

TAKE THE LEAD

Antonio Banderas stars in *Take the Lead*, a drama inspired by the true story of Pierre Dulaine, an inspirational Manhattan dance teacher and competitor who volunteers his time to teach ballroom dancing to a diverse group of New York inner-city high school students serving detention.

The students are initially skeptical of Dulaine, especially when they learn what he's there to teach them, but his unwavering commitment and dedication slowly inspire them to embrace his program. In fact, they even take it one step further and combine Dulaine's classical dance with their unique hip-hop style and music to create a high-energy, unique fusion. As Dulaine becomes a mentor for his students, many of whom haven't had much to strive towards in their lives, he inspires them to hone their craft for a prestigious city ballroom competition, and in return they share with each other valuable lessons about pride, respect and honor.

Joining Antonio Banderas in the talented ensemble cast are Rob Brown (*Coach Carter*, *Finding Forrester*), Yaya DaCosta (UPN's "Top Model"), Dante Basco (*Biker Boyz*), John Ortiz (*Narc*) Laura Benanti (*Nine*), Marcus T. Paulk (UPN's "Moesha"), Jenna Dewan (*Tamara*), and Alfre Woodard (*Beauty Shop*, ABC's "Desperate Housewives").

Take the Lead marks the feature film debut of veteran music video and commercial director Liz Friedlander (who has helmed videos for numerous artists including Joss Stone, U2, Blink 182 and Simple Plan). The film is written by Dianne Houston and produced by Diane Nabatoff, Michelle Grace and Christopher Godsick. The executive producers are Toby Emmerich, Matt Moore, Mark Kaufman, Ray Liotta and Mathew Hart.

The behind-the-scenes creative team includes cinematographer Alex Nepomniaschy, production designer Paul Denham Austerberry, editor Robert Ivison, costume designer Melissa Toth, music by Aaron Zigman and Swizz Beatz, choreographer JoAnn Jansen and hip-hop choreography from Rich and Tone Talauega.

New Line Cinema will release *Take the Lead* (rated PG-13 by the M.P.A.A. for “thematic material, language and some violence”) nationwide on April 7th, 2006.

The film’s soundtrack will be released by Universal Records on April 4th, 2006.

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

The idea for *Take the Lead* came about when producer Diane Nabatoff saw a segment on the “CBS Early Show” about Pierre Dulaine, a dance teacher in the public schools of New York. Nabatoff was instantly intrigued by the idea of a man teaching ballroom dancing to young inner-city kids and became determined to find Dulaine and learn more about his story. After two months, she finally located him in New York and arranged a meeting. “I knew immediately that I had to tell this story, no matter how long it took to get it on screen,” recalls Nabatoff.

Nabatoff and her former producing partner Michelle Grace caught the interest of Christopher Godsick, then a Senior Vice President of Production at New Line Cinema, who sparked to the idea right away. “I have always enjoyed mentor-oriented stories as well as dance films,” says Godsick. “I felt Pierre’s story took the best from both genres. If we put together the right elements, it was easy to see this project’s full potential.”

With New Line Cinema on board, development of the preliminary idea began in earnest. While the story is clearly inspired by Pierre Dulaine’s work, the filmmakers decided to change some details to make the story more accessible. As a result, the school setting in *Take the Lead* was changed from an elementary school to a high school. “We made the kids older so they could be more relatable and open up the story, and we also decided to fuse the two forms of dance to broaden its appeal,” says Nabatoff.

Christopher Godsick continues, “We wanted to deal with more mature issues – issues that are magnified in high school.” The give and take involved in the relationship between Pierre and his students is also magnified. As he teaches them the classic dances, they infuse these unfamiliar forms with their own hip-hop moves, creating a fusion, a balance of both worlds. “The writer of *Take the Lead* was faced with a daunting task. Although we remained true to the spirit of Pierre’s work, the writer had to create a compelling story and endearing characters that engaged the audience. After a brief conversation, Dianne Houston came into the studio and painted us a wonderful picture,” says Godsick. “Dianne has an incredible voice and was at one time a dancer, which gives her an understanding, and an amazing take on the story,” adds Diane Nabatoff.

With a draft of the script complete, the search for the right director began. Liz Friedlander, a veteran music video director, was an easy choice. “The minute Liz walked in, it was just so clear to me,” recalls Nabatoff. “She totally understood the story and had tremendous respect for it. Her background in music videos and dance also gave her an understanding of the world of these kids and the audience we wanted to reach.” While Friedlander was initially attracted by the dance and music elements of the story, she says that “it was the amazing characters combined with the obvious elements of music and dance that I found most intriguing.” Godsick adds, “We knew we wanted a director who could capture the attention of the youth market. We met with several directors who were either good storytellers or possessed an interesting visual style. After meeting with Liz we knew that she was a double threat. Liz has the rare qualities of a complete filmmaker who can deliver on all fronts.”

Friedlander began working with screenwriter Houston to shape the story. She was particularly interested in ensuring that Dulaine be a character and not a caricature. Friedlander explains, “even though it’s a ‘fish out of water’ story, Pierre needs to be portrayed as a real person – one that walks and breathes and evolves. Because then he is that much more human and thus more extraordinary.”

As Friedlander and Houston developed the script, conversations began about finding an actor who could best portray the character of Pierre Dulaine on screen. Antonio Banderas was the obvious first choice. “Pierre is a person who can walk into a room, command attention and convince you to do the impossible. He has presence and charisma, and so does Antonio,” says Diane Nabatoff. For Christopher Godsick, Banderas’ appeal is widespread. “It’s simple: women want him and men want to be like him.”

“Antonio’s such a good person that you know he would have the purity of heart to bring insight to the character. He understands what it is to give and therefore he is fully able to understand and relate to Pierre. Both Antonio and Pierre have an old world flavor to them that rings true,” says Liz Friedlander.

Banderas committed to the character because “Pierre is different from anything that I have done before.” He was also interested in the story’s social relevance. “The story is urban, contemporary and international. It uses dance as a vehicle to talk about problems that are out there on the streets of America, the streets of Europe.”

