

FIRST INDEPENDENT PICTURES
Presents

A SERENADE FILMS PRODUCTION

A SLY DOG FILMS PRODUCTION

A FILM BY DANNY LEINER

THE GREAT NEW WONDERFUL

Written by Sam Catlin

Olympia Dukakis
Jim Gaffigan
Judy Greer
Maggie Gyllenhaal
Tom McCarthy
Sharat Saxena
Naseeruddin Shah
Tony Shalhoub

Stephen Colbert, Dick Latessa
Will Arnett, Seth Gilliam
Anita Gillette, Julie Dretzin

and Edie Falco

PRELIMINARY PRODUCTION NOTES

Running Time: 88 minutes

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THE GREAT NEW WONDERFUL

CAST

Emme.....	MAGGIE GYLLENHAAL
David.....	TOM McCARTHY
Allison.....	JUDY GREER
Avi.....	NASEERUDDIN SHAH
Satish.....	SHARAT SAXENA
Dr. Trablous.....	TONY SHALHOUB
Sandie.....	JIM GAFFIGAN
Judie.....	OLYMPIA DUKAKIS
Jerry.....	DICK LATESSA
Safarah.....	EDIE FALCO
Mr. Peersall.....	STEPHEN COLBERT
Young Rabbi.....	JEREMY SHAMOS
Danny.....	WILL ARNETT
Charlie.....	BILLY DONNER
Debbie.....	ROSEMARY DeWITT
Clayton.....	SETH GILLIAM
Justin.....	JIM PARSONS
Alexa.....	MARTHA MILLAN
Henry.....	ED SETRAKIAN
Phyllis.....	MARILYN CHRIS
General Ganjee.....	KAPIL BAWA
Congressman Blenick.....	SAM CATLIN
Lisa Krindel.....	ARI GRAYNOR
Duff Krindel.....	BERNIE MCINERNEY
Priscilla Krindel.....	PRISCILLA SHANKS
Mr. Jeffers.....	TOM FORD
Elvis Cedeno.....	MARIO POLIT
Tony Kushner.....	AS HIMSELF
Julie Driscoll.....	JULIE DRETZIN
Jesslyn.....	ALEX MCCORD

FILMMAKERS

Director DANNY LEINER
Screenplay SAM CATLIN
Produced by MATT TAUBER
Produced byDANNY LEINER, LESLIE URDANG
Executive Producer.....VIC BARDACK
Executive Producers MICHAEL NOZIK, MICHAEL HOFFMAN, AMY ROBINSON
Executive Producers.....RAJ SINGH, GARY RUBIN, C.C. LAGATOR,
DAMON MARTIN
Co-ProducersJESSE SCOLARO, NICK GOODWIN-SELF, DANIEL SWEE
Director of Photography HARLAN BOSMAJIAN
Production Designer LAURA BALLINGER
Associate Producer.....ALLISON WOLF
Editor ROBERT FRAZEN
Costume Designer ALYSIA RAYCRAFT
Sound.....GRIFFIN RICHARDSON
Composer JOHN SWIHART
Casting DANIEL SWEE

THE GREAT NEW WONDERFUL

Synopsis

“Shock can be a tricky thing. Sometimes our emotional response to horrific events can be hidden from us at first, only to appear after some time has passed.”

“The Great New Wonderful” is populated by people you know: New Yorkers you see on the elevator, in the supermarket, at the gym. Without a trace of sentimentality, director Danny Leiner, a Brooklyn native, and his extraordinary cast paints five portraits of life in this city a year after the attacks of 9/11.

Dr. Trablous (Tony Shalhoub) is an orthodox psychologist who utilizes his unique insights to unearth the buried rage of an ordinary man (Jim Gaffigan) who has witnessed an office tragedy.

Emme Keeler (Maggie Gyllenhaal), the ruthless proprietor of The Great New Wonderful – a leading purveyor of pastries to the New York society set – struggles to unseat NY’s reigning Queen of Cake (Edie Falco), to great success and profound consequences.

Allison & David Burbage (Judy Greer, Tom McCarthy) struggle to keep their marriage together while coping with their increasingly difficult and strangely self-possessed 10-year-old son.

