

Men Will Be Boys...



RATIONAL EXUBERANCE Presents A BURT BULOS/ PL HOLLEMAN Production
A Film by PHIL LEIRNESS • THE LADY KILLERS • Music by GREG DE BELLES
Executive Produced by DEAN HAGLUND ARIS TAGLE SEAN TOWNLEY
Co- Produced by LILY HOLLEMAN PHIL LEIRNESS Produced by BURT BULOS
Photographed, Edited, Written & Directed by PHIL LEIRNESS
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**RATIONAL
EXUBERANCE**

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The Story

TAGLINE

Seven men, several crimes, violence, murder, mystery, misogyny. It is just a game.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

A dark comedy about a high-stakes game of romantic conquest gone wrong, *THE LADY KILLERS* explores the ways exploitation leads to violence.

LONG SYNOPSIS

BOYS WILL BE BOYS. For several fraternity brothers, college life was all fun and games. One of these games was a contest of romantic conquest. To the winner went a few hundred bucks and the respect of his peers. The lasting consequences of the game were a few broken hearts and a few embarrassing moments, but no one got hurt. After all, it was just a game.

Many years have passed and a few of the fraternity brothers have kept in touch, though they are in quite different walks of life. Along with some of their more new-found friends, the fraternity brothers decide to reprise their favorite game, this time for much higher stakes.

MEN WILL BE BOYS. The participants include a **HOMICIDE DETECTIVE**, a **DENTIST**, a **PERSONAL TRAINER**, a **HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER**, an **INVESTMENT BANKER**, a **THERAPIST**, and an **ON-SITE DOCUMENT DESTRUCTION SPECIALIST**. To the winner goes several thousand dollars. Unfortunately, along with higher stakes come more dire consequences.

After the new winner is crowned, one by one, the men turn up dead, and it is up to the **HOMICIDE DETECTIVE** to solve these seemingly unrelated accidents, suicides, and murders, before he becomes the next victim.

THE LADY KILLERS is for ages 17 and up, and comes complete with seven players, seven conquests, several murders, and copious amounts of sex, violence and misogyny. Like any love story based in contemporary Los Angeles, it's sexy, funny, horrifying and it just might kill you. Yet, no one should take offense. After all, it is just a game. It is just a movie.

It is just ... "Locker room talk."

The Storyteller

PHIL LEIRNESS – Director, Writer, Cinematographer, Editor, Co-Producer

The Lady Killers is the seventh feature film from Phil Leirness. His sixth film, the feature documentary *The Truth Is Out There*, earned rave reviews following its World Premiere in spring of 2011 at the British Film Institute's National Film Theatre in London. An epic of comedy, consciousness and conspiracy, the film follows former star of "The X-Files" and "The Lone Gunmen", Dean Haglund, as he travels the globe, hoping to learn what it means to seek the truth in a world where conspiracies, or conspiracy theories, are everywhere. Leirness directed, photographed, edited the film, and co-executive produced with Haglund. A sequel to the film is currently underway, with an expected premiere date of Spring 2019.

Since May of 2007, along with Haglund, Leirness has co-hosted the free weekly podcast "Chillpak Hollywood Hour" and the two have been described as "podcast royalty" by Marc Hershon of The Huffington Post and Splitsider. In addition, Leirness is a weekly American cultural correspondent for Alex Lewczuk's "Midweek Drive" on Siren 107.3 FM and Southside Broadcasting in the UK.

A graduate of the UCLA Film School, Phil Leirness made his feature film debut as a writer-director with *Til Death Do Us Part*, a low-budget romantic comedy released internationally by Solomon International Enterprises. Leirness then produced and directed an industrial film and several commercials before writing, producing, directing and acting in *The Party Crashers*. A dark comedy about a Hollywood party held hostage, Daily Variety called the film "slyly amusing" and described it as "good-looking, technically resourceful, attractively cast and assuredly paced." It played numerous film festivals around the world and was distributed internationally by Cinema Arts Entertainment. The film, which starred John Saxon, Shawnee Smith, Max Parrish, Peter Murnik, Burt Bulos, Josh Randall and Jamie Kaler, received a limited U.S. theatrical release in July of 2001 and was released on DVD/VHS through Pathfinder Pictures in October of 2002. The third feature film to be directed by Leirness was an English-language remake of the erotic classic *The Story of O* (Leirness also co-wrote the screenplay). Although legal and MPAA ratings issues prevented its release in the United States, *The Story of O: Untold Pleasures* received high-profile releases throughout the world and was a major financial success.

From 2001 to summer of 2005, Leirness served as Head of Acquisitions and Development for GOAL Productions and its feature film division, Shadowland. In this capacity, Leirness oversaw development and production of the PBS documentary *The Great Year* and directed more than forty behind-the-scenes documentary short subjects examining the making of various feature films. Leirness also directed the debut feature film from Shadowland, *Spectres*. A science-fiction ghost story called one of the year's "most impressive independent movies" by Sci-Fi Online, the film focused on the estranged relationship between a workaholic mother, played by Marina Sirtis, and her suicidal teen-aged daughter, played by Lauren Birkell. *Spectres* also starred a veritable "who's who" of science fiction performers, including Dean Haglund, Tucker Smallwood, Alexis Cruz, Linda Park and David Hedison. The film played numerous festivals around the world, earning accolades and stellar reviews, including from the Cinequest Film Festival, which declared, "Phil Leirness' *Spectres* displays

his unique talent for drawing complex characters balanced with stylish, entertaining cinema." The film became a Lifetime Movie Network exclusive in the U.S. (under the alternate title "Soul Survivor") and was released on DVD through Universal and Xenon Pictures.

In August of 2005, Leirness continued his long-standing affiliation with Cinema Arts Entertainment, becoming the Managing Director of the international production and distribution company as well as its sister companies Artedis S.A. (Paris) and Panoceanic Films. Leirness held this position until June of 2008, when he left to promote his feature film *Karl Rove, I Love You*. This fictional documentary was described as "a political *Blair Witch Project*" by The Huffington Post and "a weird love letter to the most evil political figure of our time" by The Village Voice. Leirness co-directed (along with Dan Butler), co-executive produced (along with Julia Miranda), narrated, and served as director of photography on the film, which played to sold out audiences in New York City and Los Angeles, set attendance records in Vermont, and won awards in Indianapolis (Indianapolis International Film Festival), Providence (Rhode Island International Film Festival), and Spain (Zinegoak Film Festival). Oscar-winning filmmaker Jonathan Demme called *Karl Rove, I Love You* "an all-around, first-class ensemble act of collective imagination, brought to life in a totally original film, as 'indie', and often as funny, as it gets." The film, which starred Butler, Leirness, Miranda and Alec Baldwin, was released on DVD in 2009 through Ariztical Entertainment.

DIRECTOR STATEMENT

I enjoy making movies about things that make me angry. When I find humorous ways to depict these topics, and convey these themes, then I know I am both an easier person to be around and a more interesting storyteller. As both a filmmaker and as a California state certified Violence Prevention Specialist, I had grown increasingly concerned by what I saw as a proliferation of exploitative imagery being produced, marketed and consumed as entertainment, as diversion.

When we completed THE LADY KILLERS, I knew we had made a deeply unsettling film, though I thought to myself, "Who doesn't want to see a dark comedy that explores the ways exploitation and misogyny lead to violence?" It turned out that the answer to that question was "everyone" - Everyone did NOT want to see such a film! We could not get people to look at it. And then we had a U.S. Presidential election ...

At our first table read of the screenplay, I was engaged in conversation with actress Isabel Cueva. "Obviously, this is an exaggerated depiction of toxic masculinity," I told her.

She disagreed, stating in no uncertain terms, "No. This is exactly what men are like."

I remember thinking to myself that I was glad that I did not inhabit the same world in which she lived. Now, in the wake of that Presidential election, in the wake of Harvey Weinstein and in the wake of #MeToo, we ALL live in that world.

