



HOMEBODY

PRESS KIT



LOGLINE

A gender-queer body-transfer fantasy about a little boy who sends his spirit into his babysitter's body.

GENRE

Comedy / Coming-of-Age / LGBTQ

CONTACT

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SPECS

75 Minutes

Shot on Arri Alexa

Mix: 5.1 / Stereo

2.35:1

Color



SYNOPSIS

Johnny loves his babysitter Melanie, and he's heartbroken that today is her last day with him before she transitions into being a full-time doula. He discovers a YouTube video that teaches him about Free-Spirit Meditation, a practice by which you can send your spirit out of your body and into someone else's body.

Johnny sends his spirit into Melanie. He can see through her eyes and operate her body from the inside out. Johnny-as-Melanie plays dress-up, uses Melanie's credit card to buy an obscene amount of candy, and has an awkward run-in with a high school friend of Melanie's.

From there, the pressures of pretending to be someone else stack up fast. Melanie's boyfriend Tom comes over for a visit and they have to get rid of him. Then: Sharon and Priya, Melanie's clients, call needing their doula--Melanie--to come over right away. But Johnny is trapped in Melanie's body and doesn't know how to get out.

So, Johnny-as-Melanie, a 9-year-old boy in a woman's body, has to lead the home birth with only Melanie's spirit to coach him. It's a Cyrano-de-Bergerac style comedy of errors around an inflatable birth pool in a Park Slope apartment.



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Was I supposed to be a girl? I always felt like one when I was a kid, but I also knew that those kinds of feelings were forbidden. I remember walking home from school one day, an older boy at the bus stop asked me: are you a boy or a girl? I flushed, tried to hide behind my long hair, and didn't know how to answer him.

My mom, who was pretty progressive for the 90's, let me wear dresses and make-up at home. But she taught me that those were not things for boys to do in public. I know she was just trying to keep me safe. You can do what you want behind closed doors, but outside there are people who might hurt you for being yourself.

What if I'd been a kid now, though? Now, when the Zeitgeist encourages non-conforming gender expression much differently than when I was young. How would I answer that boy's question at the bus stop? Would I have said that I was a girl? Would I have worn a dress and lipstick not just at home but outside? Would I be a trans woman now instead of a queer man? Would I be happier? *Homebody* is me wrestling with these questions.

Aesthetically, I was inspired by the high-concept body-swap movies that I grew up with like *Big* and *Freaky Friday*. I wanted to make something entertaining in the same vein as those classics, but to update them with my own queer sensibility.

INTERVIEW WITH JOSEPH SACKETT

Interview by Kate Stahl, Head of Production, Metrograph Films

Can you tell me a little about *Homebody*?

Homebody is about a little boy who gets to live as a woman for a day when he sends his spirit into his babysitter's body. It's expanded from a short film that I made a couple of years ago called *I Was In Your Blood*. In that short, there's a little boy who's obsessed with his babysitter and at the end he dreams that he goes into her body. I had no intention of expanding that short into anything bigger. But I kept thinking about it and at some point I thought, 'What if we did the *Being John Malkovich* version of this story?' Let the little boy actually go into her body and see the world through her eyes.

Where did the idea come from?

This story is very much inspired by my own genderqueer childhood. I always felt like something between a boy and a girl, although, of course, I didn't have the language to articulate that. Nor would I have wanted to talk about what I now think of as my queerness. Like a lot of queer kids, I experienced shame and negative feedback from my peers just for being myself and doing what felt natural to me. So for a long time I suppressed that genderqueer part of myself. I think this project was me processing those complicated feelings from childhood. The sense of being different, of being an outcast. But it's also a celebration of self-discovery and how exciting that process can be.

What were some of your inspirations?

When we were getting ready to shoot, my cinematographer, Laura Valladao, and I watched a lot of body swap movies like *Big, Freaky Friday, Being John Malkovich*. But we also just watched a bunch of 90's movies in general. All these high-concept romps like *Mrs. Doubtfire* and *Edward Scissorhands*. Those movies are so watchable, so entertaining. I wanted to make one of those 90's crowd-pleasers but updated with my own queer sensibility.

Talk about your process as a writer-director.

