

## LOGLINE

Inez De La Paz (Teyana Taylor) kidnaps six-year-old Terry (Aaron Kingsley Adetola) out of the foster care system, convinced that it is one last, necessary crime on her path to redemption. Holding onto their secret and each other, mother and son set out to reclaim their home, their identity and stability in a rapidly changing New York City.

## INSIDE THE STORY

Inez De La Paz is an orphan who was shuffled through New York's foster care system and nurtured by the streets. At her worst, she's volatile, impulsive, and unpredictable. At her best, she's deeply caring, determined and fiercely loyal. At her core, she's a survivor.

The formidable character is the central presence in writer-director A.V. Rockwell's compelling feature film debut *A THOUSAND AND ONE*, which traces Inez's experiences as an inner-city woman of color struggling to navigate the responsibilities of motherhood while wrestling with the secrets of her past. Unfolding over the course of two decades, the intimate, moving drama sees Inez attempt to create a better life for herself and for six-year-old Terry. Making the impulsive decision to kidnap the boy from his foster home, Inez flees with him to Harlem, where she does whatever she can to build a safe and stable home, even as New York City rapidly changes all around them.

As both Inez and Terry mature and evolve, they are impacted in countless ways by those societal changes—their colorful neighborhood becoming virtually unrecognizable and transforming them into outsiders in the community they have for so long called home. With *A THOUSAND AND ONE*, Rockwell, who grew up in Queens, New York, sought to speak to the gentrification she had witnessed first-hand by centering the city that is so close to her heart and so much of a foundational part of her identity.

In the wake of her acclaimed 2018 short film *Feathers*, about a young Black student enduring hazing at a boys' school, Rockwell set out to write a feature that would use the evolution of the city as a powerful backdrop for Inez and Terry's heartbreaking story. "While there are a number of filmmakers known for making grand odes and love letters to the city, ultimately I set out to make a film about how New York has broken the hearts of myself and my peers."

In shaping the screenplay, she took inspiration both from her own coming of age, as well as her observations of mother and son relationships. Through Inez, she wanted to shine a light on the women of color she had known who had faced unimaginable adversity in their lives yet persevered undaunted, committed to caring for the people they love—even when their efforts aren't always seen or acknowledged. "Inez and her experiences were based on a combination of different women who have been in my life," Rockwell says. "She's also the type of heroine I wanted to see more of on-screen. I wanted to see a woman of color who lives life on her own terms, no matter what society throws at her."

And there's no question that society has thrown countless hardships at Inez. When *A THOUSAND AND ONE* opens, it's 1993 and she's incarcerated at Rikers Island Correctional Facility. Released one year later, she returns to Brooklyn, hoping to resume her job as a hairstylist, but the salon no longer has a place for her, leaving her to hustle

for clients on her own. Spying Terry on the street, she approaches the boy, who seems quiet and withdrawn, wounded by her long absence. Although Inez knows that he has been assigned to a new foster mother, she worries for his well-being—once he lands in the hospital after falling from the foster home’s window, she decides that he’ll be safest with her. Blinded by love, she kidnaps the boy and flees with him to Harlem, where she grew up, even though she has no real plan for where they might live or how she’ll support him financially.

That radical act is the beginning of a years-long odyssey that will profoundly impact both adult and child. Eventually landing her own apartment, Inez acquires falsified documents giving Terry a new identity, and in time, the authorities who had been searching for Terry simply give up, turning their attention elsewhere. “Inez is largely indifferent toward the morality of any misdeed as long as she perceives the cause as noble,” explains Rockwell. “She’s done what was necessary to survive and is prepared to do the same for Terry, no questions asked. She’s a criminal but motivated by a heart of gold.”

As she began working on the screenplay in earnest, Rockwell extensively researched the state of New York’s foster care system during the 1990s to get a sense of whether such a mishandling of Terry’s case would have been plausible. She was disappointed to learn that such a situation could indeed have happened in real life. “I also gained little kernels about foster care experiences of insight that made it into the film, like the trash bag Terry and Inez carry,” Rockwell notes. “For a foster care child constantly moving to place to place, their whole life is held in that bag.”

Rockwell also studied the spread of gentrification that began in the 1990s and, in the ensuing years, profoundly reshaped the city and its marginalized communities. “In 2018, when I started writing, gentrification was still defended, dismissed or embraced so understanding the nature of it more thoroughly affirmed my beliefs regarding its racial undertones and what’s at stake for the vulnerable communities that are targeted,” Rockwell says. “It was also important for me to gain deeper insight into the entire history of New York because I wanted to understand how this era should be defined for a city that’s always changing.”

Anchoring the film in 1994 had special significance, as that was the year Rudy Giuliani took office as mayor, promising to crack down on crime, even low-level infractions such as turnstile jumping and jaywalking. “Although marginalized communities, and characters like Inez and Terry, should have benefited from his vision and promise, they were largely neglected or targeted,” Rockwell notes.

A THOUSAND AND ONE later skips forward to 2001, the year that the city stepped up enforcement of its stop-and-frisk policy, which authorized police to search any person they deemed suspicious, a policy that directly impacts a preteen Terry. The story flashes forward again to 2005, when Mayor Michael Bloomberg’s policies triggered major socioeconomic changes to the fabric of New York by supercharging gentrification, threatening historically Black neighborhoods like Harlem.

The strength and originality of Rockwell’s vision for the drama won her no shortage of support, even in the earliest stages of the project. Sight Unseen Pictures producers Eddie Vaisman and Julie Lebedev entered into a tripartite agreement with Brad Weston

at MakeReady and Lena Waithe and Rishi Rajani at Hillman Grad to develop and produce the film. “When all three companies wanted to work with A.V., it was just organic and very easy for us to partner,” says Weston. “Sight Unseen and MakeReady decided to fund the script the second we heard the space and story that A.V. wanted to explore.”

