



Directed by
Timothy Busfield

Written by
Jeff Daniels

Produced by
Michael A. Alden, Timothy Busfield, Jeff Daniels, Melissa Gilbert

Executive Produced by
Donald Clark

Grand River Productions, LLC

RUNNING TIME: 75min

Guest Artist

Production Information

Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright, Joseph Harris (Jeff Daniels), has not written a play in twenty years. Unable to unleash his voice in a way that he sees fit, Harris finds himself trapped in a no man's land of artistic discontent with his only refuge in the bottom of a glass. When he is commissioned to write a play for a small-town theatre company, in a place he would rather not be in, Harris unwillingly emerges from his self-imposed exile. Upon Harris' arrival at the local train station, he is met by an eager to please apprentice, Kenneth Waters (Thomas Macias). Not in the habit of being chaperoned, Harris demands to be booked on the next train back to New York. As Kenneth desperately tries to keep his gin-swiggling hero from leaving, the two strike a deal that leads them to explore the tangled relationship between the dreams of youth and the wisdom of age.

Grand River Productions presents *Guest Artist*. Jeff Daniels writes, produces and stars in the film, alongside Thomas Macias, Erika Slezak, Richard McWilliams, McKara Bechler, Ruth Crawford, Dan Johnson and Lynch R. Travis. It is directed as well as produced by Timothy Busfield. Also producing the film are Melissa Gilbert and Michael A. Alden. Donald Clark is the executive producer. The filmmaking team includes director of photography Willy Busfield, editor Alyssa Loveall and music by Ben Daniels.

The film will be released in 2020.

ABOUT THE FILM

The film is adapted from Jeff Daniels' 2006 play, "Guest Artist," a runner-up for the Steinberg/American Theatre Critics Association New Play Award at the nationally recognized Humana Festival, for which Daniels wrote for The Purple Rose Theatre Company that he founded in 1991. The story is based on a real-life incident experienced by the Emmy-winning actor and playwright. "In the 70s, as a member of New York's Circle Repertory Company, I met Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright, Lanford Wilson, and performed in several of his plays," recalls Daniels. "In 1997, several years after I started my own theatre company, I knew that

Lanford hadn't written anything in quite some time. So, I called him and said, 'I want you to come out here and write a play for The Purple Rose Theatre Company in Michigan.' To which he agreed."

"Unfortunately, after months of waiting for a suitable idea, he hadn't written a word," continues Daniels. "I, then, asked Lanford to come out and see our substitute production of his great play, 'The Hot I Baltimore.' However, he wouldn't fly. So, I told him to get on the train. And the idea for this story happened when I had to meet Lanford at the train station in Toledo, Ohio, at six in the morning, where he stumbled off the train, and I picked him up. Eventually, Lanford wrote not one but two plays for our company, but that morning on that train platform stayed with me. It's a story I had to write – first as a play and now a film."

Creating cinematic works under The Purple Rose Theatre Company banner has been a lifelong dream for Daniels. "After moving back home and founding The Purple Rose Theatre Company, it has always been a dream of mine to shoot in Michigan," says Daniels. "For the past twenty-eight years, I have written seventeen plays specifically for the Purple Rose. All the while, I toyed with the idea of writing film and now television for the company."

"Twice, in the past, I endeavored into this arena, writing, producing, starring and directing *Escanaba in da Moonlight* and *Super Sucker*," continues Daniels. "However, after making these films, I realized I don't like directing – Too many questions requiring too many answers – And producing is better left to those who excel in the business side of the entertainment industry."

To make his dream a lasting reality, Daniels formed a creative partnership with Timothy Busfield and Melissa Gilbert. "Teaming up with friends and fellow Michiganders, Tim Busfield and Melissa Gilbert, who are both very good at those weaknesses in my game, we turned a homegrown filmmaking dream into a reality," says Daniels. "The three of us became Grand River Productions."

For producer, Melissa Gilbert, joining forces in this ambitious undertaking was the culmination of a vast amount of experience over many years and a desire to change the status quo of filmmaking. "When we decided to start our company Grand River Productions, our mission

was to take our collective decades of entertainment experience and make quality films our own way on a very low budget,” says Gilbert. “As my husband Tim describes it, ‘To make quality films without having to push a boulder uphill.’”

“There hasn’t been anyone that I have ever worked with who does this better than Tim,” continues Gilbert. “He is able to breakdown budgets, to board and shoot films that streamline the process in an efficient and cost-effective way without sacrificing the production value. Ultimately, our goal is to tell stories that not only entertain audiences, but also, move them and hopefully open their eyes to something new.”

With their shared commitment and concerted determination in hand, the filmmaking trio opted to make *Guest Artist* the first of many projects to come. “Together, we felt that there was a film in ‘Guest Artist’ that spoke to the precarious role of the American Artist,” says Daniels. “And that made it the perfect project for Grand River Productions’ feature film debut.”

As a longtime admirer of Daniels’ artistry, on page, stage and screen, director and producer, Timothy Busfield seized the opportunity to form their new collaborative enterprise. “I’ve been a fan of Jeff’s writing for twenty-five years,” says Busfield. “I love his writing. He blends funny and dramatic as well as anybody. I think he is certainly one of our or should be one of our coveted playwrights.”

“And ‘Guest Artist’ is one of my favorites of Jeff’s plays,” continues Busfield. “To be able to direct Jeff in the movie version was an incredible opportunity. If I could only work with Jeff the rest of my life, I would die a happy man.”

