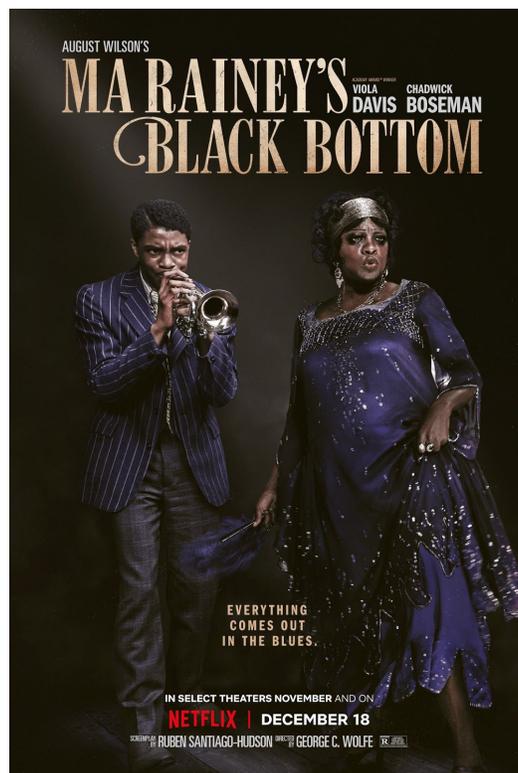


NETFLIX

MA RAINEY'S BLACK BOTTOM

PRODUCTION NOTES



Directed by GEORGE C. WOLFE

Adapted for the screen by RUBEN SANTIAGO-HUDSON

Produced by DENZEL WASHINGTON, TODD BLACK, AND DANY WOLF

STARRING Viola Davis, Chadwick Boseman, Colman Domingo, Glynn Turman, Michael Potts,
Taylour Paige, Jonny Coyne, Jeremy Shamos and Dusan Brown

Debating on December 18, 2020 on Netflix

ENTERING AUGUST WILSON'S WORLD

By George C. Wolfe

In the blues song *Michigan Water*, jazz great Jelly Roll Morton seductively croons:

*Michigan Water taste like sherry wine, mean sherry wine
Mississippi Water taste like turpentine*

For the over 100,000 Black people who migrated to Chicago from the Deep South during the first twenty years of the twentieth century, the waters of Lake Michigan must have felt intoxicating indeed. But as Jelly Roll warned, those waters turned brutally mean the summer of 1919, when a 17-year-old Black boy went swimming and inadvertently crossed an invisible line of racial demarcation. He was attacked and drowned.

When no arrests were made for the young boy's death, Black people took to the street in protest. During the ensuing confrontations, a white mob stormed Bronzeville, Chicago's Black neighborhood. Five days later 37 were dead, 536 injured, and over a thousand left homeless.

The film *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* is set during the summer of 1927. As the same racial embers which erupted eight years earlier continue to simmer, enter a different kind of explosion, but no less stinging or socially significant. Enter singer-songwriter-showbiz entrepreneur, the legendary Ma Rainey, a Black woman from Columbus, Georgia, who is used to obeying nobody's rules but her own.

Ma Rainey, aka "The Mother of the Blues," has come north for a one-day recording session. Included in her entourage is her nephew Sylvester, her newest girlfriend Dussie Mae, and band members Toledo, Slow Drag, Cutler and Levee.

Ma Rainey, as crafted by playwright August Wilson, breaks a number of rules, including those of August Wilson himself. She is the only character in August's magnificent ten play cycle chronicling the African American existence during the 20th Century, who is based on a real person. She is also the only LGBTQ character, as was Ma, an out lesbian who in her song *Prove It On Me*, unabashedly proclaims--

*Went out last night with a crowd of my friends
Must have been women cause I don't like men.*

Equally unique about 'Ma Rainey's Black Bottom', which premiered on Broadway in 1984, is that it's the only play in the cycle which is not set in the Hill District of Pittsburgh, the famed black neighborhood where August Wilson spent his formative years.

But the one quality the piece shares with the rest of August Wilson's work is its stunning language; language which is as exalted as it is visceral and raw.

As the characters in 'Ma Rainey's Black Bottom' sermonize, philosophize, talk shit, confront and condemn, their cascading words become a symphonic composition which celebrates the pain, joy and wonder of being Black, human and alive.

In as much as Ma Rainey, the historical figure, was a trailblazer, by 1927 the world was starting to leave her behind. Bessie Smith, Ma's protege and alleged former lover, had eclipsed her in record sales and popularity. And each week The Duke Ellington Orchestra could be heard on the radio, live from The Cotton Club; the modernity of Ellington's harmonics, the polar opposite of Ma Rainey and her jug band blues.

Levee, Ma's coronet player, who has his own musical sound and vision of the future, sees his time in Chicago as a chance to break free of the strictures which have kept Black performers/artists from having the creative careers they deserve.

Will Levee have a future full of promise and possibility, or will the demons of his past and ours as a country keep him and us from moving forward, unencumbered and free?

The blues as an art form has always struck me as having the power to transform the paradoxical, (faith vs despair, anguish vs desire) into a balm for the hopeful heart. Or to quote Ma Rainey –

"The blues helps you get out of bed in the morning. You get up knowing you ain't alone. There's something else in the world. Something's been added by that song."

Our last week of filming was incredibly intense, especially for Chadwick Boseman. His character Levee had a series of scenes which were as physically demanding as they were emotionally raw. The work was Herculean, the stakes incredibly high, and day after day, take after take, Chadwick more than delivered. His work was brilliant.

He and I talked about doing a play together, another film. I am, we all are still reeling from the loss. What a great actor and a gracious human being. Or to paraphrase Ma Rainey; *"The world was made better by his song."*

George C. Wolfe
Director

LOGLINE

Chicago, 1927. A recording session. Tensions rise between Ma Rainey, her ambitious horn player and the white management determined to control the uncontrollable “Mother of the Blues”. Based on Pulitzer Prize winner August Wilson's play.

SYNOPSIS

Tensions and temperatures rise over the course of an afternoon recording session in 1920s Chicago as a band of musicians await trailblazing performer, the legendary “Mother of the Blues,” Ma Rainey (Academy Award® winner Viola Davis). Late to the session, the fearless, fiery Ma engages in a battle of wills with her white manager and producer over control of her music. As the band waits in the studio’s claustrophobic rehearsal room, ambitious cornet player Levee (Chadwick Boseman) — who has an eye for Ma’s girlfriend and is determined to stake his own claim on the music industry — spurs his fellow musicians into an eruption of stories revealing truths that will forever change the course of their lives.

Adapted from two-time Pulitzer Prize winner August Wilson’s play, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* celebrates the transformative power of the blues and the artists who refuse to let society’s prejudices dictate their worth. Directed by George C. Wolfe and adapted for the screen by Ruben Santiago-Hudson, the film is produced by Fences Oscar® nominees Denzel Washington and Todd Black. Colman Domingo, Glynn Turman, Michael Potts, Taylour Paige, Jonny Coyne, Jeremy Shamos and Dusan Brown co-star alongside Grammy® winner Branford Marsalis’ score.

FROM STAGE TO SCREEN

Acclaimed American playwright **August Wilson** was born in Pittsburgh in 1945 to a German immigrant father and an African American mother and he faced many societal challenges as a biracial young man, not fully accepted by Black or white communities. In his twenties, he began to capture his experiences and the lives of those around him in poetry and longform narratives. While still largely unknown in his thirties, Wilson set out to write a series of ten plays - each chronicling African American life in a different decade - and these collected works became known as The American Century Cycle. The ten pieces would ultimately take three decades to complete and resulted in Wilson becoming the preeminent voice for the Black American experience in the process, elevating the lives of ordinary men and women on stage. Over the course of his career, Wilson received two Pulitzer Prizes (‘Fences’, ‘The Piano Lesson’), eight best-play awards from the New York Drama Critics’ Circle, and the National Humanities Medal. Wilson completed his final play in the Century series, ‘Radio Golf’, before he died in 2005 at the age of 60.

'Ma Rainey's Black Bottom' was the second play in this series of stage works and explores the struggle of the African American experience through comedy and tragedy, infused with the power of blues music. The central character, Ma Rainey - the only one Wilson based on a historical figure in his work - was an influential blues singer who became a phenomenon and who earned the mantle "Mother of the Blues". It is also notable that this play would end up being the only of his ten works to be set in Chicago, with his other pieces taking place in the Hill district of Pittsburgh, where Wilson grew up.

Over the course of these plays, Wilson charted the impact of the Great Migration from 1916 through to the 1960s, a period in which more than six million African Americans relocated from the rural South to cities in the North, Midwest and West. Using his own experiences to color his character studies, Wilson wove in explorations of "urban renewal" projects, drug epidemics and the beginnings of gentrification, as well as the evolution of Black American music over these decades.

Director George Wolfe remarks that Wilson's interest lay in exploring the consequences of the Great Migration especially for someone like Ma Rainey who had already achieved a great deal of success in the South. "Ma Rainey was able to build, in many respects, her own entertainment empire. Yet when she comes north, she has to negotiate a relationship with white power structures. How does someone with a tremendous sense of her own power come into contact with a power structure that is in many respects about diminishing her power and acquiring and extracting the juice - that is her blues - and using it for economic gain. It became very important for me to embody Chicago because for some Black people Chicago was the promised land, but for others it resulted in them doing hard and brutal work." Wolfe says that while he sees the film as very specifically about these characters, to him it is also a metaphor for America. "How can it have a future until it comes to terms with its very complicated past?"

Viola Davis, who brings the vibrant Ma Rainey to life on screen alongside **Chadwick Boseman's** ambitious and fast-talking Levee, reflects on how timely the play feels to her. "We are absolutely now waking up to the truth of how different America was for Black people, as opposed to white people." She notes that at that time 'Ma Rainey' is set in 1927, "We were just coming out of slavery in the midst of Jim Crow and we really believed in the promise of the Great Migration. There were more opportunities in Chicago and Boston, so there was hope there. When you look at 'Ma Rainey' as a narrative, you see that those hopes, dreams and what America promised us, were mixed with the trauma of our past, what we were running from, mixed with the lack of opportunities that were still very prevalent with us. You see how it affected us, especially in characters like Levee and Ma. These characters had big visions, big dreams, and the past became a huge obstacle in achieving that. But what you also

saw is the talent, the humor, and the life force. That's the tragedy of it. The promise of what we could be was still there."

Ma Rainey's Black Bottom's producer Academy Award-winner **Denzel Washington** recalls first seeing the play during its original Broadway run, with Theresa Merritt as Ma and Charles S. Dutton in the role of Levee. "I'd never heard that kind of music in words before, and I was hooked. It just pinned me to the back of my seat and I never forgot it," Washington remembers. "It's poetry. It's music. August Wilson has been called the American Shakespeare. It's not iambic pentameter, but there is a rhythm to his work that's unique to him, and like Shakespeare, as an actor you have to ride the notes. When you ride the notes, the wisdom and the genius is there. It supports you."

A decade after Wilson's passing, August Wilson's widow and the executor of his estate, **Constanza Romero**, approached Washington to see if he would be interested in shepherding the plays into movies. "I said I was just the man for the job," Washington explains. "At this point in my life, it's about service to others and I was more than willing to serve – honored to serve – one of our greatest American playwrights. To share his style, his words, his wisdom and his talent with the world is a great privilege. It is my sincere honor to continue to shepherd this work and partner with the incomparable George C. Wolfe to bring another one of August's masterpieces to the screen."

Their collaboration began with adapting Wilson's play *Fences*, which Washington helmed as a director and star alongside Viola Davis in the story of a Black couple in 1950s Pittsburgh. The 2016 film earned four Oscar nominations and Davis won her first Academy Award, for best actress.

For Romero, Wilson's words could not have been left in better hands. "Denzel stepped forward to take care of this incredible legacy that is August Wilson's work and bring these stories to film. When you see *Fences* as a movie, you see the love and devotion that Denzel has for August Wilson. He is bringing that same love and devotion to *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*." While Wilson had been able to see each of his works performed on stage, he never had the chance to witness those adapted for the screen.

"The vision was to honor August Wilson the way we honored him on *Fences*. 'Ma Rainey' was the logical one up next as we wanted to show the most prominent plays up front," says Washington's production partner **Todd Black**.