We have heard stories from many who have seen the film, first-hand accounts from many who have experienced real-life circumstances eerily similar to those we depict. In fact, one woman told of us a game almost identical to the one at the center of our story being played at a non-profit in our nation's capital.

Still, why make a movie that even I, myself, am uncomfortable watching?

Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, "People wish to be settled; Only so far as they are unsettled, is there any hope for them."

THE LADY KILLERS finds itself on the right side of an unsettling, and therefore critically important cultural conversation. It is a conversation that is long overdue.

It is a conversation that is only beginning.

- Phil Leirness

The Cast



JAMIE KALER

The host of *America: Facts vs. Fiction* on American Heroes, the host of the "Father Time" podcast and the host of "Kaler" on SiriusXM, Jamie is an accomplished stand-up comic, a frequent contributor to *Robot Chicken* and is best known for playing "Mike Callahan" on the popular TBS series *My Boys*. He has guest starred on such series as *Arrested Development*, *That 70's Show*, *How I Met Your Mother*, *Will and Grace*, *Monk* and most recently on *Heathers* and *NCIS*. He has had key supporting roles in such films as *Spanglish*, *The Family Stone*, *Dragon Wars* and was recently seen in *Teacher of the Year* and *Fixed*. In *The Lady Killers*, Jamie plays the lead role of a homicide detective.

ALEXANDRA BARRETO

Currently recurring on the television series *The Fosters*, Alexandra produced the recent detective film *Too Late* starring John Hawkes. Alexandra was a series regular on *Pepper Dennis* and has been seen in recurring roles on *Resurrection Blvd.*, *American Family*, *The District*, *Justified* and *Summerland*. She has guest-starred on *Cold Case*, *CSI: NY*, *NCIS*, *Castle*, *House M.D.* and *Pushing Daisies*. In *The Lady Killers*, Alexandra plays the cop partner of the homicide detective.



PETER SHINKODA

A talented and charming performer, Peter is currently known to television audiences as "Nobu" an arch-villain on Netflix's smash hit *Daredevil*. Before that, Peter was known to television audiences as "Dai" on *Falling Skies*. He got his start on *Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers* and has appeared on such series as *The L Word*, *Stephen King's Dead Zone*, *Supernatural*, *Stargate SG-1* and *Hawaii 5-0*. Peter's film credits include *I, Robot* and *War*, *Western Religion* and *Go for Broke* as well as the forthcoming *Waikiki*. In *The Lady Killers*, Peter plays a high school teacher who seduces one of his students while participating in a game of romantic conquest.

LILY HOLLEMAN

The independent film *@urFRENZ* earned Lily numerous best actress prizes for a performance *Variety* reviewer John Anderson described as "iconic." Lily's other films include *Tenure*, *How I Got Lost* and the recent cult hit *The Love Witch*. This year, she will be seen in *Home to Roost* and *The Thinning: New World Order*. On television, Lily has been seen in recurring roles on *Tracy Ullman's State of the Union*, *Southland* and *Shameless*. In *The Lady Killers*, Lily plays the long-suffering wife of a therapist.





DEAN HAGLUND

Known the world over as one of "The Lone Gunmen" from *The X-Files* and their own spin-off series, Dean is a renowned improvisational comedian and has toured the world with his one-man improv show, playing to sold out houses and rave reviews. Dean is executive producer and star of the documentary feature *The Truth Is Out There*. His other acting credits include the TV series *The Commish*, *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids*, *Sliders*, *Robocop: Alpha Command*, *Bones* and *Femme Fatales*. Along with director Phil Leirness, Dean co-hosts the weekly podcast "Chillpak Hollywood Hour". In *The Lady Killers*, Dean plays an on-site document destruction specialist.

CATHERINE ANNETTE

For two years, Catherine was seen in a recurring role on the television series *Femme Fatales*. Catherine's feature film credits include *Super Shark*, *Noobz*, *Zero Dark Thirty*, *Lucky Bastard*, *The Coed and the Zombie Stoner*, *After Midnight*, *Nobody Can Cool*, *The Black Room*, *Spreading Darkness* and *Proxy Kill* as well as the forthcoming *Sunset Society* and *The Capture*. A real-life swordplay expert and instructor, Catherine's combat skill will be on display in a surprise-filled role in *The Lady Killers*.



ARYE GROSS



One of the most accomplished character actors of his generation, Arye recently wrapped up a recurring role on the television series *Castle*. Previously, Arye appeared in recurring roles on *Diagnosis Murder* and *The Practice* as well as in a starring role on the ground-breaking sitcom *Ellen*. His film credits include *Minority Report*, *Gone in Sixty Seconds*, *Tequila Sunrise*, *Soul Man*, *Just one of the Guys*, *A Midnight Clear*, *Atlas Shrugged II*, *Commencement* and *Diani & Devine Meet the Apocalypse*. Arye will soon be seen as part of director Mark Pellington's all-star ensemble in *Nostalgia*. In *The Lady Killers*, Arye plays a villainous investment banker.

WHITNEY ANDERSON

Whitney has recently been seen in guest-starring roles on such series as *Masters of Sex*, *CSI: Miami*, *Veronica Mars*, *CSI: NY*, *Ghost Whisperer*, *Aliens in America*, *Bones* and *NCIS: Los Angeles* and as a series regular on the Hulu series *South Beach* and the YouTube series *The Wise Guys*. She has starred in the independent films *Shuffle*, *Alyce*, *The Godmother*, the cult smash *Zombie Strippers* and the recent releases *Toolbox Murders 2*, *American Poltergeist 3* and *Negative*. In *The Lady Killers*, Whitney plays the vengeful wife of the villainous investment banker.



BURT BULOS



The extremely charismatic Burt Bulos has starred in such independent films as *Yellow*, *The Party Crashers*, and *Blur*, and had supporting roles in such hits as *Beverly Hills Ninja* and *Godzilla*. On television, Burt has been seen on such series as *Alias*, *Without a Trace*, *NCIS*, *24* and in recurring roles on *ER* and *The Game*, and most recently in a recurring roles on the Amazon drama series *Bosch* and on the long-running daytime drama *The Days of Our Lives*. In *The Lady Killers*, Burt plays a personal trainer with a great deal of ambition.

HEIDI MARIE WANSER

An acclaimed singer, songwriter and musician, as well as an in-demand model, Heidi Marie has specialized in playing temptresses and tough-girls gone bad in films like *See Dick Run*, *Doomed* and *Game Over*. Recently, Heidi Marie was seen on the Cinemax series *Femme Fatales* and on Vin Diesel's web series *The Ropes*. In *The Lady Killers*, Heidi Marie plays a star of an action-adventure television series, who gets lured into a game of sexual manipulation by two of her business partners.



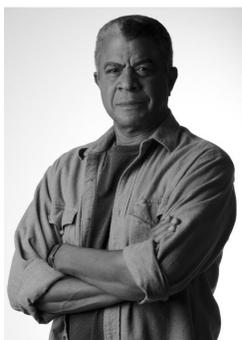


SHAUN PARKER

Shaun Parker is the writer-producer-director of the short film *Hope. You Like Crap*. He has come to the acting game after more than thirteen years of improv comedy in hopes of proving it's never too late to pursue a dream. He was an executive producer of and actor in the cult comedy *Live Nude Girls*. Shaun's contribution to "Mortified", a stage show that is a comic excavation of the strange and extraordinary things people create as children, was profiled on National Public Radio. In *The Lady Killers*, Shaun plays a successful but stunted Periodontist under great pressure to live *down* to the behavior of his peers.

ISABEL CUEVA

A writer, producer and director as well as an accomplished actress, Isabel Cueva was recently named one of Indiewire's "Women to watch". She has been seen in the SyFy television movie *American Horror House* and in the feature films *American Flyer*, *Jack the Reaper*, *North by El Norte*, *Aztec Warrior*, *The 4th* and *Vigilante Diaries*. Isabel wrote and directed the forthcoming feature film *Linda Jones* as well as the recently completed television pilot *The Haunt*. In *The Lady Killers*, Isabel plays "Maria", a fragile woman lacking in confidence who is preyed upon by her own therapist.