Upon choosing *Guest Artist* as their maiden project, Busfield and Gilbert took the film idea to Tony award-winning producer, Michael A. Alden, who was instantly taken with the story. “After meeting with Jeff and hearing his vision for the film adaptation for his play, Tim and Melissa felt that I was the right producer for *Guest Artist*,” says Alden. “As we discussed the project, I immediately felt connected to this piece and recognized that this story could be told on a cinematic platform.”

Alden then met with Daniels which cemented his desire to produce the film. “I will never forget my first meeting with Jeff at his New York City apartment,” recalls Alden. “We spent the day discussing our passion for music which included jamming on his many guitars. And when he shared his beautiful script with me, I knew immediately that I wanted to produce *Guest Artist*. Not only was I excited with the prospect of working with one of the greatest actors of all time, but also, to have the opportunity to bring Jeff’s original story, characters and message to life was something I had to be a part of.”

Receiving Daniels’ vote of confidence meant the world to Alden. “I was deeply moved that Jeff entrusted me to produce this film,” says Alden. “His belief in me is something I will carry for the rest of my life. We shared a very unique and remarkable experience filming *Guest Artist*, and I hope this is the first of many more artistic adventures to come.”

In scripting the film, Daniels, tapped into his love of writing which is, for him, an entrenched instrument for expressing the stories he needs to tell. “I consider writing for my theatre as important to my creative life as being an actor,” says Daniels. “Because of the theatre, I have learned the art of using dialogue to propel story, character and meaning to an audience. I have learned how to make them laugh, cry, sit on the edge of their seats, and most importantly, stir their thoughts and imagination.”

Daniels owes his mastery of the written word to the writing aficionados of theatre, film and television. “Simply because I was in the room, I learned about the writing process,” says Daniels. “In a medium where less is more, rivers of words cascading across a screen in the films of Preston Sturges, Paddy Chayefsky and later, to no one’s surprise, Aaron Sorkin, have always held me. In the right hands, dialogue becomes music. There is rhythm – Even melody. I have a special place in my heart for films that celebrate that art. And *Guest Artist* pays homage to that art.”

Executive Producer, Donald Clark, admired Daniels ability to create a story that gives insight into an artist’s driven personality and desire to be true to his art. “There remains nothing more engaging than human thoughts and emotions,” explains Clark. “The power of well-crafted words is enormous and Jeff is a master craftsman. The intellectual foundation of this film and its use of wit to deliver serious social commentary are nothing short of brilliant.”

With Busfield's directorial expertise behind the lens, Daniels knew the film would be told in a way that captures the spirit of the characters and speaks to the heart of the story. "Aside from being the kind of friend that tells you the truth, Tim knows and understands camera," says Daniels. "He has spent his career committing story to screen. In order for a writer to write freely, he needs a good director, someone able to step back and see where all these words are headed. This helps ensure that the intention of the writer is achieved in the most effective way possible."

"This expert oversight is essential when the writer also wants to immerse himself as an actor in a complex character such as Joseph Harris," continues Daniels. "Having Tim's outside eye and his own vision of what *Guest Artist* could be, made us both better. What Tim did to guide my Joseph Harris as well as his supervision over every element of *Guest Artist* is why the film is as good as it is."

Through their collaboration, the film captures Busfield's, Daniels' and Gilbert's respective affinity for theatrical performance. "Our shared love of the American Theatre is evident in every frame of our modern little throwback," says Daniels. "And we're happy to say that our film still feels like a play. At the end of the day, a good story is a good story."

Breathing life into this film stretched Gilbert's off screen talent. "The process itself was such a fun challenge for me," says Gilbert. "It's been a while since I wore my producer hat on a film. With *Guest Artist*, I was able to be more hands-on than with any other production I'd worked on. I did everything from finding our production offices and locations, raising the funds needed to make our film, being in the editing room with Tim and our very talented editor Alyssa Loveall, to overseeing our PR campaign."

It has also been a highlight of her long and prolific profession. "Working with Jeff and Tim has been one of the great joys of my career," says Gilbert. "*Guest Artist* holds a special place in my heart – from Jeff's beautiful adaptation of his play and fantastically nuanced performance to Tim's extraordinary ability as a director-producer – It's been a thrill to be a part of this production and partner in Grand River. We are very excited to share *Guest Artist* with audiences."

In making *Guest Artist*, Daniels experienced a sense of artistic exhilaration and accomplishment. “To shoot a film of something you wrote is different than anything else I’ve done,” says Daniels. “Usually, I’m doing someone else’s writing. Whether, it’s ‘The Newsroom’ or movies or anything else. I’m saying what someone else wants me to say. Every writer wants to say something – Particularly, the good ones. And *Guest Artist* is something that I want to say – Especially now. It’s the culmination of everything I’ve ever learned from every artist I’ve ever worked with. That’s what this is.”

Jeff Daniels portrays the world-weary, Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright, Joseph Harris, an embattled writer who refuses to conform and an outsider who growls at the modern convention like a junkyard dog. “Like all true artists, inside Joseph Harris exists a roaring creative force that cannot be silenced,” explains Daniels. “The night of his arrival at the train station, Harris is struggling against a world where what he has to say has been either missed or dismissed. True artists do not change with the times, they reflect them, and they define them. A lesser artist adjusts and writes what the audience wants. Harris doesn’t because he can’t –Because he won’t. And when that intrinsic part of him is no longer valued, he turns to the only thing that can kill the unstoppable creative force inside him.”

