

# THE WOODSMAN

*A Film By Nicole Kassell*

*Starring:*

Kevin Bacon Kyra Sedgwick Mos Def Benjamin Bratt David Alan Grier Eve

## PRODUCTION NOTES

### *The Woodsman*

#### Synopsis

Kevin Bacon, an indispensable fixture of American cinema over the past 20 years, delivers his finest performance in *The Woodsman*, a harrowing and moving tale of one man's attempt to re-enter society.

After twelve years in prison, Walter (Bacon) arrives in an unnamed city, moves into a small apartment across the street from an elementary school, gets a job at a lumberyard, and mostly keeps to himself. A quiet, guarded man, Walter finds unexpected solace from Vickie (Kyra Sedgwick), a tough-talking woman who promises not to judge him for his history. But Walter cannot escape his past. A convicted sex offender, Walter is warily eyed by his brother-in-law (Benjamin Bratt), shunned by his sister, lives in fear of being

discovered at work, and is hounded by a suspicious local police officer, Detective Lucas (Mos Def). After befriending a young girl in a neighborhood park, Walter must also grapple with the terrible prospect of his own reawakened demons.

*The Woodsman*—based on a play of the same name, directed by Nicole Kassell produced by Lee Daniels, to be distributed domestically by Newmarket Films—is an unnerving, ultimately hopeful portrait of compulsion and hard-won redemption.

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## ***The Woodsman***

### **About the Production**

“When the idea was first pitched to me, I hung up the phone,” admits producer Lee Daniels of his initial response to *The Woodsman*’s sensitive subject matter. “I have eight-year-old twins and I felt that certain subjects are just taboo. But once I started reading it, I felt similar to how I felt when I first read *Monster’s Ball*. There was a directness to it, a sparseness. What I like about the film, and what I hope it conveys, is that there are no answers. Everyone is flawed, and both of these projects have certainly made me examine some of my own flaws.”

In telling the story of Walter, a convicted sex offender returning to society after being incarcerated for twelve years, *The Woodsman* places unusually high demands on audiences: asking viewers to empathize with a character most of us would ordinarily find

repellent. Entrusted with the task of shaping this sensitive and unsettling material were Nicole Kassell, a soft-spoken but vigorously determined first-time feature filmmaker, and an extraordinary cast that includes Kevin Bacon (*Mystic River, Sleepers, Apollo 13*), Kyra Sedgwick (*Personal Velocity, Phenomenon*), Mos Def (*The Italian Job, Bamboozled*), Eve (*XXX, Barbershop*), Benjamin Bratt (*Piñero, Abandon, Traffic*), and David Alan Grier (*In Living Color*). *The Woodsman*, based on the play of the same name by Steven Fechter, was filmed in Philadelphia in 28 days over fifteen locations.

### **Path To *The Woodsman***

In March of 2000, Nicole Kassell, then a student at New York University's esteemed Graduate Film Program, attended a free staged reading of a play entitled *The Woodsman*.

"The caliber of the play was incredible," recalls Kassell of the reading, which had been produced by Arthur Miller (*Death of a Salesman*) at New York's legendary Actor's Studio. "It was a very haunting piece, and it felt like this was an important story to tell."

In fact, Kassell was so impressed with the reading that afterwards she approached playwright Steven Fechter about optioning it for a film.

"He was understandably reluctant because I was still a student at the time," says Kassell, who explains how she wrote a first draft screenplay on speculation, which she then shared with the playwright. "He was impressed with it and agreed to option it and to work with me." In Fechter, Kassell found an ideal collaborator and writing partner: "I would sit down and do a draft and show it to him, and we'd go over it together and give each other detailed notes. It was an ideal situation: space to write with an equally

invested partner.”

The screenplay for *The Woodsman* went on to win the 2001 Slamdance Screenplay Competition. That same year, Kassell was in Utah to screen her NYU thesis film, a short entitled *The Green Hour*, at the Sundance Film Festival. This impressive one-two punch did not go unnoticed by the film industry. “We started sending the screenplay around and producer Lee Daniels called it the best thing he’d read since *Monster’s Ball*,” says Kassell, who held firm to her decision not to sell the screenplay unless she was also given the opportunity to direct the film.

“At first I thought I didn’t want to work with another first-time director,” Daniels admits. “But Nicole came to the project with such an incredible level of enthusiasm. She’s methodical in the best way, and through that came a three-dimensional understanding of the characters. She’s a very soft-spoken soul, a good soul. And at first you’d never suspect that someone like her would want to put themselves in the middle of a dark storm like this.”

“I loved working with her,” says Kevin Bacon. “Nicole is very smart and has very strong opinions. She’s a good, compassionate, gentle human being who cares a great deal about filmmaking and the world.”

Says Kyra Sedgwick: “Nicole is truly the mouth that roared: she speaks very softly and carries a big stick. She’s a quietly, unobtrusively powerful person. She didn’t stop until

she got what she wanted, even with certain money and time limitations. With *The Woodsman*, she's proved herself to be a formidable film artist to say the least."

### **From Stage To Screen**

In his essay, "On A Book Entitled *Lolita*," Vladimir Nabokov famously relates how the inspiration for the novel came to him after reading an article about an ape who, after months of coaxing, had "produced the first drawing ever charcoaled by an animal."

The drawing: the bars of the animal's own cage. While psychic captivity might be an ideal metaphor for the kind of compulsion *The Woodsman* delineates, one of Kassell's principle jobs in re-imagining the material for the screen was breaking free of the static frame of the proscenium stage and finding ways to visualize what is primarily interior space.