Waithe was introduced to Rockwell through *Feathers* and found herself markedly moved the first time she read the *A THOUSAND AND ONE* screenplay. “When she came to us with this stunning script, we knew we had to help bring her vision to life,” says Waithe, who also hired the filmmaker to direct an episode of her series *Boomerang*. “I was blown away by how quiet yet loud the movie was. I felt like I knew these people. By the end, I was crying because I wanted to stay with them and see the rest of their lives play out.”

Vaisman and Lebedev felt compelled to be involved very early on. “We loved A.V.’s unique vision for telling this very raw, honest, gritty story,” says Vaisman. “Her writing felt very real and honest. She wrote *real* characters, ones who we don’t see on screen a lot. Inez specifically is complicated and layered and she pulls no punches. She is willing to do what she needs to take care of Terry, at any cost. She is also vulnerable in many ways that can be surprising at times.”

## ASSEMBLING THE CAST

With both the script and backers in place, the foremost challenge in bringing *A THOUSAND AND ONE* to the screen was finding the right performer to play mercurial Inez. The multifaceted role would be challenging for even the most experienced star, but the success of the film depended on casting someone who could believably inhabit every aspect of the character.

One name that was suggested early on was that of Teyana Taylor, the superstar R&B performer and choreographer who has rocketed to global celebrity after working with mega-selling artists including Beyoncé. Taylor choreographed the singer’s video for “Ring the Alarm” when she was just 15 years old and subsequently directed many of her own music videos, while also continuing to work with other artists. More recently, she branched into acting, appearing in such films as the 2021 comedy *Coming 2 America*.

For Rockwell, Taylor wasn’t necessarily an obvious choice to play Inez, but once the filmmaker saw her audition, the writer-director realized she was the ideal candidate. “I believed Teyana had enough range to handle the dramatic nature of the role, but equally important—and what was much harder to find—she was a stellar actress who could portray an underprivileged New York woman authentically,” Rockwell says.

Hailing from Harlem herself, Taylor says she felt an immediate and powerful connection to the character. “Inez being from New York of course spoke to me, you know?” Taylor says. “Brooklyn or The Bronx, Queens, she’s been all over, but she’s a Harlem girl. When I read the script, it was amazing. I felt the character. I felt Inez.” The actress was also touched by the central moral dilemma the film presents. “This film is about a really strong woman who has to make the wrong decision for the right reasons,” Taylor says. “She’s been through a lot but still has a heart of gold. That’s the important thing. The

intentions are so pure. She just wants to help, and she just want to look out for Terry. She wants to love and wants that love to be reciprocated.”

The film’s producers were captivated by Taylor’s thorough understanding of the character and her deep commitment to the role. “Her range is truly remarkable, and she never held back,” Lebedev says. “She was extremely committed to an honest portrayal of who this woman would be. Her depth, the richness and texture she brought were excellent.” Adds Waithe: “Teyana doesn’t do anything halfway, which is why she’s been so successful. No one else could’ve breathed life into Inez the way Teyana did.”

Searching for a young actor to play opposite Taylor as six-year-old Terry, casting director Avy Kaufman landed on Aaron Kingsley Adetola. Rockwell was impressed by how well Adetola took direction and the subtlety of his creative choices. “I thought Aaron was right because of his physical likeness to what I had in mind,” says the filmmaker. “He’s really smart and intentional when it comes to crafting his performance.” Aven Courtney (*The Last O.G.*) plays Terry at age 13, while Josiah Cross (*King Richard*) plays the character at 17.

As Terry ages, he bonds with Inez’s on-again, off-again romantic partner, Lucky, who moves in with Inez and Terry following his release from prison. Although Inez and Lucky eventually marry, their union is passionate but combative—both damaged by their rough upbringing in 1980s Harlem and families broken up amid the devastation of the drug wars, neither has any first-hand experience of positive committed relationships, and their attempts to form a family are deeply fraught. As much as Inez champions both Terry and Lucky and does everything she can to make all of their lives better, neither ever quite manage to champion her in the same way.

“Inez’s relationship with Lucky is very bittersweet,” Taylor says. “It’s like they connect, but there’s also kind of a disconnect. I feel like the same things that he loved about her in the beginning [of their relationship] are also what he uses against her. Her passion comes across to him as, ‘Oh, you’re just going to start an argument. You just want to yell and scream.’ But he really loves her.”

The role of Lucky went to Will Catlett, known for his work in television’s *Black Lightning*, *Lovecraft Country* and *Insecure*, and for such films as *The Devil You Know* and *Charm City Kings*, among other projects. “He came off as both a lover and father figure,” says Rockwell of Catlett. “Also, as Lucky, Will had the type of charisma and physical presence that Inez would submit to. Teyana, and Inez, are tough women, and if I had cast the type of actor that she could’ve pushed over, there’s no way an audience would’ve bought into the emotional pull Lucky has over her.” Adds producer Rishi Rajani: “Will captured the feeling of the ‘everyman’ striving to do the right thing while also having real flaws that made him human.”

Catlett was excited to chart the nuances of Lucky’s relationships with both Inez and Terry over the course of the film. “The movie feels like it’s in three parts: we have young Terry, we have 13-year-old Terry, and then we have 17-year-old Terry,” Catlett says. “Lucky goes through that transition with him, even though Lucky’s going through his own thing. He’s the one shining light, besides Inez, in Terry’s life. Me having a great father in my life, I thought I could bring some of that essence to the role.”

## ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

A THOUSAND AND ONE was shot in approximately six weeks during the summer of 2021, primarily in practical locations in Harlem, though the production also visited Brooklyn, lower Manhattan and Staten Island. Filmmaker Rockwell partnered with an innovative behind-the-scenes team that was eager to help her realize her vision: Eric Yue served as the film's cinematographer; Sharon Lomofsky was the production designer and Melissa Vargas was the costume designer.