Avi and Satish (Naseerudin Shah, Sharat Saxena), immigrants, best friends and security guards, travel around the city casually observing contemporary America until dramatic events force them to re-evaluate their opposing perspectives.

Judy Berman’s (Olympia Dukakis) routine is upset when she reconnects with a childhood friend whose passion for life kindles unexpected desires of her own.

One year after 9/11, these stories reveal that being lost always precedes a new beginning.

Director's Statement

“The Great New Wonderful” was borne from my desire to make a film based in NYC which was independent, intimate and visceral. Sam Catlin (writer), Matt Tauber (producer) and I began developing the script in the spring of 2002. At that particular moment in time, the specter of 9/11 was inescapable. At times it was daunting, feeling like too much of a sacred cow for us to address. But it was unavoidable, and ultimately, it was galvanizing.

All of Sam's plays and characters, some of which inspired this script, have an underlying sense of angst, unease, and agitation. Feelings of shock, dislocation and loss were palpable and became the tenets of the script. Given our moment in history, these themes felt inexorably connected to 9/11 and to New Yorkers, and informed the making of the film.

I feel blessed to have worked with an amazing cast and crew who elevated this film in every way. Given the relatively low budget of the movie, their commitment and involvement is a testament to the power of the script and the desire of these talented artists to work with unique, compelling material. For me, it was a dream come true to work with such amazingly gifted actors, each of whom gave piece of themselves to the film with their brave and indelible performances.

I hope the film succeeds in provoking thought and in tapping into a common emotional thread when dealing with loss and tragedy, both of a personal nature and on a larger scale.

- Danny Leiner

Some Questions for Danny Leiner

Q: You have directed perhaps the ultimate stoner movies of our era: “Dude, Where’s My Car” and “Harold and Kumar go to White Castle.” How did you come to make such a massively different kind of film?

After directing Dude, I received a lot of scripts in that same vein. At the time, doing another broad comedy held little interest for me and I decided to create and develop material that I found compelling and was more passionate about. So, I started Sly Dog Films with my producing partner, Matt Tauber, with the mandate of creating and collaborating on quality material, whether of an indie spirit or more mainstream in scope.

We started working with a few playwrights whose work we had seen performed locally in L.A., most of whom were New Yorkers now living here. One was Sam Catlin, a bitingly sharp writer with a singular voice. As we explored themes, characters, and stories with Sam in the spring of 02’ the specter of 9/11 was inescapable. The core of much of Sam’s writing dealt with themes of denial, paranoia and anxiety. All of these seemed inexorably connected to the collective psyche after the attack.

So with some understandable trepidation we embarked on the project using two of Sam’s playlets as a starting point. Through the development process it evolved into five stories which all dealt with life-changing events, shock, denial and catharsis.

Q: There are parts of THE GREAT NEW WONDERFUL that are funny, but you use humor in the new film very sparingly and only in the service of revealing a larger truth. Was it hard for you to avoid falling into the comic idiom?

The script dictates the tone and approach I bring to any project I work on and in this case broad comedy was not suited to the material, nor was I inclined or tempted to go in that direction.

While there are comedic elements in TGNW it is used often as a counterpoint and is more wry, ironic and commenting. I also find in this film, different moments tend to play either sad or comedic, depending on the viewer, and it is quite subjective in that respect. I believe part of the dynamic tension of the film lies in the delicate balance of drama and humor.

Q: Though you’re dealing with pretty heavy subject matter, you also avoid trafficking in sentimentality. Was that a conscious choice?

All of these lead characters are emotionally cut off to various degrees, and the tone of the film mirrors that. I was not really interested in making a sentimental film on this subject and found this perspective much more complex and compelling. 9/11 hovers around the film like a fog, so in that sense a sentimental approach would be inappropriate. The film is structured as something of a slow burn, building I hope towards a significant emotional impact by it’s end. I like to think the ultimate impact owes something to the restrained approach.

Q: You've said this film came from your desire "to make a film based in NYC which was independent, intimate and visceral." You are a native of Brooklyn. Please expand.

Well, I grew up in Brooklyn and started working in the independent NY film community after graduating SUNY Purchase. I collaborated with a number of filmmakers and actors during that time, many of whom were graduates of SUNY Purchase and affiliated with The Shooting Gallery in NYC. I loved the energy, creativity and sheer will needed to make films in that world. At that time I wrote and directed a short film, "Time Expired," and my first feature film, "Layin' Low." Both these films were shot in Brooklyn and were both great and intense experiences.

