

Alex Bogomolov, Wai Sun Cheng

Production company(ies)

DragonBear Pictures

Short biography of producer(s)

Alex Bogomolov is a multifaceted film producer and actor with a solid foundation in business and finance. Holding a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration and a Master's degree in Finance, he initially demonstrated his entrepreneurial skills by successfully launching and growing a technology startup, leading it to become a flourishing enterprise with over 250 employees. This experience honed his strategic and operational expertise, which he later applied to the film industry. In 2015, Alex moved to Canada to pursue a career in film, seamlessly merging his business acumen with his artistic passions. He founded a production company, applying his leadership and financial knowledge to the world of filmmaking. Under his guidance, the company has produced award-nominated films, commercials, and music videos, with several TV and theatrical projects in the pipeline.

Wai Sun Cheng is an Asian Canadian filmmaker. His interest in film and motion picture work began at the age of 11. Before he became a producer, Wai worked in the film industry as a VFX artist on major feature films and TV productions such as Blade Runner 2049, Fast and Furious, Fantastic Beast and where to find them, Miss Peregrine's home for Peculiar Children, Once Upon a Time, etc. With a strong background in VFX, Wai has a distinct style in his work and provides additional vfx knowledge in the process. Wai has worked on numerous distributed and award-winning projects in the form of narrative feature, shorts, commercials and music videos. His work has been selected by several festivals around the world such as TIFF, Sundance Asia, Cleveland International Film Festival, Chicago International Film Festival, Leos, Los Angeles film festival, Seattle international film festival, Canadian Cinematographer and etc. Through out the years Wai's work has also garnered several collaborations with many well known actors such as Bruce Willis, Timothy Murthy, Neal McDonough, Casper Van Dien, Sean Patrick Flanery, Nathalie Boltt, Jonathan Lipnicki and etc.

Filmography of applicant(s) - include title and year and/or a link to your IMDb page

With love and a Major Organ (2023) - Official SXSW Selection - Canadian Film Fest - Best Feature Film - Leo's Best Motion Picture nomination - Leo's Best Direction Nomination - Leo's Best wardrobe Nomination - Leo's Best Sound Nomination

Hairy Beast (2023) - Official Cleveland International Film Festival Selection - Official Chicago International Children's Film Festival Selection

Little Manila (2022) - Official Vancouver Asian Film Festival Selection

Because you are Dead to Me (2021)

Alive (2019) - VSFF Best Cinematography - VSFF Best first time director nomination - New York International Film Award Best Short film - San Francisco arthouse Festival Best screenplay

Srikandi (2019) - Official TIFF Selection - Official Sundance Asia Selection - Official Vancouver International Film Festival Selection

Gong Ju (2017) - Leo's Best Cinematography nomination IMDb links

Alex -

https://www.imdb.com/name/nm10021599/?ref=nm_sr_srg_0_tt_0_nm_5_q_alex%2520bogomolov#credits - <https://pro.imdb.com/name/nm10021599/credits>

Wai -

https://www.imdb.com/name/nm7744791/?ref=nm_sr_srg_0_tt_0_nm_8_q_wai%2520sun%2520#knownFor - <https://pro.imdb.com/name/nm7744791/credits>

Title of qualifying feature film

Ruthless Bastards

Expected release date in 2024:

August 2024

Through which distribution model is your qualifying film expected to be released:

Streaming service

Name of theatrical distributor, film festival or streaming service releasing or exhibiting qualifying film:

Dark Star Pictures, APL Films

Film synopsis

Logline: Former partners in crime reunite for a final mission against a ruthless crime boss in a partnership that could be the death of them.

Synopsis: Former partners in crime, Nico (Casper Van Dien) and Rick (Sean Patrick Flanery), were once unstoppable Fixers and Hitmen working for the formidable Benjamin

Rothstein. However, their partnership was shattered when Nico had an affair with Rick's fiancée, Rachel. Years later, a new crime lord, Sunny Gill (Parmish Verma), rises to dominate the criminal underworld, rekindling Benjamin's thirst for revenge. Sunny's dealings with the notorious Sergeev brothers, top Russian gangsters, present Benjamin with an opportunity he can't resist.

Reluctantly, Benjamin persuades Nico and Rick to reunite for one last mission. Despite their lingering animosity, the promise of a \$5 million incentive convinces them to set aside their differences. Rick also harbors a personal vendetta against Sunny, further fueling his resolve. As they delve deeper into Sunny's operations, old resentments resurface, putting their already fragile partnership to the test.

