

AFTER DARK FILMS

AN AMERICAN
HAUNTING

Starring

Donald Sutherland

Sissy Spacek

James D'Arcy

Rachel Hurd-Wood

Production Notes

Rating: Rated PG-13 (for intense terror sequences and thematic material)
Running time: 84 minutes

THE CAST

John Bell, Sr..... DONALD SUTHERLAND
Lucy Bell..... SISSY SPACEK
Richard Powell..... JAMES D' ARCY
Betsy Bell..... RACHEL HURD-WOOD
James Johnston..... MATTHEW MARSH
John Bell, Jr. THOM FELL

Cast biographies begin on Page 18.

THE FILMMAKERS

Produced, written and directed by COURTNEY SOLOMON
Produced by CHRISTOPHER MILBURN
Produced by ANDRÉ ROULEAU
Executive produced by..... ALLAN ZEMAN
Director of photography..... ADRIAN BIDDLE, BSC
Original score by..... CAINE DAVIDSON
Edited by RICHARD COMEAU
Production designer HUMPHREY JAEGER
Executive produced by..... ROBBIE LITTLE
..... LAWRENCE STEVEN MEYERS
Executive produced by..... JULIEN RÉMILLARD
..... MAXIME RÉMILLARD
Executive produced by..... SIMON FRANKS
..... ZYGI KANASA
Co-produced by..... ANDREI BONCEA
Co-executive produced by NELSON LEONG
..... FRANCIS DELIA
Associate produced by ALLESSANDRO FRACASSI
Based upon the novel *THE BELL WITCH: AN AMERICAN HAUNTING* by
BRENT MONAHAN
Line produced by MATTHEW KUIPERS
Costume designer..... JANE PETRIE
Casting director..... GARY DAVY

Filmmaker biographies begin on Page 24.

FILM SYNOPSIS

Starring Academy Award® winner Sissy Spacek (“Carrie”), Golden Globe winner Donald Sutherland (“Don’t Look Now”), Rachel Hurd-Wood (Wendy Darling in P.J. Hogan’s “Peter Pan” and the upcoming “Perfume: The Story of a Murderer”), and James D’Arcy (“Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World”), this story is based on true events validated by the State of Tennessee as the only case in U.S. history where a spirit or entity caused the death of a human being. With over 20 books written on the subject, and a town that still lives in fear of the return of the unseen spirit, the story of AN AMERICAN HAUNTING is terrifying.

Between the years 1818-1820, the Bell Family of Red River, Tennessee was visited by an unknown presence that haunted the family and eventually ended up causing the death of one its members. Starting with small sounds around the farm, and the sighting of a strange creature with piercing yellow eyes, the sounds escalated into full brutal contact with certain family members, causing psychological and physical torment. The attacks grew in strength, with the spirit slapping, pulling, dragging, and beating the Bell’s youngest daughter, Betsy. The Bells searched for rational explanations and ways to rid their house of this entity, but to no avail as the spirit began to communicate with them through sounds, and eventually multiple voices that sounded like the wind.

Fearing that the haunting was caused by a local woman—branded a witch—who had put a curse upon the family as a result of a land dispute, the Bells tried desperately to find ways of getting rid of the woman’s curse, yet the attacks and disturbances only escalated.

It was not until a personal journal of the matriarch of the Bell family, Lucy, was inadvertently discovered—along with Betsy’s doll—generations later in the attic of one of their descendants that the horrifying and shocking answer to what caused the haunting would finally be unveiled...along with the realization that the horror was still being visited on the family heirs.

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

Something terrifying happened to the Bell family of Red River, Tennessee, nearly 200 years ago. Those horrifying occurrences in and around their home have been recounted by numerous scholars and paranormal experts, making it the most documented haunting in American history. It is, to date, the only case ever recorded in the United States where a spirit caused the death of a human being, and it remains to this day an unsolved mystery...

Until now.

Ascending filmmaker Courtney Solomon writes, produces and directs a shocking vision of one family's battle against forces of the dark—and their struggle to illuminate secrets that threaten to destroy them all—in the chilling psychological horror film AN AMERICAN HAUNTING...a project that recalls some of the cinema's memorable explorations of encounters between the seen and unseen worlds, such as the 1960's "Carnival of Souls" and "The Haunting" and the 1970's "The Exorcist."

*"The time has finally come to tell you the truth
of our family's dark secret
and the horrors you suffered as a young girl..."*

For filmmaker Solomon, the dark side has always held a fascination. The up-and-coming director chose for the subject of his second feature film a story that had literally been haunting listeners and readers for two centuries—the tale of the "Bell Witch." But rather than just retelling the story of the Bells as handed down through record and legend, Solomon (as triple hat wearer writer/director/producer) turned to a book by respected horror novelist Brent Monahan entitled *The Bell Witch: An American Haunting*. Solomon was determined to incorporate validated accounts of what took place in the Bell home and dovetail those with the treatise presented by Monahan as being the root cause of the paranormal activity that tortured Betsy Bell and her family...in short, to end up with a plausible reality and one that offers a compelling story with a surprising and shocking twist.

Solomon offers, “There are certain aspects of the screenplay that do follow the original legend itself, which I felt was important to try to stay true to, because it’s historically documented, and there are many people that take it seriously. As far as the ending and what happens to Betsy Bell, that was something that was unique to the book and the author of the book, Brent Monahan. He had come up with that, and it was something that I felt was a believable cause—because essentially, it is an unsolved mystery. Our film is really one version, one representation, of what may have been the cause of that mystery.”