"The play was very minimalist, with Walter onstage the entire time and other characters entering and exiting," says Kassell. "We had to open up Walter's world and open Walter up to the world," she continues, explaining how she decided to show Walter at work and set several scenes in the lumberyard. Another major change was the addition of Mary-Kay (played by actress and hip-hop star Eve), a character not in the original play who is essential to a subplot surrounding Walter's ostracization in the workplace.

Walter is a relatively non-verbal character, and, during rehearsal, Kassell and Bacon were ruthless about pruning unnecessary and over-explicit dialogue. "That's something I'm

pretty big on,” says Bacon. “I just think it’s more interesting to see how a character reacts to the world, what’s going on behind the eyes. That’s one of the beautiful things about movies, and if you can utilize that as an actor or director, it’s a very powerful thing. I’m always wary of the big scene in movies where the character says, ‘I’m the way I am because. . .’ With this character, we felt the less said the better.”

Matching the script’s pared down verbal economy, Kassell imbues the world of *The Woodsman* with an unfussy, unadorned visual realism. “I was heavily influenced by the films of the early seventies,” Kassell says, drawing attention to such hallmarks of seventies American cinema as *Five Easy Pieces* (1970) and *One Flew Over The Cuckoo’s Nest* (1975).

“The film stock in the seventies was a little grainier, and what I like about those films is how you could take a megastar—in those cases, Jack Nicholson—and immerse him in a world that’s very real, very true.” If the film’s rough-hewn visual texture recalls the heyday of seventies American cinema, in its daring, commitment, and complete lack of vanity, Bacon’s performance, too, could comfortably sit beside the gallery of great seventies film anti-heroes: Robert DeNiro’s Travis Bickle in *Taxi Driver*, Jack Nicholson in *The Last Detail*, Al Pacino’s Sonny in *Dog Day Afternoon*.

The decision was made early on to shoot *The Woodsman* in Philadelphia, a city Bacon, Eve, director of photography Xavier Perez Grobet, and producer Daniels all originally called home. “I love Philadelphia,” Daniels says of the city of brotherly love. “It’s an

untapped place, and a fantastic place for film shoots. Many of our financiers and cast and crew are Philadelphians, so it gave the shoot a really comfortable vibe.” Kassell, who has family living in Philly, praises the city’s “amazingly supportive” film commission; and Sedgwick comments about Philadelphia’s distinctive look. “I like being surrounded by old architecture,” Sedgwick says. “For some reason it gives me a great feeling of well-being and safety, and Philly’s got some beautiful buildings.”

Grounded in the verbal naturalism of the screenplay and the visual realism of the city of brotherly love, Kassell and her award-winning editors Lisa Fruchtman and Brian A. Kates employ some adventurous and expressionistic film editing devices. Jump-cuts, freeze frames, and time displacement techniques are used in several key sequences, including the opening credits, Walter and Vickie’s first sex scene, and a sequence in which Walter watches from his apartment window as a man he dubs “Candy” abducts a young boy from an elementary schoolyard. (This last scene is disturbingly played as a hyperbolic parody of a television sportscast, replete with off-screen color commentary.)

While somewhat reminiscent of the cutting familiar from classics of the French New Wave, Kassell points to other, intriguing influences. “The way the credit sequence is edited is particularly influenced by Sam Peckinpah’s *The Getaway*, which lasts for about fourteen minutes and gives you the entire history of the lead character,” says Kassell. “The sex scene, with the jump cuts, is reminiscent of the legendary scene in Nicolas Roeg’s *Don’t Look Now*.”

## **Truth Barometer**

“Kevin signing on was beyond a dream come true,” says Kassell of the actor she describes as “a huge truth barometer.”

Bacon, who has been a fixture of American cinema since his debut in 1978’s *National Lampoon’s Animal House* (and whose career was recently feted at a gala at the Film Society of Lincoln Center), is the rare actor who is able to move between leading man and character roles. “He’s an actor people admire and want to like yet he completely transforms himself from role to role,” says Kassell. “He just focuses on every single specific detail of the character: how he walks, how he talks, how he dresses.”

Says producer Daniels: “Kevin’s a really good guy, and part of me thought he was a little crazy for taking the role, but I’m very happy he did. He brings to Walter a sense of turmoil that we don’t ordinarily see, and a frightening sense of concentration. That said, it was great to see him come out of Walter at the end.”

Almost immediately after signing onto the project, Bacon made the decision to take on the responsibilities of becoming one of the film’s executive producers as well. “*The Woodsman* is a risky project in so many ways that I felt it important for me to be as hands-on as possible,” says Bacon. “I thought it would be helpful for me to get involved with casting and other decisions.”

Bacon suggested wife Kyra Sedgwick—familiar to audiences from memorable films such

as Oliver Stone's *Born On The Fourth of July*, Cameron Crowe's *Singles*, and John Turteltaub's *Phenomenon*—for the role of Vickie. “I read the part and thought, there aren't many actresses who can be beautiful and sexy and yet you'd believe they'd be working in a lumberyard,” says Bacon. “There was originally some trepidation that because we're married it might be distracting and take audiences out of the film, but she was the right actress for the part.”

The offer of the role came as something of a surprise for Sedgwick: “I first read the script for Kev because he was thinking about it, so I wasn't thinking of it for me at all. And when I finished the script I said to him, ‘You have to do it,’ knowing that it's not necessarily going to be pleasant or fun, but you have to do it.” When the offer was made, Sedgwick admits to some apprehension about taking the part: “I'm not going to say we weren't concerned about it, but our concern was always, ‘Is this the right thing to do for Walter, for the film?’” says Sedgwick. “At the time, the press was rife with stories about how couples shouldn't appear onscreen together, how that's some sort of kiss of death, and we all questioned a great deal whether this was the right thing to do for the film. But Kevin and Nicole felt very strongly about it, and once we began working, I knew it was the right decision.”