With Banderas on board, the process shifted to finding the remainder of the ensemble cast. The filmmakers wanted to fill the roles of the students/dancers with actors who would seem to be legitimately from the South Bronx. “I spent a lot of time in New York hanging around playgrounds and schools watching kids – what they did, how they related to each other, how they looked and how they dressed. I wanted the cast to look like what I’d observed, not a Hollywood version of that,” says Friedlander.

In addition, they had to decide whether to cast dancers who could act, or actors who could dance. The roles of Sasha, Ramos and Danjou needed to be really strong dancers, while the character Kurd’s charm lies in the fact that he isn’t a dancer at all. In the end, Pierre’s students are comprised of a selection of experienced actors such as Rob Brown (*Coach Carter*, *Finding Forrester*), who plays the disaffected Rock, and Brandon Andrews, who managed to land the role of Monster in his very first audition. “We couldn’t find an actor to play the role of Monster through the normal channels,” says producer Christopher Godsick. “Instead, we started calling high school football coaches from around the country to try and find a gentle giant who could move equally well on the field and on the dance floor. Fortunately, we were able to find Brandon at a local Los Angeles high school.” For the role of Morgan, an accomplished ballroom dancer, the filmmakers needed someone who, according to Liz Friedlander, “was a really, really good dancer.” Katya Virshilas, a trained ballroom dancer who has also competed extensively, was ultimately chosen for the role.

The young actors chosen to portray Pierre’s pupils related easily to the project that fuses dance with a message about the benefits of mentoring, discipline and creativity. Possessing a background in modern, ballet and jazz dance training, Yaya DaCosta was chosen for the role of LaRhette, a student who comes into her own through the process of taking Pierre’s classes. DaCosta felt an immediate affinity for the character. “I thought that the role was written just for me. LaRhette reminded me of myself in junior high school. That’s when I was introduced to dance. LaRhette is transformed through dance.

She becomes more assured because she has discovered something that gives her life meaning.”

The film also charts the progress of the relationship between Rock and LaRhette. Their initial animosity towards each other evolves into a meeting of minds and hearts. In the beginning, they blame each other, by association, for the death of their brothers. Rob Brown explains, “There’s always tension whenever they’re together. Pierre forces them to work that tension out by partnering them in the waltz. So not only are they enemies that have to deal with each other, but they have to deal with each other face-to-face, eye-to-eye.” In the process Rock and LaRhette not only learn to waltz, they also learn to trust and care for each other.

The opportunity to work on *Take the Lead* was a dream come true for Dante Basco, who plays Ramos. “Before I was an actor, I was a dancer. In my whole career I’ve never gotten to dance in a movie. I started acting because of John Travolta in *Grease* and *Saturday Night Fever*.”

Alfre Woodard plays Augustine James, the principal who allows Pierre Dulaine to teach. “We wanted someone who could be a worthy opponent for Pierre. Alfre has that presence,” says producer Diane Nabatoff.

“I completely loved it. This was a movie I wanted to see,” recalls Woodard of her initial reading of the script. Of the relationship between Augustine and Pierre that starts as a contentious one, but eventually develops into one of mutual respect, Woodard says, “Augustine is about solving problems, and will do what’s necessary. She sees possibilities in Pierre. She tricks him into teaching her most problematic charges that spend their time in detention hall. When she sees that they listen to him, she has to recognize and respect that.”

Rounding out the ensemble cast is John Ortiz as Mr. Temple, a teacher who opposes the idea of Dulaine in the school.

Tango, merengue, salsa, foxtrot, waltz and hip hop, anyone? To prepare for the dance scenes, the actors went through an intensive, month-long rehearsal period under the

direction of choreographer JoAnn Jansen. “I have to consider the geography of the room and the geometry of the movement,” says Jansen of her approach. Known for their ‘up to the minute’ choreography, brothers Rich and Tone Talauega added the hip-hop moves, which added to the classic dances resulted in the fusion style that dominates the last section of the film.

“JoAnn has done a tremendous number of movies, is an extraordinary choreographer and knows how to move actors for the camera. The Talauega Brothers are on the cutting edge of hip-hop dance, and have a very specific and exciting way of expressing movement. We knew that if we paired them together, we’d have a perfect blend,” explains producer Diane Nabatoff.

Many of the cast had no previous dance training, so Jansen first had to assess how much each actor needed to learn in order to portray their individual character. Her teaching focuses on using what the student/actor knows and building on those skills. Elijah Kelley, who plays Danjou, explains, “JoAnn incorporates your personal experiences into whatever your character is doing. It makes it much easier to transform into the character that you’re portraying on film.”

In his role as Pierre Dulaine, Banderas performs the tango to show his reluctant students the passion and excitement that can be evoked by ballroom. Contrary to popular belief, Banderas is not a trained dancer. “Many people think I am, but it’s because I have a facility for physicality,” says the actor. “I’ve never been a great dancer, but, after dancing with Chita Rivera for 228 performances on Broadway, I dared to play in this type of movie.”

Banderas’ training began at his home in Los Angeles. After arriving in Toronto shortly before production began, he began working specifically on the choreography. “JoAnn knows how to make a person look like a dancer even if they don’t dance at all. I know the tango because I learned it. It’s about learning the fundamentals and then you can improvise. You start acting like a dancer – how to look at the girl, position your body, the movement of the head; these things can make the audience believe that you are a better dancer than you actually are,” concludes Banderas.

In addition to training with JoAnn Jansen, her assistant Allen Walls and Tone Talauega, the main group of dancers had the opportunity to work with Pierre Dulaine himself. The verdict was unanimous: Dulaine's charisma and his love of dance captivated them all. "Pierre's a rare breed. Especially these days, there are not too many people that do things for nothing," says Banderas of Dulaine's willingness and commitment to share his love of dance. Jasika Nicole, who portrays Egypt, agrees, saying "Pierre is just a phenomenally talented man and such a good teacher. He's easy to understand and treats everyone with respect. I feel so fortunate to have met him."