Although shooting on location was an enormously challenging endeavor, Rockwell felt it was necessary to give the drama the realism and the sense of urgency necessary to properly tell the story. From her vantage point as a native New Yorker, Rockwell wanted to authentically recreate the metropolis as it evolves from 1994 to 2001 to 2005.

“We created a look that demonstrated the arc of how the city changes physically and spiritually over time,” Rockwell says. “In 1994, it was still a vibrant city with vitality, unique character and architecture that nodded to its history. As the story progresses and the city cleans up its look, a lot of the grittiness is lost but also the vibrance—the city's identity is redefined altogether.”

Each period was differentiated through various lenses, filtration, color and F-stop. “For example, the '90s scenes were photographed with older vintage lenses wide open and a filter that adds a bit of glow, creating a warm, gauzy, 'dirty' image,” explains Yue, noting that, unlike the rest of the film, those sequences were largely shot using a handheld camera. “The 2000s section was photographed with modern lenses without filtration at a deeper stop, which produces a sharper and crisper image. We also developed different color profiles for each time period, such as a warmer look for the summertime in the '90s, and a cooler look for the 2000s.”

As they developed the film's visual language, Rockwell and Yue drew inspiration from the book *Once in Harlem* by Japanese street photographer Katsu Naito, who moved to the enclave in the 1980s. “He documented the landscape of the neighborhood and the various people he encountered through the years,” explains Yue. “It became a North Star for us in terms of the spirit of the film rather than a literal reference since the images were in black and white.”

*Once in Harlem* was a touchstone for Lomofsky also, as were such books as *Store Front* by James T. & Karla L. Murray, *Laundromat* by Snorri Bros and *Harlem: The Unmaking of a Ghetto* by Camilo Jose Vergara, among other titles. The production designer additionally looked to a wide array of films and television series for inspiration—everything from *Paris Is Burning*, *Gloria* and *KIDS* to *New Jack City*, *Die Hard with a Vengeance* and the HBO documentary *Lock Up: The Prisoners of Rikers Island*.

For Lomofsky, one of the key challenges was designing the two-bedroom apartment in Harlem that Inez rents to make a home for herself and Terry, which grows to include Lucky. The production utilized an actual ground floor apartment in Harlem, though in the film, the family resides on the 10<sup>th</sup> floor. “It started out bare bones, unpainted and run

down,” Lomofsky says. “As Inez’s interior and exterior life improved, the apartment did, too. She painted and bought the nicest furniture that she could afford.”

The designer worked within a controlled palette with an eye always toward creating a believable and authentic world on screen. Staying within the framework she, Rockwell and Yue had established, Lomofsky ensured the beginning of the film would feel grittier and would exude a certain warmth, color and charm. “We wanted texture in the design and wardrobe,” she says, noting that the aesthetic slowly shifts as the story unfolds. “In the 2000s, our palette changed to a cold steel and glass world. The 2000s, when gentrification took over, were depicted as sharper and cooler.”

That approach extended to the way all the scenes were lit as well, including those that took place inside the apartment. “[A.V.] did not want to ever use lamps or artificial lighting sources, which means that everything had to feel as if it were coming from the window,” says Yue, though for certain scenes taking place in the 2000s, the cinematographer used mirror boards to emulate the way the sunlight hits skyscrapers back onto the streets. “I wanted to subtly suggest the new presence of glass, a symbolic representation of gentrification—a ubiquitous material for high-rise construction,” he says.

Similarly, costume designer Vargas approached creating looks for the characters that would feel grounded and authentic to the period; influential street photographers like Sue Kwon and Jamel Shabazz were helpful in creating a timeline of style for the various locations in the story. “Timelines are incredibly important when approaching any period piece,” Vargas says. “We researched the current events happening at the time in New York City, how certain areas were changing, what music was being released and how that influenced style.”

For Inez’s early costumes, Vargas created looks that would reflect her uncompromising nature. “When we first meet Inez, we understand that she is a bold person, making bold choices about her life and Terry’s life,” Vargas says. “The same is true for her wardrobe—bold colors, choices made with a fearless attitude.” As time passes, however, and Inez relinquishes her dreams of focusing on hairstyling, taking a cleaning job at Jamaica Hospital to help support herself and Terry, her clothing becomes more sedate. “The boldness we see in the beginning fades,” Vargas notes.

For Terry, she created costumes that would initially point to Inez as the key influence for his wardrobe, though that changes as he enters his teenage years. “When he gets older, Terry’s style is influenced by his peers,” Vargas says.

Although some inevitable distance creeps between them as Terry grows up, the bond between Inez and him is undeniable, if unconventional, and proves unbreakable even as their story moves toward its truly surprising conclusion. The powerful drama unquestionably announces Rockwell as a filmmaker to watch. “She shines a light on a moment and an experience that is real and heartbreaking,” says producer Weston. “There is a freshness and wonderment with the filmmaking process to A.V. that frees her to explore that narrative and characters in a really unique way. Her voice is her special. I’m excited to see where she goes and takes it.”

For audiences watching *A THOUSAND AND ONE*, Rockwell says she hopes the film might provide some level of healing for mothers and sons who struggle in their relationship. On a personal note, the young writer-director notes that the making of the film allowed her to express some of her ambivalence toward the city. Rockwell says she loves New York wholeheartedly at the same time she recognizes that the systems in place and the people in power during her youth failed children like Terry—and the filmmaker herself. “I appreciate this opportunity I had to address how marginalized communities were treated during this era,” she says.

Yet in *Inez*, she also took the opportunity to celebrate the strength and resilience of women too seldom represented on screen with a moving, thought-provoking ode to the lengths people will go to for love, and to right the wrongs of the past. Notes Rockwell: “I’m grateful for this chance I had to honor the heroic nature of the Black women who, like *Inez*, were able to raise us and persevere despite how much they are overlooked.”