However, in the gray dawn hours at a Mid-Western train station, an unrelenting encounter challenges Harris’ outcast state. “The bitterly nostalgic playwright meets an exuberant and earnest apprentice of the local theatre company who doesn’t let Harris get his way,” explains executive producer, Donald Clark. “A clash of cynicism and idealism ensues that leads to personal transformation and a shared declaration that they are both true artists.”

Directing Daniels in this role was everything Busfield hoped for and more. “I loved every second of it,” says Busfield. “Not only is Jeff great to work with as a writer/collaborator, but he is equally masterful as an actor. Jeff pours himself into the character, and as the director this makes the work infinitely easier as well as a joy to watch him play Joseph Harris.”

Alden views Daniels’ portrayal of Harris as a crowning achievement in an already stellar career. “Playing this role was deeply personal to Jeff,” says Alden. “You could see that he

had an innate connection and understanding for this character. I believe this is one of the greatest performances of his career.”

Playing opposite Daniels is Thomas Macias as Kenneth Waters a modest theatre apprentice with dreams of seeing his name in neon lights on Broadway like his hero Joseph Harris. “Kenneth is this wide-eyed artist who gets a chance to meet his hero,” says Macias. “Joseph Harris is his idol and Kenneth hopes if he makes a good impression then that will eventually lead to Harris divulging his secrets on how to become an accomplished artist.”

“Unfortunately, the two of them get off on the wrong foot,” continues Macias. “However, Kenneth is nothing if not persistent. And he goes toe-to-toe with Harris’ insufferableness fighting for the ideals of a true artist.”

Although Harris is not how Kenneth imagined him to be, underneath his acerbic bark is a master sharing his secrets on how to embody the true artist’s way. “It’s tough meeting your heroes sometimes,” says Daniels. “They don’t turn out to be what you think. But as much as Harris enjoys mocking Kenneth, in his caustic unconventional way, he is imparting his artistic wisdom on to the aspiring young playwright.”

Similarly, to his character’s relationship with Harris, Macias found Daniels to be a mentor minus Harris’ caustic personality. “In Jeff, I got to work with, not only an award-winning actor, but also one of my mentors,” says Macias. “In a way, it mirrors Kenneth's relationship with Harris, but more fun.”

“Jeff took me under his wing, and pushed me to do better,” continues Macias. “He didn’t let me off easy, and in the process, we got to know each other and our characters.”

Macias’ road to playing Kenneth Waters is a true plucked from obscurity tale. “Thomas Macias is a brand new actor as far as the professional world goes,” says Busfield. “It’s so fun to discover somebody. And Jeff discovered him as a stage manager at his theater The Purple Rose. He was a perfect fit for the part.”

With Macias, Daniels let his gut instincts be his guide. “I just said, ‘Hmmm.’ There’s something in that kid,” recalls Daniels. “He just took all that passion for the arts and for theater and poured it into his audition. And I’m going, ‘That’s it.’ ‘That’s what we need.’”

For Macias, being cast as Kenneth Waters was an unbelievable and extraordinary experience. “It’s the strangest and most wonderful thing that has ever happened to me,” says Macias. “I asked the casting director if I could audition, and he said, ‘yes,’ with the condition that I make copies of the sides for everyone auditioning.”

“Then, I got an email from Tim letting me know I got a callback,” continues Macias. “At the callback, it was only Richard McWilliams, McKara Bechler, Jeff and me. Then, Jeff broke the news to us that we were the ones they wanted for the movie. I remember not moving, sitting in my chair frozen. We were unresponsive until Jeff got up and asked if we wanted some water.”

“It feels like it’s happened to someone else,” adds Macias. “The time I spent making this film has been one of the most incredible moments of my life. It’s been an amazing adventure. I can’t wait to share it with my family and friends.”

With simple and to the point direction, Busfield eased Macias’ acting debut jitters. “I mostly needed to keep him thinking like a pro,” explains Busfield. “I had him focus on the basic fundamentals of acting and not making any of it too complex or too precious.”

Macias attributes Busfield’s energetic and succinct direction for making him become one with the character. “Tim was a blast to work with,” says Macias. “He pushed me out of my comfort zone with his quick concise direction – ‘Go faster.’ ‘Turn harder.’ Not only did it work, but it was a lot of fun – Tim made me a better actor.”

By defying the odds and listening to the inner voice of the heart, Macias like Kenneth, discovered the truth of the artist within. “To be a true artist is to be in a constant struggle,” explains Macias. “Our art is our humanity, and if we can share something of ourselves to help others find something of themselves, then we’ve done it. We’re artists.”

In addition to Macias, rounding out the *Guest Artist* cast is an ensemble of actors also from The Purple Rose Theatre Company. “Using company members from The Purple Rose gave us a great cast of faces and talent,” says Busfield. “It is a testament to the brilliance of Jeff and what he’s been able to achieve with his acclaimed theatre company.”

Acting alongside his fellow Purple Rose Theatre artists, hearkened Daniels back to his acting roots. “For me, to work with members of the Purple Rose felt like my time with the actors of the Circle Repertory Company in the 70s,” recalls Daniels. “Every Purple Rose actor in *Guest Artist* is well-versed in the acting techniques that I was so fortunate to have learned during this period of my career. Techniques I use to this today. And there is something about the cohesion found in the singularly focused work of a company using the same creative approach that is exhilarating.”

