struck up a friendship. Lewis mentioned his love of the book and how he always dreamed of seeing an adaptation. A few discussions later, Lewis had secured the rights himself.

Deciding to use the opportunity as a unique learning experience for his students at Ohio University, Lewis gathered a group of four writers to try and tackle the book's non-linear timeline and interweaving stories. "The students had been making short films in my class for years. It just finally seemed like all the cards had fallen into place to let them attempt something bigger," said Lewis. For four months, the writers worked on formulating a structure that would allow them to include all of their favorite stories into one feature. "It quickly became obvious why other adaptations had failed to get off the ground," said Muhlberger. "The stories span from prohibition to the 1980s, with characters leaving and dying and changing throughout." The writers decided to take the two largest stories, *The Guinea Pig Lady* and *The Fisherman*, and use them as the main throughlines for the script. "Once we agreed to focus on those stories and keep the movie limited to one year, we could just interweave our favorite characters and emotional beats," said Look.

After six more months of rewriting, the script was in its shooting phase. "It was a pretty exciting experience," said Muhlberger. "For a year we got to play around with a book from an award winning author. It was intimidating at times, realizing you are adapting somebody else's baby, but we felt we really captured the theme and tone of Russell's piece. All we had to do was get it on camera."

## **PRE-PRODUCTION**

While the script was being revised, Conor Hogan signed on as coordinating producer. Pre-production began immediately and that meant designing a budget, raising funds by working at Ohio amusement parks, coming up with a realistic shooting schedule, and figuring out how to create a Website which would allow tax-deductible donations.

“Trailerparkmovie.com was important to me from day one,” said Muhlberger. “I love what the internet has done for aspiring filmmakers. There are so many wonderful resources and experiences to read about online. I wanted to document our journey so that people all over the country could follow our progress and learn with us.” A blog was set up to document every step of production, from securing locations to struggles during shooting. It benefitted the film’s fundraising as well. Donors could see where their money was being spent. “I remember checking our statistics the day after we lit a trailer on fire and seeing we had something like 500 hits. It was pretty awesome to know that people were supporting and following us from all over,” said Muhlberger.

Aside from generous individual contributions, equipment companies from all over the United States stepped forward to help. An executive of Mole Richardson flew in to meet with the crew; audio companies Sweetwater, Electro-Voice, and CAD discounted equipment; but the most passionate supporter, Zacuto, donated their custom rig to the camera department. “Having to shoot in tiny trailers or freezing temperatures was immensely difficult,” said co-director of photography Andy Poland. “All of these great donations helped us pull off the shots we needed without sacrificing quality.”

“Raising the funds was the most essential and difficult part of pre-production,” said Hogan. “We tried everything from writing grants, to entering video contests for cash prizes, to literally begging the local residents for help.” Though the movie began with a small group of students, it was completed with the help of an entire community.

## **CASTING & LOCATIONS**

### **Casting**

“Finding the right actors to play these diverse characters was really important to us,” said Muhlberger, “But the size of our cast, the unusual weekend shooting schedule, and the limited budget made the whole process extremely difficult.” Due to these factors, all of the actors had to be within a few hours of driving distance. With the help of the contacts of actress Shelley Delaney, Muhlberger and Look began auditioning and speaking with actors all across Ohio. Several Ohio University alumni and students were able to play some of the younger roles. But the real issue came when it was time to find the older characters. The directors spent over four month traveling the state, watching auditions and theater productions until they found the perfect group of actors to portray the characters Russell created over 25 years ago.

“It was an exhausting challenge that really came down to the wire,” said Look, “but watching them all put on their costumes the first day on set was one of my favorite days. It was like these characters had suddenly leapt off the page and become flesh and bone.”

### **Locations**

While co-directors Muhlberger and Look were rounding out the ensemble cast, Hogan and his fellow producers were working tirelessly to lock down locations. The first and biggest location was the actual trailer park where more than 80% of the script’s scenes take place. Early plans included shooting scenes in a real trailer park, but this idea was soon abandoned. The crew was looking at months of constant shooting, both at night and during the day. They also needed complete control of the conditions for each shoot. One noisy neighbor could ruin a whole day’s work.

The crew decided they would have to create their own trailer park. Hogan came across Lake Snowden, an RV park ten miles outside of Athens, Ohio. The facilitators of the park agreed to let the crew rent their lot for the production. Meanwhile, local businessman Jay Elsea agreed to lease eight mobile homes to *Trailerpark*. The homes were strategically placed to create the movie’s park and a ninth was purchased and saved to be burned for the climax.

With a park in place, the focus shifted to finding a frozen lake where part of the climax takes place. A group of location scouts was sent to Pellston, Michigan to look for lakes which would be frozen enough to allow a crew of 30 and a cast of 10 to work comfortably. Luckily the co-worker of a local realtor lived on a plot of land bordering a private lake. When she heard of the production she kindly offered up her house for the weekend; another example of how the kindness of strangers made this movie possible.