After spending a few years working in the studio system in LA in both film and T.V., I had a hankering to return to NY and work in a more intimate environment. I was also just excited to shoot something in NY again. I missed the energy and adrenaline of the city and really felt the urge to tap back into it.

Q: This is not usually a question one would ask a relative stranger, but did the attacks of 9/11 affect you personally? Did you go through the same kind of emotions or processes as the characters in the film?

While my personal reaction to 9/11 had elements of the characters' response, it was not as acute. I was in LA when it happened and was fortunate not to have any people close to me who were directly touched by it. On top of the initial shock and disbelief, I felt a profound sense of dislocation and isolation. I felt like I should have been there with my family and friends and in some way forever less of a New Yorker for not.

Q: You describe this as a relatively low-budget film. How hard or easy was it to shoot this film in New York City?

Both monumentally hard and at the same time in many ways very similar to my last couple of films. I guess you can say making any film is incredibly hard and each presents its own unique challenges. The low budget aspect of this film created its own obstacles, most based on logistics, mode of production and working with a much more limited support system. In this case we shot on Hi-Def and with a great lean and young crew. While I had some concern this would be almost impossible to pull off given the small budget and the kind of production value and look I wanted for the film, it really ended up feeling in league with all the others I had done. I feel the cast and crew who came aboard were so invested in the script and the production it somehow outweighed some of the impossible demands I had for the film. And for me during production it eventually became like all other projects: you have a certain amount of hours in a day to shoot a certain amount of material and you have to figure out just how the hell you're gonna do it.

Q: Your film features the ordinary lives of working Manhattan professionals, people who may seem as if they are too busy to deal with the larger implications of the world around them. Can you talk about that?

I think the film holds truths for a lot of people wrapped up in the rat race of life and about people losing perspective and their priorities. It's also about people who are doing everything in their power *not* to deal with the world around them, to avoid acknowledging and confronting feelings of sadness, pain and loss.

Q: Also, your characters are not necessarily the most likeable people. One could say that Maggie Gyllenhaal's character, for example, is competitive and self-absorbed, yet we found we have gained a profound sense of empathy towards her by the end of the film. What are you saying about us New Yorkers?

Maggie's character, Emme, is intense, competitive and striving to be the best, definitely characteristics shared by many New Yorkers. She also starts off as the film's most obviously distant and cut off character. Her journey in some ways is the smallest of the film, but clearly has a huge impact on her, and in turn how we as an audience feel about her. Seeing that first little break in her armor is heart wrenching. This of course is in no small part due to Maggie's beautiful and layered performance.

Q: The give and take between Tony Shalhoub's therapist and Jim Gaffigan's mild-mannered office worker seems to be at the thematic core of the film. By starting and ending your movie with a therapy session and its fallout, could or should audiences think of THE GREAT NEW WONDERFUL as the therapy of cinema?

The scenes certainly are the therapy of the film and embody the spirit and core of the movie. Dr. Trabulous' guiding of Sandie to self-discovery, awareness and grief reflects and mirrors the core journey of all the other characters journeys. The scenes also serve as a grounding signpost, as we keep going back to that same room and see the progression of Sandie and in turn the progression of the movie.

Q: Our heart goes out to the young couple played by Judy Greer and Tom McCarthy. Tom is, of course, also a filmmaker. Can you talk about the chemistry between them and how you went about casting them?

I think Tom and Judy are fantastic together. I've been big fan of Judy Greer's from her work in everything I've seen her in and thought from the beginning she would make a great Alison. Whether the script calls for comedy or drama, she brings a window of truth that is compelling and touching. Daniel Swee, our casting director, thought Tom would be great for David from the start. He came in to audition and I was blown away by his take. He immediately tapped into this lost dad with this inexplicably troubled and difficult child. Together, they feel like this well-oiled dysfunctional unit, united and co-dependant in their denial.

Also crucial to the mix was the superb acting and performance of Billy Donner, as Charlie. I think he gave a great performance, which was all the more impressive given his lack of experience. I believe this was his first film role and one of his first acting experiences.