Though the rehearsal period was intense, the actors portraying Pierre's students came to appreciate the training and the life lessons. "It's something that you can use for the rest of your life," says Shawand McKenzie, who portrays "Big Girl."

In addition to dancing at the rehearsals, the actors also took their moves to the clubs. These forays gave them the opportunity to not only try their new moves on the public dance floor, but also to bond with each other. "This is one of the few films where you can go to a club and do research," says Dante Basco. Actress Jenna Dewan, who plays Sasha, continues, "We were lucky to have a month of rehearsals, because we got to know each other. We spent eight hours together, we went to clubs; we really bonded. In the movie you'll see it, because we're a group. When we go out to a club we take over the place; 'here's "*Take the Lead* coming in!"

Though recognized as a trendsetting choreographer in the ever-changing inner circle of hip-hop dance, Tone Talauega found that he, too, had a lot to learn from the rarefied, disciplined world of ballroom dancing. "Partner dancing is definitely a challenge for people from the hip-hop world because hip-hop dance is about one's self. Ballroom is a totally different animal. You have to be one with your partner; you have to look like twins."

Describing her initial vision for the film, director Liz Friedlander says, "I visualized the movie starting as a stylized documentary, then exploding into a Hollywood movie at the end." In discussions with her creative team, Friedlander stressed the idea that the film "should take its cues from the learning curve of the kids. As their world opens up, the movie should also 'open up' in look and feel."

This idea is carried through the production design, camera moves and costumes. For production designer Paul Austerberry, it meant showing that the characters come from “an impoverished background, which is then juxtaposed against the fantastical world of ballroom dance.” As the film begins the colors used for the school are dominated by cool, harsh shades – blue grays – but as they are introduced to a world outside their own the tones become warmer.

For the closing scenes of the movie that take place in the ballroom during a dance competition, Austerberry drew inspiration from the plumes of a peacock. “The kids have gained confidence and it shows in the way they carry themselves – the colors support that growth,” he adds. These scenes were shot in the historic Royal York Hotel in downtown Toronto. It took two teams of eight painters 48 hours to prepare the space. In order to then restore the room back to its original state for a pre-scheduled wedding, it took 24 hours with 16 painters and several laborers working nonstop.

Friedlander and Austerberry had several discussions about the look of the dungeon-like school basement where Pierre teaches the students. “Liz had very specific ideas about the dungeon,” recalls Austerberry. “She envisioned a grimy, dark oppressive space that gets cleaner, brighter and more open as the students begin to accept Pierre’s lessons.”

To bring Friedlander’s vision to the screen, Austerberry scanned magazines and books and visited several schools and boiler rooms for ideas. “We wanted to give the sense of a really low corridor with pipes. We amalgamated ideas and materials from existing locations, existing school ballrooms and boilers rooms. I took pictures for color references and pulled images from books and magazines. Liz and I would go through and filter out the kind of things we wanted and we grouped them to create the dungeon.”

Cinematographer Alex Nepomniaschy welcomed the opportunity to show the progression of the characters as they discover themselves and their world through dance. The lighting in the dungeon is cold and hard fluorescents, but the color temperature is changed, and more light is shown through the windows as the students get more personally invested in the dance.

In terms of camera movement, Nepomniaschy utilized a hand held camera to shoot scenes with Rock and LaRhette to reflect the instability of their home lives. By contrast, the scenes in Pierre Dulaine's home are very precise and fluid in their composition.

"We purposely built some cold weather scenes in the film so that the characters can be seen cocooned in their puffy coats in the beginning and then we watch as they shed their skin," explains Liz Friedlander. To achieve the level of realism needed for the movie, costumer Melissa Toth "took inspiration from the streets of New York. I shopped at all the places the kids in this world would shop. I also listened to ideas from the actors, as they have a good sense of what rings true."

During her research, Toth and her assistant would walk the streets and do a lot of surreptitious photography of street wear of New York teenagers, as well as visiting stores where she felt the characters would shop. While she was familiar with contemporary hip-hop style, Toth knew that she had to conduct research for the ballroom sequences. "I didn't have a clue about ballroom before starting this job. I went to a ballroom competition in New York and ended up staying all day. I was fascinated by the costumes. Hip-hop and ballroom fashions are two very separate elements and it was very exciting to tackle them both."

She discovered that there's an ebb and flow to fashion in the world of competitive ballroom dance. "I learnt that nobody wears feathers on their costumes anymore. Now it's all about Swarovski crystals. These days, everything is encrusted with them," says Toth. She also discovered that ballroom costumes are technically dance costumes. "They are very technical. Under the glamorous exterior, they're built like bathing suits, like a gymnastic or ice skating costume. From afar they look like a beautiful formal dress but they're actually quite technically proficient underneath."

A lot of Toth's approach to costuming characters involves the individual actors and what they bring to the character. "A lot of the kids are from New York, so they grew up on the street, knowing what's right and what's not right." It's an approach that the actors appreciated. "Melissa's mad cool. I had a vision of Ramos, and I explained it to her, and she was totally open to it," explains Dante Basco.

In combination with the dance elements, music plays an integral role in *Take the Lead*. Director Liz Friedlander says her goal was to have the music serve as a vehicle for “both sides, Pierre and his students, to gain an appreciation for other kinds of music. It’s certainly something that has happened to me through the process of directing this movie. I’ve now listened to literally hundreds of tangos and salsas and meringues, a lot of musical styles that I hadn’t been exposed to previously.”

With the wealth of musical styles that appear in the film, Friedlander feels that “it’s important to realize the sort of validity in all kinds of music. If you listen to hip-hop, some of it is very political, but some is lifestyle based. And then the same thing happens in salsa music – they are singing about the same thing that people are rapping about, it’s just different lifestyles and forms of expression. And there’s so many types of drum loops that are the same style but from different types of music. Hopefully what we have done is found a thread to weave through, so that it doesn’t feel like one song after another, and that we can bring a validity to it across the board.”