The supporting characters each play a significant role as to how the apprentice dreamer, Waters, and the troubled playwright, Harris, dovetail in a train station in Lima, Michigan. “Helen is Harris’ absolutely hardened big league New York literary agent,” says Busfield. “She has to suffer the journey of her artist/clients daily. She sets the table for Thomas and his idealistic immaturity.”

“Franz is the audience’s point of view of Harris and Kenneth,” continues Busfield. “He’s mid-western stoic and reacts to the two men as most non-artists would if forced to be in a room with them for five hours. Hope represents the world that artists must leave behind. Artists generally must move away from the comfort of their homes to grow and find the artist inside of themselves. Mary is the angel who gives Kenneth the nerve to finally confront his master and come to terms with his inevitable growth. Larry represents the unchangeable world that doesn’t care about art and knows nothing about art. And Dan is a dead end to Kenneth’s efforts forcing him to return to his past.”

As *Guest Artist* was inspired by actual events, it was fitting to set the production in Daniels’ native home. “Making *Guest Artist* in Jeff’s hometown of Chelsea, Michigan created the perfect aesthetic,” says Busfield. “We didn’t have to make a Mid-Western town in a Hollywood environment. And we were able to shoot in the historic Chelsea Train Depot which not only added to the authenticity; it also enhanced everyone’s performance.”

“And with a narrow production window, we were able to shoot more efficiently,” adds Busfield. “The entire film was shot in nine days – seven days in Michigan with two days of filming in New York.”

Setting *Guest Artist* during the holidays gives the film an emotional center that grounds the characters. “I loved shooting at night with the Christmas lights illuminating the scenery,” says Busfield. “It gave the film an automatic heart.”

For Alden, the holiday backdrop also gives the film the hopeful sensation affiliated with the season. “I had to pinch myself because it looked like a winter wonderland,” says Alden. “The setting was warm and welcoming. It made the film feel like the perfect holiday movie filled with a Christmas spirit that is uplifting and inspiring.”

But, above all else, the best part of keeping the production close to home, allowed *Guest Artist* to be a homegrown family affair. “It is such a joy to be able to work with our family,” says Gilbert. “To see the beautiful work of my stepson, Willy Busfield, as our director of photography on his first feature film; to hear the beautiful score of Jeff’s son, Ben Daniels, also making his scoring debut, and the wonderful camera work of Jeff’s other son Luke Daniels. Even my youngest son, Michael Boxleitner, got to work on his first movie as Jeff’s stand-in. And our producer, Michael Alden, is the best friend of my second oldest son, Lee Boxleitner. Michael grew up with my kids. So, his participation added greatly to the family feel of the film.”

Busfield echoes his wife’s family experience sentiments. “I’m so proud of our kids work on this film,” says Busfield. “They did an incredible job and were fun to be around.”

To have their family at their side as the filmmakers made this film was because Daniels dared to put his artistic vision on paper. “It’s been wonderful having our sons work on this film,” says Daniels. “To think this is all because I sat down and turned a blank page into a play that became a film.”

Making this film with his producing partners far exceeded Alden's expectations. "It was a true honor working with Jeff, Tim, and Melissa," says Alden. "To be in a creative room with such brilliant talent was inspiring and a wonderful experience. They have such passion, dedication, and incredible work ethic."

"Going through production with Tim at the helm was immensely enjoyable," continues Alden. "There was always laughter on set, and his unique vision and approach to directing makes his work identifiably distinctive."

For all involved, *Guest Artist* was a labor of love and an impassioned story that encourages artists and anyone with a dream to stand your truth and never give up. "The cast, crew, and entire creative team poured their heart and soul into *Guest Artist*," says Alden. "It is a beautiful story about love, art, addiction and the human condition."

"This film reminds us that there is no expiration date for your dreams," continues Alden. "That there is always an opportunity to be creative, take steps to improve your life, and at any moment: one experience, one person, or one decision can change the course of your entire life."

And much gratitude goes to Daniels for being the "one" who made this all a reality. "I'm grateful to Jeff for coming to Melissa's and my home, and pitching *Guest Artist* to us," says Busfield. "This project has left an indelible impact on me, and I hope this film is a reminder to everyone that it's never too late to change."

ABOUT THE CAST

JEFF DANIELS (Joseph Harris, Writer and Producer) is a multi-talented, prolific performer on screen, stage and in music. With a career that has spanned over four decades, Daniels has earned critical praise for his complex, nuanced and layered character portrayals. Recently, he received his second Primetime Emmy Award for his turn as the menacing outlaw, Frank Griffin, in Netflix's western series, "Godless."

Daniels made his acting start on the New York stage appearing in a number of on and Off-Broadway productions. For his acclaimed theatrical performances, Daniels has been bestowed with several honors and awards including an Obie Award and Drama Desk Award nomination for his Off-Broadway performance in the Circle Repertory Company's production of Dalton Trumbo's "Johnny Got His Gun"; two Drama Desk Award nominations, in plays by Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright, Lanford Wilson, the first for Outstanding Featured Actor in Wilson's "Fifth of July," and the second for Outstanding Actor in "Lemon Sky"; and twice Tony Award nominated as Lead Actor receiving the first for his role in "God of Carnage" and the second in "Blackbird."