The haunting visited upon the Bells is customarily referred to as poltergeist activity—epitomized by noises, the moving of objects and the often violent assaults on those present. The possible core reason for the family’s trauma—as put forth by Monahan and Solomon—is supported by Dr. Nandor Fodor, a lawyer and journalist who dedicated his life to the study of psychic phenomenon in the mid-20th Century. Fodor once theorized that poltergeist activity was directly related to the personal problems of the subject at the center of the “haunting.” Others believe that poltergeists are the directed energy originating in a person’s mind—often an adolescent girl’s—brought about by some type of emotional or psychological trauma. All of these theories would point to Betsy as the origin of the haunting and support the plausible reality created in the film.

But as the Bell Witch was never seen by any eyewitness (only its effects), how would a filmmaker go about telling the story? Solomon continues, “It was very difficult to create the entity—to me, that was at the core of the whole movie. How you create something, a new way of showing a spirit, a part of someone’s soul that you don’t see—I felt just from my own experience, watching movies of this nature, I hate when they show it to you. It is always better in my imagination. And so I didn’t want to show it to the audience, but instead I wanted the audience to be able to see through its eyes.”

Also key to AN AMERICAN HAUNTING—prior to the on-set effects and camera work charged with creating the entity—lay in the casting. In that arena, Solomon and his filmmaking team scored with an enviable ensemble of American and British actors, headlined by two acclaimed and award-winning performers who themselves are no strangers to the genre of psychological horror: Donald Sutherland and Sissy Spacek.

Sutherland starred in the once shocking (as much for its frightening story as for its candid sexuality between the leads) and now classic “Don’t Look Now,” based on the story by Daphne du Maurier and directed by iconoclast Nicolas Roeg. Spacek played the title role in the motion picture adaptation of horror master Stephen King’s novel, “Carrie,” which was directed by Brian De Palma; Carrie White has since perhaps become one of the genre’s most remembered characters. For both actors, however, choosing a role is a simple matter of interest, being drawn to a character they feel compelled to bring to life...genre notwithstanding.

Sutherland says, “Obsession and redemption and guilt and self-chastisement—they’re interesting things to explore. And since they’re so much a part of the secret lives of so many people, particularly in this country, it’s interesting to expose them. I liked Courtney a lot, and he was open to working on the script, because it had come from the book and was in transition. Sissy and I enjoyed collaborating and worked with Courtney in a very positive way.”

Spacek explains, “My character is a woman who lived in the 1820s and is a mother of four. She’s just an ordinary woman who faces extraordinary circumstances, which is something I always find interesting in a character...and these were *very* extraordinary circumstances. Plus, it’s an intriguing story, because it’s very well documented, about a family who was haunted—there’ve been many books written about it. You can actually go and look it up in the state records where it took place. I think Courtney Solomon—who’s a huge fan of Hitchcock and Steven Spielberg—has really approached it in a very interesting and clever cinematic way.”

For the young actress cast in the pivotal role of Betsy Bell, it was the story that hooked her from the start. Rachel Hurd-Wood had recently starred in P.J. Hogan’s live-action version of “Peter Pan,” and her portrayal of Wendy—a girl in transition from the naïveté of girlhood to the awakening of young adulthood—brought her critical and popular attention. It was this quality that Solomon and his team also felt was key to the character of Betsy. (Additionally, several were struck by the resemblance between Hurd-Wood and another actress when she was just starting out in Hollywood—the young Spacek—and felt their work together presented a figurative “passing of the torch.”)

Solomon remembers, “From the very first time I met Rachel, physically, she was my vision of Betsy as I’d always imagined her. She’d just done ‘Peter Pan,’ and the very first time we met, she babbled a lot—it was darling, it was funny. But there was just something about her that I thought, ‘She’s perfect for this.’ But I want to see if she was going to be able to work, if she was going to be able to do the work and go where Betsy needs to go. So I put her through a pretty rigorous process before I actually said, ‘Yes.’ And then every time, she would not let me down. She would come back, and she would be better. She’s really a raw talent.”

It was the darker aspects of playing Betsy—and the revelation of the key to the haunting—that intrigued Hurd-Wood. She comments, “After ‘Peter Pan,’ I had indeed read many scripts—they were good, they were fine. But as soon as I read AN AMERICAN HAUNTING—it was a Saturday morning, and I had to get up and do something—but once I started, I couldn’t stop, I couldn’t put it down. I was hooked. I called my agent as soon as I finished reading it and said, ‘Please, please, please get me an audition for this, because I really, really, REALLY want to do it!’ I mean, it took me completely by surprise, the ending. I had no idea. It’s a shock and it was something that just made me think, ‘I would love to play this part.’ I had to do it.”

Along with actor Hurd-Wood, fellow British performer Thom Fell completed the cast of the major roles of the Bell family, stepping in as eldest son, John, Jr. Fell is a familiar presence on English television and has recently begun branching out into feature film work.

Fell was duly impressed by the weight his cinematic little sister bore on her young shoulders and said, “She’s done an incredible job, considering that she’s 14 and the amount of focus and dedication she’s got is really admirable. Some of that’s down to Courtney, I think—he’s really done a good job of keeping her there.”

“Are we all having nightmares now. Professor?”

When the nights of horrifying occurrences looked as if they were never going to lessen (much less end), the Bell parents turn to the most educated man in the village for advice—the recently imported professor, Richard Powell. Powell was Betsy’s teacher,

and had gradually become a trusted confidante to the family; schooled and degreed, the young man provided counterpoint to the homegrown legends and fears that had drifted into the current age from the folklore of the past. (Indeed, John Bell cites testimony from a witch trial of 1599 as evidence that such spiritual episodes can and do happen.) But once Powell becomes committed to helping Betsy and her family, he begins to see that reason has little to do with the goings-on at the Bell homestead.