Concludes producers Vaisman and Lebedev: “Fundamentally, this film is about a woman who will do anything she can to be a mother and to see her and her child succeed—on her terms. It’s a movie that we hope can resonate with audiences, especially with women and women of color, so many of whom have had to make choices and sacrifices not unlike *Inez*. For those who have found themselves pushed out of a gentrifying city, victims of police brutality, unduly punished by biased legislation, surviving in a system that gives them no support, we hope this can be a moment to see those stories reflected on screen.”

## ABOUT THE CAST

**TEYANA TAYLOR (*Inez*)** is an R&B superstar entertainer known for her work as a singer, songwriter, producer, director, dancer/choreographer, actor, fitness guru, model and mother. The Harlem native recently starred in Paramount Pictures *Coming 2 America*, the sequel to the original 1988 romantic comedy alongside Eddie Murphy, Arsenio Hall, Kiki Layne, James Earl Jones and more. Additionally, she can be seen starring alongside her husband in E!’s unscripted series *We Got Love Teyana and Iman*, and her voice can be heard on Netflix’s animated event series *EnterGalactic*. Also coming up for Taylor is the indie heist thriller *The Smack*, where she stars opposite Alan Arkin, Kathy Bates, Casey Affleck, Isabel May, Marisa Tomei and Yul Vázquez.

Taylor began her career in the music industry, signing her first deal with Pharrell, and choreographing videos for artists including Beyoncé and Jay-Z. In 2014, Taylor became the first woman signed to Kanye West’s G.O.O.D. Music imprint. She dropped her debut album *VII*, with tracks like gold-selling “Maybe” (featuring Yo Gotti and Pusha T) and the sultry “Just Different” shaping her musical persona. The critically acclaimed album debuted at No. 1 on the *Billboard* Top R&B/Hip-Hop Albums chart in 2014, cementing her position in today’s modern R&B field. The following year, Taylor starred in West’s “Fade” video; she scored her first MTV Moonman for Best Choreography at the 2017 MTV Video Music Awards.

Taylor released her second album *K.T.S.E.* in June 2018, and through her all-female production company The Aunties, Taylor directed her videos for “WTP,” the RIAA

platinum-certified single “Gonna Love Me,” (whose remix features Wu-Tang Clan’s Ghostface Killah, Method Man and Raekwon), and gold-selling single “Issues/Hold On.” Taylor also has directed videos for her peers like T.I. (“You”), Monica (“Commitment”) and Lil Duval (“Pull Up” featuring Ty Dolla \$ign).

Taylor’s critically acclaimed, third studio album, *The Album*, followed in June of 2020, debuting at #1 on the Billboard R&B charts and #8 on the Billboard Top 200. Spanning 23 songs, *The Album* features artists such as Missy Elliot, Future, Erykah Badu, Ms.Lauryn Hill, Davido, Elton John and more; Taylor directed every video in conjunction with the project. The album features singles like gold-selling “Morning” with Kehlani and gold-selling “How You Want It?” with King Combs. Because of her continuous grind, Taylor won the 2020 BET Award for Director of the Year, beating out industry heavyweights such as Benny Boom and Dave Meyers.

Her other film credits include, *The Trap*, *The After Party*, *Honey: Rise Up and Dance*, *Brotherly Love*, *The Love Section*, *Gang of Roses II: Next Generation*, *Madea’s Big Happy Family* and *Stomp the yard 2: Homecoming*. She can be seen starring in the music video for Doja Cat’s “Woman,” and she recently partnered with Bumble to create a series centered on the Black dating experience called *Luv2SeeIt*. She hosts and directs the show, where she interviews celebrities and everyday people to amplify what love in the Black community looks like.

**JOSIAH CROSS (17-year-old Terry)** is a talented young actor currently shooting a lead role in the Apple TV+ series *Lady in the Lake* opposite Natalie Portman and directed by Alma Har’el (*Honey Boy*). In addition to A THOUSAND AND ONE, he will be seen as Richard Macon in the Apple TV+ Limited Series *Masters of the Air* opposite Austin Butler, which was directed by Dee Rees (*Mudbound*), Timothy Van Patten and Cary Fukunaga. He starred opposite Will Smith in the Oscar®-winning film *King Richard*. He was also cast as the lead role of Khalid in Sam Esmail’s ABC pilot *Acts of Crime*.

**WILL CATLETT (Lucky)** recently wrapped back-to-back films as a lead role on A.V Rockwell’s A THOUSAND AND ONE and Charles Murray’s *The Devil You Know*. He can be seen in the Netflix comedy series *True Story* with Kevin Hart and Wesley Snipes. He played a key role in the HBO Max feature *Charm City Kings*, directed by Angel Manuel Soto, recurs on CW’s *Black Lightning* and made a memorable guest appearance in HBO’s *Lovecraft Country*.

Previously, Catlett appeared as the lead role in OWN’s *Love Is...* and starred in Issa Rae’s YouTube series *First*, HBO’s *Insecure* and *Brothers in Atlanta*. Other feature credits include *Force of Nature* alongside Mel Gibson, Kate Bosworth and Emile Hirsch. Behind the camera, he was in the writer’s room for *Love Is...* and is also a director and producer of such projects as *Giants* for Issa Rae Presents, the feature film *Griffin*, the short film *Stages* and the TV series *Garden Hills*.

**AARON KINGSLEY ADETOLA (6-year-old Terry)** is a young actor whose credits include *Rise*, *Superblocked* and *The Tramps New World*.

**AVEN COURTNEY (13-year-old Terry)** is a young budding actor, dancer, and model who appears opposite Teyana Taylor and Will Catlett in *A THOUSAND AND ONE*. Born and raised in Northern Virginia, Courtney began his career in dance, and he is trained in all styles of hip hop—he has performed at various events and underground battles at times being the youngest in the room. He has performed alongside such artists as Busy Bee, Nas, Aloe Blac, Dave East, Luim Manual and Blanco Brown. He has been featured in ad campaigns for Macy’s, Finish Line and Jordan Brand. He has also hosted several “How To” videos for Nickelodeon’s Go Noodle.