I think this story above all the others has elements that were really tough to play and lead to the most ambivalent and wrenching ending. Both Tom and Judy had to ride a line of being both vulnerable and caring yet also self-involved and oblivious. A little bit too much in either direction and the story becomes much less compelling.

Q: Nasseeruddin Shah and Sharat Saxena play a pair of security men guarding an East Asian diplomat, a figure New Yorkers in 2002 and even today might regard with some suspicion. Can you talk about that dynamic, and the inner life of the guards we see through the film?

The intention was to portray working class immigrants who were part of the fabric and melting pot of NYC. While the film doesn't touch directly on racism and guilt by association in the context of 9/11 their story does keep the thread of 9/11 present by their nationality and their job. The issue of intolerance is really more explored through Satish's world view, which we see on display with his prejudice and anger. This is in contrast with his best friend Avi, who embraces U.S. pop culture and his *joie de vivre*. I see the two of them as parts of a whole: by the end each moves a little in the other's direction.

Q: So what's next for you? Another stoner movie or something closer to THE GREAT NEW WONDERFUL?

I'm always looking for anything great, new, and wonderful; indie, studio, comedy, drama, anything that would somehow make me want to get up at 5:00 am for a three of months in a row and then lock myself in a dark edit room for another 6 months. Matt Tauber and I are developing a number of projects that run the gamut. One I'm very excited about is another collaboration with Sam Catlin that he is just commencing writing. We are also gearing up for pre-production on Matt Tauber's first feature, "All Fall Down," which was developed with the Sundance Institute and is being financed by HD Net Films.

About the Filmmakers

Danny Leiner (Director, Producer)

Danny Leiner directed New Line's "Harold and Kumar Go To White Castle," a tale of two roommates who experience a life changing journey as they roam New Jersey in search of White Castle hamburgers.

In 2001, Danny directed the feature film that, somehow, still seems to be at the epicenter of our pop culture zeitgeist, "Dude Where's My Car?"

In addition, he has also directed a wide range of quality television including "Arrested Development," "Everwood," "Gilmore Girls," "Freaks and Geeks," "Sports Night," "Felicity," "Action," "The Tick" and HBO's "Mind of the Married Man."

Danny's roots are in New York independent film, where he wrote and directed the award winning short film "Time Expired" (starring John Leguizamo, Edie Falco) and The Shooting Gallery feature film, "Layin' Low" (Edie Falco, Jeremy Piven). While in NY he also directed the HBO drama "Flashback."

In 2002 Danny founded Sly Dog Films with producing partner, Matt Tauber. Sly Dog's mandate is to develop and produce a wide spectrum of feature films, collaborate with emerging writers and directors, and shepherd passion projects.

Sam Catlin (Screenwriter)

Sam Catlin moved to New York City from Massachusetts when he was 16. He went to high school at Riverdale and then attended New York University's Tisch School Of The Arts where he studied to be an actor in both the undergraduate and graduate drama schools. He has worked extensively as a stage actor. Some of his credits include: "*Jackie: An American Life*" (Broadway), "*The Clearing*" (Off-Broadway), "*Marco Polo Sings A Solo*" (Signature Theater), "*Cymbeline*" (Public Theater), "*Henry VIII*" (Public Theater), "*Irma Vep*" (Dallas Theater Center—Leon Rabin Award nominee, Best Actor), "*Nora*" (Portland Stage), "*The Clearing*" (Hartford Stage) and "*Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead*" (California Shakespeare). He has also appeared on Television in "*Law & Order*", "*Gideon's Crossing*" and "*The Guardian*" (recurring) as well as the movies, "*White Oleander*", "*Lisa Picard's Famous*" and "*Burnzy's Last Call*". As a writer, Sam is pleased to be working on a new comedy with Sly Dog Films as well as developing a TV show, "*Patron Saint*" for The WB network. Sam's written several one act plays which have been produced under the title, "*This Might Hurt*" in both Los Angeles (HBO/Warner Bros. Workspace) and in New York (PSNBC). He's also written a full-length play, "*Sea Of Terror*" which he hopes to bring to Broadway in the upcoming year. He now lives in Los Angeles with his wife Julie and his son, Benjamin.

