

Joshua Tree, 1951

A Portrait of James Dean

written and directed by matthew mishory

JAMES PRESTON DAN GLENN DALILAH RAIN EDWARD SINGLETARY, JR. IN AN ICONOCLASTIC FEATURES MOTION PICTURE
MAKE-UP EDWARD JIMENEZ COSTUMES ROB SADUSKI PRODUCTION DESIGN SAMUEL PERONE ORIGINAL SCORE ARBAN & STEVEN SEVERIN
SOUND DESIGN BORJA S.R. FILM EDITING CHRIS KIRKPATRICK CINEMATOGRAPHY MICHAEL MARIUS PESSAH CO-EXEC. PROD. MIGUEL ANGEL NAKAMURA
CHERYL SINGLETARY EXEC. PROD. SHARON CORYELL LAUREN CRIBB GROPP TROY KELLY DENIS MICHAEL REIDY ELIZABETH SHOBER
RANDALL WALK JAY XUDAN CO-PRODUCER PAUL LEE PRODUCED BY EDWARD SINGLETARY, JR. RANDALL WALK ROBERT ZIMMER, JR.
IN ASSOCIATION WITH JAY-X ENTERTAINMENT MGDB PRODUCTIONS FRANCE WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY MATTHEW MISHORY

www.joshuatree1951.com

Synopsis

“What is essential is invisible to the eye.”

JOSHUA TREE, 1951 is an intimate portrait of James Dean on the cusp of achieving notoriety as both a great actor and an American icon. Set primarily in the early 1950s and focusing on Dean’s experiences as an up-and-coming actor in Los Angeles, the film is a series of revealing and sometimes dreamlike vignettes that blend biographical and fictionalized elements to present a pivotal moment in a remarkable life.

James Byron Dean was born in Marion, Indiana, in 1931; when he was six, his father took a job that moved the family to Los Angeles. In 1940, Dean’s mother died of cancer, and he was sent back to Indiana to live with his aunt and uncle. As a teenager, Dean sought the counsel and friendship of Methodist pastor Rev. James DeWeerd, who had a formative influence on him, helping to cultivate his interests in bullfighting, car racing, and the theater.

After graduating from high school in 1949, Dean moved back to California to live with his father and stepmother. He enrolled as a pre-law major at Santa Monica College, soon after transferring to the University of California, Los Angeles, where he changed his major to drama—a choice that estranged him from his father. While at UCLA, he beat out 350 actors to land the role of Malcolm in *Macbeth*. At that time, he also began participating in James Whitmore’s acting workshop. In January 1951, he dropped out of UCLA to pursue a full-time career as an actor.

The film’s “present tense” is 1951, as Dean is driving to the desert of Joshua Tree, California, a few hours journey from his Santa Monica apartment. Along for the ride is The Roommate, a struggling actor Dean has sought out as much for his cultural refinement (which Dean intends to siphon for his own career) as for his friendship and the intimacy it provides. Joining them is “chaperone” Violet, a past-her-prime would-be starlet in the employ of the charming and oily producer/manager Roger. Isolating moments both in Joshua Tree and in the recent past, the story cuts back and forth in time to show us the Dean they know: a man singularly focused on refashioning himself as the great American actor. The culmination of their trip is a series of illuminating confrontations that changes each of their lives forever.

Part portrait of a great artist as a young man, part love story, part exploration of the postwar Hollywood machine, **JOSHUA TREE, 1951** presents a side of James Dean seldom glimpsed. Aware of his own potential to be legendary, he is at once childlike and world-weary; a brute and a romantic; an intellectual and an Indiana shit-kicker; a playboy and a man of great sensitivity. An unflinching and honest exploration of Dean’s complicated sexuality and formative relationships, **JOSHUA TREE, 1951** redefines him for a new generation.





About the Production

Writer/director Matthew Mishory first conceived of **JOSHUA TREE, 1951** while in Paris, where he was staying between European festival screenings of his 2009 short film (and BFI National Archive inductee) **DELPHINIUM: A CHILDHOOD PORTRAIT OF DEREK JARMAN**, a coming-of-age portrait of acclaimed British artist, activist, and filmmaker Derek Jarman. Since childhood, Mishory has been fascinated by Dean, both for his remarkable on-screen presence and the mythic qualities that have coalesced around his personality since his tragic death at the age of 24. “Wandering about Paris and scribbling in cafes, I found myself drawn, as I had been with Derek Jarman, to thinking about hidden histories, outcasts, and the transcendental powers of intimacy. To millions, Dean remains an unblemished icon of a golden age, but to outsiders like me, he has always represented something darker, imperfect, and real.”