The filmmakers enlisted noted music supervisor Bonnie Greenberg to help assemble the eclectic soundtrack of classic standards and today’s sounds, which at times in the film are “mashed up” to create a cool, edgy hybrid of music from different generations.

For the standards, it was decided early on to pay homage to the classic American composers George and Ira Gershwin, which was made possible through the cooperation of the Gershwin Estate and Warner Chappel publishing. Additionally, a line of dialogue included in the film as an homage to the Gershwins was written in consultation with the Estate.

For the film’s original music, Greenberg sought out and recruited collaborators from around the world. This included a new modern tango from Bailongo in Buenos Aires; from Scotland, the DJ Grant McSleazy created the "Mashup" (a hybrid of six songs combined together to create a fresh sound); from New York, the brilliant hip-hop producer Swizz Beatz co-wrote and produced the end credit music, in addition to teaming up with noted film composer Aaron Zigman as the co-composer of film’s score; from Puerto Rico, the reggaetone stars Wisin and Yandel co-created and recorded the

music for the big dance finale, along with Bone Thugs, Fat Man Scoop, Drag-on, and Myelissa.

Greenberg forged collaborations and innovative pairings from diverse musical worlds, pairing rapper Q-Tip (from a Tribe Called Quest) with a classic Lena Horne recording of the Gershwin's "I've Got Rhythm," as well as having him rap on a modern recoding of the traditional tango "La Cumparsita."

In addition, the film features new music by LL Cool J, Freeway, DMX, the Youngbloodz, Topic, Akon, Swizz Beatz, Kem, jae Millz and Remy Ma, along with classics from Nat King Cole, Dinah Washington, Keely Smith, June Christy, Sly and The Family Stone and the Black Eyed Peas.

"We've tried to create a new sound of music with this film," says Greenberg. "At every opportunity we tried to merge different worlds of music together. We chose to hire a traditional film composer, Aaron Zigman, and a great hip hop producer, Swizz Beatz, to collaborate in creating the score. In some scenes we've taken contemporary tango and mixed it with hip-hop beats. In others, we took standards and mixed them with hip-hop beats. At times we've merged all three together into one piece of music."

Liz Friedlander's debut as a feature film director has won her some lifelong fans. She earned the respect of her cast with her willingness to collaborate and incorporate their ideas for their characters into her overall vision for the film. Yaya DaCosta found Friedlander's approach invaluable in helping her to tackle her first feature role. "Liz helped me a lot in understanding my character because she was open to conversation from the beginning to the end. LaRhette grew through our conversations." Antonio Banderas agrees. "Liz has a fantastic approach to actors. She doesn't put you in a tube, where you are totally trapped by her directions. She says, 'this is what I would like. Now, how you going to get in there? I don't know. You show me.' I hope that this is not going to be the last time that we work together."

The rapport between his younger cast-members also captivated Banderas. "The success of the movie lies in that group of kids interacting with each other on screen. Sometimes society forgets about kids that are in urban neighborhoods and public

schools. They are very susceptible to end up with a gun in their hands, or drugs. But if you put in a little attention and a little love - the results are magnificent. You can literally change society, because they are the future. It is there.”

ABOUT THE CAST

Antonio Banderas (Pierre Dulaine)

Antonio Banderas recently starred in *The Legend of Zorro*. His work in *The Mask of Zorro* opposite Catherine Zeta Jones and Anthony Hopkins earned him a Golden Globe nomination. Other recent work includes voicing the character "Puss in Boots" in the blockbuster animated film, *Shrek 2*, a role which he will revisit for *Shrek 3*.

Born in Malaga, Spain, Banderas attended the School of Dramatic Arts in his hometown, and upon graduation he began his acting career working in a small theater company based there. He later moved to Madrid and became an ensemble member of the prestigious National Theater of Spain.

In 1982, Banderas was cast by writer/director Pedro Almodovar in *Labyrinth of Passion*. It was the first of five films Banderas would do with Almodovar, the others being *Matador*, *Law of Desire*, *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* and *Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!* The international success of these films introduced him to Hollywood. Notably, for his American film debut in *Mambo Kings* in 1992, he spoke no English yet learned all of his dialogue phonetically.

He went on to land his first starring role in *Desperado* and continued with the follow up - *Once Upon a Time in Mexico* alongside Johnny Depp and Salma Hayek. Since then, he has starred in such films as *Spy Kids*, *Spy Kids 2*, *Original Sin*, *Four Rooms*, *Assassins*, *Miami Rhapsody*, *Never Talk to Strangers*, *Interview with a Vampire*, *House of the Spirits* and *Philadelphia*.

Banderas received critical praise and a Best Actor Golden Globe nomination for his acting and vocal talents as 'Che' opposite Madonna in the big-screen adaptation of the musical *Evita*. Other awards to his credit include a Tony nomination for Best Actor in a Musical for his Broadway debut in the Roundabout Theater Company production of "NINE", a musical inspired by Fellini's *8 ½*. He also received a Best Actor Drama Desk Award, Outer Critics Circle Award, Drama League Award and Theatre World Award.

Banderas made his directorial debut with *Crazy in Alabama*. He also recently directed the Spanish film *El Camino de Los Ingleses*.

Rob Brown (Rock)

Rob Brown recently finished filming the independent film, *The Orphan King*, starring opposite Alexis Bledel and Chris Evans.

Born in Harlem and raised in Brooklyn, Brown took a chance and went on an open casting call for extras on the Gus Van Sant film *Finding Forrester*. He landed the lead role of 'Jamal Wallace' in the film that had him starring opposite Sean Connery. The film also had him co-starring with the Oscar winning actress Anna Paquin and F. Murray Abraham. His performance earned him the 2000 Las Vegas Critics Award for Best Male Newcomer and also won the Golden Satellite Awards for Outstanding New Talent.