Courtney slowly transitioned to acting, making his debut as Tye in the film *Strive*. He has continued to make huge leaps working with directors such as Boaz Yakin in *Aviva*, Matt Sohn and Robert Townsend Jr in his first television appearance on *The Last OG* as young Tre (Tracey Morgan) in season 3 episode 4 and 5.

#### **ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS**

**A.V. ROCKWELL (Writer, director, executive producer)** is an award-winning screenwriter and director. Named as one of *Filmmaker Magazine’s* “25 New Faces of Independent Film,” her distinctive voice has been celebrated for slyly addressing issues of race, identity and systemic oppression. Rockwell’s debut feature film, *A THOUSAND AND ONE*, was written and directed for Focus Features. The film stars Teyana Taylor and was produced by Sight Unseen, MakeReady and Hillman Grad. She has directed the Clio award-winning short film *The Gospel* for Alicia Keys and numerous high-end commercials, including Bumble’s Super Bowl LIII spot featuring Serena Williams. Rockwell’s short film *Feathers* was acquired by Searchlight Pictures ahead of its world premiere at the 2018 Toronto International Film Festival. Both *Feathers* and her shorts series *Open City Mixtape* are streaming on the Criterion Collection. Rockwell studied filmmaking at NYU Tisch School of the Arts and has received fellowships from Tribeca Film Institute, the Sundance Institute and the John S. Guggenheim Foundation.

**EDDIE VAISMAN, p.g.a. (Producer)** is a producer and co-founder of Sight Unseen Pictures, an independent production and financing company with offices in L.A. and New York. Vaisman recently produced the debut film of rising star A.V. Rockwell, *A THOUSAND AND ONE*, for Focus Features, which is headed to the 2023 Sundance Film Festival. Also at the festival is the multi-part documentary film series, *Willie Nelson and Family*, which Lebedev executive produced alongside her Sight Unseen partners, Eddie Vaisman and Oren Moverman.

In 2020, the highly acclaimed HBO release of Cory Finley’s *Bad Education* starring Hugh Jackman and Allison Janney garnered Vaisman an Emmy Award® for Outstanding Television Movie. His prior credits include the 2020 genre bending horror satire *Bad Hair* from writer director Justin Simien; Kent Jones’ Independent Spirit Award nominee *Diane*; the Sundance hit and Special Jury Prize-winning *Monsters and Men*, Reinaldo Marcus Green’s directorial debut; and the Berlin Film Festival competition title *The Dinner*, from writer-director Oren Moverman.

Other producing credits include Lake Bell's *In a World...*, Michael Polish's *Big Sur* and Rob Zombie's *31*. Vaisman started his career in 2004 at Kathryn Bigelow's Paramount-based production company First Light and was Director of Development at Sony-based Avenue Pictures where, among other projects he worked on *Closer* and *Angels in America*. Following, Vaisman was Head of Production at 3311 Productions and the U.S. consultant for London-based sales and finance company Protagonist Pictures.

Upcoming for Sight Unseen, Vaisman will produce the thriller *Harmonia* with Academy Award®-winner Guy Nattiv, along with several novel adaptations, including Kiley Reid's *Such A Fun Age*, Ayad Akthar's *Homeland Elegies* and *Nobody Will Tell You This But Me* with Elizabeth Chomko set to direct. Along with 21 Laps, Vaisman and Sight Unseen recently announced *Shared Wisdom*, the true story of a high school Houston soccer team comprised entirely of immigrants and refugees and their coach, a former combat soldier in Iraq.

**JULIE LEBEDEV, p.g.a. (Producer)** is a producer and co-founder of Sight Unseen Pictures, an independent production and financing company with offices in L.A. and New York. Lebedev recently produced the debut film of rising star A.V. Rockwell, *A THOUSAND AND ONE*, for Focus Features, which is headed to the 2023 Sundance Film Festival. Also at the festival is the multi-part documentary film series, *Willie Nelson and Family*, which Lebedev executive produced alongside her Sight Unseen partners, Eddie Vaisman and Oren Moverman.

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Prior to 2017, Lebedev was the CEO and Founder of Code Red Productions, under which she launched first collaboration with Simien, the Independent Spirit Award winner *Dear White People* that led to the subsequent four season Netflix series for which Lebedev was an executive producer. Under the Code Red banner Lebedev executive produced *The Prophet*, inspired by Kahlil Gibran's beloved classic book and the social documentary *I Am Thalente*. Other credits include *The Good Doctor*, starring Orlando Bloom, Riley Keough and Taraji P. Henson, *State Like Sleep*, starring Katherine Waterston and Michael Shannon, and the UK-based thriller, *Honour*, starring Paddy Considine.

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**LENA WAITHE (Producer)** is an Emmy®-winning writer, producer, actor, and founder who continues to lead the cultural revolution in Hollywood with creativity, diversity and charisma. Waithe expertly taps into emerging societal trends with a sharp wit, speaking to myriad experiences from her unique perspective, while challenging audiences to think outside of conventional norms.

With her impressive eye for discovering and spotlighting underrepresented voices, Waithe navigates the intersection of business and entertainment in conjunction with her own media empire, Hillman Grad. The company aims to empower underrepresented artists and amplify the stories of diverse, historically marginalized communities across all industries by giving these storytellers the platform and opportunity to access the industry, while allowing them to tell their stories. The comprehensive slate includes projects at Warner Bros, Netflix, BET, Disney, Amazon, Universal, Focus, HBO, HBO Max and Showtime.