The plot thickens when Nico and Rick uncover that a banker named Treyton Jones is being coerced into aiding Sunny and the Evgeny brothers. Treyton's daughter, Emma, has been kidnapped, forcing him to facilitate the transfer of large sums of money to the Middle East.

Despite their personal conflicts, Nico and Rick prove time and again that their skills and competence are unparalleled. Yet, they must keep their tempers in check and their focus sharp if they hope to complete their mission—assuming they don't kill each other first.

"Ruthless Bastards" is a thrilling tale of betrayal, vengeance, and redemption, where old enemies must become allies to survive a world of relentless crime and moral ambiguity.

The inspiration: why was this an important film to make?

"Ruthless Bastards" was born from a desire to explore the complexities of human relationships and themes of betrayal, redemption, and moral ambiguity. This film delves into the fractured bond between Nico and Rick, former partners torn apart by betrayal, highlighting the resilience of the human spirit and the possibility of redemption even for those with the darkest pasts.

The film speaks to the current socio-economic landscape, where crime and corruption infiltrate legitimate sectors like banking and finance. The subplot of a banker forced into criminal activities to save his daughter underscores the pervasive influence of criminal networks, making the story resonate with modern audiences.

One of the unique aspects of "Ruthless Bastards" is its diverse cast and cultural dynamics. The story features a Russians teaming up with an Indian gang against Nico and Rick, who collaborate with representatives from the Chinese Triads. This diversity not only adds depth to the narrative but also represents the multicultural fabric of Canada, showcasing the country's inclusive and varied society.

Producing "Ruthless Bastards" allowed us to merge high-stakes action with deep, character-driven drama. It was important to create a film that not only entertains but also provokes thought and discussion about justice and human nature.

The making-of: how did this film come together? What were the highlights/challenges of producing this film?

"Ruthless Bastards" was inspired by classic crime dramas and buddy movies like "Lethal Weapon." We aimed to blend the intense action and deep character dynamics of these genres with a contemporary twist that reflects modern socio-economic issues and diverse cultural dynamics.

One of the major challenges was the SAG strike. Despite this, we managed to secure a waiver, which allowed us to attach Sean Patrick Flanery, Parmish Verma, Theresa Lee, Sydney Scotia and Casper Van Dien and start filming. We were incredibly fortunate to have the best team available during the strike, including an exceptional stunt team. Their dedication and willingness to work on a small indie project, even amidst industry disruptions, were truly remarkable.

Another major challenge was financing, as action movies require significant investment in stunts and special effects. The film's cast-heavy nature also added to the budget constraints. However, the team's resourcefulness and commitment helped us navigate these financial challenges and keep the production on track.

To manage costs, we wrote the script around the locations and assets we had access to, avoiding extra logistic and rental expenses. Securing financing through Canadian film tax credits was another critical step. Detailed scheduling was required to accommodate our high-profile cast.

Filming "Ruthless Bastards" was exhilarating, featuring dynamic on-screen chemistry and expertly choreographed, thrilling action sequences. It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

The journey of making "Ruthless Bastards" was both challenging and immensely rewarding. Overcoming financial constraints and navigating the SAG strike with a committed team underscored our resilience and passion for filmmaking. The trailer's positive reactions validate the hard work and creativity poured into this project. "Ruthless Bastards" stands as a testament to our dedication to storytelling and the collaborative spirit of our team.

National pride: describe what uniquely defines you as a Canadian producer.

As Canadian producers, we are defined by our commitment to showcasing our nation's diverse cultural mosaic. Films like "Ruthless Bastards" reflect Canada's multicultural heritage and inclusive values.

Our approach to filmmaking leverages Canada's reputation for innovation and creativity. Utilizing national resources like film tax credits, we produce high-quality, globally competitive films.

Furthermore, our backgrounds and experiences uniquely position us to bring a rich, multifaceted perspective to our projects. Alex's solid foundation in business and finance, combined with Wai's extensive experience in VFX and visual storytelling, allows us to approach filmmaking with a blend of strategic vision and artistic innovation.

We are also committed to nurturing and supporting local talent. By providing opportunities for emerging filmmakers and fostering a supportive environment, we contribute to the growth and dynamism of the Canadian film industry.

How will this film further your career as a producer?

The film showcases our ability to handle complex narratives and large-scale productions with well-known talents, proving our versatility and skill in creating high-quality, engaging content.

Adding a high-profile, action-packed film to our portfolio strengthens our reputation and credibility within the industry, making us more attractive to investors, financiers, and the top talent agencies.