Cast in the role of Powell was James D'Arcy. Already a popular and acclaimed actor in his native Great Britain, D'Arcy had become noticed by American audiences. And much like his character of Powell, D'Arcy was ultimately drawn in by the macabre story at the center of *AN AMERICAN HAUNTING*.

D'Arcy offers, "I suppose because it's a story that actually was verified by the government at the time as being a true haunting, and is the only case in American history where that's happened, it's something that completely fascinates people. Because I think Andrew Jackson wrote something about it—and he went on to become the President of the United States—you cannot imagine that someone in that position isn't going to start seeing ghosts if they're not actually there. So it's obviously something that has really fascinated the American public—and now has fascinated me."

As the other outsider brought into the horror of the Bell home—who ends up dealing with the situation by imbibing equal parts of brandy and the Bible—James Johnston was perhaps John Bell's most trusted friend, who wound up being less than capable at handling the escalating and uncontrollable situation. Veteran character actor (and also fellow Brit) Matthew Marsh landed the part of Johnston, and was likewise fascinated by the factual origin of the story and also moved by the endless suffering of the Bells.

Marsh comments, "It's all based on true happenings. So a lot of people witnessed these inexplicable goings-on, where there appears to be almost like a demonic possession of a young member of the Bell household. Courtney is shooting it in a way that is, I think, going to make it amazingly beautiful and visually surprising and interesting...so I think people will hopefully feel they have watched an amazing movie. Hopefully they'll be shocked and feel a bit of anger and sorrow about the plight that this family went through."

SHOOTING “AN AMERICAN HAUNTING”

Principal photography took place primarily in Bucharest, Romania, at MediaPro Studios, where the village life of 1820s Tennessee was re-created. Additional shooting also took place in Montreal.

It was this sequestering of the cast that added to the atmosphere on the set—in such a place, far removed from America of today, those required to inhabit the lives of the Bells and their acquaintances were aided by the other-worldly feel of the isolated buildings constructed in near unspoiled countryside. And more than one of the cast and crew felt they had been “visited” by something unexplainable...yet luckily, nothing nearly as upsetting as what afflicted young Betsy.

For the young actress asked to go on a very dark journey, Hurd-Wood credits her director with enabling her to forge ahead: “To get to the places that Betsy had been—to get through that myself—I couldn’t have done it without our amazing director, Courtney Solomon.”

Solomon collaborated with director of photography Adrian Biddle, devising inventive camerawork to represent the presence of the entity. Stunt work was also required, not just by those doubling for Hurd-Wood, D’Arcy and Fell during the pulse-quickenning carriage summersault and subsequent horseback chase, but also by the actors themselves. All were game for throwing themselves into Solomon’s haunted house of mirrors, physically experiencing the falls, jerks, slaps and accidents heaped upon them by the unseen entity. Thom Fell even got his own chance to “wrestle with the devil,” literally.

Fell relates, “When I found out that I got to have a wolf jump on me and then wrestle with it, I said to Courtney that I definitely, definitely wanted to do it myself. So I spent a week-and-a-half working with the wolf and gaining her trust before we shot the attack in the forest.”

Hurd-Wood also had her own, disorienting experience on the set: “Constantly, I was falling asleep in Betsy’s bed because I couldn’t sleep at night. My bed was so, so comfortable, so at lunchtime, or any break, I’d just fall asleep. Once, I fell asleep during a lighting set-up and without me realizing it, they picked up the bed and moved it off the

set...because they needed to move it for lighting or something. And I woke up and I suddenly had no idea where I was, because I thought it was first thing in the morning. And I looked around and saw all these people working—it was crazy, but it was also very funny.”

Even with all of the attention to the spiritual side of the story, the actors were mindful of grounding their character work in reality. Per Donald Sutherland: “Sissy’s terrific to work with. She’s very, very creative and inspirational, dedicated, hard-working. She pursues in the same way that I do—but in a different avenue—the truth of the subject—because that’s the only point in making this film. Courtney was making a film that’ll scare the pants off you, so it has a slightly different take on it, because it is an entertainment film. But one has to approach each character very seriously.”

Spacek adds, “It’s a different story, a unique story, that’s never been told. And although the story is extraordinary, my character is not an extraordinary woman—she lives on a farm, she’s the mother of four children—she’s just a very typical American farm wife from that period in the mountains of Tennessee.”

Solomon repays the kindnesses heaped on him by his cast and comments that all were brave and willing to commit to the dark tale of this family’s trying ordeal. “They were all incredible, and I learned so much from them, particularly Donald. He’s such a great actor, you say one, two, three words to him—if you even have an adjustment—and Donald, he just gets it. It was fantastic to work with him and all of this talented, remarkable cast.”

“What did it want? And why did it punish you?”

Although filmmaker Solomon sides with author Monahan as to the root cause of the haunting, he refuses to paint a simplistic, black-and-white portrait of cause and effect, instead shadowing his cinematic landscape with the grays of the human psyche—the sometimes contradictory emotions and the ultimate yearning for answers which may never come:

- Ancient beliefs in witchcraft are still given credence by many connected to the Bell household—so much so that characters refuse to burn a shirt stained with blood for fear it will “make things worse.”
- On the verge of marriageable age (per the custom of the day), Betsy at first confesses her love of a young neighbor, and later viciously spurns him; she eventually marries her much older professor.
- Despite his own actions, John Bell still believes himself a good man, exclaiming, “Even saints commit sins of some sort!”