In an early scene in *The Woodsman*, Vickie offers Walter a ride home from the lumberyard where they both work, then nonchalantly seduces him. A remarkably shot and edited sequence, the scene is all the more uncanny for capturing the excitement, tension, and discomfiture of two strangers being intimate together for the first time. When asked how difficult it was playing unfamiliar with the woman he's been married to

for fifteen years, Bacon says: “It’s just like any other acting challenge. Actors are professional pretenders, and that challenge is just as difficult as playing married for fifteen years with a total stranger you’ve met for the first time that day.” Says Sedgwick: “You just act it and hope it works.”

Kassell, relating an anecdote from the shoot, underscores how deep into character both actors became: “There was one day where, watching the dailies from the sex scene, after I called ‘Cut’, he broke character and gave her a, ‘*How are you doing today, honey?*’ kind of kiss, and I thought—there’s Kevin! But I never saw that when we were shooting. They both were so focused on their characters, if something didn’t feel right, it was never a question of them feeling too intimate.”

### ***Making Damaged Pieces Fit***

For Sedgwick, *The Woodsman* is as much a love story—albeit a wracked and unconventional one—as a portrait of a terrible and largely unspoken of societal problem.

“Vickie falls in love with Walter and sees something in him no one else sees, something he doesn’t see in himself,” Sedgwick says. “And I think that’s a big part of what the story’s about: how you don’t fall in love with someone who looks good on paper, that sometimes you fall in love with someone because your damaged pieces fit.”

Asked to describe Vickie, Sedgwick says, “Coping. She’s somebody who’s had some

pain and who is a survivor and who is someone I guess a lot of people would call damaged, but I didn't feel that way. . . Vickie's smart and intuitive but I think a lot of her energy is spent coping."

While Kassell and Bacon had done extensive research into sex offenders and pedophilia, Kassell worked with Sedgwick on creating an extensive backstory for her character. Late in the film, we learn that Vickie, too, has been the subject of sexual abuse as a child at the hands of her three brothers. Asked about playing that subtext, Sedgwick says, "Vickie's wary of everything in general, but she's also a fiercely loving and loyal person. She's incredibly loving and loyal to her brothers despite what they've done, and I find her loyalty an awe-inspiring thing."

That said, Sedgwick admits that the sadness of the characters' lives affected her quite deeply. "I try not to bring the character home, but it does infect you," says Sedgwick. "I certainly don't do it on purpose, but there was a subterranean despair that creeps in. These are wounded people. It was an uncomfortable place to be in, and it was uncomfortable seeing Kevin like that."

Kassell reports that both of her lead actors were incredibly generous in terms of offering rehearsal time, meeting with the writer-director a number of times during pre-production, both separately and together, to discuss their characters and work through the script. Kassell and Bacon were also sure to schedule rehearsal time with the remarkable young actress Hannah Pilkes, who plays Robin, a young girl Walter befriends in a neighborhood

park. Robin and Walter's scenes together, a triumph of staging and restraint, are among *The Woodsman's* most quietly disturbing.

"Obviously, for me, part of it was to make sure she felt safe—that she knows that I'm a father and a husband and an actor, that I'm not the character I'm playing," says Bacon.

"But that's always the case when you work with children. You try to make them feel safe and comfortable. We were continuing to work on that scene through the blocking and shooting of it, and Robin has very good instincts."

### **Good Cop/Bad Cop**

Among *The Woodsman's* other central characters is Sgt. Lucas, a neighborhood police office who regularly drops by Walter's apartment to goad and intimidate him as the ex-convict attempts to assimilate back into society. In a subtle and unexpected turn, Sgt. Lucas is played by the inestimable actor and hip-hop artist Mos Def.

"On paper, Sgt. Lucas was the one character I was most worried about coming across as a cliché, a ball-busting cop," admits Kassell. "But Mos's performance is one of the film's greatest gifts to me."

Producer Lee Daniels had previously worked with Mos Def on *Monster's Ball* and Kassell had recently seen him on Broadway opposite Jeffrey Wright in Suzan-Lori Parks's Pulitzer Prize-winning play, *Topdog/Underdog*. Kassell was enthusiastic about

the casting choice, but the actor and director didn't have the benefit of any rehearsal time together prior to filming.

While on paper, the tête-à-têtes between Walter and Sgt. Lucas might seem the most familiar aspect of *The Woodsman*, in the playing, Mos Def invests the character with a singular, powerfully mournful quality, one rarely seen in cinema's pantheon of police officers.

"It's a really fantastic turn by Mos," says Bacon in praise of his co-star. "We had no idea how he was going to do it, because we didn't have any rehearsal time with him, so we just came in and did it, and it was great to see his take on the character." Says Kassell: "When I felt sympathy for Lucas, I knew something special was happening."

### ***An Endemic Disease, Hiding In Plain Sight***

"When I took on the subject matter, I was determined not to take it on naively," says Kassell, who relates how she spent much of preproduction doing copious research, including interviewing victims, their families, and sex offender therapists. (Kassell was invited to sit in on several group therapy sessions, something she calls an invaluable experience.) "The film is fiction, but you try to assimilate all of these real people and stories and represent them honorably and accurately."

Most all of the characters in *The Woodsman*—Walter, Vickie, Robin—have been touched

by some form of abuse. In her research, Kassell learned that this prevalence is borne out statistically: it is estimated that one out of every four American has been sexually abused as a child, and it is usually victims themselves that perpetuate the cycle of abuse.

“I hope *The Woodsman* provokes conversation about a subject matter that’s traditionally considered taboo and off limits,” says Daniels. “I know that, personally, since working on this film, a close family member confided to me that she had been abused as a child, and I’d never known about it. And we’ve been besieged with e-mails from people about the subject, and the film hasn’t even opened yet. So, yes, I hope the film provokes some conversation.”