Matt Tauber (Producer)

Matt Tauber is a Sundance Institute Screenwriting Fellow and is set to direct his Sundance Lab project, "All Fall Down," for HDNet Films in the Summer of 2005. Tauber and Danny Leiner's Sly Dog Films is producing with Jason Kliot & Joana Vicente.

In the theatre, Matt has worked as either director or producer on over forty stage productions, including "American Divine," for which he received Chicago's Jeff Citation for Director, and most recently, Michael Blieden's "Phyro Giants!" which received two After Dark Awards and two Jeff Award nominations.

Matt began his career founding Kitchen Theatre Company, where for three years he served as the nation's youngest Artistic Director of a professional theatre. The regional theatre recently celebrated its 12th Anniversary.

Leslie Urdang (Producer)

Following her graduation from Yale Drama School, Leslie Urdang founded and remains the Producing Director of the non-profit New York Stage and Film Company. For 20 years, Stage and Film has developed and produced the new work of hundreds of writers including Aaron Sorkin, Steve Martin, John Patrick Shanley, Jay Presson Allen, Beth Henley, Zach Helm and Paul Weitz.

Urdang is also a film producer. Her feature films include "Me and Veronica," "The Silent Alarm" directed by Rob Morrow, "A Midsummer Night's Dream" for Fox Searchlight starring Michelle Pfeiffer, Kevin Kline, Calista Flockhart, Rupert Everett, and Stanley Tucci, and "People I Know," starring Al Pacino, Tea Leoni, and Kim Basinger released by Miramax. Urdang has also been a producer for Gary Ross' Larger Than Life Productions at Universal Studios and Robert Redford's company Wildwood/South Fork Pictures where she developed several projects including Walter Salles' "The Motorcycle Diaries."

In 2003, Urdang formed a new production company (with Michael Nozik, Amy Robinson and Michael Hoffman) called Serenade Films. The company's first three features are: "The Great New Wonderful," directed by Danny Leiner with Maggie Gyllenhaal, Edie Falco and Tony Shalhoub; "Game Six," by Don DeLillo, directed by Michael Hoffman and starring Michael Keaton; and "12 And Holding," from the acclaimed director of "L.I.E.," Michael Cuesta.

Michael Nozik (Executive Producer)

Most recently, Michael Nozik produced "Syriana," for Section 8 and Warner Bros., written and directed by Steve Gaghan and starring George Clooney, Matt Damon and Jeffrey Wright.

Nozik also produced this year's highly acclaimed Walter Salles' "The Motorcycle Diaries," winning the BAFTA for Best Film Not In The English Language as well as the Academy Award for Best Original Song for "Al Otro Lado Del Rio."

A veteran of 14 years of producing he received an Academy Award nomination for his work as the producer of "Quiz Show," directed by Redford and starring Ralph Fiennes.

He produced “People I Know,” starring Al Pacino, Kim Basinger and Tea Leoni and the Redford directed “The Legend of Bagger Vance” starring Matt Damon and Will Smith.

Nozik produced “How to Kill Your Neighbor's Dog” starring Kenneth Branagh and Robin Wright Penn, “Slums of Beverly Hills” starring Alan Arkin and Marisa Tomei, and “She's the One,” starring Edward Burns, Cameron Diaz and Jennifer Aniston.

Previously, Nozik produced three films for award winning director Mira Nair, “The Perez Family,” “Mississippi Masala,” and the Academy Award nominated “Salaam Bombay.”

Other producing credits include “Thunderheart” starring Val Kilmer, “Crossing Delancey” with Amy Irving.

Previously, Nozik was Robert Redford's producing partner and was President of his film production companies - Wildwood Enterprises and South Fork Pictures.

Michael Hoffman (Executive Producer)

Michael Hoffman was born in Payette, Idaho. He attended Boise State University and after winning a Rhodes scholarship he went on to Oxford University.

His script “Promised Land” was selected for the 1984 Sundance Institute Filmmakers Lab and was eventually produced by Robert Redford’s Wildwood Enterprises. It starred Kiefer Sutherland, Jason Gedrick and Meg Ryan.

His second feature “Restless Natives” (Sundance Film Festival, 1985), a comedy set in Scotland, was one of twenty films selected to compete for a \$1 million prize at the first annual Tokyo International Film Festival. He next made festival favorite “Some Girls” (Sundance Festival, 1988), with Patrick Dempsey and Jennifer Connelly.