Mishory’s script is driven by an emotional narrative that is often true to life, shaped through research, interviews, and his own vision of Dean as an outsider figure. “The film is both a work of history and of historiography,” says Mishory. “It is also a very intimate and very personal melodrama. James Dean’s life, his work, and his legend together represent one of the great stories of the American outsider. It is a story that has much to say about Hollywood, about sex and sexuality and interpersonal relationships, and about American culture. I believe that by reevaluating and uncovering the past, we can better understand our present and ourselves.” **JOSHUA TREE, 1951** aims to reappropriate the iconography of Dean and the 1950s in an unforgettable way.

Mishory weaves the work of other artist-outsiders he sees as sharing a metaphysical kinship with Dean, such as the poet Arthur Rimbaud, into the structure of the narrative. “Although Dean was certainly an original and changed acting as we know it, he did not come to be in a historical vacuum,” Mishory adds. “There is a fascinating context.” Indeed, the script draws inspiration from *Hamlet* and, more directly, from Dean’s favorite novella, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry’s *Le Petit Prince*. “It is a film of three princes,” Mishory continues, “Shakespeare’s Prince of Denmark; Saint-Exupéry’s messianic, golden-haired little prince, lost in the desert; and Jimmy Dean, the inimitable lost prince of Hollywood.”

Location and Cinematography

Central to the look of the film was the decision to shoot on location in Joshua Tree, California. A detail plucked from Dean's biography (he was sent to the desert between film roles to tan), Joshua Tree also has personal resonance for Mishory: "The beautiful and melancholy empty expanses and wonderful strangeness of the desert, lonely and dotted with magnificent Joshua trees, are the physical landscapes that become the emotional landscapes of the film." Beautifully rendered by award-winning cinematographer Michael Marius Pessah, the desert is a stark and surreal dream world, a place far removed from Dean's life in sunny Hollywood. And yet, the film retains a period look.

To prepare for the shoot, Pessah recalls, "Matthew and I screened a lot of source material—from the original screen tests for **REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE** to Douglas Sirk's **TARNISHED ANGELS** to Tom Kalin's **SWOON**. In the end, we made a choice to embrace the cinematic nature of the material and to approach everything with a sensibility of Old Hollywood glamour. That created an interesting tension with some of the more contemporary themes in the story and the dialogue."

Shooting on 35mm film with vintage Cooke and Angenieux lenses and Mitchell filters, Pessah channeled classic midcentury Hollywood glamour through a radical visual style. "Early on, we made a decision to shoot the film on 35mm in black-and-white, with some stylized Super-16mm and Super-8mm color accents. Of course, Matthew loved the image quality we were able to get with film. We shot entirely on color film stocks, removing most of the color in our video-transfer to achieve the glossy yet contrasty black-and-white look we were aiming for."

Pessah's experiments with the camera, encouraged by Mishory, produced some of the film's most striking visual effects: "For some shots I held bits of broken glass in front of the lens to distort the imagery. I wasn't sure if it would be successful, but Matthew encouraged me to try it out. When we got the footage back, everyone loved the look, and it opens up the movie. It's the type of shot where you really need to have a lot of trust between the director, producers, and cinematographer."

Pessah speaks enthusiastically about his fruitful collaboration with Mishory: "Matthew is a fantastic director to work with, since he is able to clearly articulate his ideas for the look of the movie, but never loses his focus on getting strong performances from the actors. He was able to take a quick look through the viewfinder and suggest without equivocation whether we were moving in the right direction. That ability to be specific in his vision, while still allowing department heads to employ their own creativity, brought out the best in everyone involved. I think that's evident to anyone who has had a chance to take a look at the film."



Cast of Characters

One of the great challenges in making **JOSHUA TREE, 1951** was casting the lead. Finding an actor to convincingly play an American icon is always a daunting task; further complicating the process was Mishory's interest in presenting a version of James Dean that stands apart from the usual histories and portrayals. Luckily, he found the perfect match in James Preston: "Beyond his uncanny likeness, Preston has a real vulnerability," says Mishory, "and that to me is the most important quality in any performer. As soon as he auditioned, I knew we had found our lead."