TUCKER SMALLWOOD

Tucker has acted in such blockbusters as *The Cotton Club*, *Presumed Innocent* and *Contact*, and in such independent films as *Spectres* and *Black Dynamite*. Tucker is well-known to science-fiction fans for his guest-starring roles on such series as *The X-Files*, *Babylon 5* and *Star Trek: Voyager*, for his recurring role on *Star Trek: Enterprise* and for his starring role on *Space: Above and Beyond*. In *The Lady Killers*, Tucker plays the mysterious, well-informed proprietor of The Shadow, a tavern where much of the film's action takes place.

CHRISTINA GRANCE

An accomplished dancer and dance instructor, as well as an actress, the lovely Christina Grance has appeared on the television series *Grey's Anatomy*, *Saving Grace* and *Castle*. Christina made her big-screen debut in *Redbelt* for writer-director David Mamet and was recently seen in both the horror-thriller *American Weapon* and the all-star comedy-drama *Jake Squared*. In *The Lady Killers*, Christina plays "Diana", a woman with secrets.



DAVID DEAN BOTTRELL

David is probably best known for playing the creepy "Lincoln Meyer" on season three of *Boston Legal*. Known for his quirky characterizations, he has made memorable guest appearances on such shows as *The Blacklist*, *Mad Men*, *Justified*, *True Blood*, *NCIS*, *Criminal Minds*, *Castle*, *iCarly*, and *Days of Our Lives*. A former off-Broadway actor & playwright, and a much in-demand acting coach in both Los Angeles and New York City, his critically-acclaimed one-man shows consistently play to sold out audiences. In *The Lady Killers*, David plays a mysterious and colorful character in one of the film's most hilarious sequences.

STEPHANIE ERB

Stephanie made her big-screen debut for legendary director Peter Weir in *Fearless* and has appeared in such films as *Starship Troopers*, *The Ring* and *Tenacious D in The Pick of Destiny*. Stephanie made her television debut on *Star Trek: The Next Generation* and has since played recurring roles on *Weeds*, *24*, *Freaks and Geeks*, *Port Charles*, *True Blood* and *Ray Donovan*. In *The Lady Killers*, Stephanie plays a key role in one of the film's most disturbing sequences.



Production Notes

Writer-director-producer-cinematographer-editor-actor Phil Leirness likes making movies about things that make him angry. If he can find a way to laugh about those things (as he did with his political satire *Karl Rove, I Love You*), or find a humorous portrayal of those subjects (as he did in his epic documentary about comedy, consciousness and conspiracy, *The Truth Is Out There*), then as he puts it, he will be "both an easier person to be around and a more interesting storyteller."

Aya Peard, an acclaimed singer-songwriter as well as an accomplished post-production visual artist, has been a life-long friend of Leirness and describes him by saying, "Phil has always had a really intense inquiry into human nature and into the journey of the soul."

Actress Lily Holleman is the long-time partner of Leirness. In fact, the two recently became engaged during a question and answer session following a screening of *The Lady Killers* in the San Jose theater where many years ago Leirness first realized he had to become a filmmaker (during a showing of Wim Wenders' *Wings of Desire*). Holleman states that "Phil is someone with a very unique perspective, who knows exactly how he wants to convey that perspective and he's not concerned with pleasing other people or being anybody else. That's what's really exciting about working with him." Holleman both acts in and co-produced *The Lady Killers*.

California State certified as a Violence Prevention Specialist in 2005, Leirness had been growing increasingly concerned, as both an activist and as an artist, about the proliferation of exploitative images sold and consumed as entertainment. So, when producer and actor Burt Bulos suggested that the time was right for them to make something truly dark, Leirness jumped at the opportunity to make a film that would explore the ways exploitation, in its many forms, leads to violence.

The Lady Killers is a dark comedy that focuses on a game of high-stakes romantic conquest gone wrong, one that leads to dire results. Leirness had originally written it more than fifteen years earlier. He recalls, "The one thing that worked very well was the game." Nevertheless, Leirness was dissatisfied with the script, so he shelved it.

Bulos had remembered the script all those years, however. "It was very commercial, but very indie. It had great twists and great characters." So, Bulos convinced Leirness to take another look at the screenplay, stressing that it was exactly what the times called for, namely a film that "goes to the edge", one that explores just how much misogyny and exploitation drive, perhaps unconsciously, our culture.

Upon re-reading the old script, Leirness realized what had left him feeling dissatisfied so many years prior. "It was because the story focused on a group of males approximately thirty years of age," Leirness explains. "The behavior they embodied was really just too much 'boys being boys'." Leirness found himself immediately inspired to turn the screenplay into something far more truthful and far more relevant, thereby hopefully creating a work that would be far more disturbing and significant. He knew he could achieve this if the game central to the film's story was played by a group of men in their forties, men who had achieved some level of stature in

their lives and who nevertheless were all consumed by, for various reasons, a need, as Leirness puts it, "to blow up their lives."

The impact of Leirness' rewrite effort was that a script that had once gone "to the edge", now, according to Bulos, had them "dancing on the edge. We were doing handstands on the edge."

"I was disturbed," recalls Lily Holleman in describing the finished screenplay. "I liked the writing, but I didn't know where it was going." Then she reached the end and found that "it all fell together." She thought, "This is good reading and it's going to be a good movie and this is exciting."

Associate Producer Eric Mark also found the material disturbing. In fact, he remembers that three-quarters of the way through reading the screenplay, he thought, "This is not only dark, it's something that scares me." However, similar to Holleman's experience, by the time Mark had reached the twists and reveals in the script's third act, he realized, "Not only was it clever, it completely reversed itself and took something that was essentially evil and turned it into something that was really provocative and really thoughtful."

Although the film would be told through the eyes of its seven male lead characters, Leirness wanted the presence of the film's female characters to be felt throughout. One way he sought to accomplish this was by giving the women voice even when they were not on-screen, in the form of songs written and performed by Aya Peard. Peard was struck by how dark the world was that Leirness sought to create and how it was populated by truly despicable characters. "He's made other films with characters that are despicable, but there has always been a touch of love or compassion for some of them," she explains. In reading *The Lady Killers*, Peard could only find one character for whom she had genuine sympathy. It was the part of Michael Austin, a periodontist too in need of his own therapist's approval, who lives with his ill mother and who finds himself bullied by his supposed friends.

It is a role designed to break people's hearts, and it is one Leirness wrote specifically for actor Shaun Parker. Leirness had first seen Parker's work in an acting class taught by David Dean Bottrell, one of Leirness' favorite character actors (who would, himself, play a deliciously funny scene in the film). "I felt like I won the lottery when I got that part," Parker exclaims. He adds that although the character is "screwed up", he fell in love with him.

Leirness wrote many of the roles in the film for actors he loved. In fact, he explains that every decision he made as a writer, director and producer was "an act of love". It was only through this approach that Leirness could explore the sometimes sinister darkness of the story and its characters without ever losing himself or being taken by that darkness. It's also an approach than would enable *The Lady Killers* to maintain a consistently comedic tone. Aya Peard observes, "The way Phil can take these despicable characters and bring so much humor out of them is one of the real gifts of this film."

The lead role of corrupt police detective Pete Martel was written with Jamie Kaler in mind. A successful actor and an accomplished comedian, Kaler remembers reading the script and thinking, "It was really funny. It was good and I liked it a lot. And so, that was the moment I knew he was never going to get this made!" Leirness had been one of the first directors to take a chance on Kaler when he cast him in *The Party Crashers* (the second feature film Leirness

directed). "I had such a fun time shooting that," Kaler remembers. In fact, he wished he had more days on that film. "I wanted to do more of it!"

"It's always been a lot of fun in Phil's films," Burt Bulos explains, having worked with Leirness on several occasions. "He has a way of making the environment a very relaxed set. As actors, we spend a whole lot of time on relaxation exercises," he says, laughing. "Phil creates such a relaxed and light set and he lets you play." Bulos also acted in *The Party Crashers* and remembers saying to himself back then, "This is probably going to be one of the most fun experiences I've had looking back."