Paramount Pictures “Soapdish” marked Hoffman’s first venture into the studio world. A critical and box office hit, it starred Sally Field, Robert Downey Jr., Kevin Kline and Whoopi Goldberg. Hoffman teamed with Hugh Grant and Downey again on “Restoration” a period drama that won Oscars for production design and costume design.

His more recent credits include Fox’s romantic comedy “One Fine Day” with Michelle Pfeiffer and George Clooney, “A Midsummer Nights Dream” again with Pfeiffer, Kevin Kline, Calista Flockhart, Stanley Tucci and Rupert Everertt, Universal’s award-winning “The Emperor’s Club,” with Kevin Kline, and “Game Six,” by Don DeLillo and starring Michael Keaton, Griffin Dunne, and Robert Downey Jr.

Hoffman also is a founding member of the Idaho Shakespeare Festival.

Amy Robinson (Executive Producer)

Amy Robinson began her theatrical career as an actress, best known for her role in Martin Scorsese's "Mean Streets," before turning to producing.

In 1982, Robinson and Griffin Dunne formed Double Play Productions. Together they produced five feature films: "Baby It's You," written and directed by John Sayles; "After Hours," directed by Martin Scorsese which won Best Director at Cannes Film Festival and Best Film at IFP Spirit Awards; "Running On Empty," directed by Sidney Lumet and starring River Phoenix which was nominated for two Academy Awards (Best Supporting Actor and Best Screenplay) and which won the Golden Globe for Best Screenplay; "White Palace," directed by Luis Mandoki and starring Susan Sarandon; and "Once Around," Lasse Hallstrom's American directorial debut, starring Holly Hunter and Richard Dreyfuss. Robinson, alongside Paula Weinstein, went on to produce "With Honors," starring Joe Pesci and Brendan Fraser.

Next she produced two films which were developed from novels: "Drive Me Crazy" for 20th Century Fox, directed by John Schultz and starring Melissa Joan Hart and Adrian Grenier and "For Love of the Game" for Universal, starring Kevin Costner and Kelly Preston and directed by Sam Raimi.

Robinson went on to produce, along with Gary Lucchesi and Tom Rosenberg, "Autumn in New York," directed by Joan Chen and starring Richard Gere and Winona Ryder. She then served as Executive Producer on "From Hell," directed by Allen and Albert Hughes ("Menace To Society," "Dead Presidents") and starring Johnny Depp and Heather Graham. In July 2002, Robinson, in association with USA Films, presented "Never Again" starring Jill Clayburgh and Jeffrey Tambor, written and directed by Eric Shaeffer.

Robinson developed and produced along with Jay Julien, "When Zachary Beaver Came To Town," based on the award winning young adult novel of the same name. The movie was written and directed by John Schultz and stars Jonathon Lipnicki ("Jerry Maguire").

Serenade Films

The formation of Serenade Films, a new production shingle designed to finance and produce feature films for theatrical distribution, is spearheaded by Leslie Urdang and her producing partners Michael Nozik, Michael Hoffman, and Amy Robinson.

Serenade's structure accomplishes something rare: it aligns the interests of investors and filmmakers. Its egalitarian business model means that filmmakers work for low but equal fees, then participate in the first dollar adjusted gross from all revenues derived from the sale and distribution of the film.

"The Great New Wonderful" is one of five films the company plans to make in the first fund. The budgets average in the low six-figures per film. Serenade recently completed "Game 6," directed by Michael Hoffman and is in post-production on "Twelve and Holding," directed by Michael Cuesta.

Sly Dog Films

Sly Dog Films was founded by Danny Leiner and Matt Tauber to develop and produce feature films, shepherd passion projects, and foster emerging talent.

Sly Dog's next project, "All Fall Down," was adapted and will be directed by Tauber. Developed through the Sundance Institute, the ensemble drama concerns two Chicago families, one from the suburbs and the other from the projects, whose lives intersect to surprising consequences. HDNet Films and Jason Kliot & Joana Vicente will produce with Sly Dog.

Sly Dog is currently developing many other feature film and television projects, including Sam Catlin's next feature screenplay, a road-trip dramedy, and "About Yvonne," a psychological thriller about a NY woman who stalks her husband's mistress. Playwright Jillian Crane is adapting.