“This is a topic that isn’t traditionally dealt with in films,” says Bacon. “Characters like this are generally thought of as monsters, and the terrifying thing is that they’re not monsters, they’re human beings, they’re family members, they’re churchgoers, they’re camp counselors. That’s the most terrifying aspect of it. This is a deep-seated problem, and what *The Woodsman* does is deal with it in a frighteningly real way. It doesn’t Hollywood-ize it. It doesn’t offer a lot of answers, but it presents this character in a very real way.”

When Walter meets Robin, a young girl who goes birdwatching in a neighborhood park, an immediate kinship forms. The question of whether or not Walter will revert to his former behavior hangs over every frame of the film.

Asked how she invested *The Woodsman* with this hint of suspense without having the film devolve into exploitation, Kassell insists, “It was essential for me not to answer that question [whether or not Walter will act on his aberrant thoughts]. In real life there is no answer, no cure. Like an alcoholic or a drug addict, this is a disease people have to struggle with the rest of their lives. What I wanted to show was a character who is trying really hard, and ask the question if someone is willing to struggle, should we be willing to give that person a second chance?”

Asked what she hopes audiences might take away with them from *The Woodsman*, Sedgwick says, “I hope that despite the difficulty of the subject matter, that they’re moved. One of the great things about film is that it offers audiences a chance to exercise their ability for compassion, to walk in another person’s shoes for a while. And I think when a movie can do that, it’s proved its validity in the world.”

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## ***The Woodsman***

### **About the Cast**

#### **KEVIN BACON (Walter)**

Kevin Bacon is one of the foremost actors of his generation, having proven his talents in a wide range of film genres from action thrillers to romantic comedies to heavy dramas, and even the occasional musical. His talent for balancing starring roles with powerful supporting characters has allowed him to build a varied and critically

acclaimed body of work.

With the support of his parents, Bacon left his native Philadelphia to become the youngest student at Circle in the Square Theatre in New York where he studied until he made his film debut as Chip in *National Lampoon's Animal House*. This led to roles in *Diner* and *Footloose*, the latter of which propelled him to stardom.

Bacon's film credits include *Trapped*, John Hughes' *She's Having a Baby*, *Criminal Law*, *The Big Picture*, *Tremors*, *Balto*, *Hollow Man*, David Koepp's *Stir of Echoes*, the sleeper hit *My Dog Skip*, *Wild Things*, *Digging in China*, *Telling Lies in America*, *Picture Perfect*, Oliver Stone's *JFK* and Rob Reiner's *A Few Good Men*. He also starred in Barry Levinson's *Sleepers* with Brad Pitt and Robert De Niro, *Apollo 13* directed by Ron Howard, *Murder in the First* (voted Best Actor by The Broadcast Critics Association and nominated for Best Supporting Actor by The Screen Actors Guild and the London Film Critics Circle), and *The River Wild* (for which he was nominated for a Golden Globe). Bacon also appeared with Meg Ryan and Mark Ruffalo in Jane Campion's *In the Cut*, which was released in September 2003.

Bacon most recently starred in Clint Eastwood's *Mystic River*, which opened the 2003 New York Film Festival and received Academy Award® and Golden Globe nominations for Best Motion Picture. Bacon will next be seen in the MGM comedy *Beauty Shop*, in which he co-stars with Queen Latifah.

In 1996, Bacon made his directorial debut with, *Losing Chase* starring Kyra Sedgwick, Beau Bridges, and Helen Mirren. Produced for Showtime, *Losing Chase* was honored with three Golden Globe nominations, including, Best Motion Picture made for television. The film debuted on Showtime and was also screened at the Sundance Film Festival and the 1996 Toronto Film Festival.

Bacon recently directed his second film, *Loverboy* which he also produced and appears in. Based on the acclaimed novel by Victoria Redel, the film stars Kyra Sedgwick and features appearances by Sandra Bullock, Campbell Scott, Matt Dillon, Marissa Tomei, and Oliver Platt.

On Broadway, Bacon starred in a one-man show, *An Almost Holy Picture*, a Roundabout Theatre Company production written by Heather McDonald. Bacon played Samuel Gentle, a church groundskeeper and ex-priest whose daughter is born with congenital hypertrichosis lanuginosa, (lanugo) a rare condition that covers her body in hair. He takes you through his journey with faith and a person's relationship with God.

Bacon's stage work also includes such Off-Broadway productions as *Album*, *Poor Little Lambs*, and *Getting Out*. He made his Broadway debut in 1983 with Sean Penn in *Slab Boys*, and also starred in the 1986 production of Joe Orton's highly-touted play *Loot*. He also starred in Theresa Rebeck's comedy *Spike Heels* with Tony Goldwyn and Saundra Santiago.

Bacon's television credits include the American Playhouse version of Lanford Wilson's play *Lemon Sky*, a production that teamed him with his future wife. Other television credits include the *The Gift* and the cable film *Enormous Changes at the Last Minute*.

With his older, musician brother Michael, Bacon is the other half of The Bacon Brothers,

a successful band with a sound that Bacon describes as “Forosoco” (which is the title of their first album)—Folk, Rock, Soul, and Country. Already highly regarded and hugely successful on the national club circuit, they have recorded three CD’s and recently released a double-live album and concert DVD.

In January 2000, the Film Society of Lincoln Center honored Bacon for his extraordinary career in the film industry. Bacon resides with his wife and two children in New York.

### **KYRA SEDGWICK (Vickie)**

Kyra Sedgwick has conquered success on stage and screen and continues to do so. She has received two Golden Globe nominations, a Theater Award, Los Angeles Drama Desk Critics Circle Award and a Dramalogue Award.