Leirness wrote the role of high school teacher Brian Kato with Peter Shinkoda in mind. It was a role that required an actor who was smart enough to be believable as a teacher, cool enough to be the type of teacher to whom students could relate, and someone who could play moral flexibility convincingly enough so that audiences would believe him abusing his relationships with those students. Shinkoda's reaction to that role? He thought, "This is what you think of me, Phil?" After getting over the initial fear of playing someone who might be reviled by audiences, Shinkoda loved the idea that he would be able to do something so different than what he had done before. "It's honestly something that's never been done by an Asian-American actor, so I took it!"

For almost eleven years, Leirness has co-hosted the Chillpak Hollywood Hour podcast with his producing partner, actor-comic-artist-inventor Dean Haglund. Leirness loved not only getting to write the key role of Paul Lewis, an on-site document destruction specialist, for Haglund, but in the process getting to poke fun at how closely Haglund continues to be identified with the rather iconic role he played for nine years on "The X-Files" (and in his own spin-off series), a role he has reprised in two episodes of the revival seasons of the show. "Is this character as close to me as you can possibly get?" Haglund wonders about his role in *The Lady Killers* for a moment before answering his own question in the affirmative. "That's damn scary, isn't it? I don't even trust me anymore!"

Bulos compares the role written for him in *The Lady Killers* to the role played by Tony Curtis in *Sweet Smell of Success*. In that classic film, Curtis' character, Sidney Falco, is constantly hustling. "He's coming from a place that's somewhat desperate," Bulos explains. "And that's what I thought of my character. He's just hustling and he's got to do what he's got to do." And what Bulos' character of Stephen Consing has to do is to curry favor with anyone in power and be willing to double-cross those close to him if it will help him curry that favor.

The role of William, the proprietor of the bar where some of the film's key action takes place, is not a sizable role. Nevertheless, it proves to be a very important one. Leirness always wanted his friend Tucker Smallwood to play the part. Smallwood says, "I can remember thinking as I read through the piece the first few times and appreciated that it takes place on a number of different levels of reality that my character could, in fact, be an embodiment of not necessarily *the* devil, but an entity of evil." Leirness loved that this idea had occurred to Smallwood, because in the original draft written so many years earlier, the character of William actually revealed himself to be the devil. "I've noticed over the years that Phil is often drawn to dark themes and when you combine humor, sex and darkness, that's a pretty volatile recipe."

In a film full of despicable, deplorable characters, the role of investment banker Dan Casey is, if not the villain, someone the audience must at least identify as being villainous. It also proved the most challenging to cast. Originally written for a specific actor, Leirness had to look elsewhere when that actor's television commitments made him unavailable. So, Leirness gave the script to Arye Gross, who in the estimation of Leirness, is the best character actor working today. Unfortunately, Gross turned it down.

"I really didn't understand what the movie was about," Gross confesses. This led to a very frustrating search for Leirness.

The script was read by many notable actors who were all eager to play the role. "Most people read the script and wanted to play the part because of how funny it was," Leirness recalls. "Arye couldn't understand why the character was funny. He couldn't understand why anyone would find it funny." Ironically, it was this very reluctance that convinced Leirness all the more that Gross was the right actor for the role. "Because ultimately he wouldn't be playing it for laughs," Leirness explains. "He wouldn't be playing it because it was funny. He would be playing it because he was finding some real person."

The clock was ticking. Production had already been postponed once. Leirness had to make a decision. To placate his producing partners, he announced on a Sunday night that he would make a casting decision by Wednesday. On Tuesday night, Arye Gross called him from France wanting to know if the part had been cast and if it wasn't, would Leirness wait to make any decision until they could meet and discuss it further. "I think I decided that things would become clearer as we went along if I would just take the leap with Phil," Gross confesses.

With the key male roles cast, Leirness turned his attention to the female roles. He had long wanted to work with the supremely talented Alexandra Barreto, coming, as he puts it, "dangerously close on a couple of occasions."

"It had been about ten years of us trying to work together," Barreto confirms. "So, to be honest, I don't think I ever thought it would actually happen." Days before her work on *The Lady Killers* was set to commence, *Too Late*, a movie Barreto was producing, had its production dates change and the two films were now in direct scheduling conflict. Before offering the role to anyone else, Leirness looked at his film's shooting schedule to see if he could reconfigure it in a way that would accommodate Barreto. He was able to, and they were finally able to work together. Her character, Ali, is the police detective partner of Jamie Kaler's character. "What I loved about Ali," Barreto confides, "was that you're just not sure what to think about her and by the end you realize she's the strongest person in the whole script."

Leirness first met actress Heidi Marie Wanser when she served as the costumer on his feature film *Spectres*. "When we worked on *Spectres*, Phil said, 'I'm going to put you in a film.'" Wanser was skeptical. "But here we are, years later, and he still has my back and still sees the talent in me." Wanser found it very easy to relate to the television actress character that Leirness wrote for her and with what she must endure. "It's a hard thing being a woman in a male-dominated industry."

Actress Christina Grance previously worked with Leirness on a short film and recalls being impressed with his ability on set to "pull the whole group together." Grance describes Leirness

as being "very clear about what he likes and what he wants." Ironically, Leirness was absolutely unclear about what he was looking for when it came to casting the role of Diana, and it was this lack of clarity that led to his casting Grance. She describes the character as "someone with a lot of mystery and ambiguity."

"All I knew was this was a woman with secrets," Leirness confesses. "There's always been something about Christina, the way she carries herself, the way she expresses herself, where you know there is a rich inner landscape within this person." It was that aspect of Grance's makeup that convinced Leirness that although he wasn't quite sure what he was looking for, she had it.

"When you're an actress, one of the main things you're always told is to never judge your character," Grance explains, before adding, "But I did." Grance had to work through her judgments about a young married woman who is lost, maybe even a little bored with life, who seeks something exciting to revivify her and finds it with the character played by Burt Bulos. Because her character was so different from herself, exploring the circumstances of her character's life and marriage ultimately proved to be the most intriguing aspect of the film for Grance.

Catherine Annette was honored that Leirness wrote the pivotal role of Sharon with her in mind, even if she remains puzzled by the casting to this day. "He cast me as a crazy girl," she observes.

When asked, Leirness confesses, "She's talented, she's sweet, she's compassionate, she's drop dead beautiful and like all of my favorite people, she has a touch of madness she embraces!"

Madness is at the crux of much of the behavior depicted on-screen in *The Lady Killers*. Aya Peard finds it "refreshing" that in a culture that tends to think of psychopaths and sociopaths as being mostly men that the film offers up a "healthy" dose of psychopathy on the part of its female characters. Laughing, she then admits, "'Refreshing' is a very strange word, but we're in the context of this dark environment, so it IS refreshing!"

Wading into such a dark environment, where depictions of psychopathy could be deemed "refreshing" is a tricky business. As associate producer Eric Mark recalls, "I think it's great to take chances. I think it's great to show extreme points of view. But I was worried at points that the film was not only exploring and showing a point of view but that it might be embracing it."

"I knew that was not the intent," Actor Arye Gross admits. "But I was concerned."

Eric Mark delves further, stating, "Movies that try to explore or explain or shine a light on exploitation often get accused of being exploitative themselves."

Phil Leirness knew this was the great risk. "It occurred to me very early on that if we were going to accomplish our aims, we could not allow a film that was about exploitation to become exploitative."

The cast and crew would soon learn that making a film that embodies so much darkness and explores so much exploitation would often attract darkness and exploitation from the world

around them. The first few days of production alone would see a shady local developer seeking to extort the production to the tune of \$5,000 a day and would find shooting interrupted as a guest in the hotel upstairs from the bar location killed himself with a double-barreled shotgun.