Most recently, Waithe joined the producing team for Broadway's *Ain't No Mo,* starring Jordan E. Cooper, which opened at the Belasco Theatre in New York City on December 1, 2022. Waithe's entertainment company, Hillman Grad, signed an exclusive overall deal with Warner Bros. Television Group. Through their partnership, Waithe and Hillman Grad Chief Executive Officer, Rishi Rajani, will produce new television programming for all platforms, including WarnerMedia's HBO Max, external streaming services, cable and the five broadcast networks.

Waithe and Hillman Grad are currently working on producing a Sammy Davis Jr. biopic. Hillman Grad also teamed up with Focus Features, Sight Unseen and Makeready on the feature directorial debut of A.V. Rockwell's *A THOUSAND AND ONE* which is set to release on March 31, 2023. Additionally, Hillman Grad Productions upcoming projects include the Disney Studios high school basketball movie *Chang Can Dunk* for Disney+; and *Being Mary: The Mary Tyler Moore Documentary*, directed by James Adolphus and set to premiere in 2023.

Waithe's previous first-look deal was with Showtime to produce projects such as the critically acclaimed series *The Chi*, which Waithe executive produces. The Showtime drama series is a relevant, timely and distinctive coming-of-age story that follows six interrelated characters in Chicago's South Side. The show has received a Peabody Award nomination, and Waithe received two NAACP Image Award nominations.

Waithe also wrote and executive produced her semi-autobiographical series, *Twenties*, for BET. The show has been praised for being the first primetime series starring a masculine presenting Queer woman of color in a lead role. Because of this, *Twenties* was selected as a finalist for MIPCOM's Diversity TV Excellence Awards in the category of Excellence Award for Representation of Race and Ethnicity – Scripted and nominated for a 2021 GLAAD Media Award in the category of Outstanding Comedy Series. The nomination was BET's first GLAAD nomination in the television space, further cementing its impact on the industry as an example of overdue intersectionality between BIPOC and the LGBTQ+ community.

For the second season, both Waithe and Rajani executive produced *Twenties The After Show*, a half-hour show that explored key themes in each week's episode of *Twenties*

and highlighted an esteemed roster of Black LGBTQ+ voices, giving them the platform to share their personal experiences with the world.

Most recently, Hillman Grad produced the film *Beauty* for Netflix, directed by Andrew Dosunmu and written by Waithe, which premiered at the 2022 Tribeca Film Festival. Waithe's Hillman Grad also produced Radha Blank's groundbreaking film, *The Forty-Year-Old Version*, which blends real life and fiction to follow its protagonist, a down-on-her-luck New York playwright, who decides to reinvent herself and salvage her artistic voice by becoming a rapper at age 40. The film premiered to rave reviews at the Sundance 2020 Film Festival, winning the festival's Directing Award: U.S. Dramatic, and was quickly purchased by Netflix for distribution.

Hillman Grad goes above and beyond to provide a platform and fellowship for diverse voices on the rise through the Hillman Grad Mentorship Lab, which is currently in its second year of programming. The lab offers opportunities for marginalized storytellers to connect, grow and accelerate their careers in television and film through personalized instruction from industry professionals in the fields of television writing, screen acting and executive development.

While Hillman Grad has already mentored roughly 600 actors, 120 writers/directors and 30 producers, the 2021 Class was the first group to go through the official Hillman Grad Mentorship Lab. Hillman Grad also has an ongoing partnership with Indeed and 271 Films for the Rising Voices program, which is entering its third year. The initiative aims to discover, invest in and share stories created by BIPOC filmmakers & storytellers by awarding 10 creatives up to \$100K to make a short film that will premiere at the 2023 Tribeca Festival in New York.

The company has expanded to include Hillman Grad Records, a label in partnership with Def Jam Recordings; a multi-project development deal with Audible, under which the first project release was *Kym*, an original, scripted comedy series inspired by the life of Emmy-nominated actress/comedian Kym Whitley; and a partnership with independent book publishing company Zando. As one of Zando's first founding publishing partners, Hillman Grad will acquire and publish four to six books over a three-year period, including memoirs, young adult titles and literary fiction.

On the acting front, Waithe can be seen in the critically acclaimed third season of *Master of None: Moments in Love*, which Waithe co-wrote, executive produced and stars in, on Netflix. Her role was originally intended for a straight, Caucasian female, yet Waithe has made Denise's experience as a queer Black woman uniquely her own. In the second season, Waithe co-wrote the "Thanksgiving" episode, for which she received an Emmy Award® in the category of Outstanding Writing for a Comedy Series, making her the first Black woman to ever do so, and a NAACP Image Award nomination.

She also appeared in the third season of HBO's *Westworld* and in Justin Simien's horror satire *Bad Hair*, which premiered to rave reviews at the 2020 Sundance Film Festival and was quickly purchased by Hulu for distribution. Previous acting credits include Steven Spielberg's *Ready Player One*, Disney's *Onward*, Showtime's *The Chi*, Netflix's *#blackAF* and their animated series *Big Mouth*, Quibi's *You Ain't Got These*, NBC's *This Is Us* and many more.

Waithe made her feature film screenwriting debut with Universal's *Queen & Slim*, directed by Melina Matsoukas and starring Academy Award® nominee Daniel Kaluuya and Jodie Turner. The film received numerous accolades including two AAFCA awards, seven NAACP Image Awards nominations, one award at the annual National Board of Review Gala and Best Picture at the BET AWARDS.

For her numerous television successes, Waithe was named *The Hollywood Reporter's* 2020 TV Producer of the Year, making her the youngest to receive the honor. In 2019, she was honored with the Creative Impact in Producing Award at the Palm Springs Film Festival. Waithe was also selected by the American Black Film Festival Honors to receive the Industry Renaissance Award, which recognizes content creators whose exemplary work in film and television contributes to changing perceptions of people of color in the entertainment industry.