This fall, Segwick will be seen in Showtime's *Cavedweller* opposite Aidan Quinn, for director Lisa Cholodenko (*Laurel Canyon, High Art*). Sedgwick, who developed and produced the film, plays Delia, a rock singer who returns to her Georgia hometown

hoping to regain custody of the two daughters she left with her abusive ex-husband.

Showtime is planning an October release.

She will next appear in Joseph Sargent's *Something the Lord Made* for HBO. Sedgwick co-stars along side Alan Rickman, Mos Def and Mary Stuart Masterson. She plays the role of Mary Blalock, the wife of Alfred Blalock, who performed the first open-heart surgery procedure. The film will premiere on HBO, on May 31st.

Segwick has also wrapped production on Kevin Bacon's independent drama *Loverboy*, co-starring along side Matt Dillon, Campbell Scott and Marisa Tomei. She co-produced the film with Kevin Bacon and Bigel Mailer.

In 2002, Sedgwick co-starred with Parker Posey in Rebecca Miller's independent film, *Personal Velocity*, winning the Dramatic Grand Jury Prize at the 2002 Sundance Film Festival. Other recent credits include the Emmy nominated TNT movie, *Door to Door*, opposite William H. Macy, Helen Mirren, and Kathy Baker, Fisher Stevens' film *Just A Kiss*, Showtime's *Behind the Red Door*, opposite Keifer Sutherland and Stockard Channing; *Secondhand Lions*, co-starring Michael Caine, Robert Duvall, and Haley Joel Osment.

Other films include John Turteltaub's *Phenomenon* opposite John Travolta, *What's Cooking*, which opened the 2000 Sundance Film Festival, the romantic comedy, *Labor Pains*, *Critical Care*, with James Spader and Albert Brooks, *Born on the Fourth of July*,

*Mr. and Mrs. Bridge*, *Singles*, *Lemon Sky*, and *Hearts and Souls*; HBO's *Montana*, with Stanley Tucci, Robin Tunney, and Philip Hoffman and Showtime's *Losing Chase*, in which she executive produced and starred opposite Helen Mirren. *Losing Chase* premiered at the Sundance Film Festival and received a Golden Globe and Cable Ace nomination.

Sedgwick's theater credits include the The Culture Project's New York production of *The Exonerated*, a triumphant run of Nicholas Hytner's *Twelfth Night* at Lincoln Center, *Ah Wilderness!* for which she won the Theater Award, and David Mamet's *Oleanna*, which garnered her a Los Angeles Drama Critics Circle Award and a Dramalouge Award.

### **MOS DEF (Sgt. Lucas)**

Regarded as one of hip-hop's most introspective and insightful artists, Mos Def has shaped a career that transcends music genres and artistic medium. A child of hip-hop's Golden Era, the native Brooklynite spent his childhood imbedded in the culture surrounding him as well as absorbing knowledge from across the artistic spectrum.

With the release of *Universal Magnetic* (1996) Mos became an underground favorite, leading to his legendary collaboration with Talib Kweli. The two formed Black Star whose debut album, *Mos Def and Talib Kweli Are Black Star*, would become one of the most critically acclaimed hip-hop albums. Mos followed that release with his 1999 solo debut, *Black On Both Sides*, which was certified gold and credited by critics as bringing

hip-hop back to its soapbox roots.

As with his music, Mos has demonstrated insight and passion with his acting career, appearing in Spike Lee's *Bamboozled*, MTV's *Carmen: A Hip Hopera*, 2002's critically acclaimed *Monster's Ball*, Showtime, and the 2002 romantic comedy *Brown Sugar*, for which he received an NAACP Image Award nomination. In addition Mos has served as the host, music supervisor, and co-executive producer for the HBO series *Def Poetry* and served as a writer, producer and actor on the MTV sketch comedy series *Lyricist Lounge*. Mos completed his Broadway debut in 2002 in the Tony-nominated, Pulitzer Prize-winning, *Topdog/Underdog*. Mos re-teamed with *Topdog* playwright, Suzan Lori Parks and director George Wolfe for the off-Broadway play, *Fucking A*, for which he was awarded an Obie Award.

Mos Def will soon be seen in *A Confederacy of Dunces*, starring alongside Drew Barrymore, Olympia Dukakis, Will Ferrell, and Lily Tomlin, and based on the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel by John Kennedy Toole. He has also been tapped to star as "Ford Prefect" in Spyglass Entertainment's *The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy*. The film will be directed by Garth Jennings and Nick Goldsmith, and will start filming in May 2004. Mos Def will release a new studio album in the fall of 2004.

### **BENJAMIN BRATT (Carlos)**

An actor whose striking presence on screen is balanced by a sure hand with a variety of

material, Benjamin Bratt stars this summer opposite Halle Barry in *Catwoman* for Warner Bros. Later this year, Bratt makes a cameo appearance in Mike Mills' independent *Thumbsucker*, with Vince Vaughn, Vincent D'Onofrio, Keanu Reeves and Tilda Swinton. In February 2005, Miramax Films will release *Ghost Soldiers*, in which Bratt stars for director John Dahl.

Bratt delivered a breakthrough performance in Miramax Films' *Piñero*. Directed by Leon Ichaso (*Bitter Sugar*, *Sugar Hill*), *Piñero* traced the life of artist Miguel Piñero, the controversial New York figure whose urban poetry is recognized as a precursor to rap and hip-hop. "Observing the world through hooded snake eyes in a fog of cigarette smoke, jabbing the air as he raps out poetry in a sly staccato drawl, Benjamin Bratt resurrects the spirit of the playwright, poet and actor Miguel Piñero with the kind of thrilling brio that Dustin Hoffman brought to his screen portrayal of Lenny Bruce 27 years ago," wrote Stephen Holden in *The New York Times*. "It is a career-defining performance that could catapult the 37-year-old actor...into the kinds of juicy anti-heroic parts once gobbled up by Mr. Hoffman and Robert De Niro."