The first day of production was particularly challenging. For Leirness, it began with a middle-of-the-night phone call from Bulos, who was in tears. "I've know Burt decades. Never heard him in tears before." Bulos managed to ask Leirness if he had heard the news about Jamie. "And my heart sank. I immediately knew our lead actor had died."

Fortunately, death was not the issue. Quite to the contrary, in fact. The entire shooting schedule had been front-loaded for Kaler, because his wife was due to give birth to their first child towards the end of the planned shoot. The child was clearly following its own schedule, however, and Kaler's wife went into labor scant hours before the first day of production, a day that was to begin with Kaler shooting a six and a half page scene in which he was the focal point. Leirness still marvels at Bulos' reaction, "I had never heard anyone respond like someone had just died when, in fact, someone had just been born!"

Now chagrined, Bulos admits, "I wanted to be happy for him. I really did, but he was in every shot the first day!" Leirness and his assistant director, Dan Ringe, conceived of and executed a plan to shoot around their leading man. Still, as Bulos describes, "That was just indicative of how the day went."

In addition to the unexpected loss of their lead actor and the aforementioned extortion attempt on the part of the nearby developer, there were problems with the shooting permit and several other snafus. Dean Haglund, who in addition to acting, was also executive producing the film, says, "Like any indie film, you're seconds away from the whole thing collapsing."

At one point, during the height of the stress Bulos would experience as a producer that first day, he became enraged by actor Peter Shinkoda's complaints over wardrobe. Shinkoda explains, "I found myself wearing a lot of really bright pink. Pink that does not occur in nature. Pink that almost seemed like a personal joke on me!"

This color choice was related to another strategy Leirness employed for making the female characters present throughout the film, even when they weren't on-screen: the use of colors. "That one threw me for a while," gaffer Jeff "Yogi" Allen confesses. "Because I noticed in some scenes, there isn't as much blood as there should be, or why isn't there any blood, but there's a reason for all of it." Each of the lead women in the film was assigned a dominant color, a color they would wear and that would denote their unique surroundings. When those colors appear on-screen outside of those surroundings and when those women are not present, it is because their influence is being felt by other characters. In fact, sharp viewers will be able to know who is doing what to whom, by "reading" the on-screen colors.

Despite this explanation, Shinkoda was not appeased. "It was like he went out of his way to find the cheapest, the ugliest pink, and insist that I wore it. We had many conflicts about this."

Recalling those conflicts, Bulos admits, "All I could think was that I am going to kill this man."

The first days of production proved challenging for Arye Gross as well. Those were the days when the scenes with all the male characters together were filmed. "It was difficult to get a sense of what the relationships were," Gross explains. Those scenes put his character, Dan Casey, in a place where he does not control everything. "It wound up being that the stuff that was tough for Dan was the stuff that was tough for me." Hearing himself say these words, Gross confesses, "We're probably much closer than I would want to admit."

Whitney Anderson played Dan Casey's wife in the film. She says of Gross' performance, "I think he really embodied that archetype of the powerful, misogynistic man, who is not as humane because of his position."

Gross determined that "Dan Casey is a sociopath. He is a guy who not only takes whatever he wants, he enjoys the fact that people find it disturbing. I think he feeds off of that." Gross hardly believes his character is unique, however. "I think a lot of people with that psychological, emotional profile do extremely well in business." The more he says about the character, the more it becomes apparent that Gross ended up having a great deal of fun playing Dan Casey.

Leirness had directed Anderson before and describes her as "so smart and so specific in every choice that she makes". In a case of life imitating art, Anderson found herself, more than ever before, thinking the script through, deeply analyzing her character's motivation and planning her behavior. After the fact, Anderson came to appreciate that this was because the character herself had her life at stake and from the beginning had every move she would make somewhat mapped out.

Anderson had a sex scene with Jamie Kaler and this scene proved the most challenging for both performers. Kaler, in particular, found himself incredibly nervous. "Mainly because I was embarrassed that I was having this sex scene when I had a wife and a new baby at home," he explains. Leirness realized that he had to get all of Kaler's nervous energy out, so he went about concocting some of the most elaborate and outrageous and hilarious moments ever to be filmed for a love scene. Then, once all Kaler's nervous energy had been expended, Leirness described the simple, intimate moments he needed in order to make the scene work.

One of the reasons this method was effective was because Kaler had been encouraged throughout the shoot to improvise. "It was a really fun working environment on this," Kaler recalls. "It was so collaborative and so creative. We got to play a lot and that gave us a lot of great moments that end up in the film."

Other actors in the film were aided by Kaler's background in improvisation. Arye Gross explains, "While he's a tremendous dramatic actor, he's such a strong comic that he is able to feed you to keep things moving along."

Alexandra Barreto shared many scenes with Kaler and loved the improvisational freedom they were allowed. "I think improv allows your personal life to connect to the character," she says. "And I just feel like those are the most natural scenes. And the most fun."

One of the methods Leirness found very exciting to use while shooting *The Lady Killers* and which he looks forward to using again was to start shooting a scene as scripted. Then, he would

encourage more improvisation on the part of the actors. And then right before moving on, he would have the actors go back to the scene as scripted. Kaler describes the results of this technique, "All of the improv you would hold in and the intention of the improv was there, but it would come out in the words of the scene." Leirness found that all the moments and all the energy discovered through improvisation were still there only now they were informing the original scripted words. Like Leirness, Kaler found this approach quite exciting. "Since then, I've used that process a lot."

Perhaps a significant reason why so many actors find it fun, exciting, creative and collaborative working with Leirness is because to him "a set is a playground." It's quite important to Leirness to have the opportunity to discuss through each character, each scene, each moment with his actors. Unfortunately, as Leirness states, "Sometimes you are going to get kicked out of a location if you don't wrap out within a matter of moments."

One such occasion was while shooting a scene between Burt Bulos and Christina Grance's characters. It was missing any kind of spark. Leirness knew they were only going to get one more take at it, so he called upon what he knew of Grance due to their close friendship and put that knowledge to use. As Grance recalls, "He made me very angry. He knew my buttons to push." Grance channeled that anger and Leirness was delighted by the outcome. Nevertheless, he was uncomfortable about what had taken place.

"Did I exploit my friendship with a performer in order to get a moment that we needed?" he wonders. "It really left me shaken."

There were certainly no hard feelings on Grance's part. "It was actually one of my favorite moments and it was a good lesson for me." Prior to that moment, in her own words, she had been just playing the scene in a very "nice" manner. As she says, "We don't really watch movies to watch people be nice."

Far from playing a scene too nice, one of Lily Holleman's biggest challenges as an actress came when she had to violently attack one of the characters. Initially it did not disturb her. "I know there's a murderer inside each and every one of us," she says. "It's part of the survival instinct." Once she was in the scene, however, she became quite troubled as she found herself taken by the character's energy. As she describes, "It wasn't until the actor was pulling against me that I realized I was truly choking him." At that moment Holleman snapped out of it and was deeply affected by what happened.

A scene that disturbed Eric Mark going into filming was one involving statutory rape. It was important to Leirness that when dealing with such a sensitive subject, in this case, an inappropriate teacher-student relationship, that they would not let the audience off the hook by allowing it to become fantasy or comedy. It needed to be something that was truly uncomfortable, truly reprehensible, while at the same time, revealing as to why such a circumstance is all too commonplace. While commendable, this approach left many, including Eric Mark to wonder, "Is this something that is going to make audiences turn away, not only while they watch it, but potentially before they watch it, depending upon what kind of reviews and commentary there might be about the film?" Ultimately, however, Mark believes the scene to be intrinsic to the film and says, "It really reflects the kind of distorted values we were trying to overcome with this movie."

One scene that expressly addresses the question of morality is played by Tucker Smallwood and Dean Haglund. It's a pivotal scene and one that takes on added significance upon repeat viewing. For Leirness it was just a thrill to see Smallwood and Haglund share the screen as they had done in two of his previous feature films. Of Smallwood, Haglund declares, only half-joking, "That guy intimidates the hell out of me. He's got a stack of homework done and he knows his character history."