Brown went on to star alongside Samuel L. Jackson and Ashanti in *Coach Carter*, the story of a controversial high school basketball coach (Jackson) who benched his undefeated team due to poor grades. Brown plays a member of the team involved with a schoolmate (Ashanti.)

He is currently attending college in New England.

Yaya DaCosta (LaRhette)

Yaya DaCosta makes her feature film debut in *Take the Lead*. She previously appeared in Isaac Mizrahi's short film "SuperModelHero", for internet release. DaCosta's work in television includes roles in the Nickelodeon pilot, "Always There," UPN's "Eve" as well as "America's Next Top Model."

Born and raised in Harlem New York, DaCosta graduated from Brown University with a degree in Africana Studies/International Relations.

Dante Basco (Ramos)

Dante Basco has appeared in the feature films *Biker Boyz*, *Naked Brown Men*, *Extreme Days*, *But I'm a Cheerleader*, *The Debut*, *Faking' Da Funk*, *Rave* and *Riot*.

Born and raised in the City by the Bay, Dante started out break-dancing at the age of 8 with his three brothers. They quickly became one of the top dance groups in San Francisco, opening for acts like Ice T and performing during half-time shows for the San Francisco 49ers and the Oakland As.

Dante and his family moved to Los Angeles in the mid '80s where he started to work immediately. He was introduced to audiences in Steven Spielberg's *Hook* as 'Rufio' the leader of the Lost Boys, starring opposite Robin Williams and Dustin Hoffman.

A young man of many talents, Dante writes poetry and hosts open mike poetry readings, billed as "Da Poetry Lounge," every Tuesday night at the Greenway Court Theatre in L.A. Upon attending a reading, hip-hop mogul Russell Simmons was so impressed with the concept of spoken word poetry, it inspired him to create "Def Poetry Jam" for HBO. Dante has appeared on the HBO special several times to share his spoken word poetry.

He and his brothers are currently shopping around a scripted sitcom in which they would star, and are also busily recording a hip-hop/rap album.

John Ortiz (Mr. Temple)

John Ortiz is currently filming *Pride and Glory* starring Nick Nolte, Ed Norton and Colin Farrel. He recently finished filming *El Cantante* starring Marc Anthony and Jennifer Lopez and Michael Mann's *Miami Vice*. Ortiz has also appeared in *Narc*, *Ransom*, *Carlito's Way*, *Amistad*, *Riot*, *Side Streets*, *Sgt. Bilko*, *Before Night Falls* and *The Opportunists*.

On television, Ortiz was recently a series regular on CBS' "Clubhouse." He also spent two seasons playing rookie detective Ruben Sommariba in the ABC series "The Job" with Denis Leary.

Ortiz is an Obie award-winning stage actor who co-founded LAByrinth Theatre Company and is co-Artistic Director of the company with actor Philip Seymour Hoffman. Some of the highlights of his 23 theatre credits are Stephen Adly Guirgis' "Jesus Hopped the A Train" (Drama Desk Nomination – Best Lead Actor) and "The Last Days of Judas Iscariot"; the Broadway production of Nilo Cruz' Pulitzer Prize winning play "Anna in the

Tropics”; John Patrick Shanley’s “Where’s My Money?”; Jose Rivera’s “Cloud Tectonics” (New York premiere), “Sueno” (world premiere), “References to Salvador Dali Make Me Hot” (world premiere), and the upcoming “School of the Americas” (Public Theater). Ortiz performed in two world tours of “The Persians” and “Merchant of Venice” both directed by Peter Sellars as well as “The Skin of Our Teeth” (Delacourte Theatre) and “The Rose Tattoo” (The Goodman). Regionally, he has performed at the Mark Taper Forum, The Goodman, Hartford Stage, Arena Stage, Yale Repertory, South Coast Repertory and Cincinnati Playhouse. John was born, raised and lives in Brooklyn, New York.

Laura Benanti (Tina)

Laura Benanti is a critically acclaimed actress who has starred on Broadway and in film and television. Laura is currently starring in the Broadway bound, New Line production of “The Wedding Singer” and has recent television credits that include a leading role in the FX comedy, “Starved.” She also shot her first independent feature *Social Grace* which was directed by B.D. Wong.

Benanti previously worked with Antonio Banderas as ‘Claudia’ in the Broadway revival of “Nine,” for which her work was recognized with an Outer Critics Circle Award nomination. Her other stage performances include the role of Cinderella in “Into the Woods” which she received nominations for both the 2002 Tony Award for Best Featured Actress in a Musical and the 2002 Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Actress in a Musical. Laura also received a Tony nomination for her performance as the female lead in “Swing” on Broadway and has additional Broadway and Off-Broadway credits that include “The Sound of Music,” “Wonderful Town”, and “Time and Again” . Recently, she has performed in “A Little Night Music” at the LA Opera House and in “The Winter’s Tale at the Williamstown Theater Festival.

Benanti also writes and performs her own music.

Marcus T. Paulk (Eddie)

Marcus T. Paulk recently appeared in *Roll Bounce* directed by Malcolm Lee. Other feature film credits include *Nothing to Lose* and *One Night Stand*.

Paulk starred for six years as Myles Mitchell, the precocious little brother in UPN's popular comedy series "Moesha." His work in television include roles in "Hammerman," "Me and the Boys," "Thea," "Grace Under Fire," "The Fresh Prince of Bel Air," "The Sinbad Show," and "Martin." In addition, he had a supporting role in the Disney TV movie "Safety Patrol" and did voice-over work on the children's series "Happily Ever After." He is also currently working on his CD under the name of MP.

Jenna Dewan (Sasha)

Jenna Dewan recently completed a starring role in the film *Untitled Music High* for Disney, Summit Pictures and producer Adam Shankman. Dewan has also starred in *Tamara* for Lionsgate and *Waterborne*. She has also appeared in *Hip Hopera: Carmen* and *The Hot Chick*. For television, she has had roles in "Quintuplets," "Dark Shadows" and "Boston Public." She is currently shooting *The Grudge 2* for Columbia and producer Sam Raimi.