Ichaso cast Bratt in *Piñero* after seeing his performance as a streetwise muralist in brother Peter Bratt's *Follow Me Home* (1997), featuring Alfre Woodard. His screen credits also include Stephen Gaghan's *Abandon*, Steven Soderbergh's *Traffic*, *Miss Congeniality* opposite Sandra Bullock, *Red Planet* with Val Kilmer and Carrie-Anne Moss, John Schlesinger's *The Next Best Thing*, Curtis Hanson's *The River Wild* with Meryl Streep and Kevin Bacon, Phillip Noyce's *Clear And Present Danger*, starring Harrison Ford and

Taylor Hackford's *Bound by Honor*.

Bratt established himself on Dick Wolf's critically acclaimed drama *Law & Order*. A series regular for four seasons, he received an Emmy Award nomination for Outstanding Supporting Actor in a Drama Series for his portrayal of Detective Reynaldo Curtis in 1999. In 1998 and 1999, the cast garnered Screen Actors Guild Award nominations for Outstanding Performance by an Ensemble in a Drama Series.

Bratt also starred in Showtime's *Woman Undone* with Randy Quaid and Mary McDonnell, *James A. Michener's Texas*, and *After the Storm*, based on the story by Ernest Hemingway.

An alumnus of the MFA program at the American Conservatory Theatre in San Francisco, Bratt recently starred with Julianna Margulies in Kate Robin's *Intrigue with Faye* at New York's MCC Theatre. He also appeared on stage at Shakespeare Festival/LA, LATC, Theatre Geo, the Utah Shakespearean Festival and more recently, The 24 Hour Plays Benefit to Aid Working Playground at the Minetta Lane Theatre in New York.

Bratt lives in New York and San Francisco with his wife—actress Talisa Soto—and daughter Sophia.

## **DAVID ALAN GRIER (Bob)**

Tony Award nominee and graduate of the Yale School of Drama, David Alan Grier successfully made the diverse jump from theatre to television to film and still alternates between all three. Perhaps best known for his work on the acclaimed Fox TV series *In Living Color*, David Alan Grier has helped create some of their most memorable characters, including Antoine Merriwether, old Calhoun Tubbs, the blues singer and fast-talking Clavell of Funky Fingers Productions.

Grier has also gained recognition for his numerous roles in such films as *Blankman*, *In The Army Now*, *Boomerang*, *Loose Cannons*, *Amazon Women On The Moon*, Spike Lee's dramatic anthology film, *Tales From The Hood*, and *Streamers* for which he won a Golden Lion Award for Best Actor at the Venice Film Festival.

A native of Detroit, Grier attended the University of Michigan and received his Bachelor of Arts in Radio, Television and Film. He received his master's degree from the Yale School of Drama and soon after, began his professional career on Broadway in *The First*, a musical about black baseball player Jackie Robinson. Grier's portrayal of Robinson earned him both critical praise and a Tony nomination in 1981. He then went on to star with Adolph Cesar and Denzel Washington in the critically-acclaimed Off-Broadway production of *A Soldier's Play*, roles which all three actors continued in Norman Jewison's highly successful film version, *A Soldier's Story*. Grier has just wrapped the TNT movie *The King of Texas*. This film is a western rendition of Shakespeare's *King Lear*, Grier Stars opposite Marcia Gay Harden, Lauren Holly and Patrick Stewart.

## **EVE (Mary-Kay)**

Passionate, powerful, fearless, and aggressive, Eve is a force to be reckoned with. A dynamic woman of unparalleled talent, persistence, and ambition Eve has become a versatile vixen who can move between music, movies, and fashion with equal success. A native of Philadelphia, Eve has come a long way. Her debut multi-platinum album, *Let There Be Eve*, was one of the most successful ever by a female emcee. With her follow-up record, *Scorpion*, Eve only solidified her place in the industry as one of the most respected rap female artists in the game.

On her most recent album, *Eve-olution*, Eve served as the primary creative force. The resulting offering portrayed her as a woman who will not, has not, and never will be ignored. “This album means so much to me because it stems straight from me,” she said. “And I want people to understand that...I’m going to represent not just me, but black women, the ghetto—man, just life.” While it is true that her solo output was an excellent indication of her fast-rising fame, *Eve-olution* solidified her as the preeminent first lady of hip-hop. *Eve-olution*’s sixteen phenomenal cuts showed why Eve will always be that girl—a highly empowered woman who exudes strength, femininity, and bravado. Eve is currently working on a new album to be released in 2004.

With a new fashion line and a film/television career, Eve has excelled to new and uncharted heights as a multi-media icon. In the blockbuster film *XXX*, Eve played action star Vin Diesel’s best friend and business partner in an underground web site. Although

it was a small role in the film, the opportunity led her to star in numerous film and television productions including the smash hit comedies *Barbershop 1 & 2* and the television drama *Third Watch*. The actress is currently starring in the highly anticipated UPN television show *Eve* and also had a cameo appearance in last summer's blockbuster *Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle*. "I'm really taking this movie thing seriously," says Eve. "I want to be respected as an actress."

Fetish, Eve's new fashion line to be distributed by urban modernizers Iceberg Jeans, will feature "higher-end" gear for women. "I want Fetish to be its own brand and hold its own weight. It's going to be quite different from the clothing and lingerie you see now," says Eve. "It'll have a very unique appeal yet affordable-exclusive in style and taste but not in value. A woman who is charismatic, classy, sassy, and serious: Eve is all about the business. Nothing more. Nothing less.