In 2018, Washington was starring in director **George C. Wolfe's** revival of Eugene O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh* on Broadway, and it was at that time that the pair started to discuss working together on the screen adaptation of *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*. The idea of Wolfe

helming the film seemed like a natural choice, especially when Romero revealed that Wolfe had sent Wilson a letter after the opening of the playwright's Broadway plays *Seven Guitars* and *Two Trains Running* in the 1990s, indicating how much he wanted to be involved in his work. "His experience and his talent is one that melds so well with August Wilson," Romero says.

"George knows the history of 'Ma Rainey', as well as the history of that kind of music, better than any director today. When he said 'yes,' he fit into his role as the director like a hand into a glove," Black remarks. "George was a perfect choice for Ma Rainey," agrees Davis. "He's a brilliant director and he is a visionary."

The search was next underway for a screenwriter to work alongside Wolfe to adapt the play. The creative team decided upon acclaimed actor, director and screenwriter **Ruben Santiago-Hudson**, who had also written *Lackawanna Blues*, which Wolfe had directed. Once again, the team were thrilled to collaborate with someone who had personal experience with Wilson's works. Santiago-Hudson had first met Wilson when he auditioned for *Two Trains Running*, and while he didn't get the role (losing out to a rising star named Laurence Fishburne), he left an impression on the playwright, who incorporated Santiago-Hudson's rhythms of speech and musical language into the character of Canewell in *Seven Guitars*, which he originated on stage and which won him a Tony Award. Later, Santiago-Hudson introduced the role of Caesar in 2004's *Gem of the Ocean* and directed 2017's *Jitney*.

"I know August's work quite personally and intimately," Santiago-Hudson says, remembering how he told Washington, "No one's going to be more passionate and no one is more knowledgeable about this work. Nobody's going to work harder than me to try to make this everything you want it to be, everything I want it to be, and everything August would want it to be. Please invite me to the party."

When it came to approaching the method of adaptation, Wolfe's intention was to stay true to the spirit of the play, while reimagining it for the screen and harnessing the new textures the different creative medium could provide. Throughout Wilson's work, there are often larger-than-life characters constrained in small spaces - allowing the audience to witness how they react and collide in these environments - so the filmmakers wanted to ensure they were never diluting the playwright's fundamental intentions.

One of the first amendments Wolfe wanted to make was to change the play's winter setting to a hot summer day. He felt that this would magnify the intensity of what every single character is going through, highlighting "their need for release, their need to conquer, their need to win, their need to come out on top was magnified by the intensity of the sun," he reveals.

“My job was to evolve a visual and visceral language of storytelling, so that the audience knew exactly what was at stake at any given moment in the story,” Wolfe explains. “What you take home from theater are the ideas. Film is about action.” He says that he appreciated the different perspectives brought to the adaptation that came from joining forces with Santiago-Hudson. The pair sought to combine the ideas percolating inside of the play and fuse them with the inherent what-happens-next energy of a screenplay. “Ruben adores August's writing - he's been in a number of plays, he's directed many of them and he did a one man show - so in many respects he brought this purity, and for lack of better words, I brought a kind of storytelling irreverence. That was the nature of our collaboration,” recalls Wolfe.

With an exceptional behind-the-scenes team falling into place, the next step was to find the right actors to play the two leading roles - the titular character and her young, ambitious cornetist player, Levee.

From the beginning there was really only ever one person that came to mind to play Ma Rainey - Academy Award-winner **Viola Davis**. Davis had stunned Broadway with her Wilsonian debut in 1996 as Vera in ‘Seven Guitars’, receiving a Tony nomination. Five years later, in ‘King Hedley II’, Davis swept the Tony, Drama Desk, and Outer Critics Circle awards as Tonya, a pregnant wife despairing over bringing a baby into the desolate streets of 1980s Pittsburgh. Playing opposite Denzel Washington as Rose in ‘Fences’, she reaped the Tony in 2010, and the Oscar in 2017.

From critically acclaimed roles that include Jackie Robinson, James Brown and Thurgood Marshall, through to the unprecedented success that came with playing Marvel superhero Black Panther, the filmmakers were thrilled when **Chadwick Boseman** joined the project as Levee, delivering an electric and heartbreaking performance that required both physical and mental prowess. “We knew he had an underlying intensity and could carry the balance of Levee’s character from seeing other things he’d done,” Black recalls. “He had that almost dangerous but appealing quality, so he could be likable and scary all at the same time. There’s not a lot of actors who have that ability.”

Of Viola’s portrayal of Rainey, Wolfe says, “When you have somebody as smart, ferocious and fearless as Viola playing Ma Rainey, the character resonates with that ferocity and fearlessness, and emotional rawness and supreme intelligence. You’re casting somebody who has all those qualities in abundance. Viola brilliantly lived in all the corners and crevices and cracks of Ma's veracity and vulnerability, and no line, no pause, no look, no moment goes uninvested when it comes to Viola.”

Washington describes Davis as "one of the greats of all time" and says, "It's been an honor for me to be able to help in a small way and find roles that give all of us the chance to see how brilliant she is."

Davis admits that she hadn't initially envisioned herself in the role, however, she quickly began to see the complexities inherent within Rainey and a deep emotional bond with the character grew. Ma Rainey also compelled Davis to draw directly on her experiences as a Black female artist in an entertainment industry still dominated by white men, and the more time Davis spent getting to know Rainey, the more she recognized just how ahead of her time the singer and entrepreneur truly was. "First of all, she knew her worth and she knew how to negotiate her worth," she says. "She knew how valuable her music was and how much her management and record label needed her. She understood it and she was unapologetic about it. I believe that makes her very much a liberated and modern woman. She was also absolutely unapologetic about her sexuality. She was incredibly authentic and tapped into her desires and her impulses. I loved that about her. There was something about that that I just wanted to channel, because I feel like sometimes I apologize for my power. To be able to play and channel someone who does not, it became like an elixir."

In *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, Davis sings the mournful song "Those Dogs of Mine", while the rest of the tracks were recorded by vocalist Maxayn Lewis, recruited by the film's composer and music historian, Branford Marsalis. Wolfe explains that he felt that it was most important that the music become an expression of the dynamics of the character because it's "the soul, content, power, command, fierceness and intelligence of who this woman is that leads the conversation."

Pitted against Rainey is Levee, a smart, charismatic young man determined to stake his claim on the music industry, not yet knowing that he's a tragic hero. He scorns the conservative musical style favored by Ma, preferring to play a new, improvisational form of jazz. Levee sees Chicago as a place where he can break free of the restrictions placed on Black performers.

For Boseman, this adaptation of *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* was the closest he'd come to performing in one of Wilson's plays although he was intimately familiar with the breadth of his work. During production he recalled, "I did a staged reading of 'Gem of the Ocean' that was also broadcast as an audio play and much of that cast was the Broadway cast. Other than that I have seen 'Two Trains', 'King Hedley II', 'Radio Golf', 'Joe Turner's Come and Gone', 'Jitney', 'Fences', and 'Gem of the Ocean'. I'd never seen 'Ma Rainey', but it has always been my favorite read amongst the plays. As a student I was taught to revere Dutton's performance."

Boseman was just 10-years-old when he first encountered Wilson's words through his older brother, and he immediately felt a deep resonance to the rhythms, emotions and themes that reflected the reality of the Black American experience.

Writing in an opinion piece for The Los Angeles Times in 2013, Boseman said of Wilson's plays: "The musicality and sensibility of Wilson's work are the blues, filled with parables, folklore and mother's wit. It is the type of poetry that any actor worth his salt craves. The trained actor's tongue savors the complexities of such speeches, taking note of what spices and hints have been distilled in it. Filling one's nostrils with the emotionally charged breath to recite an August Wilson monologue can be transformative. The blood spilled by Wilson's quill made living words that have the power to inhabit the devoted actor and light a spark inside his breast so that inhalations taken for their utterance make the soul of the character blaze up and take shape in the actor's body and face when he/she exhales them in speech."

Ma Rainey's Black Bottom also offered the opportunity that Boseman and Washington had searched for to work together, a desire made even more special after Washington learned that the pair were connected by a life-altering event many years earlier. While Boseman was studying for his undergraduate degree at Howard University, he and eight other students were accepted into a summer acting program at Oxford's British American Drama Academy, but could not afford to attend. Phylicia Rashad - a professor at Howard and a mentor to Boseman - approached Washington about anonymously covering the students' tuition fees, which he generously agreed to do. Boseman spoke of the impact of this act while honoring Washington with the American Film Institute's Lifetime Achievement Award in 2019. In his speech, Boseman recalled that, "As fate would have it, I was one of the students that he paid for. Imagine receiving the letter that your tuition for that summer was paid for and that your benefactor was none other than the dopest actor on the planet."

Reflecting on the experience of collaborating with Boseman and seeing the astounding work that he contributed to this film, Washington says, "I'm happy that I got to be a part of sharing his genius with the world. I miss him and I love him. On film we'll always have him and I'll never forget him."

"When Denzel said that he'd like Chadwick Boseman to play Levee in our production of *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, awe engulfed the room," remembers Santiago-Hudson. "No other actor in my lifetime has made such an incredible, universal impact, in such a terribly brief amount of time. His portrayal of Levee continues that legacy to perfection."

Ruminating on the aspect of Levee's story that resonates the deepest, Davis says that for her it's about the trauma of the past. "We're still experiencing the trauma of slavery, Jim Crow and the Black codes to this day," she says. "Trauma embeds itself in your cellular memory. The

only way to evolve from it is to heal from it and then it needs to be reconciled. In the absence of reconciliation, in the absence of anything that can heal it - especially when you're still in the midst of it as Levee is - then it just consumes you. There's nothing in his life that grounds him other than his music and when that is taken away, there is nothing. I think that's how a lot of African Americans feel, that we are our history, and we're seeing too many side effects of it that are still detrimental and destructive."

Wolfe remembers how intense the final week of filming was, especially for Boseman who was portraying the darkest moments of Levee's life. "I knew Chadwick to be a very smart, very skilled actor; and so that's what we set out to explore as actors and director, Levee's possibilities and unresolved pain. All these horrible things that can happen to an artist, to a Black artist, to a young Black man, happened to Levee in one day in the recording studio. And because of the scars of his childhood, the only weapons he has to survive are his optimism, and his talent. His character had a series of scenes which were as physically demanding as they were emotionally raw. The work was Herculean, the stakes incredibly high, and day after day, take after take, Chadwick more than delivered. His work was brilliant."

Davis says that she never doubted that Boseman was going to bring everything he had to the role. "I think it's one of the greatest - if not the greatest - role for an African American actor in history. I had absolute chill bumps. It was just beautiful work from him. The depth of where Levee goes and how frightening that role is, he just went there, but I knew he could do it."

Potts remembers Boseman possessing a quiet intensity on set. "You could see him watching what everyone did and listening to what everyone said," he notes, describing him as a generous human being and actor. Turman recalls noticing how Boseman would push himself and allow himself to be pushed past predetermined outcomes. "This trust made for exciting moments in his performance, as well as those of us working opposite him," he says.

Black notes that the team were intent on bringing a stellar group of actors on board to round out the other members of Ma's band, wanting performers who would be as powerful, strong and individual in their own ways as Viola is. "When you study these three actors - **Colman Domingo, Glynn Turman, Michael Potts** - and know their work, we knew the combination of talent and rawness that they all brought and that along with Chadwick, they would be able to stand up to Viola," he explains.

Domingo, soon to be seen in Nia DaCosta's *Candyman* revival and Janicza Bravo's *Zola*, plays trombonist Cutler. He says that Wolfe purposely brought together a group of actors that had a deep respect for theater. "We understood the work at hand and that we needed to get on top of this beast that August Wilson had laid out for us," the actor says.

Award-winning actor Glynn Turman, who won an Emmy for his recurring role on *How To Get Away With Murder*, was deeply familiar with Wilson's works and had previously played Toledo in the stage version of 'Ma Rainey's Black Bottom'. He worked closely with Wolfe to adapt the character for film, even learning how to play the piano. "We were working one day and Wolfe said, 'Glynn, just do it. I trust your truth'. That just freed me to do things that I wouldn't have done had I not been that unleashed," he recalls.

Broadway veteran Potts, who has enjoyed an illustrious stage career including being part of the original cast for *The Book Of Mormon*, plays the quiet bassist Slow Drag. He too had a long-standing connection to Wilson's works, having been around the playwright during his early years and playing Turnbo in 2017's *Jitney* (directed by Santiago-Hudson). Potts also had established a relationship with Washington and Wolfe, having starred alongside Washington in 'The Iceman Cometh', directed by Wolfe. He describes building a brotherhood with Domingo and Turman quickly, crediting Wolfe for nurturing such a collaborative environment.