Dewan was an award recipient for Teen People's "What's Next" 2000. She is also a trained dancer, specializing in Jazz, Hip Hop, Ballet, Tap, Lyrical, Modern and Salsa.

Alfre Woodard (Augustine James)

Alfre Woodard recently starred in *Something New* as well as *Beauty Shop* with Queen Latifah. The four time Emmy award winning actress has also been named the newest cast member of the ABC drama, "Desperate Housewives."

Woodard's extensive list of feature film credits include roles in *The Forgotten*, *Radio*, *The Core*, *The Singing Detective*, *K-Pax*, *Love 'n Basketball*, *How To Make an American Quilt*, *Passion Fish* and *Crooklyn*. She has also lent her voice to animation and recently portrayed the cheetah mother in *The Wild Thornberry's Movie* and the voice of a lemur named "Plio" in the blockbuster *Dinosaur*.

Woodard has appeared in numerous television series including "Hill Street Blues," "St. Elsewhere," "L.A. Law," "The Practice" and "Inconceivable." The Disney channel telefilm "A Mother's Courage: The Mary Thomas Story" earned her an Emmy nomination and she was awarded an ACE award for her portrayal of Winne Mandela in the HBO

presentation of "Mandela." Woodard also received a Golden Globe and Emmy award for her role in HBO's "Miss Ever's Boys".

Always drawn to the theater, she numbers among her stage credits Broadway's "Drowning Crow", "Map of the World", "Horatio," "Me and Bessie" on Broadway and at San Francisco's ACT, and "Split Second" at the Mayfair Music Hall. She also appeared in the long running Los Angeles production of "Love Letters" as well as executive produced "East Texas Hot Links" at the Met Theatre.

Katya Virshilas (Morgan)

Katya Virshilas says she's been dancing since she could walk, but in fact never got into it professionally until her mother paid her to take her first class after moving to Canada.

Born in Lithuania, Katya moved to Israel at the age of 6, and then to Vancouver at the age of 13. Once she started dancing, her rise to the top of the competitive dance world was swift. In 2001, she and her partner won the Canadian Latin Dance Championship, and competed on the world stage in St. Petersburg, where they were ranked 20th in the world.

When casting began for the feature, *Shall We Dance*, starring Richard Gere, she was a natural choice for one of the dancers in that film. Bitten hard by the acting bug, she began taking classes, and was soon booking gigs on such projects as "Smallville" and "Reefer Madness." Katya has just wrapped a guest lead on the upcoming pilot for NBC/Universal, "Underfunded," and will be seen in a recurring role on the new series, "Alice, I Think."

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

Liz Friedlander (Director)

Highly regarded in the music industry as one of the finest music video directors, Liz Friedlander is making her move to the silver screen with her first feature film from New Line Cinema, *Take the Lead*, hitting theaters April 7th. Starring Antonio Banderas, the drama is inspired by the true story of Pierre Dulaine, a Manhattan dance teacher who volunteers his time to New York inner-city high school students.

It is no mystery why Friedlander was chosen for *Take the Lead*. Having directed over 80 music videos for artists such as U2, Celine Dion, REM, and most recently such emerging talent as Joss Stone and New Found Glory, her resume definitely fit the bill. Many of Friedlander's videos have received honors from both Billboard and MTV Video Awards alike, taking home the MTV Viewer's Choice Award for Best Video of 2002 for her work with Michelle Branch. Prior to working as a music video director, Liz worked as both a producer and editor, teaming up with The Red Hot Chili Peppers among others.

Originally from New York, Liz attended the Drama Conservatory school at Carnegie Mellon in Pennsylvania. She then attended the University of California Santa Cruz followed by the UCLA Film School, where she graduated as the valedictorian of her class, and won the prestigious Frank S. Glicksman Award for her short film "Eleven-Twenty."

Liz now resides in Los Angeles.

Dianne Houston (Writer)

Dianne Houston is an Oscar nominated writer/director with numerous film and television credits to her name including *Tuesday Morning Ride* (Oscar nominated short film); "The Knights of the South Bronx" (TV movie); and the upcoming indie film: *Three Dates*. Houston's TV credits include "NYPD Blue" (director); "Brewster Place" (writer); "City of Angels" (writer/director); "Crossing Jordan" (director); and "The Education of Max Bickford" (writer). Houston is currently pairing with hip hop superstar Missy Elliott, writing and directing a feature film based on Elliott's life.

Diane Nabatoff (Producer)

In 2000 Diane founded her own company Tiara Blu Films. Since then she has produced *Take The Lead* starring Antonio Banderas to be released by New Line on April 7 and *Narc*, a Paramount release, written and directed by Joe Carnahan, starring Ray Liotta and Jason Patric. She Executive-Produced “Knights of the South Bronx” starring Ted Danson (nominated for a SAG award) for A&E; as well as Co-Executive Produced the pilot for the HBO series “Baseball Wives by Tom Fontana and Julie Martin. She is currently developing projects at a number of studios and cable networks as well as several features that will be independently financed. Her projects include: The novel White Jazz by James Ellroy, to be adapted and directed by Joe Carnahan with Warner Independent; To Begin With by Jonathan Feldman with Stratus; God’s Mistress by Jeannine Dominy. Not In This Life by Craig Bolotin, The Girl Who Struck Out Babe Ruth by Rocky Lang starring Erika Christensen, and Friends Again, written by George Gallo, starring Ray Liotta all to be independently financed; “Abraham House” to star Susan Sarandon with A&E; and “Racing For Time” to be directed by Charles Dutton for Lifetime. She will be shooting the series “After Hours” featuring Daniel Boloud for iN DEMAND this spring.