Waithe is an advocate for queer representation throughout the industry and has been honored with several accolades such as The New York City LGBT Community Center's Trailblazer Award, a GLAAD Media Award, the MTV Awards Trailblazer Award, named *OUT* Magazine's Artist of the Year and featured on the cover of the *OUT* 100 annual issue, and featured in numerous LGBTQ impact lists and Pride issues across publications such as *The Hollywood Reporter*, *Fast Company*, *Variety* and more.

Waithe grew up in Chicago and currently resides in Los Angeles.

**RISHI RAJANI (Producer)** is the CEO for Hillman Grad, the full-service media and production company founded by actor, producer and Emmy Award®-winning writer Lena Waithe. In his role, Rajani oversees all divisions across Hillman Grad, guiding the company's strategic and creative direction, while developing new business partnerships.

Since joining the company in 2018 as president of film and television, Rajani has played a key role in furthering Hillman Grad's mission to empower underrepresented artists and amplify the stories of diverse, historically marginalized communities across all industries.

Rajani works strategically to produce award-winning content and expand Hillman Grad's burgeoning business. He has secured strategic partnership deals with the likes of Warner Bros. Television Group, a joint venture partnership with Def Jam Recordings to launch Hillman Grad Records, a multi-project development deal with Audible to launch the company's podcast division and Zando Projects to create Hillman Grad books with additional projects in the works for branded content, fashion, cannabis and kids, to name a few. Moreover, Rajani also originated the company's Rising Voices director fellowship with Indeed, serves as an Executive Mentor for the Hillman Grad Mentorship lab and launched a South Asian mentorship program under "The Salon."

Under the Hillman Grad production banner, Rajani executive produced the series *The Chi*, *Twenties* and *Boomerang*, as well as the Sundance award-winning film, *The Forty-Year-Old Version*. His upcoming feature film projects include *A THOUSAND AND ONE* written and directed by A.V. Rockwell, starring singer-songwriter Teyana Taylor for Focus Features; Disney+'s original, live-action *Chang Can Dunk*, written and directed by

Jingyi Shao; *Being Mary: The Mary Tyler Moore Documentary*, the first authorized biography of the iconic actor and producer; and the Verzuz documentary, *Gifted & Black* for Amazon Prime, both of which are directed by James Adolphus.

Since its inception in 2015, and under Rajani's leadership, Hillman Grad has grown to include six divisions and 20 employees, rising to become one of the most groundbreaking companies in entertainment.

Born in London, and raised in upstate New York and Portland, Ore., Rajani graduated from New York University before rising through the ranks as a film and television development executive at 20th Century Fox, UTA, Paradigm and Studio 8.

**BRAD WESTON (Producer)**, founder and CEO of MAKERREADY, has spent more than 30 impressive years in the entertainment business and has presided over both major and independent studios. In May 2017, Weston founded and launched MAKERREADY, an independent studio that develops, finances and produces talent-driven projects, including original feature films, domestic and international premium television, premium short form digital and branded content.

MAKERREADY recently released *Not Okay* for Searchlight Pictures and Hulu, starring Zoey Deutch and Dylan O'Brien, directed by Quinn Shephard. The company has three films awaiting release: *A THOUSAND AND ONE*, the feature debut of A.V. Rockwell with Focus Features distributing and *Sight Unseen* and Hillman Grad partnering on March 31st; *Chang Can Dunk* for Disney+ with Jingyi Shao directing on March 15; and *Book Club 2* for Endeavor Content and Focus Features on May 12. In 2018, the company released the film *Queen & Slim*, written by Emmy Award®-winner Lena Waithe (*Master of None*), directed by Grammy® winning Melina Matsoukas (Beyonce's "Formation") and starring Academy Award® winner Daniel Kaluuya (*Judas and The Black Messiah*) and Jodie Turner-Smith, which debuted to critical acclaim and box office success.

MAKERREADY has a financing deal with Fifth Season (formerly Endeavor Content) spanning feature films, television and unscripted content. The company is in prep on *Killer Heat*, a feature adaptation of the Jo Nesbø short story *The Jealousy Man* for Amazon with Philippe Lacote directing and Roberto Bentivegna writing; and *Mad*, a feature adaptation of *Mad, Bad, and Dangerous to Know* by Chloe Esposito starring Dakota Johnson and to be directed by Iain MacDonald. Other upcoming projects include a limited series adaptation of John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* to be written and directed by Academy Award®-nominee Ramin Bahrani; an English-language remake of the Academy Award®-winning film, *Another Round*; and an adaptation of the artistic short film, *Sad Day*, with singer-songwriter FKA Twigs and Hiro Murai for FX.

Prior to forming MAKERREADY, Weston served as president and CEO at New Regency, beginning in 2011, where he ushered in an auteur and creative-focused era. Under his purview, the company received a remarkable 34 Academy Award® nominations and 12 wins. Films include Alejandro González Iñárritu's Academy Award®-nominated Best Picture *The Revenant* and Adam McKay's Academy Award®-nominated Best Picture *The Big Short*, the back-to-back Academy Award®-winning Best Pictures *Birdman* and *12 Years a Slave*, David Fincher's *Gone Girl* and Darren Aronofsky's biblical epic *Noah*.

Weston began his career in marketing at Lucasfilm and then went on to produce six independent films. In 2000, he was named president of Dimension Films where he closely oversaw and executive produced the hugely successful *Spy Kids* trilogy, *Scary Movie 2* and *Scary Movie 3*, *The Others*, *Bad Santa* and Robert Rodriguez's *Sin City*.

In 2005, Weston joined Paramount Pictures as president of production and was responsible for such films as *Star Trek*, *Cloverfield*, *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, *World Trade Center*, *GI Joe*, *The Fighter* and *Rango*. As a result of working closely together on the mutual successes of their films, Weston was able to develop and maintain relationships with some of the most sought-after filmmakers in the industry including JJ Abrams, David Fincher, Gore Verbinski, and David O. Russell, among many others.