The white men at the center of the power games and fiery confrontations with Ma Rainey and her band are brought to life on screen by **Jonny Coyne** (*The Night Of*) who plays Sturdyvant, the exploitative, penny-pinching owner of the recording studio, and Ma's manager Irvin, played by **Jeremy Shamos** (*The Undoing*), who views himself as an expert mediator between Ma and Sturdyvant, while in reality he possesses very little negotiating power.

Also included in Ma's entourage for this one-day recording session are her nephew Sylvester, played by **Dusan Brown** (*42*), who Ma wants to record the voice introduction to her song 'Ma Rainey's Black Bottom' in the hope of helping him to overcome his stutter; and her latest girlfriend Dussie Mae played by **Taylor Paige** (*Zola*), who is also the object of Levee's desire.

Dussie is a young woman trying to elevate her situation by any means as she searches for the possibility of hope and excitement at every turn. Paige recalls the excitement she felt anticipating the work she would get to do alongside Davis and Boseman. "Viola has been on my list of people I've wanted to work with for so long," she says. "She is raw, unapologetic, and strong. She knows who she is, and she gives a damn. She really cares and it's refreshing."

And by the time it came to filming her biggest day with Boseman, the pair had had the space to try different approaches to the scenes. She says they would "try, and play, and fail. And do it again. Laugh about it. We didn't overly plan our romance, but he'd always ask if I was okay and comfortable. It was a dance between us that was generous and sexy. It was a rare moment where I felt all is well and I deserve to be here with this force. This force Chadwick. These elevated works from August. This legend George."

When reflecting on the final performances in the film, Romero says she was floored by what the cast and director brought to Wilson's play. "Viola's whole body, her makeup, her wig, are Ma Rainey, one hundred percent. And Chadwick is all pain and joy and youth encapsulated in a very precarious package. The rest of the cast is unbeatable and George was so right for this project, the camera sizzles with the rhythms he found in the language."

The end result is a frenetic sojourn weaving together stage and cinematic techniques to lead audiences through the lives of these characters over the course of one monumental day in Chicago, in which all of their lives are left forever changed.

THE HEART AND BLUES SOUL OF MA RAINEY

As Viola Davis set out to take on the formidable and trailblazing Ma Rainey - the only one of Wilson's characters based on an actual historical figure - she reflected on the differences between Rainey and her previously played Wilson characters - Rose in 'Fences', Tonya in 'King Hedley II' and Vera in 'Seven Guitars'. "Ma definitely is unapologetic about owning her power. I would not put that with Rose, Vera, or Tonya," Davis explains. "Ma has her own agency and autonomy; it's not tied into a man at all."

The actor threw herself into researching everything she could about Rainey and the world she came up in, although it was initially more challenging than Davis anticipated. "I was amazed at the lack of information there was, which is another thing we're fighting as African Americans," Davis says. "There is a lack of information out there about our own history, which is what makes August valuable." She says that what she took from listening to Rainey's music was her ability as a brilliant storyteller. "I found it to be an introduction and a window into her soul. I saw her music as being her protest."

Davis found that Ma's song spoke out against "a culture that had put her on the periphery and was spitting her out" - thus, the singer was forced to constantly navigate her worth. Part of that fight against the systemic and societal barriers against her was the aesthetic armor that Ma chose to wield against the world, particularly with her outfits and makeup.

"Ma had a mouthful of gold teeth - that's what all the musicians said - so I did a mouthful of gold teeth and I got the molding and everything. A lot of people who observed her also said that her makeup looked like greasepaint," Davis says. "When you go back to that time period, that was the style - really heavy eye makeup and really heavy lashes. A lot of her bandmates said that especially when she was in the tent, the makeup was so pronounced. I decided to take that choice and run with it. I thought it was an interesting character choice. A huge part of it is because it's a mask."

Davis worked closely with makeup artist **Sergio Lopez-Rivera** to recreate how Ma would have used makeup in the late 1920s, but he also drew particular inspiration from Bette Davis in the 1962 psychological drama *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?*

“Ma was always sweaty, so I got the idea of making her makeup look like she had applied it herself without any tools, just with her fingers,” Lopez-Rivera says. “I wanted it to look messy and I wanted it to look like it was constantly melting, and constantly running, to convey a little bit of that angst, that struggle.”

Being able to bring Wilson’s words to the big screen again meant exploring “a window into the life of the artist and the life of all the characters” that he breathed life into, Davis says. “Not a lot of us as artists, as human beings and certainly characters in plays are given that grace and that respect. I always want to play homage to all these characters by embracing the full scope of their pathology and their humanity.”

THE SARTORIAL SPLENDOR OF MA RAINEY’S BLACK BOTTOM

With a career spanning seven decades across stage and screen, costume designer **Ann Roth** has a treasure trove of archival images and costumery dating back to her earliest days on Broadway in the late 1950s and early 1960s. It was that vast collection that she was able to pull from quickly when Wolfe and Washington urged her to come on board for the film.

“George Wolfe is one of the best directors I know. We have worked together on three or four shows now. Denzel and I have done both movies and Broadway shows and we love each other, and Todd Black and I did a movie together maybe five years ago. These are particularly good friends of mine,” she says.

Starting the project while she was in France, Roth established a backstory for Ma’s wardrobe, imagining that the singer would have a Memphis tailor who made and constantly refitted her clothes for her as she grew older.

“When Ma is finished at night, when she takes her clothes off, they’re wet. And they get on a bus or a train, and her clothes take a beating,” Roth explains. “These clothes are tough; they’re not delicate. She would love them to be, but she’s not a delicate woman.”

Time was tight for Roth to get the costumes designed and ready for shooting, and she spent much of her preparation time in France. When Roth returned to Manhattan, she had Viola Davis fly out overnight for a fitting, creating costumes that would capture Ma’s essence. “Usually Ma Rainey and how she looks has been greatly stereotyped in cinematic history and in life,” says Davis. “The Black woman is always dark, fat, funny, can sing, and is really not

sexualized in any way that is dangerous. But that's not my understanding of women like that. Ma is my Auntie Joyce, my Aunt Letha, who were highly sexual and the most beautiful women I ever seen in my life. They were stylish. I didn't want Ma to physically look like she was apologizing for herself. I wanted her to switch. If those breasts were hanging out like that? They just hung out. She was unapologetic about her sexuality. I had to honor that."

Roth also paid careful attention to the details of Ma's outfits, making the clothes both a plumage for performances and an armor against societal prejudices. When Ma throws a fur over her dress as she walks into the recording studio on that stifling hot Chicago summer day, it is meant to make a bold statement. "She's probably got the feeling that she is in a very smart place," Roth says. "What she had to put on to go to rehearsal to knock them dead as she came down the steps was her fur. That is her mentality."

Another key item of attire were the fancy new shoes that Boseman's Levee stops to buy before turning up late to the recording session. "I wanted them to be yellow," Roth recalls. "In that period, most men had a pair of black shoes and a brown pair. When you went to church, those were the black shoes, and the brown shoes were working shoes, but yellow shoes were extraordinary. You had to be a high-stepper to have them, or to wear them, or to pay for them."

For Ma's band, Roth designed costumes that would reflect the journey that the men make from the South to the North. The purple suits that the men wear on stage with Ma during a performance are items that she would have likely bought them, but for the recording studio, they would have worn their own clothes.

As well as dressing the leads, Roth also oversaw the costumes for all the background actors, including the elegant ladies wearing white silk stockings in the chic tea room at the hotel where Ma saunters down the stairs wrapped in her fur, her arm thrown around Dussie Mae, much to their disapproval. Even for the audience in Barnesville, Georgia, who crowd together to see Ma – wearing an embroidered, vibrant blue velvet gown – perform in a tent in a forest, Roth thought of the smallest details of how each person would look.

"I had dressed every single one of those people as though it was Saturday night and they had thirty cents to see Ma Rainey, the famous blues singer," Roth says. "These were people out on a field, who had bathed and had on their finest clothes. But their finest clothes were cotton, and they all had shoes on that may have been their mother's or their sister's."

Davis appreciated Roth's hyper-detailed approach noting that she researched every aspect of the wardrobe - how the pieces were made, who would have worn them, when and why. "She's that brilliant and she's that dedicated. Even during the tent scene, which must've had over a

hundred extras, I kid you not, I saw it with my own eyes, she went up to each and every one of those extras and she had her hands on them. She explained where each part of their costume came from and what it meant to be in that tent. They listened intently. Ann Roth is not just a costume designer, she's an artist and she's a teacher. That's what makes her extraordinary.”

ENVISIONING CHICAGO IN 1927

While the play and film are both set in Chicago, the filmmakers made a conscious decision to shoot the film in Wilson’s hometown of Pittsburgh. Production designer **Mark Ricker** was brought on by Wolfe to reimagine Wilson’s play for the screen.

The energy and pacing of *Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom* is enhanced by the claustrophobic settings of the stifling hot recording studio, elevating the frayed tempers, impatience and anxiety of the characters. Even in the few scenes set outside of the studio, Ricker harnessed alleyways and busy streets to keep the frenetic pace consistent.

To really bring Chicago alive in 1927, Ricker researched the nitty gritty details of what the city was like. “It’s a complete re-education about what literal materials were invented, like chain link and corrugated concrete, and diving into the details of what makes Chicago, Chicago, from elevated trains to lamp posts to trash cans,” he explains.

For the actual recording studio, Wolfe told Ricker that he wanted a “fantastic small vaudeville Victorian theater.” Ricker found a Pittsburgh location that fit the bill, but the venue fell through a few days before they were scheduled to begin work, so Ricker and his team had to build out the entire set on a soundstage.

“I think we ended up with something that was better than the location, as it gave us more flexibility but then we were able to really push some of the details that we wouldn’t have been able to do in the other place,” Ricker says.

In 1927, recording studios were beginning to shift from acoustic to electronic recording, something that Ricker had to quickly familiarize himself with in order to build out the intricate details of the studio. He also drew inspiration from the original Paramount Recording Studio located in the rear of a chair company warehouse, and in *Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom*, we see the recording studio located within the fictional Illinois Chair Company. The studio was soundproofed with horse hair and burlap sacks, as well as heavy curtains that muffled the bricks.

“Some of it is just based on conjecture and what we thought would look visually interesting, but it’s also based on a sense of reality,” Ricker says. “It had to be texturally solid so that we

could spend time in this room with the windows open or closed and the curtains drawn. It had to be a good-looking room.”

Down in the basement rehearsal space where Ma Rainey’s band members Cutler, Slow Drag, Toledo, and Levee wait for the singer to arrive, Wolfe had envisioned a subterranean room with no windows and a locked door in order to elevate the claustrophobia for the characters. Ricker, along with cinematographer Tobias Schliessler, ultimately added one window to the room, in order to weave the heat into the space.

“The one window in the room gives a host of opportunities for feeling the heat and the light that comes into that room,” Ricker says. “We were literally going to track the light moving over the course of the film, and we’re very cognizant of the light as it pertains to the heat on this hot day in July, in Chicago in 1927.”

Bringing the viewer inside of the sweat-filled high stakes of the film was important even in the outdoor spaces. Even the opening scene of the film is orchestrated to feel frantic, setting the pace as the camera follows two young boys running at breakneck speed through a forest at night, as if they’re trying to get away from something. Soon, we see them enter an open field where a tent has been constructed, and the sounds of Ma Rainey’s guttural melodic moans ring through the sequence.

“The tent appears through the woods and it’s glowing. You start to hear the music, and we rush right up to Viola’s face,” Ricker says. “Experiencing it was a magical moment. To be in a summer night in the woods when the fireflies are out and the mist is there, the music is there and you smell the hay that we put all over the place, you are transported. When all of the senses are firing at once, you really feel like you’re there.

DIVING DEEP INTO THE BLUES

At the heart of *Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom* is the moody, soulful blues music that the titular character is known for and so Wolfe knew there was just one man for the job of bringing the score alive – famed jazz and classical saxophonist, composer and music historian **Branford Marsalis**.

“I instantly knew I wanted to work with Branford Marsalis, because when you collaborate with Branford the composer and arranger, then Branford the historian, musicologist, dramatist and raconteur show up as well,” Wolfe says. “Because he understands the inherently transgressive nature of the blues, Branford’s arrangements capture not only the cultural and regional DNA in Ma Rainey’s songs, but the wit and rage embedded in every note, shout and moan.”

Marsalis, a three-time Grammy Award winner, has long been entwined with jazz on screen, from co-starring as a horn player in Spike Lee's 1988 film *School Daze* to leading The Tonight Show Band for *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno*.