Prior to founding her own company, Diane was a Producer at Interscope Communications, where she developed and produced films that include: *Very Bad Things*, written and directed by Pete Berg and starring Christian Slater, Cameron Diaz and Daniel Stern; *The Proposition* starring Kenneth Branagh, Madeleine Stowe and William Hurt; *Operation Dumbo Drop*, directed by Simon Wincer and starring Danny Glover, Ray Liotta and Denis Leary; *Separate Lives* starring Jim Belushi and Linda Hamilton; *Holy Matrimony*, directed by Leonard Nimoy and starring Patricia Arquette; and *Body Language* starring Tom Berenger.

Earlier in her career, Diane was the Senior Vice President of Production for Henry Winkler’s Fair Dinkum Productions and Vice President of Vestron Pictures where she served as Executive Producer of *Hider in the House* and *Fear* which received an Ace Award nomination. She began her film career in Los Angeles at The Feldman-Meeker Co. working on *The Golden Child* starring Eddie Murphy and serving as Associate-Producer of *The Kindred* and *Near Dark*.

In addition to her career in the film industry, Ms. Nabatoff has had diverse experiences in the entertainment field: she worked with the legendary Joseph Papp at The New York Shakespeare Festival; consulted with a London-based documentary film company; worked in programming at HBO; understudied both female roles in the Broadway Production of "I Love my Wife"; and performed in off- Broadway shows, nightclubs and television commercials as a singer-actress.

Prior to receiving a Masters of Business Administration from Harvard Business School, she earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from Harvard University, where she was the first female producer of Hasty Pudding Theatricals and the founder of The Radcliffe Pitches, the first Harvard female vocal group.

Christopher Godsick (Producer)

Christopher Godsick is the President of LSG Industries, a film and television production company. He acquired *Take the Lead* while serving as a Senior Vice President of Production at New Line Cinema. Mr. Godsick supervised the development of the project and then transitioned into a producing capacity prior to start of pre-production. He was a production executive on many of New Line's "tentpole" development projects including *Shazam*, *Rush Hour 3* and *Samurai Jack*. Mr. Godsick was also the executive on the New Line blockbuster *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*.

In addition to producing, Mr. Godsick became a member of the Writer's Guild by co-creating two one-hour dramas for network television. Taking advantage of his knowledge in military affairs, he co-created "In Harm's Way" in 2003 and sold it to CBS through Spelling Entertainment. In 2004, Mr. Godsick continued his relationship with CBS and Spelling through the sale of a one-hour drama entitled "The Bible Code."

Godsick was a Partner in WCG Entertainment where he was an Executive Producer of the John Travolta film, *Broken Arrow* for Twentieth Century Fox; Executive Producer on the television series "Once A Thief" of which 22 episodes were produced for syndication; Producer on the Paramount Pictures feature *Face Off*, starring John Travolta and Nicholas Cage; Executive Producer on the Columbia Pictures film *Replacement Killers* starring Chow Yun-Fat and Mira Sorvino; and Executive Producer on "Black Jack," a television pilot for the USA network.

Mathew Hart (Executive Producer)

Mathew Hart has worked with several major and mini studios including Paramount, Universal, Columbia, Disney, Miramax, Nickelodeon and Broadway Pictures since 1978.

As an Executive Producer, his latest credits include the feature films *The Man* for New Line Cinema and *Confessions of a Teenage Drama Queen* for Disney Pictures. He also co-produced *John Q* for New Line Cinema and was an Associate Producer on *Undercover Brother* for Imagine Entertainment and Universal Pictures.

Hart's credits as a Production Manager include *How to Deal*, *The Recruit*, *John Q.*, *Undercover Brother*, *Frequency*, *The Hurricane*, *Down to Earth*, *The Corruptor* and *54*.

Alex Nepomniaschy (Cinematographer)

Alex Nepomniaschy recently completed work on the independent feature, *10th and Wolf*. His feature film work includes *The Prince and Me*, *Narc*, for which he was nominated for the Spirit Award for Best Cinematography, and *Safe*, which won the Best Cinematography Award from the Boston Society of Film Critics. Other film credits include *A Time for Dancing*, *It's The Rage*, *Never Been Kissed*, *The Alarmist*, *The Associate* and *Mrs Winterbourne*.

Paul D. Austerberry (Production Designer)

Paul D. Austerberry most recently designed *Assault on Precinct 13*. He has worked on such productions as *Resident Evil: Apocalypse*, *Highwaymen*, *The Tuxedo*, *Exit Wounds*, the Canadian feature *Men With Brooms* and *Mercy*.

As art director, Austerberry's credits include *X-Men*, *Forever Mine*, *The Corruptor*, *Half Baked*, *The Real Blonde*, *Extreme Measures*, *Harriet the Spy* and *Kids in the Hall: Brain Candy*. He was awarded a Gemini Award for his work designing *Inspired by Bach*.

Robert Ivison (Editor)

Robert Ivison was born in Montreal, Canada. He began his career editing music videos for artists such as U2, Eric Clapton, Blink 182, The Wallflowers, Whitney Houston, Celine Dion, Ben Folds Five and others. He has worked with Director Liz Friedlander since 1997 on music videos and commercials.

His other feature credits include *Walking Tall* and *Stander*.

Melissa Toth (Costume Designer)

Melissa Toth has been designing costumes for feature films for over a decade. Notable credits include *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, for which she was nominated for a Costume Design Guild Award.

She also designed the costumes for Kenneth Lonergan's *You Can Count On Me*, (Sundance Grand Jury Prize), Ben Younger's *Prime*, Woody Allen's *Hollywood Ending*, and Todd Solondz's *Welcome to the Dollhouse* (Sundance Grand Jury Prize). Melissa's latest film, Kenny Lonergan's *Margaret*, is due out next fall.

Aaron Zigman (Music By)

One of the most accomplished new voices in film music, Aaron Zigman is rapidly establishing a glowing reputation for his exquisite, lyrical and highly evocative scores.

Mr. Zigman made his feature debut writing the music for director Nick Cassavetes' critically acclaimed drama *John Q*, starring Denzel Washington. Their collaboration continued with the romance *The Notebook*, starring Gena Rowlands and James Garner, based on the Nicholas Sparks.