## PRODUCTION

The three-month, 37-day-shoot began on Saturday, January 24th and wrapped Sunday, April 26th. As college students, every member of the crew had, at the very least, two other classes they were taking in addition to the production. Not only that, but working on the movie meant giving up almost every Saturday and Sunday in February, March, and April. Additionally, it meant giving up the coveted 'spring break week' in order to complete a nine day, back-to-back block shoot. "There were times when we were literally going straight from class to the set, shooting for the weekend, and then returning all the equipment just in time to head back to class," said Hogan of the experience.

Every week contained a new obstacle. As the script spans an entire year in the park, the crew had to shoot in every season. Early on this meant shooting scenes in the middle of winter, with freezing temperatures. The trailers had no plumbing, electricity, or heat and the cast and crew very quickly learned the value of layers. Sometimes the actors had to chew on ice chips to hide their cold breath while shooting summer scenes. Fake snow was placed, then replaced with autumn leaves, all to give the film the scope that Russell intended in his original book.

Three weeks into production, the crew faced the first massive obstacle when they set fire to a trailer as part of the climax. With the help of the local fire department, the crew was given twenty minutes of estimated burn time to capture the essential scene. "It was pretty incredible," said Muhlberger of the experience. "The firefighters even let us start the fire ourselves. There's nothing like walking into an empty room with a road flare and leaving with it on fire. It was pretty surreal." The next weekend involved a 9-hour drive north to Michigan to shoot on a frozen lake. "Everything went great the first couple hours," said Look. "But then it started snowing and visibility dropped. It took every second of daylight to get that scene in the can, but it was worth it."

None of those scenes, however, matched the difficulty of shooting with thirty guinea pigs. "When we wrote Flora's scenes in the script, we didn't really think about how we were going to shoot them. Then we suddenly had to figure out how to fill her trailer with real life animals," said Muhlberger. The producers contacted the American Humane Association to make sure all rules and regulations were followed. "Getting that 'No Animals Were Harmed' logo was such a huge goal for me," said Hogan. "But I think when people see it at the bottom they will once again be reminded of how professional this production was."

## **POST-PRODUCTION**

Throughout the entire production process, editor Benn Draher spent the weekdays editing the previous weekend's footage. Just a few days after wrapping, Muhlberger and Look were able to sit down and watch a rough cut of the film for the first time. From there they had only a few short weeks to get a work-in-progress cut ready to screen for Russell Banks at the Lake Placid Film Forum. As part of the original contract, *Trailerpark* had to be approved by Russell in order to play at film festivals. When the film ended and the lights came up, Russell praised the film to the audience in the packed auditorium. In a later interview he said, "...the level of professionalism was extraordinary, really extraordinary...I've never seen a student production of that quality in my life!" For a project that was once in the hands of Atom Egoyan and HBO, hearing the author's praise was a special moment for everyone involved.

After Russell gave his approval for festivals, the directors went back into the cutting room to trim and focus the story. "We spent a lot of time rethinking the characters and how they had changed from script to screen," said Muhlberger. "Getting Russell's approval really motivated us to go in and play with the cut, bringing out the humor and depth that each of these actors brought to the piece."

For Lewis, the piece represents so much more than just a class project. "The students brought so much energy and hard work to the piece that it has become something better than I ever imagined. I can't wait for them to share it with an audience."

## CAST

Merri Biechler Jon Farris Shelley Delaney Tyler Rollinson Mark Mann  
 Nathan Bigger Dinah Berkeley John Atzberger Janice Paxson Evans  
 Lily Herold David Haugen Terry Hoge Stefan Kumor

## CREW

### DIRECTORS

Jonny Look & Patrick Muhlberger

### BOOK BY

Russell Banks

### SCREENPLAY BY

Patrick Muhlberger  
 Jonny Look  
 Nick Knittel  
 Jeff Bowers

### EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

Frederick Lewis

### COORDINATING PRODUCER

Conor Hogan

### SUPERVISING PRODUCERS

Andrew Heaberlin  
 Jennifer Taylor  
 Rachel Hohenfeld

### CASTING

Patrick Muhlberger  
 Jonny Look  
 Shelley Delaney

### FIRST ASSISTANT DIRECTORS

Jillian Jacobs & Nick Knittel

### DIRECTORS OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Andrew Poland & John Veleta

### PRODUCTION DESIGNER

Lauren Malizia

### ART DIRECTORS

Cara Fitzgerald & Bryan Fulk

### LEAD GAFFER

Hank Wagenbach

### EDITOR

Benn Draher

### ORIGINAL MUSIC BY

Tim Race

### SOUND DESIGNER / MIXER

Josh Landis

### POST-PRODUCTION SOUND SUPERVISOR

Pierce Martin

### PRODUCTION SOUND SUPERVISOR

Jack Martin

### POST-PRODUCTION COORDINATOR

David Jeffries

### VISUAL EFFECTS SUPERVISOR

Wesley Cronk