Marsalis shifted gears a little to look more closely at the blues music scene in the 1920s as he crafted the score for *Ma Rainey*. Keeping with Wolfe's instructions to stick to Wilson's script, Marsalis brought on a bass player, a pianist, a trumpeter and a trombone player to create the desired sound.

"Because the majority of music played at that time was outside, it was outdoor music, it wasn't indoor music," Marsalis explains. "In modern times, musicians practice in little, tiny rooms and cubicles so they develop inside voices, their instruments don't project as much as they did from the musicians of the twenties and the thirties. Logically, the only musicians that I could hire that would make any sense were New Orleans musicians because they still have that sound."

Just as the blues are woven through all of August Wilson's stage works, Marsalis wanted to weave the playwright into the music of *Ma Rainey*. "He was a musician," Marsalis says of Wilson. "He really had an understanding of music, what its purpose was, and the thought process of the musician and so that made it unique." Wolfe unreservedly agreed with the approach and was thrilled with the seamless melding of words and music. "Shifting from the irreverent buoyancy of twenties jazz, to the haunted sounds of the characters' haunted past, Branford's glorious score exists in concert with August Wilson's glorious words," he says.

In order to harness the sound and cadences of *Ma Rainey*'s deep, guttural, moaning melodies, Marsalis fully immersed himself into her music. Her trick, he realized, was to perform in the same way over and over again. "Her voice is massive. Oh my God, she carried the room, you could tell." Viola Davis sings "Those Dogs Of Mine" in the film and to record the other three tracks, Marsalis recruited American soul singer Maxayn Lewis, a conservatory-trained pianist who began her singing career in the 1960s as a member of The Ikettes in the Ike & Tina Turner Revue. Lewis was thrilled to lend her voice to the project, having been a fan of Marsalis's work for years. "Mr. Marsalis had the wisdom to bring the music to life in the most authentic way possible, and he kept us all on track with his incredible humor, knowledge and kindness. It is a stunningly beautiful film. As I was singing I found myself being pulled into the story."

When it came to the approach for Boseman's coronet player Levee, Marsalis advised the actor to inhabit the emotions that Levee was feeling into the way that he played. "Levee had ambitions that, at that time in our country, were reserved for white men," he says. "This was the thing about segregation that was the most vicious. What we like to do is talk about the

indignity of walking in the back door of a restaurant, physical things, however I think the indignity of not being allowed to use your brain to the fullest capacity that you know you can, was probably the most stinging thing.”

At Boseman’s request, Marsalis wrote up a chart for finger positions so that he could mimic playing the instrument properly, and suggested that the actor draw influence from the physicality of how Louis Armstrong - who had performed in Ma Rainey’s band - played the coronet. “Before we began filming, Chadwick reached out to ask me to write the fingerings for the cornet on a piece of music, so he could learn to mimic playing authentically. By what I have seen in other films, most actors are only interested in looking the part of a musician, not actually trying to make the playing look convincing. The same intensity he brought to playing James Brown and Jackie Robinson, he brought to the character of Levee,” Marsalis says.

As the temperature rises and tensions heighten in Ma Rainey, Marsalis’ score waxes and wanes through the stifling recording studio on that hot July day in Chicago, adding punctuated staccatos and melancholy reflections to the characters’ journeys. “When Ma Rainey, Levee and his bandmates decry, defend, lie and rejoice, their words and the film’s music transform into blues arias, percussive, elegant and raw,” Wolfe says.

GETTING TO KNOW THE REAL MA RAINEY

The history of the blues can’t be written without the pioneering efforts of Ma Rainey, and yet as the years have gone by, her name has faded from the spotlight. Born Gertrude Pridgett in 1886 in Columbus, Georgia, the young girl left home at the age of 14 so that she could perform on the Black minstrel troupe circuit in the American South. While touring through Missouri in 1902, she heard the sultry sounds of the country blues song and became enamored, incorporating it into her act. Soon, it became the song that her audiences most requested, and she crafted her shows around the blues, accompanied by a jazz ensemble.

In 1904, she married vaudeville singer William “Pa” Rainey, which led to her changing her name to “Ma” Rainey. In 1912, she hired a teenage Bessie Smith as a dancer and became a protege of Rainey’s. Smith went on to become known as the “Empress of the Blues” and while Smith went on to make almost twice as many records as Rainey, the two forged an enduring friendship. During this time, famed jazz trumpeter Louis Armstrong also became a member of the Ma Rainey backing band.

At the age of 38, Rainey signed with Paramount Records and made her first recordings in Chicago, ultimately recording over 100 songs. Dark-skinned and heavysset, Rainey defied the Black beauty aesthetics of the time, opting instead to don gold teeth and a necklace made of twenty gold dollar pieces. She was famous for her flamboyant performing style and

costuming, opting for luxe dresses, sequins, feathers and heavy makeup. She was well ahead of her time as an openly queer singer, posing in a suit and fedora for one record jacket cover and singing about her bisexuality on 'Prove it on Me Blues' which features the lyrics:

*Went out last night with a crowd of my friends
They must've been women, 'cause I don't like no men.'*

But what Rainey also had to fight against was the cultural exploitation of Black music, dealing with the white men who ran the touring booking businesses that would capitalize on her ability to headline big city venues. In *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, we see her being aggressively demanding of the white male label executive and studio owner, knowingly exerting her power in a room that she can control. However she is also aware that her career is stalling, as audiences had begun demanding the sounds of Harlem and her record label attempts to push her in the same direction.

Despite only recording for a period of five years in the 1920s, many of Rainey's songs subsequently became blues standards. She became known as the "Mother of the Blues" and influenced not only countless blues singers like Smith, but she also had an impact on Black literature and drama from poets Langston Hughes and Sterling Allen Brown to Alice Waters, who based the character of Shug Avery in her novel "The Color Purple" on artists including Rainey and Smith. Bob Dylan's 1965 song "Tombstone Blues" was heavily influenced by the blues and references Rainey.

Ma Rainey ran three theatres in Columbus, Georgia before she died, passing away from a heart attack in 1936 in the handsome house that she had purchased. She was inducted into both the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame and Blues Foundation Hall of Fame in 1990, and was the honoree of a US Post commemorative stamp in 1994.

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ABOUT THE CAST

VIOLA DAVIS (Ma Rainey)

In a prolific career spanning stage and screen and a vast spectrum of genres, Viola Davis is one of the most respected and celebrated actors of her generation, and the first black actress to win Tony ('Fences' and 'King Hedley II'), Oscar (*Fences*) and Emmy (*How to Get Away with Murder*) awards.

Born in South Carolina and raised in Rhode Island, Davis studied theater at Rhode Island College before studying at The Juilliard School. She received an honorary doctorate at Juilliard's 109th Commencement Ceremony and she also holds an honorary doctorate from her alma mater, Rhode Island College.

Davis broke out on Broadway in the 2001 revival of August Wilson's 'King Hedley II', in which she played Tonya, a role that earned her Tony and Drama Desk awards. She later appeared in 2004's off-Broadway production 'Intimate Apparel', and returned to Broadway in 2010 in Wilson's 'Fences', starring alongside Denzel Washington.

In film, Davis' roles have spanned thrillers, dramas, sci-fi and superheroes. In her early career, she frequently collaborated with Steven Soderberg, from *Out of Sight* to *Solaris*, as well as starring in Washington's 2002 directorial debut, *Antwone Fisher*.

In 2008, Davis starred in the critically revered film *Doubt* alongside Meryl Streep, Amy Adams and Phillip Seymour Hoffman. The film earned Davis supporting actress nominations from the Golden Globes, Screen Actors Guild and her first nod for an Academy Award. The National Board of Review recognized Davis with the Breakthrough Award and she was also honored as a Virtuoso by the Santa Barbara Film Festival.

In 2012, Davis received her second Oscar nomination, this time for best actress, for her portrayal of the heart-broken but stoic Aibileen Clark in Tate Taylor's *The Help*, which was also nominated for best picture. That year, Davis won best actress at the Screen Actors Guild and Critics' Choice awards, and was also nominated for a Golden Globe and British Academy Film Award.

In 2016, Davis reprised her stage role as Rose Maxson in the screen adaptation of *Fences*, starring alongside Washington, who also directed and produced the film. Davis' performance won her best actress at Critics Choice, Golden Globe, SAG and BAFTA, before culminating in her first Oscar win.

Davis' other notable film credits include four vastly different projects in 2013 – young adult sci-fi *Ender's Game*; gritty thriller *Prisoners*; gothic fantasy *Beautiful Creatures*; and independent drama *The Disappearance of Eleanor Rigby*. In 2014, she starred alongside Boseman in the James Brown biopic *Get on Up*; in 2015, she starred alongside Jennifer Lopez in *Lila & Eve*; and in 2016, she joined DC antihero film *Suicide Squad* alongside Will Smith, Margot Robbie and Jared Leto, a role that she will reprise in next year's *The Suicide Squad* directed by James Gunn. She also starred as the lead in Steve McQueen's 2018 heist thriller *Widows* and most recently in 2019, Davis was recently seen in Amazon Studios' family comedy *Troop Zero*.

On television, Davis recently wrapped the final season of the Shondaland and ABC series *How to Get Away with Murder* in which she played the lead, Annalise Keating, a role that won her an Emmy – making her the first Black actress to win outstanding lead actress – and two Screen Actors Guild awards. Her other small screen credits include Showtime’s *United States of Tara*, NBC’s *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* and ABC’s *Scandal*.

Off screen, Davis and her husband Julius Tennon founded JuVee Productions in 2012, ushering in projects that would give a voice to the voiceless through strong, impactful and culturally relevant narratives. The Los Angeles-based and artist driven company produces film, television and digital content across all of entertainment. JuVee Productions’ projects includes an adaptation of Rachael Lloyd’s memoir *Girls Like Us*; a docuseries entitled *The Last Defense* that dives into the flaws in America’s justice system; an ABC comedy titled *Black Don’t Crack*; and *Woman King*, a drama starring Davis and Oscar-winning actress Lupita Nyong’o.

Davis’ future projects include the TV series *First Ladies*, in which she’ll play former First Lady Michelle Obama, and the Netflix documentary *Giving Voice*.

CHADWICK BOSEMAN (Levee)

In the past decade, Chadwick Boseman established himself as one of the most prolific actors of his generation. What Boseman achieved in his short career has left an indelible mark on Hollywood today and for generations to come.

A native of South Carolina, Boseman was fueled by purpose and the power of God. He graduated from Howard University and attended the British American Dramatic Academy at Oxford. It was at The Mecca that Boseman began to define that purpose through writing, directing, acting and activism.

He made his feature film debut in Gary Fleders’ drama *The Express*, playing football great Floyd Little. His breakout performance came in 2013 when he received rave reviews for his portrayal of the legendary Jackie Robinson in Warner Bros’ *42*. The film, which had the highest-grossing debut for a baseball movie, tells the story of Robinson’s history-making signing with the Brooklyn Dodgers under the guidance of team executive Branch Rickey, played by Harrison Ford.

In 2014, Boseman once again garnered critical praise for his portrayal of James Brown in Universal Pictures’ *Get On Up*. The biopic, which also stars Viola Davis, Octavia Spencer and Dan Akroyd and directed by Tate Taylor (*The Help*), chronicles Brown’s rise from extreme

poverty to become one of the most influential musicians in history. Boseman received the 2014 CinemaCon Male Star of Tomorrow Award, was named one of the Top 10 Best Movie Performances of 2014 by Time Magazine, and was awarded a Virtuous Award from the Santa Barbara International Film Festival for his portrayal of Brown.

Boseman joined the Marvel Cinematic Universe as the African superhero “Black Panther” in Marvel’s 2016 release of *Captain America: Civil War*. This marked the film debut for the character, also known as “T’Challa,” which was created by Marvel writers Stan Lee and Jack Kirby and introduced in the comics in 1966. Boseman brought the character to the forefront starring in his own solo film Marvel’s *Black Panther*, which received critical acclaim and broke global box office records. The film went on to receive seven Academy Award nominations, including Marvel’s first ever Best Picture nomination. The cast also won the Screen Actors Guild Award for Outstanding Performance by a Cast in a Motion Picture.

Boseman also starred in the title role of Open Road Films’ *Marshall* alongside Josh Gad and Sterling K. Brown. The film tells the story of Thurgood Marshall, the first African American Supreme Court Justice, as he battled through one of his career-defining cases as the Chief Counsel for the NAACP. His other feature film credits include the revenge thriller *Message from the King*, which premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival and garnered Boseman the Vanguard Honor for Achievement in Performance Award at the festival, the independent psychological post-war drama *The Kill Hole*, and Summit Entertainment’s *Draft Day* opposite Kevin Costner. In 2019, Boseman starred in *21 Bridges*, which he produced with his partner Logan Coles, through their shingle Xception Content.