It is these levels that add resonance to AN AMERICAN HAUNTING and render it more than a horror film. As cast member James D’Arcy comments, “It’s the kind of film that actually does bear watching for a second time—because there’s a twist towards the end that, I think, puts the rest of the film in a totally different perspective. And if you were to watch it a second time, hopefully there’d be clues there that you’d be able to pick up on and see that it was always headed in that direction.”

Allan Zeman Presents, In Association With Midsummer Films, Remstar Films, SC Mediapro Pictures and After Dark Films, A Christopher Milburn Production of A Courtney Solomon Film: Donald Sutherland, Sissy Spacek, James D’Arcy and Rachel Hurd-Wood in AN AMERICAN HAUNTING. Casting is by Gary Davy. Line producer is Matthew Kuipers. Costume design is by Jane Petrie; the production design is by Humphrey Jaeger. It is based on the book *The Bell Witch—An American Haunting* by Brent Monahan. The director of photography is Adrian Biddle, BSC. The original score is by Caine Davidson. It is edited by Richard Comeau. The associate producer is Alessandro Francassi. It is co-produced by Andrei Boncea. The executive producers are Allan Zeman, Robbie Little, Lawrence Steven Meyers, Maxime Rémillard, Nelson Leong, Simon Franks and Zygi Kamasa. The film is produced by Christopher Milburn and André Rouleau. AN AMERICAN HAUNTING is written, produced and directed by Courtney Solomon. www.anamericanhaunting.com

ABOUT THE LEGEND

If an interested party were to conduct a search of the web for documents about the Bell family and the paranormal activities associated with their story, that person would be barraged with innumerable writings about the most famous haunting in American history—and the only time that such occurrences resulted in the death of a human being (verified by eyewitness accounts and official county and Tennessee state documentation). As such, it is only natural that many historians and experts have added their flourishes to the legend of this infamous American haunting. Though some even espouse their own theories as to the cause of events in and around the Red River area, it is still widely considered, to this day, an unsolved mystery.

In reading these various retellings of the Bell family's story, however, a "general consensus" of the legend of the "Bell Witch" emerges. (Note: The use of the word "witch" at the time of the original haunting connoted spiritual activity. It was not used in the more narrow definition of the word—the primary definition in modern times—of a female practitioner of sorcery. The Bell family itself did not employ the term, but the name has stuck through generations of popular usage.)

The Bell Witch first manifested in quiet Robertson County near the Red River bottomland in Tennessee (in a town later known as Adams) in 1817. On a typical hunting expedition, John Bell, accompanied by his son and a friend, entered the woods in search of prey. Through dense fog, a shadowy figure darted between the trees. Suddenly, a menacing creature materialized from the mist and ferociously lunged at John. Rifle ready, he shot at the snarling beast...but it vanished as quickly as it came.

That night, strange sounds befell the Bell household—a scratching and knocking at the windows. Then, the wooden floorboards creaked with invisible footsteps as though someone, or something, made its way inside the home.

Daughter Betsy was suddenly beset by a terrifying presence in her bedroom. It yanked off her blankets and whispered her name. At first, the family attempted to explain away these terrors as unusually violent nightmares...but that was just the beginning. The haunting would continue to escalate in scope and violence.

Family friends James Johnston and Richard Powell were the first to learn of these unusual occurrences and experienced the unforgettable phenomenon firsthand. Well-regarded men, they assumed the macabre disturbances were nothing more than fancy...until the screams started in the still of one unbelievably horrific night. Running upstairs, they discovered Betsy fighting for her life as she was violently dragged across the floor by an invisible force displaying inhuman strength. Her hair was brutally yanked straight out of her scalp. Dangling suspended in mid-air, Betsy was slapped, beaten, stricken, while her mother, father and their friends watched in horror, unable to stop the battering.

Word of the haunting continued to spread. Later, a family acquaintance (and future President of the United States), General Andrew Jackson, heard of the accounts at the Bell house. Joined by a crew of trusted men, Jackson arrived at the Bell settlement to encounter the entity. (Some legends even supply that the wagon carrying Jackson's entourage was mysteriously halted just before reaching the Bell property—and was allowed to continue after Jackson acknowledged the “witch.”) Never one to disappoint, “she” violently assaulted Jackson and his men, who left the next day.

Night after night for four years, the horrific phenomenon afflicted the family. Breathing, whispers, creaking, cries rapidly intensified into nightmarish assaults. It came; it frightened; it tortured...then vanished, only to return again. With each brutal attack, the entity grew stronger. Eventually, it developed a voice and spoke, mocking and berating them. (Some report the entity held conversations and delivered discourses as well.) Desperate to know who or what the source of these vicious beatings could possibly be, they continued to seek counsel with the village's most educated resident, friend Richard Powell.

All logical evidence pointed to the Bell's neighbor, Kate Batts, an eccentric woman already considered a witch by most in the town. John Bell and Kate Batts were more than just neighbors, though—they were business partners in a land deal that went bad, leaving Kate feeling deeply betrayed and deceived. Witnessed by many, Kate cursed not only John, but his health, happy family, and daughter Betsy, too.

The terrors only intensified. Young Betsy was continually tormented in her sleep, often beaten, dragged and assaulted. The Bell family was incapable of helping her

against this unseen but dangerous entity. Her performance in school suffered and she began seeing visions. The effects of the haunting on Betsy would be permanent.

The ongoing, relentless disturbances also began affecting John Bell. Even after the death of a family member, the entity was not done with the Bells. She swore to return seven years later...and, as promised, she arrived with a vengeance at the home of John Bell, Jr. She then vowed to return once again, 135 years later.