His other theater credits include Lanford Wilson's, "Redwood Curtain" and A. R. Gurney's "The Golden Age." Currently, Daniels is starring as Atticus Finch in the Broadway presentation of "To Kill a Mockingbird."

In addition to his work on and Off-Broadway, Daniels is the Founder and Resident Playwright of his non-profit stage company, the Purple Rose Theatre Company located in his hometown of Chelsea, Michigan. The theater has produced many plays, of note, are "Flint," "Guest Artist," which was a Runner-Up for the American Theatre Critics Association Best New Play; "Across the Way," a finalist for the American Theatre Critics Association, and "The Meaning of Almost Everything," also American Theatre Critics Association nominated."

An equally revered television and film actor, Daniels made his big screen debut in Miloš Forman's Academy Award nominated film, *Ragtime*. He, next, appeared in James L. Brooks' Oscar-winning *Terms of Endearment*, followed by Woody Allen's *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, earning his first Golden Globe nomination. Daniels also gained critical attention for his work in Jonathan Demme's *Something Wild* achieving a second Golden Globe nomination. Further accolades ensued in recognition of Daniels' masterful performance in Noah Baumbach's widely praised *The Squid and the Whale* that garnered him an Independent Spirit Award, Golden Globe and National Society of Film Critics Award nominations.

Daniels' other feature credits include *Marie*, *Heartburn*, *Radio Days*, *The House on Carroll Street*, *Sweet Hearts Dance*, *Checking Out*, *Arachnophobia*, *Welcome Home*, *Roxy Carmichael*, *Love Hurts*, *The Butcher's Wife*, *Timescape*, *There Goes the Neighborhood*,

Rain Without Thunder, Gettysburg, Speed, Dumb and Dumber, Redwood Curtain, Fly Away Home, 2 Days in the Valley, 101 Dalmatians, Trial and Error, Pleasantville, My Favorite Martian, It's the Rage, Chasing Sleep, Cheaters, Escanaba in da Moonlight, Super Sucker, Blood Work, The Hours, Gods and Generals, I Witness, Imaginary Heroes, The Five People You Meet in Heaven, Because of Winn-Dixie, The Preacher, Good Night, and Good Luck, RV, Infamous, The Lookout, Mama's Boy, A Plumm Summer, Space Chimps, State of Play, Traitor, The Answer Man, Away We Go, Paper Man, Howl, Looper, Dumb and Dumber To, Steve Jobs, The Martian, The Divergent Series: Allegiant, and The Catcher Was a Spy.

On the small screen, Daniels captivated with his tour de force portrayal of, Will McAvoy, in Aaron Sorkin's award-winning HBO series, "The Newsroom," for which he won a Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Lead Actor in a Drama Series. He was also Emmy-nominated for his turn as John P. O'Neill in the Hulu miniseries "The Looming Tower."

An accomplished musician in his own right, Daniels has made six full-length albums with proceeds benefitting his Purple Rose Theatre Company.

THOMAS MACIAS (Kenneth Waters) was born in Hawaii, and grew up in Rochester, New York. After graduating from Rochester Institute of Technology, Macias moved to Chelsea, Michigan to apprentice at the Purple Rose Theatre Company.

After five years with the company, Macias has gone from apprentice to Resident Artist and Stage Manager working behind the scenes on approximately 1,000 performances.

Bitten by the acting bug, he decided to attend the Pointless School of Improv, in Ann Arbor, Michigan, graduating in 2017. And when Macias is not stage managing, he teaches improv classes at the Purple Rose.

ERIKA SLEZAK (Helen Morell) made her television debut, on March 17, 1971, in the daytime soap opera, "One Life to Live." In 2005, she broke her own record as the most honored actress in Daytime Emmy history, when she won her sixth Outstanding Lead Actress award for her portrayal of Victoria Lord. Ms. Slezak also won this prestigious honor in 1984, 1986, 1992, 1995 and 1996. In November 2002, she was inducted into the National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences' esteemed Silver Circle.

In addition to appearing in Jeff Daniels' film, *Guest Artist*, she also had a guest starring turn in the FOX drama, "The Resident."

A graduate of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London, Ms. Slezak was admitted to the prestigious school when she was only 17, one of the youngest students ever accepted. But, honors in the world of the arts are a tradition in her family.

Her father, the late Walter Slezak, starred in many films and Broadway hits, among them "Fanny," for which he won the Tony Award. Her grandfather was the world-famous operatic tenor, Leo Slezak, who sang in Vienna and Berlin, as well as at New York's Metropolitan Opera.

Before making her debut in television on "On Life to Live," Ms. Slezak established solid credentials in the theater. She was a member of the Milwaukee Repertory Company for three seasons, where she starred in everything from Shakespeare to Noël Coward, and she performed for another season at the Alley Theatre in Houston.

In 1974, Ms. Slezak was starring as Elizabeth, in Somerset Maugham's play, "The Circle," at the Roundabout Theatre when she met her husband, actor Brian Davies. They have been married for 40 years, and they have two children.

RICHARD MCWILLIAMS (Franz) is a veteran of the theatre appearing in numerous productions that include "Harvey," "Mornings at Seven," "33 Variations," "The Vast Difference," "The Price," "Long Day's Journey into Night," "Broadway Bound," "A Moon for the Misbegotten," "Richard III," and "Desire Under the Elms."

McWilliams has also appeared on Broadway in "Orpheus Descending" as well as Off-Broadway in "The Night Hank Williams Died" and "Macbeth."