Boseman’s theatre directing credits include ‘Dutchman’, ‘Wine in the Wilderness’, ‘Indian Summer’, ‘Spear in the Sun’, ‘Colored Museum’, and ‘Six Hits’. For the screen he wrote, directed and executive produced the short film *Blood Over a Broken Pawn*. His theatre acting credits include ‘Romeo and Juliet’, ‘Macbeth’, ‘Breathe’, ‘Learning Curve’, ‘Willie’s Cut and Shine’, ‘Rhyme Deferred’, ‘Bootleg Blues’, ‘Zooman and the Sign’, and ‘Urban Transitions’, for which he won an AUDELCO Award for Best Supporting Actor. Additional writing credits include ‘Deep Azure’, which was nominated for a Jeff Award for Best New Play and is published in the Hip Hop Theater Anthology *Say Word*; ‘Hieroglyphic Graffiti’, which was produced at the National Black Theatre Festival and the Hip Hop Theatre Festival; and co-wrote ‘Rhyme Deferred’, which appears in the Hip Hop Theatre Anthology ‘The Fire This Time’.

This year, Boseman joined the talented ensemble in Oscar-winning director Spike Lee’s Netflix Originals film *Da 5 Bloods*, which follows four African American vets who return to Vietnam in search of their fallen squad leader and the promise of buried treasure.

His final role is *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, in which he returned to his theatrical roots and embodied a character hungry for life. It brought his relationship with Denzel Washington full circle. Boseman told the story on stage at the American Film Institute's Lifetime Achievement Award ceremony, which honored Washington's career. "There is no Black Panther without Denzel Washington," Boseman said, as a visibly emotional Washington watched on. "And not just because of me, but my whole cast, that generation stands on your shoulders."

In August, Boseman's untimely death sent shockwaves through Hollywood and beyond, demonstrating the wide, impactful reach of his talent. Aged just 43, Boseman passed away after a four-year private battle with colon cancer, leaving his peers and fans in mourning for his loss.

In each project throughout his career the edification of Black folk, through the art of storytelling, remained cornerstone. At the 2019 Screen Actors Guild Awards, where the cast of *Black Panther* were anointed the year's Best Ensemble, Boseman best summed up the importance of representation on screen, and of collaborating to create a bold new world for Black excellence.

"To be young, gifted and Black – we all know what it's like to be told that there is not a place for you to be featured, yet you are young, gifted and Black. We know what it's like to be told to say there is not a screen for you to be featured on, a stage for you to be featured on. We know what it's like to be a tail and not the head. We know what it's like to be beneath and not above. And that is what we went to work with every day because we knew, not that we would be around during awards season and that it would make a billion dollars, but we knew that we had something special that we wanted to give the world. That we could be full human beings in the roles that we were playing. That we could create a world that exemplified a world that we wanted to see. We knew that we had something that we wanted to give, and to come to work every day and to solve problems every day with this group of people, every day with this director, that is something that I wish all actors will get the opportunity to experience. If you get to experience that, you will be a fulfilled artist."

COLMAN DOMINGO (Cutler)

A proud recipient of an Honorary Doctorate Degree in Humane Letters from Ursinus College, Colman Domingo is a 2020 Juilliard School Creative Associate. He is a Tony®, Lawrence Olivier, Drama Desk, Drama League and NAACP Theatre Award nominee, OBIE and Lucille Lortel Award winning actor, playwright, director and producer. He has been recently

celebrated as a Newport Beach Film Festival's Artist of Distinction and honored by The Vineyard Theatre for his thirty year body of work. Domingo recently filmed *Without Remorse*, with Michael B. Jordan for Paramount. Colman stars in A24's *Zola*, *The God Committee* alongside Kelsey Grammar and Julia Stiles, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* alongside Viola Davis and Chadwick Boseman, produced by Denzel Washington, and MGM's *Candyman* written and produced by Jordan Peele. Colman recently starred on *The Twilight Zone* for CBS All Access and recurs on the critically acclaimed *Euphoria* on HBO. Going into its sixth season, Colman stars on AMC's global hit *Fear The Walking Dead* as Victor Strand. Domingo is a recipient of The Best Drama Actor from The 2018 Independent Television Festival presented by the Television Academy® in *Nothingman* directed by Eli Kooris and Joshua Shaffer. Colman is a recent recipient of the Sundance Feature Film Program Grant. Mr. Domingo, his creative partner Alisa Tager and AMC Networks are currently developing an original drama series for television, titled *West Philly, Baby*, which he will write, direct, and Executive Produce. He is also at work on an untitled half hour comedy for HBO, which he will produce with Sarah Jessica Parker's *Pretty Matches*.

Domingo's hit Broadway musical 'Summer: The Donna Summer Musical' was honored with two Tony® Award nominations as well as Drama Desk and Drama League. It kicked off its National Tour in Fall of 2019, and started its Brazilian engagement in March 2020 in San Paulo.

Colman starred in the Academy Award® winning Barry Jenkins drama *If Beale Street Could Talk*, the Academy Award® nominated Paramount film *Selma* as Reverend Ralph Abernathy, Lee Daniels' *The Butler*, Lincoln directed by Steven Spielberg, three films directed by Spike Lee, including *Miracle At St. Ana*, *Red Hook Summer* and *Passing Strange*, *Freedomland* directed by Joe Roth, *True Crime* directed by Clint Eastwood, *The Birth of a Nation* directed by Nate Parker, *Assassination Nation* directed by Sam Levinson and *First Match* directed by Olivia Newman, and Noah Hawley's *Lucy in the Sky* for Searchlight Pictures.

Domingo starred in The London Evening Standard Award winning 'The Scottsboro Boys' at the Young Vic in London, in a role which he originated on and Off Broadway and reprised on the West End.

Domingo followed in the footsteps of Zakes Mokae, James Earl Jones and Danny Glover and starred as Zachariah in the New York revival of 'Blood Knot' written and directed by Athol Fugard as the inaugural production of the Signature Theater Center Off Broadway. Colman is well known for his star turns as Mr. Franklin and a German performance artist, Mr. Venus of Berlin, in the Tony and Drama Desk Award winning groundbreaking musical 'Passing Strange' directed by Annie Dorsen on Broadway and documented on film by Spike Lee. Mr. Domingo

has starred in the first ever screen adaptation of a Ralph Ellison story for PBS, *King of the Bingo Game*.

Colman made his British and Australian theatrical debuts with his self-penned solo play 'A Boy and His Soul' at the Tricycle Theater and Brisbane Powerhouse Theaters, the production which originated at the New York City's stalwart the Vineyard Theatre. He starred in his play 'Wild with Happy' that had its debut at the Public Theater. His fourth play 'Dot' premiered at the Humana Festival at Actors Theater of Louisville and premiered Off Broadway at the Vineyard Theatre directed by the legendary Tony award winner Susan Stroman. Dot is enjoying regional productions around the country and is published by Samuel French.

Domingo and nationally acclaimed theatre-maker Patricia McGregor co-authored the critically acclaimed, sold out, and Barrymore Awards for Excellence in Theater nominated production of 'Lights Out: Nat "King" Cole' musical that had its world premiere at People's Light Theatre in October 2017, and premiered on the West Coast at the Geffen Playhouse in February 2019, starring Dulé Hill and Daniel J. Watts, to sold out audiences and was extended twice. It broke all ticket sales records to become the most profitable show in Geffen's twenty-four-year history.

As a 21-year veteran theatre director, Domingo recently helmed his self-penned family drama 'Dot' at the People's Light Theatre in Malvern, PA, and the critically acclaimed IRNE award nominated (Best Direction of a Play) Huntington Theatre's world premiere of 'A Guide For The Homesick' by Ken Urban. Colman also staged Claire Kiechel's 'Pilgrims for the Lark'. His NAACP theatre award nominated (Best Direction) and StageSceneLA celebrated (Outstanding Comedy Direction and Outstanding Production of a play) production of 'Barbecue' closed to sold out houses at the Geffen Playhouse. Colman helmed the Off-Broadway Alliance Best Family Musical Award winning production of 'A Band of Angels' and staged August Wilson's Seven Guitars for Actors Theater of Louisville. He also helmed the Off-Broadway productions of 'Exit Cuckoo' for The Working Theater and Single Black Female for the New Professional Theater. He has directed for Berkeley Rep as well as Lincoln Center Director's Lab. Colman has received residencies and/or commissions from The Geffen Playhouse, American Conservatory Theater, People's Light & Theatre Company, New York Theater Workshop, Scott Rudin Productions, Jeffrey Sellar, The Wallace Foundation, San Francisco Cash Fund, New Professional Theater and the March of Dimes.

Mr. Domingo is on faculty of The National Theater Institute at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center and has taught, guest lectured and mentored at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the University of Texas at Austin, the Savannah College of Art and Design, University of Wisconsin, Madison O.M.A.I., The New York Writers Institute as the Burian Lecture Fellow, University of Minnesota, Temple University, The Art Institute of San Francisco and Community College of Philadelphia.

GLYNN TURMAN (Toledo)

Award-winning, New York City-born actor, Glynn Turman, enjoyed his first real taste of acting success as a young teenager, originating the role of Travis Younger on Broadway in Lorraine

Hansberry's landmark play 'A Raisin in the Sun' in 1959 opposite Sidney Poitier and Ruby Dee as his various family members. Upon graduation from the renowned High School of Performing Arts in New York, he apprenticed in regional and repertory companies throughout the country until he settled in Los Angeles in the mid-1970's. Turman is also an award-winning stage and television director, helming episodes of *Hanging with Mr. Cooper* and *The Wayans Bros*, also directed during his seasons of acting work on *The Cosby Show* spinoff *A Different World*. His strong work in film and television continues today with his memorable roles on *The Wire*, *House of Lies* and *Queen Sugar*, including the most recent season of Noah Hawley's *Fargo* for FX opposite Chris Rock.

In 2008, Turman scored his first Emmy win as Outstanding Guest Actor for the HBO series *In Treatment* and he earned his second Emmy nomination for the same category in 2019 for his role as Nate Lahey Sr. on ABC's *How to Get Away with Murder*. He's won three NAACP Image Awards and a NAACP Lifetime Achievement Award for Theatre, the 2011 National Black Theater Festival's 'Sidney Poitier Lifelong Achievement Award', the 2010 Pan African Film Festival Lifetime Achievement Award, the 2013 & 2010 LA Stage Ovation Awards for Outstanding Lead Actor for two August Wilson plays, 'Joe Turner's Come & Gone' & 'Two Trains Running' and in 2017, he was nominated for a third Ovation Award and a NAACP Theatre Image Award as Outstanding Lead Actor for 'Ma Rainey's Black Bottom'. Turman has had a Los Angeles Critics Award, a Dramalogue Award and multiple NAACP Image Award nominations including in 2015 for his portrayal as Jeremiah Kaan on the Showtime hit series *House of Lies*.

Turman's career catapulted to new heights since his Emmy win in 2008 and his upcoming projects are a testament to his non-stop work releasing this year and next, including his role as Toledo in the Denzel Washington-produced Netflix adaptation of August Wilson's 1982 play *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*. Turman stars opposite Chadwick Boseman, Viola Davis and Colman Domingo. He also stars in the upcoming season of AT&T Audience Network's *Mr. Mercedes* opposite Brendan Gleeson as Judge Bernard Raines, the no-nonsense judge presiding over Lou Linklatter's murder trial, he suffers no fools and takes no prisoners. He is none too pleased with the lawyers working on this case who seem hell bent for trial. Turman also has strong supporting roles in the current season of TNT's *Claws*, as Niecy Nash's character's father, in Netflix's Marlon Wayans film *Sextuplets* and in Ben Affleck's highly anticipated drama film *The Way Back* for Warner Bros.