Long-time improvisational comic that he is, Haglund might want you to believe that he makes things up as he goes along. Smallwood knows better, however. "Dean always seems to me to be committed," he says. "Whatever it is he's involved with or talking about, he's present, he's invested in it." The two men share an incredibly eclectic array of interests. Smallwood smiles when thinking about Haglund and states, "It's always neat to be around him. He's a real character."

Catherine Annette, who had acted with Haglund in the past, and does so again in *The Lady Killers*, says of her co-star, "He's such an interesting guy. He's an artist. He's really funny. He's very smart."

For his part, Haglund has always been struck by Annette's comedic ability. "She's so funny. I don't think there's been a project yet that shows how hilarious she is."

Annette does get to show off, or at least hint at, some of her impressive comedy chops in the film. The only challenge she found was in having to kiss Haglund after having known him for so long. Haglund felt the same way, explaining, "It's like a brother-sister relationship."

When Leirness was first telling producer Burt Bulos about Shaun Parker, he mentioned a live show he had seen Parker perform in. The show is called "Mortified" and it features adults at their most vulnerable, sharing embarrassing childhood artifacts (journals, letters, poems, lyrics, etc), in order to reveal stories about their lives. Bulos had never heard of "Mortified", but immediately knew that Leirness had to write such a show into the screenplay. Two pivotal sequences in the film take place at a show called "Horri-fied". The first features Shaun Parker's periodontist character reading from an old diary. Associate Producer Eric Mark says of Parker's performance in this sequence, "Sean did such a fantastic job, it made me remember why I do all of this. It was a key moment in the film, but it was also just a wonderful little encapsulation of how fantastic the professions we're all a part of can be."

Parker says of his approach to these scenes, "I know how good that show can be. So, it was interesting to take this narrative that is not real and just wanting to do justice to what those shows are about try to make it feel real." Of course, *The Lady Killers* is a dark comedy, so as Parker describes, "How it is turned on its head just really takes something that is wonderful and makes it into this kind of gross, slimy thing."

Phil Leirness was no stranger to playing the "slimy" scenes depicted in the film, for in addition to his responsibilities as writer, director, co-producer, cinematographer and camera operator, he also acts in *The Lady Killers*, playing therapist John Reid. "I enjoyed acting in this film more than I've enjoyed acting before and part of that is because I have gotten to the point where I am able to silence the critical and judgmental voice within myself and really open myself to the reality of the character."

While describing Leirness' performance in a late-night, darkened alleyway encounter between the therapist character and Shaun Parker's character, gaffer and key grip Jeff "Yogi" Allen comments, "It's just a solid, gangster performance is what that was. That's a climactic moment right there and I'll never forget that scene."

Leirness admits, however, that he's always been fairly careful about casting himself and about what roles he would call upon himself to play. "Those roles always work best when what I'm doing on-screen is directing." In particular, Leirness enjoyed the therapy scenes between his therapist character and his character's patients.

In addition to his associate producing responsibilities, Eric Mark also acts in the film. He describes one of these therapy scenes: "It was interesting working with Phil on a scene that really required me to be highly neurotic, difficult in ways that I like to think that I'm not." Mark goes on to concede, "As any acting coach will tell you, we can find ourselves in any character and I realized that there's more of me in that character than I'd care to admit. And Phil certainly did a great job of bringing that out."

On the other hand, Lily Holleman found her scenes with Leirness to be highly challenging. They play husband and wife in the film. Citing his close personal relationship with Holleman, Leirness knew it would never be easier for him to play these scenes than if he could play them with her. "All of the emotional material was going to be right there for me to draw on." His only concern was that it might be "cheating" to use such an emotional shortcut in order to make those scenes easier. Holleman put his mind at ease, telling him that actors are always looking for precisely those kind of shortcuts.

Nevertheless, for Holleman, her close relationship with Leirness made those very scenes more difficult. "It was harder to get behind the imagination aspect of it," she explains. "I thought it would be easier because it was coming from Phil, but all of a sudden, it was harder."

For Burt Bulos, the biggest challenges in making the film came not from being an actor, but being a producer. When asked what those challenges were, he answers, "Everything." He explains that in low-budget independent filmmaking, it's very important to have minimal characters and minimal locations. "I think we had maximum characters and maximum locations," he laughs.

No one knew the challenges posed by some of those locations better than gaffer and key grip Jeff "Yogi" Allen, whose responsibility it was to oversee the installation of all equipment into those locations as well as to execute their lighting. "I love the challenges," Allen declares. "That's the best part of it all."

In the year prior to shooting *The Lady Killers*, Leirness had directed and produced 2nd Unit on five Lifetime television movies. That experience reminded him of how much can be accomplished by a small crew of elite filmmakers with versatile gifts. Allen certainly fits that description, for in addition to designing the lighting and serving as key grip, he also served as set medic and even helped design, build and decorate sets. "I had a blank room," Allen remembers. "It looked like a hospital room. It had blue tiles on the wall and that was it. And we decided that was where the morgue was going to be." Allen completely transformed that

space into an impressive and realistic set. "That's the fun of it. Getting to be creative and pull the impossible."

Citing first assistant cameraman Aram Aramyan, first assistant director Daniel Ringey, production sound mixer Darryl Williams and others, Leirness enthusiastically declares that many members of his relatively small crew are true storytellers. "When you are surrounded by people like this, you can do more, you can do it more quickly and you can move with much greater flexibility than with a much more sizable crew."

The Lady Killers was shot in Los Angeles in August. At the end of that month, a blistering heat wave struck. Eric Mark says, "I shot a scene in another movie that was done in the Simi Valley desert and it was 120 degrees. This was so much worse than that!" Both because of logistics, but especially because of the heat, Jeff "Yogi" Allen describes working in the Herald Examiner building in downtown Los Angeles as being the hardest part of the entire film. The building is old, with no air-conditioning and little or no ventilation. It was 110 degrees outside when the production arrived, but 125 degrees in the office set they had built on the top floor of the building. Then, within an hour of turning on their lights on that set and beginning to shoot, the temperature reached 150 degrees.

Many scenes were shot throughout the Herald Examiner building over the course of two days. These scenes involved comedy, suspense, sex and violence. In speaking of how the production overcame both the unbearable heat and the logistical challenges posed by the edifice, Allen declares, "There is a testament to the director all through the whole sequence in that building."

Heidi Marie Wanser, who acted in many of the key scenes shot in the Herald Examiner, concurs, crediting Leirness' ingenuity and creative flexibility. "He has all these crazy ideas in his head, but when it comes out, it's just amazing art."

Phil Leirness likes taking on projects that are going to show him what he is made of. That is why he embraced the challenge of making a low-budget film with so many locations and such a large cast. He understood that the biggest challenge he would face with *The Lady Killers* would be to find a tone that would allow the film to comment on exploitation without becoming exploitative. As Leirness puts it, the film required "a tone so precise and so delicate, so easy to puncture, and once punctured, would never be regained." Tone is a topic often discussed by Leirness and Dean Haglund on their weekly podcast, Chillpak Hollywood Hour. To them, it's the part of filmmaking almost no one talks about because it's the hardest part of a film to market effectively. Nevertheless, it's the aspect of storytelling most responsible for how an audience is going to feel while watching a film.

As Shaun Parker states, "So much goes into tone. It's the editing. It's the pacing. It's the music."

Singer-songwriter Aya Peard's haunting and deeply emotional voice is an integral character in the film's story. Through her songs, insight into the characters' behavior can be gleaned, especially when that behavior finds the men acting out in overcompensation. As she explains, her songs are used "to trigger an emotional transmission." That transmission helps to inform the film's unique tone.