Aaron's upcoming scoring projects include Lions Gate's *Akeelah and the Bee*, starring Angela Bassett and Laurence Fishburne and *Flicka*, the remake of the 1943 film which spawned the tv series, based on the novel [My Friend Flicka](#), by Mary O'Hara. Fox will release the film in July 2006.

Zigman is an accomplished composer of concert works, having written numerous symphonic pieces. Among his works is a 35 minute-long tone poem divided into 5 movements, written as a tribute for Yitzhak Rabin, which was performed by the Los Angeles Jewish Symphony. The USC Symphony orchestra recently performed Zigman's "Impressions," a suite for wind ensemble.

Aaron has also worked extensively as a music producer, arranger and writer for such recording artists as Christina Aguilera, Seal, Aretha Franklin, Natalie Cole, Oleta Adams, Phil Collins, Tina Turner, Patti Labelle, Chicago, Nona Gaye, Carly Simon, the Pointer Sisters, Huey Lewis, and Big Mountain.

Zigman's song work has been featured on such film soundtracks as *Mulan*, *Buster*, *What's Love Got To Do With It?*, *The Bird Cage*, *License to Kill*, *Pocohantas* and *Corrina, Corrina*.

Swizz Beatz (Music By)

After selling more than 88 million records at the age of 26, Swizz Beatz aka Kaseem Dean is not only an accomplished producer, but also a successful business entrepreneur and the prominent force behind the evolution of hip-hop music. Through his talents alone, Swizz Beatz is responsible for numerous top 10 Billboard singles throughout his 10 year career and continues to show the world that he is the leading music producer in the industry.

The music prodigy developed his talents at a young age by spinning at local clubs, parties and creating his own mix-tapes. At the young age of 16, Swizz was given the chance to work with his uncles, Joaquin "Waah" and Darrin "Dee" Dean, who founded the independent record label Ruff Ryders. Seizing the opportunity to make a name for himself with their unknown, but talented roster of artists, Swizz produced the label's first major chart breaking hit, DMX's "Stop, Drop". From there on, Swizz's career snowballed, and he started producing hit after hit for other influential talents like the First Lady of Ruff Ryders Eve and Jay-Z on his historic "Hard Knock Life" album. Having sold multi-platinum numbers before graduating high school, Swizz passed up the traditional role of attending college to shift focus on his explosive career as a producer.

A decade later Swizz continues to show the world that he is unstoppable. From Mary J. Blige's melodious rhythms to Nas' multi-platinum flow, Swizz Beatz is the ingenuity and mastermind behind the magnanimous impact of an endless roster of household name talent, which include such artists as Beyonce, R. Kelly, Busta Rhymes, Limp Bizkit, Metallica, Korn, Whitney Houston, Fat Joe, Nas, Ice Cube, Foxy Brown, Christina Milian,

Lil' Kim and Redman to name a few. He has also produced scores for various Oliver Stone films including *Biker Boys* and *XXX (Triple X)*.

Having been presented with numerous awards and honors, which include Grammy Awards, MTV Video Music Awards, BET Awards, Billboard Awards and many others, the natural fire burning inside him has led him to become a business entrepreneur.

Bonnie Greenberg (Executive Music Producer)

Bonnie Greenberg is as much as any person responsible for integrating music and motion pictures for the past decade. She is a firm believer that music should enhance and support the visual images of the film.

Bonnie Greenberg began her career in music and film as a child playing the piano, harp and flute and writing film reviews for the high school newspaper. She received a law degree and worked in business affairs at MCA Records and Paramount Pictures. Seizing upon the opportunity to merge music and film she left the executive desk and entered the world of music supervision. Since then, she has been integrally involved with over 50 films spanning all budgets and genres from independent films including *Spanking the Monkey*, *Hairspray*, and *Menace II Society*, to mid budget independent and studio films such as *Undercover Brother*, *The Best Man*, *The Mask*, and *The Truth About Cats and Dogs*, to major big studio blockbusters including *My Best Friend's Wedding*, *How The Grinch Stole Christmas*, *What Women Want* and *Something's Gotta Give*, to the hit series "Desperate Housewives."

She received an NAACP award for album of the year for her work on *The Best Man*.

In addition to her music supervisor activities, Ms. Greenberg has worked for the State of New York in preparing materials to educate children in the State's drug program for which earned her the Governor's Plaque Award. She authored various music chapters of the Matthew Bender four volume practical law treatise entitled "Negotiating Contracts in The Entertainments Industry." She has been featured in several documentaries and is a frequent lecturer on the use of music in films. She teaches music supervision at UCLA Extension.

JoAnn Jansen (Choreographer)

JoAnn Jansen recently worked with Cameron Diaz and Shirley MacLaine in *In Her Shoes*, and with Orlando Bloom and Kirsten Dunst in *Elizabethtown*. Other recent projects include the upcoming *Mrs Harris* with Annette Bening and Sir Ben Kingsley, *Houndog* with Dakota Fanning, *Lonely Hearts* with Salma Hayek and Jared Leto, *Rumor Has It* with Jennifer Aniston and Kevin Costner, and *Marilyn Hotchkiss' Ballroom Dancing and Charm School* starring Marisa Tomei, Mary Steenburgen and Danny DeVito.

Other film credits include *Shall We Dance*, *Havana Nights-Dirty Dancing*, *Pirates of the Caribbean*, *Along Came Polly*, *Uptown Girls*, *Remember The Titans*, *The Mexican*, *Lucky Numbers*, *Fear & Loathing in Las Vegas* and *What Dreams May Come*.

In television, she has choreographed for the series "Charmed" and "Strong Medicine." Other television work includes two episodes of "X-Files." Her credits also include numerous commercials including the Target Design campaign.

As an independent producer, she has co-produced several projects with Lawrence Bender including *Havana Nights-Dirty Dancing*, *A Price Above Rubies* starring Renee Zellweger, and was associate producer on *Fresh* and *White Man's Burden*.