I enjoy writing, but that part of the process is just me working alone in my room so it's pretty solitary. Things really got fun when I started working with the team because all of a sudden you have these new brains thinking about this story, contributing their ideas, making it better. This was a very collaborative project.

"This story is very much inspired by my own genderqueer childhood. I always felt like something between a boy and a girl..."

You have a strong core group of collaborators, can you talk about building that, working together etc.

Yeah, I feel really lucky that I've been able to work with a lot of the same people on multiple projects. I mean, no matter what your role is on set, making a movie can be really challenging. But the whole process feels more comfortable when you're working with people who you know. Colby and Tre were both in the short so we had all worked together as a unit and they had played these parts before. Our production designer and costume designer had both worked on my last 3 shorts so we all understand each other's taste and aesthetic. And with Ariel Marx, our composer, this was our 8th collaboration. We met when we were both in grad school at NYU and have been working together for years now. So at this point, we've developed our own language. I can say something to her that sounds like code, like 'Can we add more shadow here?' and she understands what I mean.

"I wanted to make one of those 90's crowd-pleasers but updated with my own queer sensibility."

Colby's performance really anchors the film. How did you build her dual performance as Melanie and Johnny-as-Melanie?

I agree, Colby's performance is such an exciting part of this movie. Although the credit goes to her! She really did her homework on this project. Before we even started rehearsing, we had a couple of script meetings where she came with pages of thoughts and questions and ideas about her character. There are a bunch of lines that we reworked together to sound looser and more organic so she was a really generous collaborator in that sense.

Then in our rehearsals, we would always spend part of the session with Tre, sometimes reading through a given scene, but more often just hanging out, drawing, whatever. Then when Tre and his mom would head home, Colby would stay and practice imitating his body language and his speech patterns, how he would tie his shoe or laugh at a joke. Her job was channeling a 9-year-old and she took that job very seriously.

Brooklyn becomes a character in the film, how did that come to be?

Well, I'm from Portland, OR, originally, but I've lived in Brooklyn for over 10 years so it's a big part of my life. We ended up getting really lucky finding these homes to shoot in that were all close to Prospect Park. And I fell in love with that pink brownstone that we shot as the exterior of Johnny's house. That wasn't the exterior of the brownstone we shot as the interior, but it was just around the corner. It felt like a really delicious visual metaphor for how it feels to be a queer kid. You're on this block where every other house you can see is a brownstone and here you are painted this bright pink. There's no hiding that you're different. Which is terrifying if you're trying to fit in. But if you can embrace the difference, it's kind of special being the one pink brownstone on the block.

Can you tell me about the themes of birth and rebirth?

Yeah, you know, I've always been fascinated with birth and pregnancy. As a kid, I loved playing with dolls and I remember this one fantasy I had very vividly. I had this daydream where I pick up a baby doll and it comes to life and then it's my baby to take care of. I'm not really sure where that fascination comes from, but it's always been a thing for me. And since this is a coming-of-age movie it is a story about rebirth. Johnny goes through this experience of being Melanie and he is reborn as a new person because of it.

What do you hope audiences will take away from *Homebody*?

You know, I'm a happy ending kind of person so I want *Homebody* to leave people feeling good, feeling uplifted. I experienced a lot of emotional turmoil in my youth stemming from my queerness, and I didn't want to shy away from those feelings. But my instinct was to make something fun and entertaining. Figuring out who you are is scary and it's exciting. I wanted to capture both of those feelings. Pushing against the boundaries of the gender binary is a transgression, it's breaking the rules. But sometimes it's good to break the rules to see how they apply to you. Or if they apply to you at all.

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What have you taken away from this process?

I feel like my answer to this question is boring, but the honest truth is I've come away from this project with endless gratitude for everyone who was a part of the process. It just takes so many people to make a movie happen. I'm very independent. So left to my own devices, I will almost always try to do things by myself. But a movie isn't something that you can make by yourself, nor would it be very fun if you did. It's a gift in a way to be forced to rely on such a vast network of people to bring a story to life, especially when the subject matter is so personal and so vulnerable.

What's next?

We just started early pre-production on my next movie. It's a queer sci-fi rom-com called *Cross Pollination*. It's about an alien on Earth struggling to pass as a human, but things get complicated when he falls in love with a man and gets knocked up. It plays with a lot of the same themes as *Homebody* like gender, sexuality, self-discovery. But we're painting with a very different set of brushes. There are spaceships and abductions and drag queens and alien births. With *Cross Pollination*, I really gave myself permission to throw all these things that I'm fascinated by into the blender.