As a Resident Artist at The Purple Rose Theatre Company, he performed in its production of "Annapurna."

DAN JOHNSON (Dan) has worked steadily as a professional actor and writer across the state of Michigan. His theatre appearances include “Assassins,” “Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street,” “All Childish Things - The Special Edition,” “Tales from the Mitten” which he was also co-author, “Best of Enemies,” “Twelfth Night” also composing the original music, “Necrofighter!” of which he was the author, “Tartuffe,” “Handle with Care,” “Brother of All,” “Kayak,” “Buzz ,” where he won the 2015 Detroit Repertory Theatre Subscriber Award for Best Supporting Male Actor, and “Firepower,” receiving a nomination for the 2017 Wilde Award and Broadway World Detroit Award for Best Supporting Actor.

Johnson was an understudy in the Purple Rose Theatre Company’s productions of “Never Not Once,” “Harvey” and “Stand.”

He is a graduate of Eastern Michigan University with a degree in Communication and Theatre Arts. *Guest Artist* marks his film debut.

MCKARA BECHLER (Hope) is an up and coming actress. She is performing her first role as Hope in *Guest Artist*. Bechler has also filmed commercials for 2188 Studio with director Jeff Daniels. She received her acting training at The Purple Rose Theatre Company.

Bechler was born and raised in Howell, Michigan.

LYNCH R. TRAVIS (Larry) was born and raised in Chicago, Illinois. While attending Carleton College, in Northfield, Minnesota, and studying for an Economics degree, he got the theater bug. But, Travis decided to pursue his business career delaying his entry into the professional acting arena for 15 years. In 1993, he was living in Metropolitan Detroit and rediscovered his love for acting.

Travis is a member of Actors’ Equity’s Association and SAG/AFTRA and is the recipient of theatre awards from the Ann Arbor News, Detroit News, Detroit Free Press, Oakland Press, Encore Michigan, Lansing City Pulse and the Detroit Theatre Examiner for his work as an actor and director. He has also won Subscriber Awards at the Performance Network and Detroit Repertory Theaters. This past season Travis received four nominations for his work as an actor and director from Broadway World Detroit.

Travis has also done a number of commercials and voice overs. He has been featured in eight motion pictures and made guest star appearances on NBC's "Chicago Fire" and "Save Our Sons."

He is a Resident Artist at the Purple Rose Theatre, Workshop Director for the Detroit Repertory Theater and a board member of the Jewish Ensemble Theatre. Travis has taught acting and theater at the Michigan Actors Studio, Mosaic Youth Theatre, Ann Arbor Public Schools, Wayne State University, and at Vista Maria Residential Program for Girls.

Currently, Travis resides in Westland, Michigan, and is a proud grandpa who is expecting granddaughter number two this spring. He is eternally grateful for the opportunities created by Jeff Daniels, Timothy Busfield and others for Midwestern Actors.

RUTH CRAWFORD (Mary) has appeared in The Purple Rose Theatre Company's productions of "Mornings at Seven" and "Harvey." She is looking forward to performing in their upcoming summer presentation of "Welcome to Paradise."

Crawford has appeared in several theatrical venues throughout the Detroit area such as Meadow Brook, The Tipping Point, Williamston Theatre and the Jet.

As a member of The Colony Theatre in Los Angeles, she was seen in "The Cocktail Hour" and "Ring Round the Moon."

Crawford has been featured in a number of movies and television shows filmed in and around Detroit, including the film *Flipped*, AMC's "Low Winter Sun," FX's "Trust," as well as a recurring role on "Detroiters."

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

TIMOTHY BUSFIELD (Director, Producer) is a Producer, Director and Emmy Award winning actor with over 650 professional credits. As a director his most recent film *Guest Artist*,

written by and starring Jeff Daniels, is due to premiere in 2019 at The Santa Barbara International Film Festival.

As an actor he has been a series regular or recurring character in 18 series including “thirtysomething,” “The West Wing,” “Entourage,” “Designated Survivor,” “Sleepy Hollow,” “Secrets and Lies,” “ED,” “Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip,” “Trapper John, M.D.,” “The Byrds of Paradise,” “Champs,” “Family Ties,” “Without A Trace,” “The Paper Chase,” “Reggie,” “All My Children” and most recently “One Dollar.”

Busfield has appeared in over 40 television movies and feature films, including *Field of Dreams*, *Stripes*, *Revenge of the Nerds*, *Nerds in Paradise*, *Quiz Show*, *Sneakers*, *Striking Distance*, *Little Big League*, *First Kid*, *National Security*, *23 Blast*, *Strays* and *Trucks*. His short film *One Smart Fellow* which he co-directed, co-wrote, and also acted in, won many film festivals nationwide in 2015-2016.

Busfield has directed over 140 episodes of television, including “This Is Us” and multiple episodes of “The Fosters” (also directed the pilot), “thirtysomething,” “Sports Night,” “Damages,” “Lipstick Jungle,” “Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip,” “Without A Trace,” “Las Vegas,” “The Night Shift,” “Secrets and Lies,” “The Glades,” “Designated Survivor,” “The Rookie” and many more.

He has served as a Producing Director on six television series including “Secrets and Lies,” “Mind Games,” “Lipstick Jungle,” “Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip,” “Without A Trace,” “ED” and the mini-series “Maneater.”