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## ***The Woodsman***

### **About the Filmmakers**

#### **NICOLE KASSELL (Director/Co-writer)**

With her debut film *The Woodsman*, Nicole Kassell has proven herself an accomplished storyteller with the aesthetic of an independent filmmaker as well as the craft of a commercial film director. *The Woodsman*, Kassell's first feature screenplay, based on the

play by Steven Fechter, won her first prize at the 2001 Slamdance Screenplay Competition.

Kassell is a graduate of NYU's Graduate Film Program. At NYU, Kassell's work was recognized with a two-year Teaching Assistant scholarship, as well as Outstanding Achievement Awards in directing, writing, editing, and producing. While at NYU, Kassell produced, and directed three short films; *Jaime*, which won the 1999 DGA Best Female Student Filmmaker Award; and *The Green Hour*, which was honored with the Warner Brothers Pictures Film Production Award as well as selected for the 2002 Sundance Film Festival. Her short films have screened at numerous film festivals worldwide and sold internationally.

Kassell recently signed on to direct *The Ride Down Mt. Morgan*, a feature adaptation of Arthur Miller's play with Michael Douglas attached to star and produce with Mark Canton. She is currently reworking the screenplay which she adapted. The film is described as “a comic satire on the state of contemporary marriage.”

Kassell currently resided in New York with her husband.

### **LEE DANIELS (Producer)**

Lee Daniels, President and CEO of Lee Daniels Entertainment, began his career in entertainment as a casting director and manager after a chance meeting with a Hollywood

producer, who recognized that Daniels had the business and artistic savvy to succeed. He initially started out as a music video casting director for Prince and continued his work with the artist as Associate Casting Director for the films *Under the Cherry Moon* and *Purple Rain*.

A self-made entrepreneur, Daniels started out in the health industry by launching his own health care agency at the tender age of twenty. Since the launch of Lee Daniels Entertainment in 1984, Daniels has managed a roster of A-list talent that included Nastassja Kinski and Academy Award® nominees and winners such as Morgan Freeman, Hilary Swank, Cuba Gooding Jr., and Marianne Jean Baptiste.

*Monster's Ball*, the first production of Lee Daniels Entertainment, was a remarkable pioneering achievement. The film marked Daniels as the first African-American sole producer of an Academy Award nominated movie and earned him a place on *Variety* Magazine's "10 Producers to Watch" list for 2002. A critical and box office success, *Monster's Ball* was nominated for two Academy Awards® in 2002—Best Original Screenplay and Best Actress, for which Halle Berry won an Oscar. To date, the picture is Lions Gate's most profitable film. The film earned more than \$31 million at the U.S. box office (more than ten times its production cost of \$2.5 million).

Daniels' current project, *Shadowboxer*, will mark his directorial debut. Written by Academy Award®-nominee Will Rokos (*Monster's Ball*), the film which is slated to begin shooting in Spring 2004 stars Helen Mirren, Cuba Gooding, Jr., Ryan Phillippe,

and comedienne Mo’Nique.

Outside of his work in film, Daniels briefly stepped into the world of politics and community development. He was recently asked by Harlem neighbor and former president Bill Clinton to produce public service announcements to inspire young people of color to vote. The effective campaign was launched in March 2004 and featured actor/musician LL Cool J and Grammy winner Alicia Keys. Daniels was honored with the President’s Award from the Philadelphia Chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and currently serves on the board of The Center for Community Change based in Washington, D.C.

A native of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Daniels was 13 years old when his father, a police officer, was killed in the line of duty, leaving his mother to raise five school-age children on the inner city streets of West Philadelphia. After leaving Lindenwood College, Daniels moved to Los Angeles and opened the first health care agency in the United States to be under contract with the renowned AIDS Project Los Angeles. The agency also held contracts with such major organizations as the American Heart & Lung Association and the American Sickle Cell Anemia Association. After one year of the agency’s launch, the initial employee roster grew from five nurses to over 500. In just two years, Daniels sold a significantly profitable business that grossed over several million dollars.

In 2002, Daniels was the recipient of the Urbanworld MECCA Visionary Award

(Minority Entertainment for the Cinematic and Creative Arts), the Blockbuster Filmmaker Award from Minorities in Business magazine, and was featured in “The Vibe 100,” *Vibe* magazine’s list of the 100 most influential black individuals in America. He is also the recipient of the Japanese Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film released in 2002.

Daniels, who is based in New York City, is the father of twins, Clara and Liam.

### **DAMON DASH (Executive Producer)**

When hip-hop music emerged from the underground, many thought it was a fleeting fad, one whose popularity would not stand the test of time. Now many years later, hip-hop culture reigns supreme, permeating society on many levels from music to fashion to films. At the center of this ongoing phenomenon is entrepreneur Damon Dash.

At 32 years old, Damon Dash has constructed an empire, a highly revered hip-hop kingdom which began with music powerhouse Roc-A-Fella Records and now incorporates the #1 urban fashion company Roc-A-Wear, a film division, a vodka company called Armandale, *America* magazine and a non-profit community outreach program called Team Roc. Dash belongs to a music industry peer group that only a handful can claim membership and has achieved a level of hard-earned respect as a role model that only few executives arrive at.

Roc-A-Fella Records began in 1995 when the Harlem-raised Dash and the now multi-

platinum rapper Jay-Z decided to start their own label after fruitlessly searching for a record deal for Jay-Z. Aggressively and independently, the Roc-A-Fella upstarts began pressing records themselves, selling them out of their cars and seeking play on mix shows. This got the notice of Priority Records who ventured with the young entrepreneurs to release Jay-Z's now classic debut *Reasonable Doubt*. The tide turned one day when Jay-Z decided to record with the then unknown rapstress Foxy Brown. Foxy Brown's label Def Jam, initially opposed to the artistic pairing of the two rappers, was soon charmed by Dash and his hungry company. Today, Def Jam and Roc-A-Fella enjoy an extremely successful 50/50 joint venture. It consistently ranks top three among its urban music competitors and has over 15 gold and platinum records under its belt with artists including Jay-Z, Kanye West, DJ Clue, Freeway, Cam'ron, Memphis Bleek, Old Dirty Bastard, the Young Gunz and Beanie Sigel. Roc-A Fella artists achieve a longevity and relevance that is rarely found in hip-hop music today.