Not only did she return, but this time, she never left. Many visitors to the site of the Bell settlement testify to uncanny experiences and offer photographic evidence of their interaction with the entity.

This strange and true tale remains the most documented haunting on American soil, substantiated by eyewitness reports and authenticated affidavits.

ABOUT AFTER DARK FILMS

When filmmakers Courtney Solomon and Allan Zeman formed their production entity, After Dark Films, the initial intent was to produce AN AMERICAN HAUNTING (along with future films in the same vein), and then go the route of other independently produced projects outside of the mainstream studio system—seek distribution and marketing deals after the fact. But something changed all that.

“The short answer is, I got pissed off,” explains Solomon. “We weren’t really happy with what the studios were offering for the U.S. release. And I’m not the only filmmaker out there saying this. I don’t really want to dis the studios, because I like the studios. A lot of the people there are really nice people. But the reality is that I was pissed off as an independent filmmaker, who puts a lot into making a film, that it doesn’t necessarily go to the right audience, the right people don’t see it and they don’t see it the right way.”

Solomon theorized that he and Zeman could set about marketing and domestically distributing AN AMERICAN HAUNTING themselves.

“I talked to Allan,” Solomon continues, “and said, ‘If we put our own money into it, maybe we can create our own independent-friendly, mini-studio. So that filmmakers with good, commercial, independent fare can have a viable alternative, to have some place to go with their films and not see them get drastically altered from what they intended in the first place.’”

Zeman—whose acumen helped him to create successful business holdings—was initially hesitant, but soon warmed to the idea and agreed, providing capital. “Then I thought, ‘Oh my God, what did I say?’ laughs Solomon, who quickly became head of After Dark’s marketing and distribution arms (in addition to his existing duties as head of production).

Working with a much smaller budget than the studios (and most independents), After Dark managed to pull off a series of impressive feats. They secured distribution for AN AMERICAN HAUNTING, which is slated to open on 2,000 screens during the first weekend of the 2006 summer movie season (in an already crowded marketplace opposite some staggering competition). They brought super-hot website MySpace.com onboard as

a promotional partner, which would provide grassroots marketing to “all the right people,” according to Solomon, who adds, “It’s exactly where a lot of the music groups that couldn’t get the big labels to take them got known and then ended up on iTunes, because of MySpace and the real people out there.”

Many of the freelancers tapped by After Dark to aide in the marketing and distribution reinforced Solomon’s belief. “A lot of them said, ‘We’re so glad you’re doing this, because we know so many people that want to have a viable alternative to the way things are being done.’” This widespread feeling helped to galvanize the support and enabled Solomon and Zeman to “do more for our money than we ever could have ordinarily.”

Solomon’s goal is to get his film in front of the moviegoers who will appreciate the film’s craft, utilizing quality, precision-targeted marketing. “We’re not asking for charity. We are looking for people to support this movie because we’re trying to do something good here. We’ve gone to town every possible way trying to get this movie out there, just like the studios do...but also smarter, leaner, and hopefully, in not such an antiquated manner. When this is all done, yes, hopefully, our movie does well. But I’m more hopeful that after it does well, I’m left with After Dark Films, a company that’s set itself up to release other films, because it’s got all the network and infrastructure in place—albeit quickly built—that can now be a company *for the filmmakers*, to give them what they want. Hopefully, it can become a label that is identified with quality, independent film.”

Solomon and Zeman look to future acquisitions, in addition to creating more of their own product—which is a tall order. “What’s unique about it is there’s nobody really that comes up with the idea for their movie, gets financing, writes it, produces it, directs it, then creates a distribution company to put it out on 2,000 screens in the United States of America, raises the money to do that, then runs the marketing and distribution to put it out wide like a studio does. Maybe it’s ‘After Dark’ because pretty much, in order to compete with the little resources we have, I spent a lot of time working after dark!”

ABOUT THE CAST

DONALD SUTHERLAND plays John Bell, Sr., an upstanding citizen in his rural Tennessee community and the head of the Bell family, who are besieged by a demonic, unseen presence.

Sutherland is one of the most prolific and versatile of motion picture actors, with an astonishing resume of more than 100 films, ranging from the biting political satire of Robert Altman's "M.A.S.H.," to the intimate drama of Robert Redford's "Ordinary People," to the subtle intricacy of Alan Pakula's "Klute," to the eccentric romanticism of Fellini's "Casanova."

Sutherland has also made films with Bernardo Bertolucci ("1900"), Nicolas Roeg ("Don't Look Now"), John Schlesinger ("The Day of the Locust"), Paul Mazursky ("Alex in Wonderland"), Robert Aldrich ("The Dirty Dozen"), John Sturges ("The Eagle Has Landed"), Herbert Ross ("Max Dugan Returns"), Louis Malle ("Crackers"), Philip Borsos ("Bethune"), Ron Howard ("Backdraft"), Richard Marquand ("Eye of the Needle"), Euzhan Palcy ("A Dry White Season"), Richard Pearce ("Threshold," for which he won the 1983 Genie Award as Best Actor), Oliver Stone ("JFK"), Robert Towne ("Without Limits"), Clint Eastwood ("Space Cowboys"), the film adaptation of John Guare's "Six Degrees of Separation," and a cameo appearance in the National Lampoon classic "Animal House."

Sutherland was recently seen as Keira Knightley's father in "Pride & Prejudice," Nicole Kidman's father in Anthony Minghella's "Cold Mountain" and Charlize Theron's father in F. Gary Gray's "The Italian Job." He appeared in Robert Towne's "Ask the Dust" with Salma Hayek and will soon appear in Griffin Dunne's "Fierce People" with Diane Lane, in "American Gun" with Sissy Spacek and in "Aurora Borealis" with Louise Fletcher and Juliette Lewis.