Successfully producing "Ruthless Bastards" helps us build valuable connections with distributors and streaming platforms, ensuring wider distribution and increased visibility for our future projects.

In summary, "Ruthless Bastards" is a pivotal project that showcases our strengths, expands our professional network, and enhances our marketability, paving the way for future successes and opportunities.

What is your next step as a Canadian independent producer?

We collaborate with emerging Canadian writers and directors to build a robust library of projects. We plan to leverage our growing network of industry connections, including distributors and streaming platforms, to ensure these projects reach a wide audience. Our goal is to continue producing high-quality, impactful Canadian films that resonate globally.

Annick Blanc, Maria Garcia Turgeon

Production company(ies)

Midi La Nuit

Short biography of producer(s)

Annick Blanc and Maria Gracia Turgeon's love of innovative storytelling and striking visuals has led them to create Midi La Nuit . Their debut feature films, Hunting Daze and Who Do I Belong To, premiered internationally this year at prestigious festivals: SXSW and Berlinale competition. Next, they are slated to feature at Karlovy Vary International Film Festival, continuing their journey across the global festival circuit.

Blanc and Gracia Turgeon got Oscar Nominations for Best Live Action Short Film 2 years in a row in 2020 with Brotherhood (TIFF, Sundance) and in 2019 Fauve (Sundance Special Jury Award, Telluride). They also have won Best Canadian Short Film at TIFF both in 2018 with Brotherhood and in 2017 with PRE-DRINK. They have a dozen films to their credit that have been shown in renowned festivals such as Sundance, Locarno, Tribeca, Telluride and Tiff amongst others.

Filmography of applicant(s) - include title and year and/or a link to your IMDb page

Tout Simplement, 2016: Grand prix Focus-FNC, TIFF, CSA

IMDB

Annick Blanc https://www.imdb.com/name/nm3869291/?ref=fn_al_nm_1

Maria Gracia Turgeon https://www.imdb.com/name/nm5637080/?ref=fn_al_nm_1

Feature films:

Hunting Daze, 2024: SXSW, Sydney, Jeonju, Karlovy Vary, Fantasia, FIFF
Namur, Thessaloniki FF, - Best Screenplay, Audience Award- Jim Thorpe FF

Who Do We Belong To, 2024: Berlinale Competition, Karlovy Vary, Best Director- Hong Kong FF, Grand Prize- Taipei IFF, Istanbul FF, Flying Broom women FF, Taipei IFF, Mediterranean FF, Dubran IFF, Guanajuato IFF, Melbourne IFF, Afrika FF Köln, Helsinki IFF, FIFF Namur, BFI, Mostra de Sao Paulo, Mostra de Valencia, Stockholm IFF, Films from the south,

Short Films:

Brotherhood, 2018: Oscar Nominee, Best Canadian Short-TIFF, Sundance, Audience Award- Winterthur Int. Short Film Festival

Fauve, 2018: Oscar Nominee, TIFF, Special Jury award-Sundance, Telluride, CSA

Tibbits Hill, 2019: Busan, FNC, Best Short film- RVCQ, Bronze Prize- Solveig Anspach

The Color of Your Lips, 2018: CSA, Best fantastic short-Austin Fantastic fest, Fipresci Critic Prize– Regard sur le court, Best Canadian Short – Festival Court d’un soir
le Ver, 2018: Best Short – Festival Vitesse Lumière, FNC, Regard sur le court,
Pre-Drink, 2017: Best Canadian Short-TIFF, CSA, Tampere, Atlantic Film Festival
How Tommy Lemenchick Became A Grade 7th Legend, 2017: Tribeca, Giffoni Int. Film Festival, International Jury Award, Public Award-Reggio IFF
Lost Paradise Lost , 2017: Vancouver IFF, FNC, RVCQ, Best Directing - SPASM

Title of qualifying feature film
Hunting Daze

Expected release date in 2024:
March 8th 2024 (world premiere), August 16th 2024 (theatrical release)

Through which distribution model is your qualifying film expected to be released:
Festival

Name of theatrical distributor, film festival or streaming service releasing or exhibiting qualifying film:
SXSW (film festival), Maison 4:3 (distributor)

Film synopsis

Nina, a young, tempestuous woman, is taken in by a group of hunters in a remote cabin. In the midst of this tough, yet endearing, male micro-society, she feels like she finally belongs. A mysterious stranger’s arrival disrupts her newfound place in their male micro-society. Both raw and dreamlike, Hunting Daze offers up a unique universe where humour, horror, the uncanny, and the sensual combine.

The inspiration: why was this an important film to make?