His many film credits include *Race*, *Dakota's Summer*, *Super 8*, *Burlesque*, *Takers*, *Sahara*, *John Dies at the End*, *Kings of the Evening* (for which Glynn won Best Supporting Actor at the 2009 San Diego Black Film Festival), *Men of Honor*, *Deep Cover*, *Gremlins*, *J.D.'s Revenge*, *Light It Up*, *The Serpent's Egg*, *The Inkwell*, *How Stella Got Her Groove Back*, and the cult classic *Cooley High*. Glynn's television series and roles include Jeremiah Kaah on *House of*

Lies, Colonel Taylor on A Different World, Ernest Bordelon on Queen Sugar, Suits, Graves, Proof, Criminal Minds, NCIS: LA, The Wire, Revolution, The Defenders, In Treatment, CSI, The Bernie Mac Show, Law and Order, CI, Resurrection Blvd, Big Apple, Scrubs, Southland, Buffalo Soldiers and The Minstrel Man. Glynn has also directed several films, plays and television shows from the 80's hit *Dynasty* to several webisodes for the Showtime series, *House of Lies*. Turman has also had a prolific stage career, having starred in three August Wilson plays, most recently 'Ma Rainey's Black Bottom' directed by Phylicia Rashad and in 2015 he co-starred in Eugene O'Neil's 'A Moon for the Misbegotten' opposite Audra McDonald in Williamstown. He has performed in such plays as Athol Fugard's 'My Children! My Africa!', 'Ceremonies in Dark Old Men', Ron Milner's 'What the Wine Sellers Buy', 'Eyes of the American' & his own autobiographical, one-man show, 'Movin' Man'.

He always had a love for horses as a young child and grew up training them. He started competing in rodeo about 35 years ago and placed in several competitions. In 1999, Glynn won the state's Regional Team Roping Finals and placed in the top 5 in the National US Team Roping Champion Finals in Oklahoma City. In November 2011 Glynn was inducted into the Western Heritage MultiCultural Museum's Hall of Fame in Ft. Worth Texas. Glynn and his wife Jo-An currently own a ranch in Lake Hughes, California called IX Winds Ranch. They bought the 20-acre ranch 40 years ago and built the entire ranch from ground up; currently keeping a small stable of 3 quarter horses. In 1992, Glynn and Jo-An co-founded a free, non-profit, western style summer camp program called "Camp Gid D Up" for inner-city and at risk youth which takes place at IX Winds, which they started as a promise to the late Mrs. Coretta Scott King to help bring peace among youth gangs and to help youth in the community after the riots in the 1990s.

MICHAEL POTTS (Slow Drag)

Michael Potts is an accomplished actor of stage and screen who most recently starred as the heartwarming "Mr. Hawkins" in the Tony® nominated musical *The Prom*. Upcoming, he'll star alongside Viola Davis and Chadwick Boseman in the Netflix film adaptation of August Wilson's *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*.

In 2018, Potts received critical praise for his role as Joe Mott alongside Denzel Washington in the Tony® nominated Eugene O'Neill revival 'The Iceman Cometh'. For his role in 'Iceman', Potts received the distinguished "Richard Seff Award," which is presented to veteran actors for their performances in supporting roles both on and off Broadway. Additionally, Michael was appointed as the 2018 Denzel Washington Endowed Chair in Theatre for Fordham University.

In 2017, he starred as the notorious gossip “Turnbo” in the Tony award winning production of August Wilson’s ‘Jitney’, under Ruben Santiago-Hudson’s direction. Additionally, that same year, Potts appeared alongside Olivia Wilde and Tom Sturridge in the stage adaptation of George Orwell’s dystopian masterpiece ‘1984’.

Potts is widely recognized for his role as the well-mannered yet feared assassin, Brother Mouzone on HBO’s critically acclaimed series *The Wire* alongside Idris Elba and Dominic West and as Detective Maynard Gilbough in the Emmy Award winning HBO drama *True Detective*, opposite Matthew McConaughey and Woody Harrelson. On the stage, he is known for originating the role of Mafala Hatimbi in the Tony award winning musical ‘The Book Of Mormon’.

In 2015, he starred in the HBO six-hour miniseries, *Show Me a Hero*, co-created by David Simon (*The Wire*) and directed by Oscar winner Paul Haggis. Recurring television roles also include CBS’ *Madam Secretary* and FOX’s *Gotham*.

As a graduate of the Yale School of Drama, Potts’ extensive theater background has afforded him several performances on New York’s theater stages. Roles in ‘Rent’, ‘The Tempest’, ‘Twelfth Night’ and ‘Richard III’ garnered him the Falstaff Award for best Male Supporting Performance and The Village Voice’s Obie Award for his portrayal in the off-Broadway production of ‘*The American Play*’. Potts originated the role of Brooks, Sr. in the Tony Award winning play ‘*Grey Gardens*’ and additionally the role of Paul Pierce in Tony Kushner’s ‘The Intelligent Homosexual’s Guide to Capitalism and Socialism with a Key to the Scriptures’ at the Guthrie Theatre. In the regions, Michael has starred in ‘Oedipus, Highway Ulysses’, ‘Romeo and Juliet’, ‘The Hostage’, ‘The Rivals’ and was in the original Broadway company of ‘Lennon’.

Additionally, Potts has held recurring roles on multiple primetime television shows such as, *Bored to Death*, *Damages*, *Nurse Jackie*, *Flight of The Conchords*, *Oz* and *Law & Order*. In film, he has held his own alongside Mel Gibson and Julia Roberts in *Conspiracy Theory* and in *The Peacemaker* with George Clooney and Nicole Kidman.

He is an active supporter and contributor of the 52nd Street Project, dedicated to the creation and production of new plays for, and often by, kids between the ages of 9-18 that reside in the Hell’s Kitchen neighborhood in New York City. The organization achieves this goal through a series of unique mentoring programs that match kids with professional theater artists.

Potts was born in Brooklyn, New York and raised in Wisacky, South Carolina. He now resides in New York City.

TAYLOUR PAIGE (Dussie Mae)

A versatile and talented actress, Taylour Paige is quickly making a name for herself in Hollywood as one to watch.

Taylour will next be seen opposite Viola Davis and Chadwick Boseman in George C. Wolfe's *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* for Netflix. Based on the play of the same name, the film centers on a fateful recording session with "Mother of the Blues" Ma Rainey in 1927 Chicago. Taylour plays Dussie Mae, Ma's girlfriend who accompanies her to the recording session. The film releases on December 18, 2020.

Following this, Taylour will be seen as the titular character in *Zola*, the Sundance sensation based on a true story born from an infamous 148-tweet Twitter thread in 2015. The film follows Zola, a Detroit stripper and waitress who strikes up a new friendship with a customer (Riley Keough) who convinces her to join in on a weekend of dancing and partying in Florida. What at first seems like an exciting trip rapidly spirals downward into a 48-hour journey involving a dangerous pimp, a clueless boyfriend, gangsters and other unexpected adventures in this wild tale. The film debuted at the 2020 Sundance Film Festival and was nominated for the Grand Jury Awards pre-screening; A24 acquired it out of the festival and will slate their release following theaters reopening.

Taylour made her feature film debut at SXSW in 2016 with the comedy *Jean Of The Joneses*. The film opened to rave reviews and put Taylour on the map with the title role. She then went on to star in Yann Demange's *WHITE BOY RICK* opposite Matthew McConaughey.

Other credits include Disney's *High School Musical 3*, HBO's *Ballers*, BET's *Hit The Floor*, ABC's *Grey's Anatomy* and MGM's *The Baxters*.

Taylour started her career at a young age training at the Westside Ballet Academy and spent two summers at the Kirov Academy of Ballet in Washington, DC. In 2001, she became a student of the choreographer, director, executive producer and actress Debbie Allen. That year, she was cast in Debbie Allen's 'Pearl', and went on to do every musical with the Academy from 2001-2009.

Taylour currently resides in Los Angeles.

DUSAN BROWN (Sylvester)

Emerging actor, writer, director, Dusan Brown can next be seen in a strong supporting role in the Netflix feature film, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*. He joins Oscar winner Viola Davis, Chadwick Boseman (*Black Panther*) and Emmy winner Glynn Turman. Two-time Tony winner,

George C. Wolfe (*The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*) will direct while Todd Black, Dany Wolf and Oscar winner Denzel Washington produce. Ruben Santiago-Hudson adapted the August Wilson screenplay which follows Ma Rainey (Davis), the “Mother of the Blues,” and the tensions that boil over between her white agent, her producer, and her bandmates while making a record in a studio in Chicago, 1927. In the film, Brown plays ‘Sylvester,’ Ma Rainey’s teen nephew who has a severe stutter.

Hailing from Chicago, but having been in Hollywood since 2010, when other teens seem to hit a dry spell about this age, Brown, a high school senior, is heating up! *CAP*, a short film in which he also plays the lead, just won the 2019 HBO Short Film Award at American Black Film Fest and Brown's short film, *Reece*, which he wrote, directed, edited and colored, was recently selected to screen at several (and counting) film fests, to include the 2019 Los Angeles International Shorts Festival and the Indie Short Fest, where it was nominated Best Director, Best Ensemble Cast and won Best Student Film.

Brown's past credits includes the motion picture *42*, series regular voicing lead characters on Disney's *The Lion Guard* and Nickelodeon's *Blaze and The Monster Machines*, as well as guest-starring roles on such shows as *Community*, *Criminal Minds*, and *The Big Bang Theory*, to name a few. On the theatre side, Brown also played the lead role of Young Simba in Disney's ‘The Lion King’ on Broadway, North American Tour for which he was nominated for a Young Artist Award for his performance.

When not acting or making films, Brown loves spending time with his family, hanging out with his older brother Dante (MA, Lethal Weapon) and friends, writing screen plays, editing random videos, studying the filmmaking process, watching movies, playing video games and fishing. Upon graduating next year 2020, this honor student has plans of continuing his education via college, attending film school.

JEREMY SHAMOS (Irvin)

Jeremy Shamos can soon be seen in George C. Wolfe’s *Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom*, with Chadwick Boseman and Viola Davis. In television, he is currently recurring opposite Donald Sutherland and Nicole Kidman, in the HBO upcoming limited series *The Undoing*. In his numerous Broadway appearances he received a Tony nomination for ‘*Clybourne Park*’, and was in ‘*Glengarry Glen Ross*’ with Al Pacino, ‘*Noises Off*’, ‘*The Assembled Parties*’ among others, most recently starring opposite Amy Schumer in ‘*Meteor Shower*’. Off-Broadway he has garnered awards and nominations for ‘*Engaged*’ (Obie Award), ‘*If I Forget*’ (Drama Desk nomination), ‘*Dinner with Friends*’ (Lortel Award), and ‘*Animals Out of Paper*’ (Drama Desk nomination), among others. His film credits include Cory Finley’s *Bad Education*, Alejandro Inarritu's *Birdman*, Woody Allen’s *Magic in the Moonlight*, Ang Lee’s *Taking Woodstock*, and

Michael Showalter's *The Big Sick*. Television credits include recurring roles on *Better Call Saul* and *Nurse Jackie*, and guest appearances on *Succession*, *Fosse/Verdon*, *Blindspot*, *The Night Of*, *The Affair*, and "Smilf."

JONNY COYNE (Sturdyvant)

Jonny Coyne appears in Netflix's feature adaptation of August Wilson's award-winning play, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*. Produced by Denzel Washington and directed by George C. Wolfe, Coyne plays the role of "Sturdyvant" alongside Viola Davis and Chadwick Boseman.

Coyne previously appeared opposite John Hamm and Rosamund Pike in Brad Anderson's political thriller *Beirut*. In television, he recurred opposite James Spader as the lead villain across season five of NBC's drama *The Blacklist*. And he had a major recurring role throughout season 3 of AMC's supernatural dramedy *Preacher*, playing the iconic character "Allfather" from the original comic book series.

Originally from England, Coyne attended the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts in London, where at graduation he was awarded the Hannam-Clark prize. He has had great success since moving to the United States in 2009 when JJ Abrams cast him as a Series Regular in the coveted role of "Warden Edwin James" in his FOX television series *Alcatraz*.

Since then, Coyne has held numerous recurring roles including AMC's period drama *Turn*, Chuck Lorre's CBS comedy *Mom*, as well as *Salem* and *Manhattan* both for WGN.

In film, Coyne is often remembered for his part as "Gus Petraki" alongside Angelina Jolie in *Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Cradle Of Life*. He had a memorable scene opposite Colin Farrell in *London Boulevard* directed by William Monahan (writer of *THE DEPARTED*). Coyne appeared opposite Sean Penn in *Gangster Squad* (directed by Ruben Fleisher); in Todd Phillips' *The Hangover 3* where Jonny hit the road with the wolf pack and John Goodman in the role of "Hector"; and in the Oscar-nominated film *Nightcrawler* with Jake Gyllenhaal.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

GEORGE C. WOLFE (Director)

A renowned director and playwright of theater and film, five-time Tony Award winner George C. Wolfe has firmly established himself as one of America's most important and influential cultural voices. With the ability to deftly command both the worlds of stage and film, Wolfe most recently directed the highly anticipated feature film adaptation of August Wilson's play *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, starring Viola Davis and Chadwick Boseman for Netflix.