For television, he won Emmy and Golden Globe awards for his supporting performance in the HBO film "Citizen X." He also won a Golden Globe for his portrayal of Clark Clifford, advisor to President Lyndon B. Johnson, in the HBO historical drama "Path to War," directed by the late John Frankenheimer. Sutherland currently stars as Speaker of the House Nathan Templeton on the hit series "Commander in Chief."

Sutherland starred with Justin Kirk and Julianna Margulies in a sold-out, critically acclaimed engagement of Jon Robin Baitz's "Ten Unknowns" at the Mitzi Newhouse Theatre of Lincoln Center, receiving an Outer Critics Circle Award nomination for Best Actor. He also starred in the London, Toronto and Los Angeles productions of "Enigmatic Variations," an English-language translation (by his son, Roeg Sutherland) of Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt's French play.

SISSY SPACEK portrays Lucy Bell, the devoted wife and mother, who is forced to stand by as her family is attacked by dark spiritual forces.

Spacek has been one of the industry's most respected actresses for more than three decades. Her many honors include an Academy Award®, five additional Oscar® nominations, three Golden Globe Awards and numerous critics awards.

She first gained the attention of critics and audiences with her performance in Terrence Malick's widely praised 1973 drama "Badlands," in which she starred opposite Martin Sheen. In 1976, Spacek earned her first Academy Award® nomination and won a National Society of Film Critics Award for her chilling performance in the title role of Brian De Palma's "Carrie," based on the Stephen King novel. The following year, she won the New York Film Critics Circle Award for her work in Robert Altman's "Three Women."

In 1980, Spacek starred as Loretta Lynn in the acclaimed biopic "Coal Miner's Daughter," winning the Oscar® and Golden Globe Award for her performance. Spacek also swept the New York Film Critics Circle, Los Angeles Film Critics, National Board of Review and National Society of Film Critics Awards for her portrayal of the country music legend.

Spacek received another Golden Globe nomination the next year for her work in "Raggedy Man," directed by her husband, Jack Fisk. She earned her third Oscar® and Golden Globe nominations for her role in Costa-Gavras' 1982 drama "Missing," opposite Jack Lemmon, and her fourth Oscar® and Golden Globe nominations for her work in 1984's "The River," in which she starred with Mel Gibson.

In 1987, Spacek gained her fifth Academy Award® nomination and won another Golden Globe and the New York film Critics Circle Award for her performance in the

dark comedy “Crimes of the Heart.” Her most recent Oscar® nomination came for her portrayal of a mother grieving for her murdered son in the drama “In the Bedroom,” for which she also won a Golden Globe Award, an Independent Spirit Award and an AFI Film Award for Best Actress. In addition, she garnered Best Actress Awards from a number of critics’ organizations, including the Los Angeles, New York and Broadcast Film Critics. Her work in “In the Bedroom” also brought Spacek two Screen Actors Guild (SAG) Award nominations, one for Outstanding Lead Actress and another for Outstanding Cast, shared with the rest of the film’s ensemble.

Spacek’s other film credits include “A Home at the End of the World,” “The Straight Story,” “Blast From the Past,” “Affliction,” “The Grass Harp,” “JFK,” “The Long Walk Home,” “ ‘Night, Mother” and “Marie,” “Nine Lives,” “The Ring Two” and “North Country.”

Spacek has also been honored for her work on the small screen, where she has starred in several highly praised longform projects. She received Emmy Award nominations for her portrayal of Zelda Fitzgerald in “Last Call” and for her work in Tommy Lee Jones’ Western “The Good Old Boys,” as well as SAG Award nominations for her performances in “Midwives” and “A Place for Annie.” Her additional television credits include “If These Wall Could Talk,” “Beyond the Call,” “Streets of Laredo” and “A Private Matter.”

JAMES D’ARCY portrays professor Richard Powell, educator to young Betsy Bell and confidante of the Bell family.

One of the most popular actors in the United Kingdom, D’Arcy’s garnered great attention with international audiences with his portrayal of First Lt. Tom Pullings in the Oscar®-nominated “Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World,” opposite Russell Crowe, for director Peter Weir. Prior to that, he starred as Nicholas Nickleby in the highly acclaimed Channel 4 UK television production of “The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby.” Additionally, he starred in the BBC production of “The Ice House,” which also ran in the United States on the PBS series “Mystery!”

D’Arcy starred in “Dot the I,” opposite Gael Garcia Bernal (which has just had its successful American release after being featured at the Sundance Film Festival), and also

starred in “Exorcist: The Beginning” for director Renny Harlin. He portrayed Sherlock Holmes in “A Case of Evil,” also appearing in the films “Revelation,” “The Trench,” “Wilde,” “Guest House Paradiso,” “The Bass Player Peter” and “Charity.”

His television appearances also include the UK telefilm drama adaptation of Oscar Wilde’s “The Canterville Ghost,” Ruth Rendell’s “Bribery and Corruption” and several BBC TV productions such as “Silent Witness,” “Beck,” “Dalziel and Pascoe,” “Tom Jones” and “Sunburn.”

James was brought up in London and fell into acting almost by accident. He left school and went to Australia for a year, where he became interested in acting while working in the drama department at a school in Perth. When he returned to the UK, he applied for the prestigious London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art (LAMDA) and graduated in July 1995. During his three-year course at LAMDA, he gained acting experience by appearing in the plays “Heracles,” “Sherlock Holmes,” “As You Like It,” “Wild Honey,” “The Freedom of the City” and “Larkrise to Candleford.”