Preston was thrilled about the project as soon as he read the script, seeing in the role a tremendous opportunity to challenge himself as an actor. He plunged into months of research to prepare himself, anticipating that the role of James Dean "will be by far the hardest role that I will ever portray. James Dean was a wild dude. He was down for anything, and I had to find that same fearlessness inside myself."

Preston describes working on the film as "an honor," adding, "James Dean's is a story worth dissecting. It blows my mind that Jimmy has been dead for nearly 60 years and yet his movies are stuck forever in our heads." His work with Mishory has been equally rewarding; he describes their collaboration as a "beautiful dance," explaining, "we are both in the same 'rhythm' at all times, and he leaves a lot of room for me and my creative expression, which I believe is imperative because Jimmy himself was a very opinionated person." Of other similarities between Preston and Dean, Mishory observed a funny coincidence as production on the film commenced: "James was on set, shooting our movie, when he received the call that he had landed **THE GATES**. Now he has fans all over the world. It is an interesting parallel, his career coming together quite quickly as Dean's did nearly 60 years ago."

Mishory is equally thrilled with his selection of Dan Glenn to play The Roommate. "James Dean needed a foil, a complement, both in real life and in this film. The Roommate is an entry point for the audience—an opportunity to get close to James Dean, to understand who he truly was. Not unlike the great stars of the period, Dan Glenn brings an earnestness and everyman quality to his character that audiences will really appreciate." Glenn adds, "working with Matthew has been one of the highlights of my career so far. The role of The Roommate takes me to an emotional place every person experiences at some point in life, the intersection between love and destiny. Matthew has an uncanny ability to help me navigate that emotional terrain."

Finding the right actress to play Violet was crucial to the mood of the film, as Mishory conceived the character "in the great cinematic tradition of the femme fatale, with a revisionist twist." Violet is "one of the troops in the behind-the-scenes war that was Old Hollywood," says Dalilah Rain, the gifted and glamorous actress who would not seem out of place in Michael Curtiz's **MILDRED PIERCE** or David Lean's **BRIEF ENCOUNTER**. "It is ultimately that conflict that brings Violet to a crossroads."

Mishory enlisted his frequent collaborator, actor Edward Singletary, Jr. (**DELPHINIUM**), to portray Dean's producer and "manager" Roger, in a career-defining role. "I've never had so much fun playing bad," Singletary recalls. "And I did it with sincerity. Roger is a personification of the brutal Hollywood machinery that exists even today, but he's also a human being. That complexity fascinates me."

The stellar supporting cast includes Erin Daniels (**The L WORD, A SINGLE MAN**), Robert Gant (**QUEER AS FOLK, HOT IN CLEVELAND**), Clare Grant (**WALK THE LINE, ROBOT CHICKEN**), Portuguese star Rafael Morais (**HOW TO DRAW A PERFECT CIRCLE**), veteran Broadway actor David Pevsner (**FIDDLER ON THE ROOF**), and young Norwegian actor Nick Heyman.



About James Preston

James Preston was an international audience favorite as young werewolf Lukas Ford on ABC's hit summer series **THE GATES**. He is currently the international face of the fashion and lifestyle brand Abercrombie & Fitch. James began his acting/modeling career at age 13 in New York City with the modeling firm Generation. His image graced a full-page ad in *The New York Times* and a series of nationwide ads in 2002. James's television credits include guest star roles on the new CBS series **BLUE BLOODS**, ABC's **THE FORGOTTEN**, and ABC Family's **MAKE IT OR BREAK IT**.

About Dan Glenn

Dan Glenn's television credits include **PUSHING DAISIES**, **CSI**, **PASSIONS**, and **1000 WAYS TO DIE** for Spike TV. He has also appeared as a regular on the popular Web series **BEVERLYWOOD**, in numerous independent films, and in nine plays, including **LA: HOLY GHOSTS**, written by Romulus Linney, at The Gardner Stages, **LOOSE ENDS**, written by Michael Weller, at The Whitmore-Lindley Theater, and **CITY OF ANGELS**, at the NoHo Arts Center. A native of Fresno, California, Dan graduated from Fresno State University and studied with Art Wolff of NYU's Tisch School of the Arts and renowned television actor Richard Hatch of **BATTLESTAR GALACTICA**.