A master storyteller, Wolfe first gained critical acclaim in 1986 for his penning of the off-Broadway production of 'The Colored Museum', a series of vignettes exploring different aspects of the African-American experience that electrified audiences and established him as a bold new voice in the American theatre.

In 1990 Wolfe's adaptation and direction of 'Spunk', three short stories from Pulitzer Prize winning author Zora Neale Hurston, garnered him an OBIE Award for Best Off-Broadway Director and cemented his position as one of Broadway's visionary writer/directors.

In 1991, he directed the musical about the life of Jazz musician Jelly Roll Morton, 'Jelly's Last Jam'. The resoundingly successful show would gain national acclaim and result in 11 Tony nominations, including two for Wolfe for Best Book of a Musical and Best Direction of a Musical, and a Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Book of a Musical.

In 1993, with his reputation cemented as a preeminent Broadway director, Wolfe would go on to helm the original production of the Pulitzer Prize-winning 'Angels In America-Millennium Approaches', for which he would win his first of five Tony Awards, and its follow-up production 'Angels in America: Perestroika'.

In 1996, Wolfe garnered his second Tony Award for 'Bring In 'Da Noise, Bring in 'Da Funk', a musical which he conceived, produced and directed featuring tap-dance sensation Savion Glover; and in 2001 he received his third Tony Award for Best Special Theatrical Event for his direction of 'Elaine Stritch at Liberty', the autobiographical one-woman show from the renowned Broadway performer.

Widely considered an actor's director, Wolfe made his feature film debut in 2005 when he directed HBO's critically acclaimed tele-picture *Lackawanna Blues*, for which he received Directors Guild and National Board of Review Awards, along with Independent and Emmy Award nominations. He followed up with the 2008 feature film *Nights in Rodanthe* starring Richard Gere and Diane Lane, and the 2017 HBO film *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, starring Oprah Winfrey and Rose Byrne.

In 2018, Wolfe returned to Broadway to direct Eugene O'Neill's classic play 'The Iceman Cometh', starring Denzel Washington in the lead role. The production received rave reviews, and garnered Wolfe his 15th Tony Award nomination.

Having helmed 17 Broadway productions, Wolfe's additional stage credits include 'Twilight', 'The Tempest', 'Golden Child', the Pulitzer Prize-winning 'Top Dog/Underdog', 'The Normal Heart' and Nora Ephron's 'Lucky Guy' starring Tom Hanks.

In addition to his extensive stage and film work, George C. Wolfe was appointed to President Obama's Committee for the Arts and the Humanities, and is a Chief Creative Officer of the Center for Civil and Human Rights. From 1993-2005, he served as producer of New York's famed Public Theater Shakespeare Festival, and was named a "Living Landmark" by the New York Landmarks Conservancy.

RUBEN SANTIAGO-HUDSON (Screenwriter)

A formidable theatrical multi-hyphenate, Ruben Santiago-Hudson is a Tony Award-winning actor, an Emmy and Golden Globe-nominated writer, and a director. A native of Lackawanna, New York, Santiago-Hudson studied at Binghamton University and earned a MFA from Wayne State University.

In 2001, he penned the autobiographical play 'Lackawanna Blues', which was commissioned as a solo performance piece by The Public Theater and New York Shakespeare Festival, then under the artistic leadership of George C. Wolfe. Santiago-Hudson performed the play, bringing to life over two dozen characters and garnering his first Obie award. He adapted the play into a 2005 film for HBO, which earned him Emmy and Writers Guild nominations, and won an NAACP Image Award, National Board Of Reviews honors, The Humanitas Prize and a Christopher Award.

Santiago-Hudson made his Broadway acting debut in 'Jelly's Last Jam', opposite Gregory Hines. He originated the role of Canewell in August Wilson's 'Seven Guitars', which earned him several accolades including the Tony Award for best featured actor in a play. Other Broadway credits include Lydia Diamond's 'Stickfly', produced by Alecia Keys, and Wilson's 'Gem of the Ocean'.

Ruben's theatre directing credits include the world premiere of Dominique Morriseau's 'Paradise Blue' and 'Skeleton Crew'. When Santiago-Hudson held the position of Associate Artist at The Signature Theater Company, he directed August Wilson's 'Seven Guitars', Leslie Lee's 'The First Breeze of Summer' and Athol Fugard's 'My Children! My Africa!'. He also served as Artistic Director of dramatic readings for all 10 plays of August Wilson's 'American Century Cycle' that was recorded at The Green Space NYC for live audiences which aired on WNYC and NPR in 2013. He directed 'Ma Rainey's Black Bottom', 'Jitney' and 'The Piano Lesson', and performed in 'Fences' and 'Seven Guitars' in that series.

Working with the Public Theatre again in the summer of 2010, Santiago-Hudson starred as 'King Leontes' in Shakespeare in the Park's production of *A Winter's Tale*. Most recently, Ruben directed *Othello* at The Delacorte Theater for the NY Shakespeare Festival.

On film, Santiago-Hudson starred opposite Al Pacino in 1997's *The Devil's Advocate*; with Samuel L. Jackson in 2000's *Shaft*; John Travolta in 2001's *Domestic Disturbance*; opposite Denzel Washington and Russell Crowe in 2007's *American Gangster*, and alongside David Oyelowo in 2014's *Selma*.

On television, Santiago-Hudson recently starred in BET's *The Quad*, where he made his television directorial debut as well. He recurs in Showtime's hit series *Billions* opposite Damian Lewis, and OWN's *David Makes Man*, alongside Phylicia Rashad. Santiago-Hudson co-starred for three seasons on *Castle*; in the gritty crime drama *Low Winter Sun*; portrayed famed chemist 'Dr. Percy Julian' in *Forgotten Genius*, and starred opposite Gregory Hines in *The Red Sneakers*. Other TV credits include starring opposite Halle Berry in 2005's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and recurring roles on *The West Wing* and *Law & Order*.

Amongst the many recognitions Santiago-Hudson has earned over the years are awards from The Drama Desk, Outer Critics Circle, Lucille Lortel and Drama League. He received a NAACP Lifetime Achievement Theatre Award at the Los Angeles NAACP Theatre Awards in August 2009.

In 2014, The Ruben Santiago-Hudson Fine Arts Learning Center opened in his hometown of Lackawanna, New York. Santiago-Hudson is the driving force of this dream project which teaches young people the transformative power of the arts.

DENZEL WASHINGTON (Producer)

Academy Award-winning actor and producer Denzel Washington is one of Hollywood's most acclaimed stars and celebrated performers, garnering nine Oscar nominations and two wins over his illustrious career, alongside a plethora of industry recognitions and accolades.

He received his first Academy Award for best supporting actor in the 1989 historical war drama *Glory*. He went on to win the best actor Oscar for his portrayal of a corrupt cop in the 2001 crime thriller *Training Day*. On stage, Washington won a Tony Award for his performance in the stage revival of *Fences*, marking his return to Broadway in 2010.

Washington has forged a reputation for portraying real life figures on screen, garnering critical acclaim for his bold performances. He earned his first Oscar nomination for 1987's *Cry Freedom*, playing South African anti-apartheid activist Steve Biko. He went on to portray civil rights activist Malcolm X in 1992's *Malcolm X*; boxer Ruben 'Hurricane' Carter in 1999's *The Hurricane*; football coach Herman Boone in 2000's *Remember the Titans*; poet and educator Melvin B. Tolson in *The Great Debaters* and drug kingpin Frank Lucas in *American Gangster*, both released in 2007.

A native of Mt. Vernon, NY, Washington graduated from Fordham University, where he majored in drama. He spent a year at San Francisco's prestigious American Conservatory Theatre before beginning his professional acting career in New York, where he performed in theatre productions such as 'Ceremonies in Dark Old Men' and Shakespeare's 'Othello'.

He rose to fame as Dr. Phillip Chandler on NBC's long-running hit television series, *St. Elsewhere*. His other television credits include "The George McKenna Story, License to Kill, and Wilma. His film credits also include *Much Ado About Nothing* (1993), *Crimson Tide* (1995), *Inside Man* (2006), *Unstoppable* (2010), in which he reunited with director Tony Scott for the fifth time; and *2 Guns* (2013), in which he starred alongside Mark Walberg, In 2016, he reunited with director Antoine Fuqua for a star-studded remake of *The Magnificent Seven*.

In 2016, Washington produced, directed and starred in the critically acclaimed film adaptation of playwright August Wilson's *Fences*. The film received four Academy Award® nominations, including best actor for Washington and best actress for Viola Davis, which she won.

More recently, Washington starred in Dan Gilroy's 2017 film *Roman J. Israel, Esq.*, for which he received multiple best acting nominations, including nods at the Golden Globes and Academy Awards. Washington did his first sequel in 2018, when he reprised his role from 2014's *The Equalizer* in Fuqua's thriller, *The Equalizer 2*.

In 2016, Washington was honored with the Cecil B. DeMille Lifetime Achievement Award at the 73rd Golden Globe Awards, cementing his legacy in Hollywood. In 2019, he was honored with the AFI Life Achievement Award, one of the highest honors for a career in film.

Up next for Washington is playing the lead role in Joel Coen's Shakespeare adaptation *Macbeth*, alongside Frances McDormand. Washington will also be directing the upcoming film *Journal for Jordan*, which will star Michael B. Jordan.

TODD BLACK (Producer)

One of Hollywood's most respected producers, Todd Black is known for having worked with many of the top talent in the industry, both in front and behind the camera. Most recently, *The Equalizer 2* opened number one at the box office, which marks the fourth collaboration with director Antoine Fuqua, after *The Equalizer*, *Southpaw* and *The Magnificent Seven*.

Black entered the business as a casting associate after attending USC's School of Theater. Shortly after getting out of school, he produced Michael Eisner's television series, *Disney Sunday Night Movies*. Black next went on to produce 1993's *Fire In The Sky* for Paramount Pictures and *Wrestling Ernest Hemingway* for Warner Bros.

In 1995, Black became President of Motion Picture Production at Mandalay Entertainment where he oversaw movies such as *Donnie Brasco*, *Seven Years In Tibet*, *I Know What You Did Last Summer* and *Wild Things*, to name a few. A few years later, he teamed with producer Jason Blumenthal to create Black & Blu Productions.

In 2001, Black and Blumenthal joined veteran producer Steve Tisch to form Escape Artists, which has a first-look production deal with Sony Pictures. Their first film, which Black personally oversaw throughout the filmmaking process, was *A Knight's Tale*, starring Heath Ledger.

Among Black's numerous credits as a producer include 2006 drama *The Pursuit of Happyness*, which earned Will Smith an Academy Award nomination for best actor; Tony Scott's 2009 thriller *The Taking of Pelham 123*; 2012's *Hope Springs*, starring Meryl Streep and Tommy Lee Jones; and 2014's raunchy comedy *Sex Tape*, starring Cameron Diaz.

Black's long-time collaboration with Denzel Washington began when he brought *Antwone Fisher*, the screenplay he developed for ten years, to the Academy Award-winner. Washington decided not only would he star in the 2002 film, but he would also direct the touching drama, cementing their partnership as producer and director. When Washington stepped behind the camera to direct 2007's *The Great Debaters*, Black was once again his producer. Both films earned the Producers Guild Stanley Kramer Award.

His most recent films with Denzel Washington include the critically acclaimed 2017 drama *Roman J. Israel, Esq* that garnered Washington nominations for best actor at the Golden Globes and Oscars; and *Fences*, Washington's third time directing. *Fences* won Screen Actors Guild Awards for both Denzel Washington and Viola Davis, as well as winning Viola Davis the Academy Award for best actress.

Most recently, Black produced 2017's *The Upside*, starring Nicole Kidman, Bryan Cranston and Kevin Hart; 2018's *The Equalizer 2*, the first sequel that Washington has ever done; and 2019's family comedy *Troop Zero*.

Escape Artists has gone on to make movies that have grossed more than \$1,000,000,000 at the worldwide box office. These films include mega hits *The Pursuit Of Happyness*, *The Equalizer*, and *The Magnificent Seven*.

DANY WOLF (Producer)

Dany Wolf is an award-winning producer, who has partnered with some of the world's most respected and innovative filmmakers on a diverse range of feature films. He is best known for his long-standing collaboration with auteur Gus Van Sant and cinematographer Harris Savides, which produced three seminal art house films: *Gerry* (2002), the 2003 Cannes Palme d'Or winner *Elephant*, and *Last Days* (2005).