In theatre, Busfield has appeared in over 50 regional theatre productions and on Broadway twice, most recently as Lt. Daniel Kaffee in Aaron Sorkin’s “A Few Good Men.” He has also directed more than 35 professional productions and written dozens of children’s plays. Busfield founded two of America’s most successful professional theatres, The Fantasy Theatre (AKA the B Street School Tour) and The B Street Theatre, both in Sacramento, California. Now in their 33rd season, the theatres perform annually for over 250,000 children and adults at their facility in Sacramento and in schools throughout northern California.

He has an honorary PhD from Michigan State University and has served as an Artist in Residence and Director of National Content for their PBS affiliate WKAR.

Busfield lives in New York City with his wife, television icon and fantastic cook, Melissa Gilbert.

MELISSA GILBERT (Producer) is an Emmy winning, Golden Globe nominated actor, director, producer, and New York Times Best Selling author. As a producer her most recent film *Guest Artist*, written by and starring Jeff Daniels is due to premiere in 2019 at The Santa Barbara International Film Festival.

As an actress Gilbert's career began at the age of two appearing in commercials and guest spots. She achieved iconic status by the age of 19 after a ten-year run on the television classic "Little House on The Prairie." She has starred in over fifty television movies and feature films including *The Miracle Worker* (Emmy Nomination), "The Diary of Anne Frank" and "Splendor in the Grass." Her television series credits include "Little House on the Prairie" (Golden Globe Nomination, two Young Artist Awards), "Sweet Justice," "Stand By Your Man" and ABC's "Secrets and Lies." Gilbert's company, Halfpint Productions, produced several films including *The Miracle Worker* (Emmy Award).

Gilbert made her stage debut in 1979 as Helen Keller in "The Miracle Worker." A member of the legendary Actor's Studio, her other professional theater credits include Laura in "Glass Menagerie," Elma Duckworth in "Bus Stop," Melissa Gardner in "Love Letters," and Rose White in "A Shayna Maidel" (Outer Critic's Circle Award and Theater World Award). In 2008, Gilbert created the role of Ma in the Guthrie Theater's presentation of "Little House on the Prairie: The Musical," and touring North America the following year. In 2014, she played M'Lynn in a production of "Steel Magnolias" at the Totem Pole Playhouse. Her recent Off-Broadway credits include "If Only: A Love Story" at the Cherry Lane, "The Dead 1904" with the Irish Repertory Company and "My Brilliant Divorce" at the New Ohio Theater.

As an author Gilbert has penned three books. [Prairie Tale: A Memoir](#) (New York Times Best Seller), [Daisy and Josephine](#), a children's book and [My Prairie Cookbook](#).

In 2017, Gilbert, along with her partners Jeff Daniels and Timothy Busfield formed Grand River Productions and produced their first independent feature, *Guest Artist*.

In 1996, she made her television directing debut with the ABC after school special “Me and My Hormones.”

Gilbert will next appear in the independent feature film *When We Last Spoke* scheduled for release in 2019.

She served two terms as the 23rd President of Screen Actors Guild and in 2015 Gilbert and her husband Timothy Busfield co-starred, co-wrote and co-produced the multi-award-winning short film “One Smart Fellow.”

Gilbert was honored with the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce’s Lifetime Achievement Award, and at the age of twenty-one, Gilbert received a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. She is very proud to tell people that her star is just a short walk from her father’s.

Gilbert is the proud mother/stepmother of six sons and one stepdaughter. She is also grandmother/step-grandmother to her absolutely perfect, brilliant granddaughters, Lulabelle and Ruby.

MICHAEL A. ALDEN (Producer) is a two-time Tony Award winning Broadway Producer, three-time Emmy Award winning Television Producer, Film Producer, the Broadway Global Producer of the Year, Rounder/Universal recording artist, Billboard charting recording artist, actor, and the youngest multiple Tony award winning producer in history.

Alden's Broadway producing credits include “Pippin” (2013 Tony Award: Best Musical Revival), “Porgy and Bess” (2012 Tony Award: Best Musical Revival), “An American in Paris” (four Tony nominations) “Evita” starring Ricky Martin (Tony Award nomination for Best Musical Revival), “Bonnie & Clyde” (2 Tony Award nominations), “High” starring Kathleen Turner, “On the Town” (Tony nominated), and “Groundhog Day” which won the Olivier Award for Best Musical in London.

Alden has won every major theatrical award in theater, including the Tony Award, Olivier Award, Drama Desk, Outer Critics Circle, and Drama League Award. His international productions include: "Pippin" (Japan, Netherlands) "An American in Paris" (Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris, Dominion Theater London).

He is the creator and producer of the original television series "Monster's Rock" for Netflix and produced the television special "From Broadway with Love" (PBS), and "Due Process" (PBS/NJTV) for which he won three Emmy Awards. Most recently, Alden produced the film *Guest Artist*, starring Jeff Daniels, and is in development on forthcoming film and television projects.

His Broadway Charity/Philanthropic Concerts (Producer) include Habitat for Humanity Gala (honoring President Jimmy Carter, hosted by Garth Brooks), Project Creo (global education charity), Broadway Unleashed (animal benefit & was featured on The Today Show) among many others. He also produced various concerts for Broadway stars & recording artists.