About Dalilah Rain

Dalilah Rain studied theater at the University of Massachusetts before embarking on a successful theater career that included roles in Sam Sheppard's **FOOL FOR LOVE** and in Edward Albee's **WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF?**. Her film credits include the new Web series **AVENUE OF THE STARS** and the current festival favorite **THE MAN THAT I WAS**, directed by Dave Cole. Dalilah first worked with Matthew Mishory in 2009 on his award-winning short film **DELPHINIUM: A CHILDHOOD PORTRAIT OF DEREK JARMAN**. She is also an accomplished model and has appeared in numerous commercials and photo shoots and has posed for international award-winning artists Jeremy Lipking, Michael Siegal, and Jonathan Bickart.

About Matthew Mishory, Writer/Director

Filmmaker Matthew Mishory's work has been shown at major film festivals and art galleries around the world (from London to New York to Reykjavik to São Paulo) and permanently installed at the British Film Institute's National Film Archive in London. **JOSHUA TREE, 1951** is his feature film debut.

In 2009, Matthew directed **DELPHINIUM: A CHILDHOOD PORTRAIT OF DEREK JARMAN**, a stylized and lyrical coming-of-age portrait of legendary painter, filmmaker, and activist Derek Jarman's artistic and sexual awakening in 1950s England. The film had its world premiere at the Reykjavik International Film Festival in Iceland, its UK premiere at the Raindance Film Festival in London, and its California premiere at the Frameline International Film Festival in San Francisco. **DELPHINIUM** won the Eastman Kodak Grand Prize for Best Short Film at the 2010 United States Super 8 and DV Film Festival. Following two sold-out screenings at the British Film Institute in 2011, it was permanently installed in the BFI's National Film Archive in the special collection Beautiful Things.

Previously, Matthew's short film **NICK AND KATE** screened in competition at Filminute 2008, one of 25 selections culled from a field of nearly 2,000 by a jury that included two-time Oscar winner Paul Haggis and German film critic Andrea Dittgen. He also directed the fine art commission **THE MARIONETTES**, shot entirely with miniatures.