Wolf is a lifelong martial artist who speaks five languages including Mandarin Chinese. He executive produced 2010's *The Karate Kid*, starring Jackie Chan, Jaden Smith and Taraji Henson, which was filmed in China. He also executive produced John Hillcoat's 2012 drama *Lawless*, starring Tom Hardy, Jessica Chastain and Jason Clarke, which premiered in competition at the 2012 Cannes Film Festival.

As a commercial & music video producer, Wolf has overseen ads directed by Wes Anderson, John Landis, Wong Kar Wai, and John Woo. One of the music videos that Wolf produced is Allen Ginsberg's poem, "Ballad Of The Skeletons," with music by Paul McCartney & Philip Glass.

CONSTANZA ROMERO (Executive Producer)

Constanza Romero is an artist and a costume designer. She has been nominated twice for the Tony for her costume designs on August Wilson's 'Fences' and 'Gem Of The Ocean'. Other Broadway productions that she has designed the costumes include 'The Piano Lesson', 'Seven Guitars' and 'The Mountaintop'. In addition, Romero has worked on numerous August Wilson plays that have been performed around the country, including the Goodman Theatre in Chicago and the Mark Taper Forum Theatre in Los Angeles.

Romero was introduced to August Wilson in the late 1980s by her teacher at Yale University when he assigned 'The Piano Lesson' as part of her graduate program for theater design. The play would make its debut at the Yale Repertory Theatre before running on Broadway in 1990.

Wilson and Romero got married in 1994. Since his passing, Romero has managed the August Wilson Estate.

TOBIAS A. SCHLISSLER, A.S.C. (Cinematographer)

German cinematographer Tobias Schleissler studied cinematography at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia, Canada, and began his career shooting documentaries, before segueing into independent features, television movies, music videos and commercials.

Schliessler has shot many notable films including Disney spectacles such as 2018's *A Wrinkle In Time* and 2017's *Beauty And The Beast*; 2013 thriller *Lone Survivor*; 2009 action thriller *The Taking Of Pelham 123*; 2008 superhero tale *Hancock*; 2007 musical drama *Dreamgirls*," and 2004's sports movie *Friday Night Lights*."

Most recently, Schliessler shot Bill Condon's 2019 movie *The Good Liar* and this year's Netflix Original film *Spenser Confidential*, directed by Peter Berg and starring Mark Wahlberg.

In addition to his feature work, Schliessler has been honored by the Association of Independent Commercial Producers (AICP) for his cinematography on commercials for Audi and Lincoln, both works now part of the permanent archives of The Museum of Modern Art's Department of Film and Video in New York City.

MARK RICKER (Production Designer)

A native of North Carolina, Mark Ricker has carved a career across film and television. After studying English at UNC Chapel Hill, Ricker earned an MFA in Scenic and Production Design from NYU's Tisch School of the Arts, and his first film experience was handing out hot dogs to extras on 1988's *Bull Durham*.

As an art director and set designer, Ricker contributed to the designs of *The Shipping News*, *Far From Heaven*, *Kate And Leopold*, *The Thomas Crowne Affair*, *The Out-Of-Towners*, and *The Substance Of Fire*. He began his career in the prop and set decorating departments of *Passion Fish*, *The Last Of The Mohicans*, *Once Around* and Volker Schlöndorff's 1990 adaptation of *The Handmaid's Tale*.

Ricker earned his first Emmy nomination for Barry Levinson's 2010 TV movie *You Don't Know Jack*, and in 2019, he earned his second Emmy nomination for his work on director Ben Stiller's acclaimed limited series, *Escape At Dannemora*. He has also received Art Directors Guild nominations for his work on Jay Roach's Academy Award-nominated *Trumbo*, Tate Taylor's 2011 drama *The Help* and 2009's *Julie & Julia*, written and directed by Nora Ephron.

Most recently, Ricker's production design was seen in 2019's Fox News drama *Bombshell*, marking his third collaboration with director Jay Roach after 2016's *All The Way* and 2015's *Trumbo*. He also designed the comedies *Snatched* (2017), directed by Jonathan Levine, and *Keeping Up With The Joneses* (2016), directed by Greg Mottola. Other notable credits are 2014's *The Judge*, starring Robert Downey Jr. and Robert Duvall; Tate Taylor's 2014 James Brown biopic *Get On Up*; and Nat Faxon & Jim Rash's 2013 independent drama *The Way, Way Back*.

Ricker's other design credits include *Conviction*, *The Nanny Diaries*, and Lasse Hallstrom's *The Hoax*. He also designed three films for director Griffin Dunne – *The Accidental Husband*, *Fierce People* and *Lisa Picard Is Famous* – as well as Ben Younger's *Prime*, starring Meryl Streep and Uma Thurman; Rebecca Miller's *The Ballad Of Jack & Rose*, starring Daniel Day-Lewis and Catherine Keener; *Sunshine State* for John Sayles; Jill Sprecher's *Thirteen Conversations About One Thing*; *Julie Johnson*, directed by Bob Gosse; and director Alex Winter's *Fever*, featured at the Cannes Film Festival in 1998.

ANN ROTH (Costume Designer)

With a career spanning seven decades, Oscar and Tony-winning Ann Roth is one of the most notable costume designers of stage and on screen.

Roth has earned 10 Tony Award nominations, winning best costume design in 2013 for 'The Nance'. She has also earned four Oscar nominations and one win, for her work on 1996's *The English Patient*.

Born in Pennsylvania, Roth graduated from Carnegie Mellon with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree and started her career as a scenery painter for the Pittsburgh Opera. When she met Irene Sharaff, Roth moved to California to apprentice with the famed costume designer on 1954's *Brigadoon*. Roth later moved to New York where she became one of the top Broadway costume designers, creating the costumes for the first-run productions of *The Odd Couple*, *They're Playing Our Song*, *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas*, *Biloxi Blues* and *Deuce*, among others.

Roth's designs can be seen in films such as 1984's *Places In The Heart*, 1999's *The Talented Mr. Ripley* and 2002's *The Hours*. Other notable movies include *Midnight Cowboy*, *Klute*, *Marathon Man*, *Coming Home*, *Working Girl*, *Silkwood*, *The Birdcage*, *Primary Colors*, *Cold Mountain*, *Mamma Mia!*, *Julie & Julia*, and most recently, Steven Spielberg's *The Post*.

She also designed the costumes for television series such as *Angels In America* and *Mildred Pierce*, earning Emmy nominations for both projects. On Broadway, she created the costumes on 'The Book Of Mormon', 'Carousel', 'Three Tall Women', 'The Iceman Cometh', 'To Kill A Mockingbird', and 'Gary: A Sequel to Titus Andronicus', all nominated for Tony awards.

Ma Rainey's Black Bottom is Roth's fourth collaboration with director George C. Wolfe, and their first film together. They previously worked on the Broadway productions of 'Shuffle Along', 'The Iceman Cometh', and 'Gary: A Sequel to Titus Andronicus'.

BRANFORD MARSALIS (Composer)

After four decades in the international spotlight, the achievements of saxophonist Branford Marsalis continue to grow. From his initial recognition as a young jazz lion, he has expanded his vision as an instrumentalist, composer, bandleader and educator, crossing stylistic boundaries while maintaining an unwavering creative integrity. In the process, he has become an avatar of contemporary artistic excellence.

The Branford Marsalis Quartet, first formed in 1986, remains Branford's primary means of expression. In its virtually uninterrupted three-plus decades of existence, the Quartet has established a rare breadth of stylistic range and a continuity of personnel. 'The Secret Between the Shadow and the Soul', recorded in Melbourne, Australia in the midst of an international tour in the Spring of 2018, and nominated for a Grammy in 2019, contains the mix of challenging original and classic compositions, and the range of moods from the tender to the explosive, that has defined the group. With its focus on melodic strength and extrasensory interaction, the album confirms that the Branford Marsalis Quartet remains a paragon of uncompromising jazz excellence.

While the Quartet thrives, Branford continues to expand his status as a musical collaborator that dates back to his early experiences as a sideman with Clark Terry, Art Blakey and his brother Wynton Marsalis and extends through encounters with Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis, Sonny Rollins, Herbie Hancock and Harry Connick, Jr.

As always, Branford also remains eager to join in musical ventures with artists in other musical realms. His relationship with Sting, which began with the pop icon's first solo album 'The Dream of the Blue Turtles' in 1985, was resumed when Branford contributed solos to Sting's collaboration with reggae star Shaggy, '44/876'. And Branford's status among Deadheads, dating back to 1990 as the ultimate guest artist with the Grateful Dead, moved the spinoff band Dead and Co. to break precedent for the first time and announce Branford as a guest artist at the band's August 26, 2018 concert in Arrington, Virginia.

Classical music also continues to play a growing role in Branford's musical life. Sally Beamish reconceived her composition "Under the Wing of the Rock" to feature him after hearing Branford interpret another of her works, and Gabriel Prokofiev wrote "The Saxophone Concerto" for Branford on a joint commission from the Naples Philharmonic and the Detroit Symphony. Branford and the Ural Philharmonic performed and recorded the Prokofiev piece during August 2018 in Yekaterinburg, Russia. Branford has performed these and other works by Copland, Debussy, Glazunov, Ibert, Mahler, Milhaud, Rorem, Vaughan Williams and Villa-Lobos with leading orchestras in the United States and Europe, and served as Creative Director for the Cincinnati Symphony's Ascent Series in 2012-13.

The role of Branford's contributions to the Broadway stage expanded in 2018 when he scored acclaimed director Kenny Leon's revival of 'Children of a Lesser God'. His previous efforts included music for the revival of 'Fences', which garnered him a Drama Desk Award and a Tony nomination, 'The Mountaintop' starring Angela Bassett and Samuel L. Jackson, and the revival of 'A Raisin in the Sun'.

All of these achievements have been supplemented by Branford's efforts beyond the realms of performance and composition. After directing Columbia Records' jazz program, he founded the Marsalis Music label in 2002. He has held workshops on campuses around the world, while establishing extended teaching relationships with Michigan State, San Francisco State and North Carolina Central Universities. After the devastation wrought by Hurricane Katrina, Branford joined his friend Harry Connick, Jr. and New Orleans Area Habitat for Humanity in the creation of the Musicians' Village, a community in New Orleans' Upper Ninth Ward that provides homes to displaced families of musicians and other local residents. The Ellis Marsalis Center for Music, honoring Branford's father and Connick's teacher, provides state-of-the-art performance, instruction and recording spaces at the heart of the Village. For these and other efforts, Branford received an Honorary Doctorate of Letters from Tulane University in 2017, adding to a series of awards including three Grammys and his citation (together with his father and brothers) as a Jazz Master by the National Endowment for the Arts.

Branford continues to spread the message of his music around the world, including Russia, where he appeared in St. Petersburg's host-city celebration of International Jazz Day 2018, and China, where he headlined Shanghai's JZ Jazz Festival the following September. Regardless of context or location, Branford Marsalis remains steadfast in his quest for musical excellence.

ANDREW MONDSHEIN, A.C.E. (Editor)

Veteran film editor Andrew Mondshein has been editing feature films, documentaries and television for more than three decades, collaborating with many talented directors.

A graduate of the University of Florida, Mondshein began his career as an assistant editor on Sidney Lumet's 1982 films *Deathtrap* and *The Verdict*, and went on to edit the filmmaker's movies from 1984 to 1992: *Daniel*, *Garbo Talks*, *Power*, *Running On Empty*, *Family Business* and *A Stranger Among Us*. He also worked with director Susan Seidelman, editing 1985's *Desperately Seeking Susan*, 1987's *Making Mr. Right* and *Cookie*.

Mondschein was nominated for an Academy Award for his work on M. Night Shyamalan's 1999 supernatural thriller *The Sixth Sense*. He has also collaborated with Swedish director Lasse Hallström on many of his films, including his first English language film, *Once Around*, as well as *What's Eating Gilbert Grape* and *Chocolat*, which received five Academy Award nominations including best picture.

Most recently, Mondschein edited Doug Liman's 2017 action *American Made*, starring Tom Cruise, and the director's upcoming *Chaos Walking*, due for release in 2020. Mondschein's other notable credits include 2017's *The Mummy* revival, Natalie Portman's 2015 directorial debut *A Tale of Love and Darkness*, 2012's *The Odd Life of Timothy Green*, and 2002's *Analyze That*.

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