"Hunting Daze" is an important film for us to make because it plunges the viewer into a psychological thriller where reality and dark humor gradually shift towards nightmare and horror. We have created a genre film that is both sensory, captivating, and mysterious, making it a unique addition to Canadian cinema. Beneath the veil of metaphor, we explore with this piece the theme of toxic masculinity and individual responsibility within a group, offering a thought-provoking narrative that resonates with contemporary social issues.

In the current context, it is crucial for us to create a film about a strong woman who confronts and triumphs over toxic masculinity. By participating in the cinematic conversation started by the #MeToo movement, we aim to tackle this subject in an entertaining yet metaphorical way. Our approach is designed to reach audiences who might be resistant to or fatigued by direct discussions of these issues, thereby broadening the impact of our film's message.

As people increasingly opt for home viewing over cinema outings, we wanted to create a truly cinematic experience that would intrigue and draw audiences back to theaters. "Hunting Daze" aspires to be breathtaking, entertaining, and intelligent—a film that stands out in the landscape of Canadian cinema. We promise a sensory experience that can only be fully appreciated on the big screen, encouraging a return to communal film-watching.

Amidst the ongoing political crises, we also believe it is important to showcase a character who is unafraid to challenge the establishment and dismantle harmful structures. This theme resonates with current societal movements and provides a narrative of empowerment and change that we feel is essential. Moreover, we believe that the possibilities offered by intertwining genres are underexploited in Canadian cinema.

With "Hunting Daze," we leverage the appeal of genre films and the element of surprise that comes from mixing different genres. Our innovative approach not only captivates the audience but also adds a layer of complexity and depth to the storytelling. Given the film's impressive run in prestigious festivals such as SXSW, Jeonju, Sydney, Fantasia, and Karlovy Vary, along with the enthusiastic audience response, we can confidently say it was a successful endeavor. Our unique approach not only captivates the audience but also adds a layer of complexity and depth to the storytelling. This fusion of genres allows us to explore multifaceted characters and themes in a way that single-genre films often cannot, thereby enriching the viewer's experience and providing a fresh perspective in Canadian filmmaking.

"Hunting Daze" is a vital film for us because of its bold exploration of toxic masculinity, its engagement with contemporary social movements, and its commitment to revitalizing the cinematic experience. We stand as a testament to the power of film to entertain, provoke thought, and inspire change.

The making-of: how did this film come together? What were the highlights/challenges of producing this film?

Our filmmaking journey began with challenges long before the cameras started rolling. Securing funding was as usual a lengthy process where we ended up successfully locking a nearly \$2.5 million budget.

The onset of the pandemic necessitated a year-long postponement of our shooting schedule, followed by an unexpected pregnancy of our producer-director, which further delayed production by another year. These challenges left us in a precarious situation, exacerbated by inflation and a shortage of skilled labor, all managed within our pre-pandemic budget. Despite these setbacks, we utilized the extended timeframe to enhance our creative process and maximize productivity. We creatively streamlined the film without compromising the creative vision. We take pride in being the "magic department," achieving so much with so little. Drawing from our experiences producing shorts, we navigated these challenges successfully.

Our debut film was incredibly ambitious. Among the significant challenges we successfully tackle : safely setting an actor on fire, complicated animal scenes such as our actress acting closely with a wolf, a dog acting to die, a complex blood rain rig requiring frequent resets of the actors, a car accident. Every day had a challenge, and all that while shooting in remote locations. We also navigated through unpredictable changes in temperature during Quebecois autumn, necessitating quick adjustments to our plans. Last but not least, we manage an ensemble cast of seven actors involved in daily intense physically and emotionally charged scenes.

Thanks to our reputation and previous shoots, we also managed to secure a talented cast including Nahema Ricci, Bruno Marcil, Alexandre Landry, Marc Beaupré. We also had incredible key creative partners who had collaborated with us previously and were eager to join us for our first feature film. Both cast and crew believed in our vision, prioritizing the project despite its modest budget. These collaborations were crucial in achieving the production value we aimed for.

Yet, another hurdle awaited us during distribution. With minimal contacts in the feature film distribution world, we had to work hard to establish our presence. Despite the odds, we secured an international sales agent with a Minimum Guarantee (MG) before a festival selection, a rare feat for a Quebec debut feature. Our film then found its place in renowned festivals such as SXSW, Jeonju, Sydney, and Karlovy Vary, paving the way for distribution deals in the US, Eastern Europe, and Latin America.