CAST

Colby Minifie - MELANIE
Tre Ryder - JOHNNY
Maria Dizzia - CLAIRE
Whitmer Thomas - TOM
Jasmin Walker - SHARON
Purva Bedi - PRIYA
Zoe Chao - RUBY
Julian Cihl - GURU
Dina Hashem - SUNITA

CREW

Joy Jorgensen - Producer
Joseph Sackett - Writer/Director
Laura Valladao - Cinematographer
Alan Wu - Editor
Ariel Marx - Composer
Yu-Hsuan Chen - Production Designer
Lillian Prentice - Costume Designer
Eli Cohn - Sound Designer

CAST



Colby Minifie



Tre Ryder



Maria Dizzia



Purva Bedi



Jasmin Walker



Whitmer Thomas



Zoe Chao



Julian Cih



Dina Hasem

CREW



Joseph Sackett / Writer + Director

Joseph Sackett is an award-winning filmmaker who has written, directed, and produced projects that have screened in competition at the Festival de Cannes, Slamdance, and Outfest among others. He received his MFA in Screenwriting and Directing from NYU Tisch Grad Film. He is currently in pre-production on his second feature film, "Cross Pollination".



Joy Jorgensen / Producer

Joy is the lead producer and founder of Killjoy Films. Born in the American South, Joy has a Bachelor's Degree from Columbia University and a Master's Degree in Screenwriting and Directing from the NYU Tisch School of the Arts. She is the recipient of a SAG Award for her work in television and the Media Services Award for excellence in creative producing. Her work as a producer has shown as Sundance and TIFF, among others.



Laura Valladao / Cinematographer

Laura Valladao is a Cinematographer based in Brooklyn, NY. She shot the short film "My Nephew Emmett", which won the student Academy Award in 2017 and went on to be nominated for an Oscar. Her most recent feature, "Premature" premiered in the NEXT program at Sundance 2019.



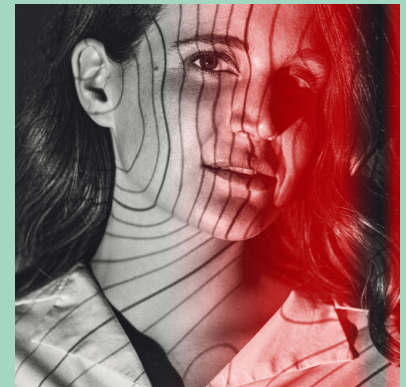
Yu-Hsuan Chen / Production Designer

Yu-Hsuan Chen is a New York City based set and production designer born and raised in Taipei, Taiwan. She received her MFA in Design for Stage and Film at NYU Tisch School of the Arts. Working among theater, film, event and exhibition, she is always excited to work with collaborators to tell stories through space and visuals, creating a world for compelling souls to live in.



Alan Wu / Editor

Alan Wu is an award-winning editor and filmmaker from Baltimore, MD. He holds an MFA from NYU Tisch School of the Arts where he was the recipient of the Maurice Kanbar Fellowship. Recent editing credits include "Bamuun Nafi" (2019) which won the Golden Lion for Best First Feature at Locarno.



Ariel Marx / Composer

An eclectic composer and multi-instrumentalist, Ariel Marx draws from many genres and often combines orchestral and rare instruments with electronics to create unique worlds of sound. Her scores have premiered in films at Sundance, TIFF, SXSW, Tribeca, Woodstock, Criterion Channel, as well as Amazon, Netflix, HBO, and is a Sundance Film Music and Sound Design Lab fellow.



**COLBY MINIFIE
TRE RYDER
MARIA DIZZIA**

HOMEBODY

A FILM BY JOSEPH SACKETT

A Killjoy Films production. "Homebody" Colby Minifie Tre Ryder
sound designed by Eli Cohen costume designer Lillian Prentice
production designer Yu-Hsuan Chen original score by Ariel Marx
editor Alan Wu director of photography Laura Valladao
PRODUCED BY JOY JORGENSEN WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY JOSEPH SACKETT