In 1999, Damon Dash set out to wage a grand scale hip-hop arena tour dubbed the "Hard Knock Life Tour." The tour was a blistering success, a 54-city sell out which grossed approximately \$18 million dollars and single-handedly changed the hip-hop touring industry.

As innovative and powerful as the Roc-A-Fella brand has become, it is only natural that Damon Dash would bring his influence to Hollywood. In 1999, in conjunction with Dimension Films, Roc-A-Fella Films released *Backstage*, the compelling behind-the-scenes documentary tracing the path of the Hard Knock Life tour. In September of 2001, Roc-A-Fella Films released *State Property*, starring Roc-A-Fella rap artist Beanie Sigel

for Lion's Gate. In October of 2003 Dimension released *Paid in Full*, which received rave reviews, and was nominated by the Independent Spirit Awards as "Best First Feature." The film is an 80's period piece set in Harlem based on the lives of drug kingpins like Albert "Alpo" Martinez. Dash also directed and produced the independent comedy *Death of a Dynasty*, a satire about the world of hip-hop, which premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival in May of 2003.

Not surprisingly, the fashion industry has also been impacted by the magic touch of Damon Dash whose keen sense has translated into a giant clothing empire known as Roc-A-Wear. Roc-A-Wear is the #1 urban clothing producer and is growing every year. The company has a children's, women's, men's, and juniors' line. In addition to Roc-a-Wear, Damon recently launched Washhouse, which is a more conservative line consisting of sweaters and button downs.

Not satisfied with only being amazingly successful in the US, Dash recently expanded to the UK. He produced pop sensation Victoria Beckham's current number one single and launched Roc-a-Wear in select London stores.

Damon Dash, along with having his own two beautiful children, finds balance in his life with a community program called Team Roc. With this program, he and his business partners sponsor youth basketball teams, providing funds for uniforms, touring and tutoring.

**STEVEN FECHTER (Co-writer)**

Screenwriter and playwright Steven Fechter co-wrote the screen adaptation of his play *The Woodsman*, for which he and co-writer Nicole Kassell won first prize in the 2001 Slamdance Screenwriting Contest. Fechter's theatrical works have been performed at numerous venues in New York City. His play *The Last Cigarette*, published by Samuel French (2000), has been staged around the country. Fechter is the recipient of four writing fellowships from Yaddo and is a graduate of the CUNY Graduate School with a PhD in Theatre.

**XAVIER PEREZ GROBET (Director of Photography)**

Grobet received an Independent Spirit best cinematography nomination for his lyrical, haunting, work on artist/director Julian Schnabel's award winning *Before Night Falls*. His versatility can be seen in the heartwarming *Tortilla Soup* for director Maria Ripoli. Grobet has also shot *A Painted House*, an adaptation of John Grisham's novel, for *Like Water for Chocolate* director, Alfonso Arau. His most recent film is the soon-to-be-released *Cavedweller* for director Lisa Cholodenko. Grobet's work can also be seen on HBO in *Deadwood*, and the currently-shooting *Big Love* for director Rodrigo Garcia.

**LISA FRUCHTMAN (Editor)**

Oscar-winning editor Lisa Fruchtman cut her teeth in this business as an Assistant Editor on *The Godfather, Part II* and her career rocketed from there. With two Oscar nominations for groundbreaking films *The Godfather, Part III* and *Apocalypse Now*,

Fruchtman won her Oscar for *The Right Stuff* in the 1984. She has continued to edit some of the most successful films, including *My Best Friend's Wedding* with Julia Roberts, the Award-winning *Children of a Lesser God*, and the critically acclaimed HBO film *Normal*, starring Jessica Lange and Tom Wilkinson. Fruchtman resides in the California Bay area.

**BRIAN KATES (Editor)**

Brian Kates is best known for his work on HBO's *The Laramie Project* which earned him both critical acclaim and an Emmy nomination. His innovative style and "razor-sharp editing," as described by *LA Weekly*, has been showcased in several feature films, including *Henry Hill*, *Trick*, and the 2004 Sundance Film Festival selection *Tarnation* (executive produced by Gus Van Sant). Kates's latest film is *Lackawanna Blues*, directed by Broadway legend George C. Wolfe.

**FRANK L. FLEMING (Costume Designer)**

Frank L. Fleming has been in the business for over 13 years, since having started out on such Spike Lee films as *Jungle Fever* and *Malcolm X*. *The Woodsman* is his second effort with producer Lee Daniels, having been costume designer on the Oscar-winning feature *Monster's Ball*. He served as costume designer on *No Such Thing* with Sarah Polley and his most recent film is director Marc Forster's (*Monster's Ball*) *Stay*, with Ethan Hawke and Naomi Watts, which will be released by 20th Century Fox. Frank resides in New York.

**STEPHEN BEATRICE (Production Designer)**

Stephen Beatrice has worked on over a dozen features films with a history of critical acclaim. Beatrice served as Production Designer for both *Girlfight*, the 2000 Sundance Film Festival winner, and the 2002 Tribeca Film Festival Winner, *Roger Dodger*. His talents have also been featured in *Love, Liza* (starring Phillip Seymour Hoffman and Kathy Bates) and *Tape* (with Ethan Hawke and Uma Thurman). His latest project is *P.S.*, starring Oscar-nominee Laura Linney and Oscar-winner Marcia Gay Harden.

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