Film audiences will next see D’Arcy in “Rise,” a supernatural thriller from director/writer Sebastian Gutierrez. He costars opposite Lucy Liu, Michael Chiklis, Carla Gugino and Robert Forster.

RACHEL HURD-WOOD stars as young Betsy Bell, whose innocence and very life are challenged when she becomes the target of an insidious evil.

Hurd-Wood is currently one of the most appreciated young actors from Britain. She became well known for her very first role, Wendy Darling, in “Peter Pan,” the fantasy feature film directed by P.J. Hogan. For Rachel, this was just the very beginning. Shortly before she started filming AN AMERICAN HAUNTING, she finished performing in “Sherlock Holmes and the Case of the Silk Stocking” with Rupert Everett, which was broadcast on British Television and on American television’s PBS. She also recently completed filming the feature “Perfume: The Story of a Murderer,” directed by Tom Tykwer and featuring an international ensemble cast, including Dustin Hoffman and Alan Rickman.

Hurd-Wood is back at school now and is determined to do well academically. She reads scripts sent by her agents and there may be another project for her on the

horizon. Rachel also has become very interested in working with children who have special emotional and psychological needs.

Currently, the young actress lives with her parents and her brother in a Victorian cottage on the edge of a forest in leafy Surrey, about an hour from London, and goes to school locally. Her father Philip is an actor and screenwriter and has worked as a voice-over artist for over 20 years.

MATTHEW MARSH portrays well-meaning Bell family friend James Johnston, whose faith is little match for the dark forces haunting the Bells.

Marsh is one of the most charismatic British actors whom audiences appreciate for his strong and diverse roles both in British and American films. Audiences have had the opportunity to see him in Joel Schumacher's "Bad Company" (2002) with Anthony Hopkins and in Marc Munden's "Miranda" (2002) with Christina Ricci. He has made films with Robert Redford and Brad Pitt, appearing in Tony Scott's "Spygame" (2001). Previously, Marsh performed in Tony Martin's "Jimmy Fizz"; John Mackenzie's "Quicksand" (2001); and "The Fourth Protocol" (1987), being his first feature film, with Michael Caine and Pierce Brosnan.

"Alambrado," by Marco Bechis (2001), in which he appeared, was nominated for the Golden Leopard at the Locarno Film Festival. He was also featured in Billie August's "Smilla's Sense of Snow" (1997), which was nominated for the Berlin Film Festival's Golden Bear.

For television, Matthew has performed in "The Commander" series. One year before, he starred in Christopher Menaul's "Belonging" and "Wall of Silence"; in Philip Martin's "Hawking"; in Phil John's "Murphy's Law" (the latter two for BBC). He also appeared in Urs Egger's "The Return of the Dancing Master."

In 1998 he worked with director Suri Krishnamma in "A Respectable Trade," a BBC film that was honored by San Francisco Film Festival and was also nominated for a BAFTA Award.

Marsh began his career in television in 1985 with "In the Secret State," directed by Christopher Morahan. He has since performed in more than 30 movies for the small screen.

THOM FELL plays John Bell, Jr., the eldest son in the family, whose devotion to his sister sometimes puts him in the pathway of the unseen evil assaulting the Bells.

The up-and-coming British actor has made his face familiar to his country's television viewing public, having starred in a variety of TV projects, including the series "The Residents," "Midsomer Murders," "Heartbeat" and "Foyle's War." He also starred in the telefeature biopic "Prince William."

His feature work includes the short film "Roach" and the upcoming "Highlander: The Source."

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

Canadian-born **COURTNEY SOLOMON** (Written, Produced and Directed by) made his feature film debut by producing and directing the feature film “Dungeons & Dragons” (2000), based on the worldwide gaming phenomenon.

Solomon now follows up with the chilling psychological thriller **AN AMERICAN HAUNTING**. Solomon not only produced and directed his second feature film, but also wrote the screenplay; the film stars legendary actors Donald Sutherland and Sissy Spacek, who are joined by an international cast featuring James D’Arcy, Rachel Hurd-Wood, Matthew Marsh and Thom Fell.

AN AMERICAN HAUNTING also serves as the premiere production from the independent shingle After Dark Films, with Solomon and Allan Zeman as co-founders and partners. After Dark Films was formed to not only serve as the production entity for **HAUNTING**, but also to handle the tasks usually carried out by a studio, namely the marketing and distribution. As such, After Dark stands as a truly independent studio, “which I hope will become synonymous with quality, independent film.”

For the first 14 years of his career, **CHRISTOPHER MILBURN** (Produced by) worked as an actor on stage and screen and was regularly seen as Dave Inchcape in the popular British television series “Rumpole of the Bailey.” In January 1995, he decided to concentrate on producing, and so set up Midsummer Films.

The first film under the banner was “Caught In the Act,” an ensemble comedy directed by Mark Greenstreet, which was selected for the UK Comedy Film Festival 1997 and won the Jury Award of Excellence at the Laguna Beach Festival in the USA.

In 1997, Milburn teamed up with director Eric Styles and the pair decided to develop a number of projects together. The first of these was “Dreaming of Joseph Lees,” which was shot in 1998 and was released by Fox Searchlight (1999), following a successful tour of international film festivals (including the Cardiff International Festival, where it was chosen as the opening night film). The film was based on an original screenplay by Catherine Linstrum and starred Samantha Morton, Rupert Graves, Lee Ross, Miriam Margolyes and Frank Finlay.

Milburn is developing a number of other projects through Midsummer Films, several with Linstrum commissioned as screenwriter, including the 19th century California-set “Muybridge,” which will be a co-production with Industry Entertainment and executive-produced by Nick Weschler and Rosalie Swedlin.