**ERIC K. YUE (Cinematography)** is an artist and filmmaker born and raised in New York City. He began his career directing music videos with emerging musicians such as Kelela, Okaykaya, Ratking and was named by *Vice Magazine* one of the Five Directors Shaping the Future of Music Videos.

As a cinematographer he has shot three feature films, including *The Giant*, directed by David Raboy, which had its world premiere at Toronto International Film Festival in 2019. His second feature, *A THOUSAND AND ONE*, will have its world premiere at the 2023 Sundance Film Festival and will be distributed by Focus Features. He recently completed A24's *I Saw the TV Glow*, directed by Jane Schoenbrun, which is currently in post-production. His work has been featured in film festivals such as Sundance, Toronto, Rotterdam, Locarno and New York Film Festival. He has also worked across disciplines with artists such as Josh Kline, Ian Cheng, Oneohtrix Point Never, and Ivo van Hove on various moving image projects.

He received his BFA in filmmaking from NYU Tisch School of the Arts and MFA in Fine Art at University of Pennsylvania.

**SABINE HOFFMAN, A.C.E. (Editor)** began her journey as a film editor in Berlin, studying philosophy, art and film history. In the United States, she has edited award-winning feature films for more than 20 years, including Rebecca Miller's films *Personal Velocity*, starring Kyra Sedgwick and Fairuza Balk; *The Ballad of Jack and Rose*, starring Daniel Day Lewis; *The Private Lives of Pippa Lee*, starring Robin Wright and Keanu Reeves; *Maggie's Plan*, starring Julianne Moore, Greta Gerwig and Ethan Hawke; and the upcoming *She Came to Me*, starring Anne Hathaway, Peter Dinklage and Marisa Tomei. She edited Kyra Sedgwick's directorial debut *Story of a Girl*, starring Kevin Bacon; Richard LaGravenese's musical *The Last Five Years*, starring Anna Kendrick; *Elvis and Nixon*, starring Michael Shannon and Kevin Spacey; Jesse Peretz's *Juliet Naked*, starring Rose Byrne and Ethan Hawke; Julie Taymor's *The Glorias*, starring Julianne Moore and Alicia Vikander; and Rebecca Hall's *Passing*, starring Tessa Thompson and Ruth Negga. She worked with Roger Ross Williams on *Cassandra*, starring Gael Garcia Bernal, and is currently editing *Inappropriate Behavior*, starring Rose Byrne, Bobby Cannavale and Robert DeNiro, for Tony Goldwyn. Hoffman also has

edited numerous documentary films including *The Twelve Disciples of Nelson Mandela*, Laura Poitras's *Terror Contagion*, Academy Award®-nominated *Ferry Tales* and is a co-producer on Emmy®-nominated *Coded Bias*. Hoffman is an adjunct professor at Columbia University and a member of AMPAS.

**KRISTAN SPRAGUE (Editor)** is an award-nominated editor and native New Yorker. Born on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, he now lives in the Bronx. Sprague cut Daniel Kaluuya's Oscar®-winning performance in *Judas and the Black Messiah* and was nominated for an Independent Spirit Award for Best Editing in 2014. His work on such films as *I Don't Live Today*, *Italian Studies*, *The Salt in Our Waters* and *When I Get Home* has won numerous awards and played at festivals including Sundance and Tribeca.

**SHARON LOMOFSKY (Production Design)** gained international recognition for her production design work on the Oscar®-nominated feature film *Before the Rain*, which also won the Golden Lion at the 1994 Venice Film Festival. Born in South Africa, Lomofsky went on to design critically acclaimed features including *Manny & Lo*, *Claire Dolan*, *Piñero*, *A Love Song for Bobby Long*, *The King*, *Stephanie Daley*, *El Cantante* and Chris Rock's *I Think I Love my Wife*. She also served as the production designer for the hit cheerleading comedy *Bring It On*; director James Marsh's Oscar®-winning documentary *Man on Wire*; Vera Farmiga's critically acclaimed directorial debut *Higher Ground*; and the quirky Sundance favorite *Robot & Frank*.

More recently, she was the production designer for both *The Purge: Election Year* and *The First Purge*, as well as the television series *The Purge*. Her television credits also include NBC's *Lincoln Rhymes* and Darren Starr's *Younger*. Her latest live-action short film, *The Letter Room*, was a 2021 Academy Award® nominee.

**MELISSA VARGAS (Costume Design)** is a Colombian costume designer based in New York. She got her start styling award-winning music videos for Bob Dylan and Danny Brown, then expanded to commercials, films and television. Her transition into film began in 2014 with Ben Younger's *Bleed for This* and *Nerve* directed by Rel Shulman and Henry Joost. Since then, she has designed multiple period films and several series for NBC and Facebook Watch. Recently, she designed the costumes for *Wu Tang: An American Saga* Season 2 and 3.

**GARY GUNN (Music)** is an acclaimed composer who has worked on countless award-winning projects across film, TV, multimedia art and interactive experiences. He has collaborated in the creation of immersive, cutting-edge installations that span several continents and has exhibited at noted sites such as the Palais de Tokyo, The Smithsonian Institution, Moogfest, SXSW, The 14th Factory and TED. He is the composer of the Peabody Award winning TV series *David Makes Man* and SXSW Grand Jury Award winning documentary *Master of Light*, for which he received a 2022 IDA Documentary Award nomination for Best Music Score.

His singular artistic perspective has garnered attention from leading luminaries, including being selected for Oprah's *Super Soul 100* list, honoring "a collection of 100 awakened leaders who are using their voices to elevate humanity." *The Wall Street Journal* profiled Gunn for a cover story, recognizing him as one of the pioneering curatorial voices in the music streaming space. A Howard University graduate, Gunn was born and raised in Washington, D.C. and currently resides in New York City.