Leirness had worked with composer Greg De Belles on two previous feature films and it's a collaboration both men enjoy. De Belles is also an accomplished photographer and often thinks visually when he composes. Leirness' editing style has been described by Marc Hershon of the Huffington Post as being both lyrical and musical. On *The Lady Killers*, Leirness began by sending to De Belles various music themes dating to the late 1950's and 1960's that evoked to him the nature of the seven male lead characters in his film. De Belles was gratified to find upon receiving that file that he and Leirness were already on the same wavelength. In taking their cues about how to behave in their forties, these characters were men reaching back to images of manhood they remembered from their youth.

De Belles got into some trouble, however, when his compositions served to make the male characters seem too hip or too cool. Time and again, Leirness would reject these compositions, telling De Belles that the characters might think of themselves as hip, but that it was important to the film's tone that the audience not believe that the filmmakers thought of the characters this way.

Musically, what they ended up with was, in the words of De Belles, an "almost Nina Rota-inspired, kind of retro approach. It made it comedic, but you could also pivot into something more dramatic." Indeed, this ability to elegantly pivot between the comedic and the dramatic is at the heart of the film's tone. De Belles explains, "Whenever you're walking on that edge of dark comedy, if you're pushing the wrong buttons, the film will take itself too seriously."

Another frequent collaborator of Leirness who was critical to the creation of the film's tone was supervising sound editor and re-recording mixer Garrard Whatley. Through his company RocketWerks, Whatley has created the aural landscape for countless independent films. Leirness describes Whatley's work by saying, "He gets it! He understands that story comes through character and the more we can authentically explore and express how those characters perceive the world around them, the more likely we are to create a work that will resonate with audiences."

Finding the right tone is always important, but especially so with a film that at times comes across like a thriller, at other times, a mystery. Actor and executive producer Dean Haglund described the movie as "female positive crime drama film noir". The individual performances by the cast played a critical role in the film's ability to dance between so many genres while maintaining a singular tone. Some performers, like Jamie Kaler, found themselves in a comedy. Others, like Burt Bulos, found their characters in a drama.

"I had always read it as a comedy. I just thought it was hilariously funny, but I have a very morbid sense of humor," Kaler admits. About his co-star, Burt Bulos, he adds, "I think Burt thought it was a straight up drama." In support of this theory, Kaler recounts that at one point during filming, Bulos told him he loved that Kaler was bringing so much comedy to the material. Kaler remembers immediately asking him, "This IS a comedy, right?"

Ultimately, the film certainly reveals itself to be a dark comedy, but one with a tone that required varying approaches to the material on the part of the ensemble cast. Actor and producer Bulos explains, "For me, I just had to play it straight. Know who my character was and go after what he wanted."

Another element that served to create and maintain the film's unique tone is the fact that many of the shooting locations lent themselves to the idea that the story is playing out on multiple levels of reality. Ultimately, Haglund was thrilled by the film's tone, commending Leirness by saying, "I think Phil did a great job of riding that razor, razor edge."

In describing the finished film, actor Peter Shinkoda states, "It certainly has an original look and feel and tone to it, something that most Hollywood studios would be reluctant to green-light."

Raising financing is always challenging for an independent film, especially when, as actress and co-producer Lily Holleman, states it is "a movie that no one has ever seen before."

Nevertheless, actor and associate producer Eric Mark finds that challenge to be part of the joy of filmmaking because "what it really requires," according to Mark, "is bringing other people on board with your vision."

Although mostly financed through independent investment, a significant portion of the funds necessary to produce *The Lady Killers* were raised through crowd-sourcing campaigns. There are two elements of these campaigns that Leirness loves. The first is that they give filmmakers the opportunity to engage their audience in conversation before their films are even made. The other aspect Leirness loves is that crowd-sourcing campaigns embrace what, for him, is a truth all too quickly overlooked in modern life and that is, as he puts it, "Money is energy. When we put our energy towards things we admire, what we admire will grow."

The team behind *The Lady Killers* took away many lessons from its making. Lily Holleman summed up these lessons by advising other would-be producers to "just go for it. Just do it. Just start. Just take an action step."

Actress Christina Grance echoes this philosophy, saying, "Probably what I'll take with me is always just making bolder choices as an actress and even as a person."

Through what he describes as "years of struggling as an actor and learning the craft," Peter Shinkoda has found that he doesn't really get to stretch himself in studio projects. On *The Lady Killers*, he learned that he has a voice. "And that's what I will take with me," he declares. "I enjoy having a voice and those projects (that allow me to express it) I will always gravitate towards." So moved was he by his experience on the film that Shinkoda describes himself as being "heartbroken" when it was over.

Actress Whitney Anderson can relate to this sentiment, describing the project as a "dream come true."

The aspect of the film that actress Heidi Marie Wanser enjoyed the most was getting to meet so many amazing women. Indeed, at a time when women are so under-represented on-screen, it is refreshing to find a film where 14 of the 32 speaking roles are played by women. This is only one way in which *The Lady Killers* boasts extraordinary diversity, however, a diversity that Christina Grance finds to be "more important than people realize." She remembers what it felt like growing up to see a performer who was Asian or Latin in the midst of almost

exclusively white casts. It made her feel like she was seen. "You don't even have to relate to the story. It's just about seeing yourself reflected back," she explains.

Certainly, as Burt Bulos points out, a diverse cast is reflective of life in a major city and as their film takes place in Los Angeles, it only made sense. Nevertheless, when the incredibly diverse nature of the film's cast is pointed out to him, Dean Haglund exclaims, "Oh, yeah, this is abnormally diverse. But that's because movies are abnormally not diverse I guess!"

For her part, Lily Holleman gets "very tired of seeing the same types of people in the same kinds of roles."

To have the true picture of the world reflected in cinema and television is rare, but Leirness had emphasized to actor Peter Shinkoda that he is "color blind" when it comes to casting and Shinkoda was pleased to find this illustrated in the film's final cast. "Phil is a man of his word and his intentions are being realized here."

When asked about diversity, however, Leirness tightens up. It's a question he clearly does not want to be asked. "Honestly, I can't believe we're still talking about this," he exclaims. Realizing that he nevertheless needs to address it, he exhales, gathers himself and declares, "*The Lady Killers* should not be the exception. *The Lady Killers* should be the rule." He states, "Our strength as a species is in our diversity. The greater the diversity of expression, the stronger and healthier we will be." Leirness goes on to elucidate the danger a lack of diversity poses to society. "When we cannot place ourselves in another's position, it becomes easier for us to treat that person like an object, to exploit them in some way. This film is about how exploitation leads to violence."

Burt Bulos acknowledges that the circumstances that occur in the film's story are "extraordinary" and as a result "there is an extraordinary backlash to the exploitation" involved in those circumstances.

The film has many different possible meanings, all of which lead to provocative questions and compelling conversation. For Eric Mark the most important message involves respecting people as individuals and not treating them as objects. For Christina Grance, the film is about the repercussions of boys behaving badly and of men behaving like boys. She feels that the movie holds a humorous mirror up to a male-dominated world, exposing the choices that our patriarchal society has made and to what those choices have led us.

Whitney Anderson advises viewers, "Take what you want from it, but I think there's amazing themes in the story, very relevant to today and to being a human."

To Greg De Belles, the message of the film is quite clear. "The message is that Phil Leirness is a hell of a filmmaker."

For his part, Leirness truly believes *The Lady Killers* has a chance to be that rarity: A dark comedy that can both disturb and delight audiences for many years to come.

However, when the film was almost completed, test screenings proved just how challenging it was going to be for audiences. As sexual and relationship violence educator Abigail Sims

explained, "Just when you think you have a handle on the exploitation (in movies), this film upsets the apple cart as it depicts toxic masculinity brought to its ghastly logical conclusion."

In a Huffington Post article on the commercial risk posed by making a film that "challenges conventional wisdom, accepted mores and attitudes as well as business as usual," Marc Hershon commends the "artistic courage displayed by filmmaker Phil Leirness." He also recounts the events of one test screening in particular, where after seeing *The Lady Killers*, "no less than three couples broke up because of their reactions to what they had seen."

Divisive reaction was what the filmmakers were met with when they began to show the film to film festival programmers as well. Lily Holleman was shocked to hear from people that the type of misogyny and exploitation depicted in *The Lady Killers* simply "didn't exist anymore."