ANDRÉ ROULEAU (Produced by) most recently served as a producer on the sweeping romantic epic “Head in the Clouds,” starring Charlize Theron, Penelope Cruz and Stuart Townsend. He also produced Bob Rafelson’s noir thriller “The House on Turk Street,” starring Samuel L. Jackson and Milla Jovovich.

His television producing credits include “One Special Night.” His upcoming feature film credits include “Le Secret da la mère,” the French Canadian comedy written and directed by Ghyslaine Côté.

Accomplished editor **RICHARD COMEAU** (Edited by) has made a reputation for himself in his native Canada, where he has been working in the entertainment industry since 1990. His lengthy list of feature film editing credits includes such projects as the upcoming “La Secret da la mère,” as well as “C’est pas moi, c’est l’autre,” “Elles étaient cinq,” “Accordéon,” “Mambo Italiano,” “Heart: The Marilyn Bell Story,” “Maelström,” “2 secondes” and “La Comtesse de Bâton Rouge.” His editing work has won both a Gemini and a Jutra award, and he’s received three Genie nominations.

CAINE DAVIDSON (Original Score by) makes his feature film composing debut with “An American Haunting.”

Award-winning cinematographer **ADRIAN BIDDLE, BSC** (Director of Photography) received several nominations for best cinematography (Academy Award®, BAFTA and BSC) for his work on the international hit “Thelma & Louise.” His work on “1492: Conquest of Paradise” also received a BSC nomination, and his work on “The Butcher Boy” won him the Best Cinematography prize at the European Film Awards.

Biddle’s additional work has been seen in numerous films, including the recent “V for Vendetta,” “Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason,” “Reign of Fire,” “The Mummy”

(and its sequel), “The Weight of Water,” “101 Dalmatians” (and its sequel), “The Tall Guy,” “The Princess Bride” and “Aliens.”

Adrien Biddle passed away on December 7 of last year.

HUMPHREY JAEGER (Production Design by) has been designing for more than 25 years and has compiled an impressive list of feature film and television credits, including “Fated,” “Benedict Arnold: A Question of Honor,” “Victoria Wood’s Sketch Show Story,” “Happy Together,” “The Black Dog,” “Dreaming of Joseph Lees,” “Persistence,” “Wing and a Prayer,” “The Shadowy Third,” “The Vision Thing,” “Little Sir Nicholas,” “The Life and Loves of a She-Devil,” and many others.

JANE PETRIE (Costume Design by) has worked in a variety of costuming and wardrobe capacities on a select group of impressive feature film projects, including “The Constant Gardner,” “Gosford Park,” “Buffalo Soldiers,” “Captain Corelli’s Mandolin,” “The World Is Not Enough,” “Notting Hill,” “Elizabeth” and “Oscar and Lucinda.” In addition to “An American Haunting,” her costume designing credits include the upcoming feature “The Lives of the Saints,” the series “Sensitive Skin” and the short film “Road to Damascus.”

Prolific, best-selling writer **BRENT MONAHAN** (Author, *The Bell Witch—An American Haunting*) has also written *The Book of Common Dread: A Novel of the Infernal*, *The Blood of the Covenant*, *The Jekyll Island Club*, *The Sceptred Isle Club* and *To Move the World*, among others.

ALLAN ZEMAN’s (Executive Produced by) previous executive producing credits include “Hacks” (2002) and “Dungeons & Dragons” (2000). The Hong Kong-based businessman is co-founder and partner (along with Courtney Solomon) of After Dark Films, an independent production company that also markets and distributes films—with AN AMERICAN HAUNTING as the company’s premiere project wholly created and distributed by After Dark.

ROBBIE LITTLE (Executive Produced by) most recently executive produced the 2005 Academy Award®-winner for Best Foreign Language Film, “Tsotsi,” from South Africa. His additional producing credits include “Titus,” “Illuminata,” “The Prophecy II,” “Trading Mom” and “Il Cugino Americano.”

LAWRENCE STEVEN MEYERS (Executive Produced by) has served in a variety of producing capacities on such titles as TNT’s “The Librarian: Quest for the Spear,” Adrian Lyne’s “Unfaithful,” Robert Downey, Sr.’s “Hugo Pool,” “Return of the Living Dead II” and “Leather Jackets.” As an actor, Meyers appeared in such films as “Guncrazy” and “Dick Tracy.”

MAXIME RÉMILLARD (Executive Produced by) served as a producer on the upcoming “Le Secret da la mère,” in addition to producing “Head in the Clouds,” “Elles étaient cinq,” “The House on Turk Street” and the miniseries “Les Liaisons dangereuses.”

NELSON LEONG (Executive Produced by) previously collaborated with Courtney Solomon, serving as executive producer on 2000’s “Dungeons & Dragons.”

SIMON FRANKS (Executive Produced by) recently served as co-producer on the multiple Oscar®-nominated “Good Night, and Good Luck,” and also executive-produced the recent Demi Moore-starrer “Half Light” and the ensemble comedy “The Best Man.” He also served as executive producer on “Madhouse,” “School for Seduction,” “Tooth,” “Bollywood Queen,” “Spider” and “Bend It Like Beckham,” among others.

ZYGI KAMASA (Executive Produced by) recently served as co-producer on the multiple Oscar®-nominated “Good Night, and Good Luck,” and also executive-produced such projects as “Half Light,” “The Best Man,” “Bollywood Queen,” “Spider” and “Bend It Like Beckham.” Additionally, he produced the films “Tooth,” “The Scarlet Tunic,” “An Ideal Husband” and “Sunset Heights.”

—an american haunting—