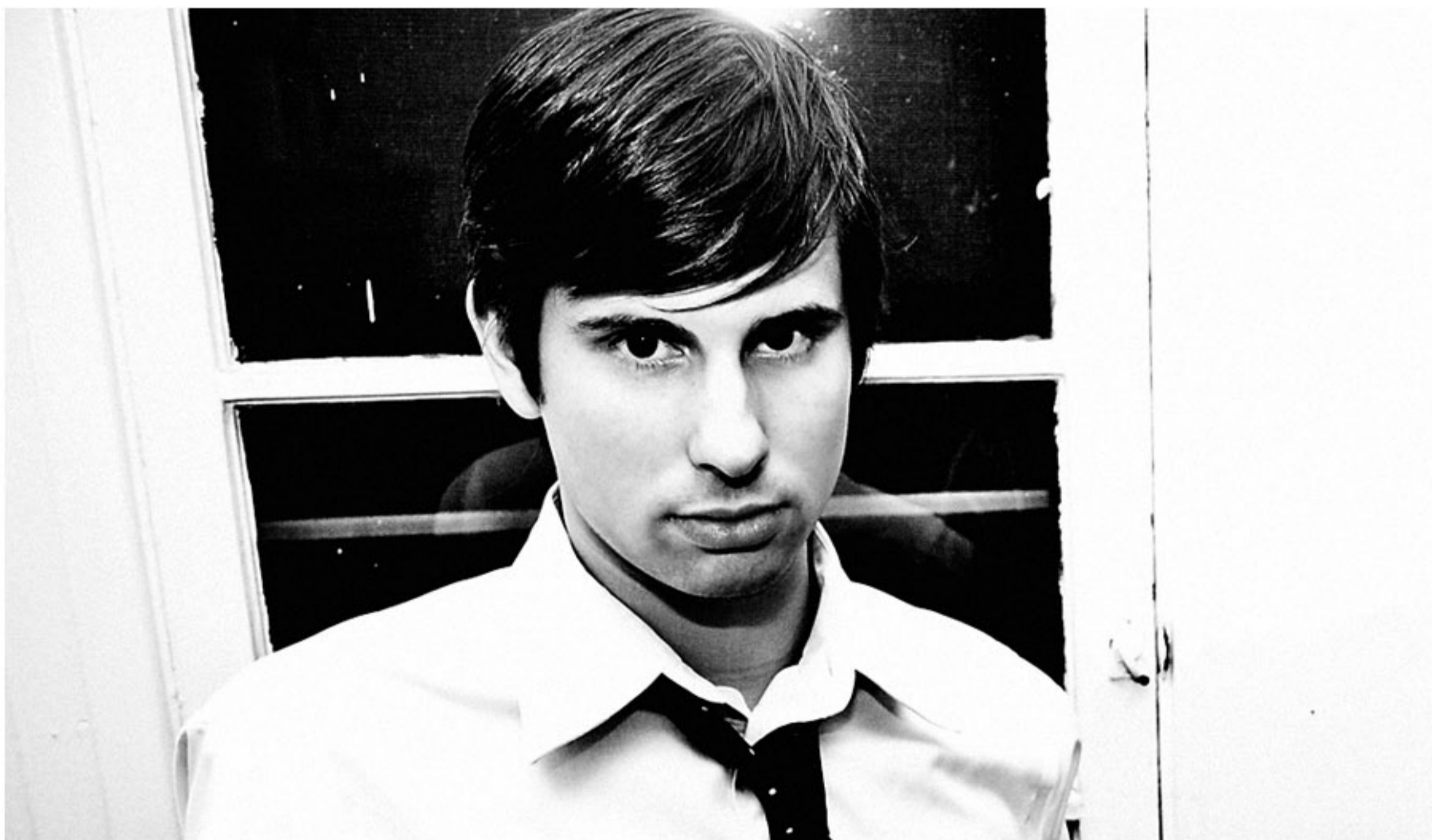
In September 2009, Matthew traveled to Iceland, where he was invited to participate in the Transatlantic Talent Laboratory. A program held in conjunction with the film festival and intended for young filmmakers preparing to direct a first feature film, the Talent Lab is where Matthew first developed **JOSHUA TREE, 1951**. Master class instructors included Cannes award winners Giorgos Lanthimos, Jessica Hausner, and João Pedro Rodrigues, and Oscar nominee Friðrik Þór Friðriksson. Matthew previously studied Film Theory and Screenwriting at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and received a J.D. (Juris Doctor) in law from Loyola Law School.

JOSHUA TREE, 1951 / 2012 / Feature / 35mm

DELPHINIUM: A CHILDHOOD PORTRAIT OF DEREK JARMAN / 2009 / 12 mins / 8mm & HD

THE MARIONETTES / 2009 / 5 mins / HD

NICK AND KATE / 2008 / 1 min / 16mm



About Michael Marius Pessah, Cinematographer

Michael Marius Pessah was born in Cambridge and raised in New York. He earned a B.A. in Humanities at Hampshire College, where he was the recipient of a Kodak Cinematography Scholarship award. He received his M.F.A. in cinematography at the American Film Institute, where he currently teaches. In 2007, Michael was the recipient of an **LA Weekly Theater Award** for his multimedia projections for the play **IPHIGENIA**. In 2008, he photographed the documentary **VIVA LA CAUSA**, which was shortlisted for an **Academy Award**. His narrative work has been broadcast on HBO, MTV, BET, Nickelodeon, Comedy Central, Cartoon Network, and the BBC, and has been screened in theaters nationally as well as at the Cannes, Tribeca, and Palm Springs film festivals. His documentary work has been broadcast on the USA Network, Current TV, and Canal+. When not on set, Michael has been known to sit in on standing bass at local jazz clubs.