As an actor, Alden performed on Broadway in "Something's Wonderful" (featuring Tom Hanks, Shirley Jones), "Oliver" (featuring Brian Stokes Mitchell), "Camelot" (featuring Jeremy Irons), and "Brigadoon" at the Shubert Theatre. He also played an Apostle in the Hollywood production of "Jesus Christ Superstar" starring Jack Black, Yvonne Elliman, and Ted Neeley.

Alden is a Rounder/Universal Recording Artist, singer, musician, as part of the country/bluegrass band Malibu Storm. His single "Photograph" reached # 2 on Billboard Chart and featured a hit music video on CMT (country music television), GAC (Great American Country TV), and VH1. Alden toured the nation and internationally with his band including several performances at the legendary Grand Ole Opry.

He produced the spoken word album, "Rosie the Imperfect Angel," featuring Melissa Gilbert and album notes by Academy Award winner Marlee Matlin which was on the Grammy ballot. The album included an original musical composition written by Alden and performed by the Moscow Symphony Orchestra.

DONALD CLARK (Executive Producer) is the Executive Producer of *Guest Artist*, his first feature film. A retired lawyer and now entertainment entrepreneur, Clark is co-owner of the Chicago Magic Lounge - a live performance theater dedicated to the unique art form of close-up magic and the number one rated nightlife destination in Chicago (TripAdvisor) and one of "Chicago's Best" (Chicago Magazine). Clark was a producer of the Broadway play "The Encounter," which won a special Tony Award, Drama Desk Award, and Outer Critics Circle Award in 2018.

Clark previously served as the General Counsel of the United Church of Christ, a Protestant religious denomination comprised of almost 5,000 local churches and approximately 900,000 members and was Acting President of the Chicago Theological Seminary. He graduated from Williams College and obtained his law degree from Rutgers University, which honored him as one of "Rutger's Finest" and gave him its Distinguished Alumni Award. Clark also has an honorary degree from the Chicago Theological Seminary.

A recognized specialist in religion clause jurisprudence, Clark's legal practice was nationwide in scope and included overseeing the litigation that brought marriage equality to North Carolina and successfully arguing an important establishment clause case before the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court. His pro bono work includes the successful post-conviction representation of a death row inmate in Alabama. Clark's civic engagements include serving as Chair of the Board of Trustees of both the Adler Planetarium and the Chicago Theological Seminary. He has held elected office as the President of the West Northfield District 31 School Board.

Clark was a member of the 1984 Illinois Men's Curling championship team.

CARLEY BURGESS (Co-Producer) has always dreamed to improve representation in film and reconstruct narrative norms. That took her to Michigan State University where she graduated in 2017 with a degree in TV, Cinema and Radio. Her dream then led her to Brooklyn, New York where she now lives and works as a producer and writer.

Burgess wrote the Student-Emmy winning short film, *On the Way Up*. Her collaboration with Timothy Busfield and Melissa Gilbert first began with the award-winning short film, *Tenure*. A year later, she had the pleasure of working with them again, alongside Jeff Daniels, where she co-produced the feature film *Guest Artist*.

ALYSSA LOVEALL (Editor, Producer) has always been drawn to the art of storytelling. Growing up in small town Indiana, she gravitated to film and editing as the ultimate narrative platform. After graduating with a Telecommunications degree from Indiana University, she moved to Los Angeles to pursue a career in the entertainment industry.

Loveall has worked as an editor/assistant editor on numerous television shows and independent projects including “The Blacklist,” “Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D” and “Brooklyn Nine-Nine.”

Most recently, she edited and produced the independent feature film *Guest Artist* written and starring Jeff Daniels and directed by Timothy Busfield.

She lives in Santa Monica with her husband Cole, sons West and Boone and cat Halle.

WILLY BUSFIELD (Director of Photography) is an American cinematographer and filmmaker. He holds undergraduate and master’s degrees in film studies from California Institute of the Arts.

Since graduating, Busfield has lensed over a hundred commercial campaigns for clients such as Calvin Klein, Chanel, Tiffany & Co., Sonia Rykiel and Hermès. He has also produced and co-directed over thirty episodes of network and cable television.

Busfield splits his time working between New York, Los Angeles and Paris.

BEN DANIELS (Music by) is an American Audio Engineer and Singer/Songwriter. He studied at the Conservatory of Recording Arts & Science in Tempe, Arizona.

Daniels runs 2188 Studio in Michigan where he records bands including his own (Ben Daniels Band) and conducts other commercial work.

MICHAEL FERDIE (Re-Recording Mixer, Producer) is a Supervising Sound Editor, Designer and Re-Recording Mixer in Los Angeles who grew up in Tucson, Arizona.

An MPSE Golden Reel, Hollywood Post Alliance and Hollywood Reel Independent Film Festival award winner, he has worked on "Jessica Jones," "Young Sheldon," "TRON: Uprising," "Fringe," *Titan A.E.*, *Happy Endings* and "Designated Survivor" among many others.

Ferdie most recently collaborated on the film *Guest Artist* as well as the award-winning films *One Smart Fellow* and *Tenure*.

MICHAEL LOHMANN (Producer) first made his mark as a cinematographer on numerous television series some of which include "Boston Legal," "The Glades," "Harry's Law," "Monday Mornings" and "Nashville." In addition to his work behind the lens on "Nashville," he also served as director and producer of the acclaimed series.

Most recently, Lohmann is the co-executive producer of ABC's new family drama, "A Million Little Things" and is also developing the series "Disgraceland" for MRC which he is writing and directing.

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