According to Leirness, "Then we had a Presidential election and suddenly people were at least willing to acknowledge that misogyny and exploitation were problems worth discussing."

North Hollywood CineFest was the first film festival to take a chance on the film. The result was *The Lady Killers* being the best attended film at the festival and Jamie Kaler being awarded the "Best Actor" prize. Richard Propes ("The Independent Critic") described the film as "jarringly honest and disturbingly authentic."

In his review, Propes wrote, "the film points the camera back at Hollywood's easy exploitation of women and, I'd dare say, the ways in which we as audience members easily surrender to being entertained by the exploitation of others."

The Albuquerque Film Festival followed in summer of 2017, where again *The Lady Killers* proved to be the best attended film at the festival and one that prompted fascinating discussion.

By the time the film played its third and final film festival, the Tri-Cities International Film Festival in Washington State, the #MeToo movement had commenced and news of Harvey Weinstein had dominated cultural discussion. Once again, *The Lady Killers* was the best attended feature film at the festival, winning the prize for "Best Comedy Feature Film".

At this point, Spoiler Free Movie Sleuth's Matt Giles concluded his review of *The Lady Killers* by writing, "I enjoyed the movie, and yet I was totally disturbed by it, which is why it's exactly the kind of film we need right now."

Technical Specs

Running Time: 109 minutes
Aspect Ratio: 1.78 (16x9)

Original Shooting Format:
1920 x 1080, 24p

Opening Credits: Title Cards

RATIONAL EXUBERANCE
Presents

A
BURT BULOS/PL HOLLEMAN
Production

A Film by
PHIL LEIRNESS

THE LADY KIILLERS

End Credits: Title Cards

Photographed, Edited,
Written & Directed
by
PHIL LEIRNESS

Produced by
BURT BULOS

Co-Produced by
LILY HOLLEMAN
PHIL LEIRNESS

Executive Produced by
DEAN HAGLUND
ARIS TAGLE
SEAN TOWNLEY

Music by
GREG DE BELLES

End Credits: Cast Title Cards

JAMIE KALER

PETER SHINKODA

BURT BULOS

DEAN HAGLUND

PHIL LEIRNESS

And ARYE GROSS

Introducing SHAUN PARKER

WHITNEY ANDERSON

CATHERINE ANNETTE

ALEXANDRA BARRETO

ISABEL CUEVA

CHRISTINA GRANCE

LILY HOLLEMAN

HEIDI MARIE WANSER

with DAVID DEAN BOTTRELL

STEPHANIE ERB

and TUCKER SMALLWOOD

and Introducing KATALINA VITERI

SPENCER BERGER
ISABEL CORTES

JAKE HEAD
HANA JANE

KENNEDY KABASARES
JESSICA KOZAK

ANDREA MONIER
ERIC MARK

JOHN SLOAN
RICK MORA

DAVID SOBOLOV
YI TIAN

GIANCARLO VIDRIO
ALLANNA VICENTE

End Credits: Title Crawl

Associate Producer
ERIC MARK

First Assistant Director
DANIEL RINGEY

Second Assistant Director
TINA MARTIN

Key Set Production Assistant
JOSH BELL

2nd Unit Director
JOSH BELL

Location Manager
MADELINE RANDOLPH

Production Assistants
GAGE BROWN
JOEL HALSTEAD

Camera Operators
PHIL LEIRNESS
JOSEPH M. SETELE
LEIGH LISBAO UNDERWOOD

First Assistant Camera
ARAM ARAMYAN

Script Supervisor
HEATHER "CASPER" CASTERLIN

Art Director
ROBERT ULLOA

Property Masters
BLANE PIERRE
RICHARD KANE III

Set Decorator
STACIE RIPPY

Art Department Assistant
VANESSA BOLANOS

Costumer
SAEHEE SIMMONS

The Ladies' Wardrobe provided by
TWELFTH STREET BY CYNTHIA VINCENT

Key Makeup & Hair
GAIL GULINO

Hair Stylist
STEPHANIE PASAKARNIS

Special Makeup Effects
CRISTINA WALTZ
LAWRENCE MERCADO

Gaffer
JEFF "YOGI" ALLEN

Best Boy
JAKE LEWIS

Key Grip
JEFF "YOGI" ALLEN

Swing/Grip
TOM PARKS

Set Medic
JEFF "YOGI" ALLEN

Craft Service
DANNY SCHACHNOW

Caterer
CARLOS LEOS

Production Sound Mixer
DARRYL WILLIAMS

Visual Effects
ODD SPROCKET

Visual Effects Supervisor
ED BISHOP

Video Post Production
TEDS

Colorist
JASON WEICHEL

Post Audio Facility
ROCKETWERKS

Supervising Sound Editor
GARRARD WHATLEY

Re-recording Mixer
GARRARD WHATLEY

Original Score
Performed, Recorded & Mixed by
GREG DE BELLES

"From You"
Written by Aya Peard and Amir Alam
Performed by AYA PEARD
Courtesy of Eye Peered Publishing, BMI

"Departures"
Written by Aya Peard and Leonardo Canneto
Performed by AYA PEARD
Courtesy of Eye Peered Publishing, BMI

"Paradise Hiding"
Written and Performed by AYA PEARD
Courtesy of Eye Peered Publishing, BMI

CAST
(In Order of Appearance)

Stephen Consing	Burt Bulos
Peter Martel	Jamie Kaler
Kiki	Yi Tian
Detective Valens	Rick Mora
Brian Kato	Peter Shinkoda
Michael Austin	Shaun Parker
William	Tucker Smallwood
Paul Lewis	Dean Haglund
Dan Casey	Arye Gross
Diana	Christina Grance
Mrs. Casey	Whitney Anderson
Dan's Bodyguard	Jacob Head
Cheri	Isabel Cortes
John Reid	Phil Leirness
Actress	Jessica Kozak
Hana	Hana Jane
Dave	Eric Mark
Maria	Isabel Cueva
Ali Batista	Alexandra Barreto
Paul's Client	David Dean Bottrell
Dental Assistant	Andrea Monier
Amanda Webber	Katalina Viteri
Neil	Giancarlo Vidrio
Lisa	Heidi Marie Wanser
Kennedy	Kennedy Kabasares
Parking Attendant	Spencer Berger
Sharon	Catherine Annette
Sheila Simmons	Stephanie Erb
Detective Jenkins	John Sloan
Michelle	Lily Holleman
Security Guard	David Sobolov
Coroner	Alanna Vicente

The producers gratefully acknowledge the
invaluable assistance of the following:

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Bryan Erwin
Burn Fitness

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Cynthia Vincent
Dr. Alison Williams
Empire State Gas
Gary Zacuto, Sara Pyle, Shoreline Studios
Grant Landry
Hans Friedrich
Harry Ralston
Janet & Vitali Hason
Jennifer Musselman, MFTI
JJ Rogers, XVIII Entertainment LLC
Kinetic Theory Circus School
Leonard Ross
Mauricio Sanchez
Mr. & Mrs. Keith Jones
Nickie & Jack Ruskey
Oanh Ly & Ron Eustiss
Patricia & Stephen Lem
Rivera Media & Public Relations
Scott Hilchey
Shirley Hanna-King
Vernon Holleman III

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Liz and Ben Brown
Monte Cooper
Peter Levin
Robbie Consing
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Thomas McAuliffe

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Jeff Gum
Jesse Dioquino
Jessica Bulos
Nathan Gorth
Nick Maiorino
Patricia Paquette
Petrina Townley
Raniel Trinidad
Seiji Takashita
Stephen & Christy McAvoy

End Credits: Closing Title Cards

SAG-AFTRA
ONE UNION

Photographed entirely using a Sony PMW-EX1

Shot on Location in Los Angeles,
Burbank, North Hollywood, Culver City, Santa Monica,
Canyon Country, Anaheim and Cypress, California.

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THE LADY KILLERS

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