About Steven Severin, Composer

A key member of the infamous Bromley Contingent, a group that helped to redefine fashion and culture in 1970s England, Steven Severin formed the legendary band **Siouxsie and the Banshees** in 1976 with Siouxsie Sioux. One of the foremost alternative bands of the 1980s and 90s, the Banshees were one of the few bands from the London punk scene that continued to evolve, innovate, and succeed across decades, and Steven is featured on all 16 albums as a co-lyricist and songwriter. He has since worked on various solo projects and collaborations, including **The Glove**, with Robert Smith of The Cure, as well as produced artists and written articles on the arts and culture for publications such as **The Guardian**. He recently embarked on his international “Music for Silents” tour and has composed motion picture scores with his wife, Arban. In 2009, Steven and Arban scored Matthew Mishory’s film **DELPHINIUM: A CHILDHOOD PORTRAIT OF DEREK JARMAN**.

About the Producers

Born and raised in Orange County, California, actor/producer **Edward Singletary, Jr.**, co-starred in the feature film **THANK YOU, GOOD NIGHT**, with Mark Hamill and Sally Kirkland, and various commercials, and starred in a national anti-crystal methamphetamine campaign directed by Joel Schumacher. He has studied with legendary acting teacher David LeGrant and has himself taught at The California Conservatory of The Arts and the David LeGrant Studio. As a producer, he has worked on the films **SUNDAY AFTERNOONS**, starring Paul Dooley; **THE MARIONETTES**, shot entirely with miniatures; and **DELPHINIUM**. In 2008, he formed the production shingle Iconoclastic Features with filmmaker Matthew Mishory. The company launched at the Sundance Film Festival. He splits his time between Los Angeles and Laguna Beach, California.

Randall Walk most recently produced the feature film **SCAB**, which premiered internationally at over 20 film festivals. Prior to that he produced the short film **JUMBO GIRL**, shot by two-time Academy Award winning cinematographer Janusz Kaminski (**SCHINDLER’S LIST** and **SAVING PRIVATE RYAN**) and starring Whitney Dylan and James Denton (**DESPERATE HOUSEWIVES**). It premiered at LA Shorts Fest, and Randall was nominated for an **IndieProducer Award**. Since studying film at Columbia College in Chicago, where he often collaborated with D. P. Mauro Fiore (**AVATAR**), Randall has worked in numerous capacities behind the scenes as producer, director, and production designer. He served as the storyboard artist for Janusz Kaminski’s directorial debut **LOST SOULS**, starring Wynona Ryder and Ben Chaplin. His next project is the feature **SECURITY**, which is set in Michigan in the days leading up to the 9/11 attacks.

Producer **Robert Zimmer, Jr.**, a graduate in Radio-TV-Film from the University of Texas at Austin, began his career as a creative executive for legendary producer Aaron Spelling. Zimmer worked on a number of Spelling’s hit TV series and films including **THE USUAL SUSPECTS**, **BEVERLY HILLS 90210**, **MELROSE PLACE**, and **7th HEAVEN**. As a television writer, he staffed for **STAR TREK: VOYAGER** and Spelling’s **SUNSET BEACH** and was nominated for a **WGA Award**. His produced feature films include **HALF-LIFE** (official selection, Sundance 2008), and **THANK YOU, GOOD NIGHT**. Zimmer also served as consulting producer on Matthew Mishory’s award-winning short film, **DELPHINIUM**. Active in politics, he writes a weekly political column for 411mania.com.

C a s t

James Preston Jimmy Dean
Dan Glenn The Roommate
Dalilah Rain Violet
Edward Singletary, Jr. Roger
Featuring Erin Daniels, Robert Gant, Clare Grant

C r e w

Director Matthew Mishory
Screenplay Matthew Mishory
Director of Photography Michael Marius Pessah
Production Design Samuel Perone
Editor Chris Kirkpatrick
Score Arban and Steven Severin
Sound Design Borja Sau Razquin
Make-Up Edward Jimenez
Costumes Rob Saduski (Emmy Nominee)
Producers Edward Singletary, Jr., Randall Walk, Robert Zimmer, Jr.
Co-Producers Paul Lee, Alexa Sau
Production Company Iconoclastic Features
In Association With Jay-X Entertainment, MGDB Productions France



About Iconoclastic Features

Dedicated to aesthetically ambitious and socially provocative endeavors in feature film, short-format new media, and fine-art film, Iconoclastic Features, LLC, officially launched at Sundance in 2008. The company has offices in West Hollywood and co-production partners in London and Paris. Productions have premiered to major film festival and art gallery audiences in dozens of countries around the world. Please visit our official Web site, www.iconoclasticfeatures.com.

Press Inquiries

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