We are finally eagerly preparing, with our Canadian distributor Maison 4:3, for our first theatrical release set on August 16. We continue to learn and grow from this experience, gaining insights into the marketing tools needed and exploring different ways to reach our audience.

This challenging journey has made us stronger as women, partners and producers and taught us invaluable lessons and reaffirmed our passion for filmmaking.

National pride: describe what uniquely defines you as a Canadian producer.

As Canadian producers, we champion a cinema rooted in artistic merit rather than solely commercial appeal. This ethos allows us to boldly take risks and create unique cinematic experiences that challenge audiences and defy expectations. Our commitment to nurturing a strong artistic and cinematic vision ensures directors can imprint their distinctive signatures on every project.

We pride ourselves on inclusive and multicultural storytelling, both on-screen and behind the scenes. Our films portray diverse Canadian stories in multiple languages—French, English, Spanish, Arabic—and are shot in various countries, celebrating the rich tapestry of global cinema.

At the heart of our cinema is a feminist perspective, amplifying the strength and narratives of women. We push forward stories of resilience, empowerment, and talent, contributing to a cinematic landscape that values equality and representation. Our success is fueled by the exceptional creative and technical talent of Canadian cast and crews, who bring depth and innovation to every production. Many of our cast and crew have been able to gain experiences in both independent and major studio shoots.

The Canadian film industry has established itself as a key player in international co-productions. As Canadian producers, bolstered by institutional support, we were able to acquire experience and explore the co-production landscape to unite Canadian and international talents. These collaborations allow us to create films with a broader impact on both national and international stages.

In essence, as Canadian producers we stand at the forefront of a dynamic industry, shaping narratives that resonate globally while fostering creativity, diversity, and artistic excellence.

How will this film further your career as a producer?

This film marks a significant milestone in advancing our career as producers, enriching our knowledge across all aspects of production, funding, distribution, and crew management. The challenges we navigated have fortified our capabilities, preparing us to tackle even larger and more complex projects with confidence.

The success of our film has solidified the trust and confidence of funding institutions such as Telefilm and SODEC in our abilities. Alongside with our co-production "Who Do I Belong To," which premiered at Berlinale this year, we have now unlocked access to financial structures supporting budgets of 3.5 million and beyond.

Adding two feature films which received acclaim at prestigious festivals, to our two Oscars nominations for live action short, has not only elevated our profile but also expanded our network significantly. These successes have opened doors to new opportunities in production, coproduction and distribution and forged valuable connections crucial for future projects.

Moreover, our efforts in building an audience for our films within the festival circuit and beyond have been fruitful. We have learned to leverage social media and marketing tools effectively, enhancing our film's visibility and engagement across diverse audiences, including the general public, media, and social platforms.

As we continue to navigate the evolving landscape of filmmaking, these experiences and achievements have positioned us to pursue ambitious projects with greater impact and reach, shaping a promising trajectory for our future endeavors in the industry.

What is your next step as a Canadian independent producer?

As a Canadian independent producer, our next steps are poised to elevate the presence and impact of strong, unique and meaningful films in the global film industry while continuing to promote Canadian culture and talents. We currently have a diverse array of projects, spanning Canadian productions and international co-productions at various stages of development and production.

We are thrilled to have secured Telefilm funding for our upcoming majority co-production with Canadian-Colombian director Juan Andrés Arango, scheduled to commence filming in spring 2025 in Colombia. This highly anticipated project has already garnered attention, having won the DALE Award at the prestigious San Sebastian lab and being selected for Cannes' Cinefondation lab. We believe this film, about the resilience of the Emberá indigenous people fighting to return to their land, carries a hopeful and important message, and we are committed to bringing it to the public. Working with our Colombian co-producer to navigate this shoot in the dangerous Bogota slums and the jungle will be an unprecedented challenge from which we will learn a great deal.

Looking ahead, we aim to expand opportunities for strong Canadian talent. Discussions are underway with XYZ and Film Forge to explore the potential of our first interprovincial co-production. We are excited to discover new talents and innovative methods of production while uniting forces with fellow Canadians from other regions. This collaboration will not only strengthen our domestic film industry but also highlight the diverse and rich cultural narratives across Canada.

In addition, our premiere at SXSW has opened doors to potential partnerships in the US, broadening the scope of some projects that we are developing like 'Black Ballerina', which combines commercial appeal with unique storytelling. We are supported in this endeavor by the acclaimed team at Black Bear Pictures known for bringing 'Immaculate', 'I Care a Lot', and 'Mudbound' to the screen. Those connections will help us secure Canadian and American A-list cast members, ensuring strong appeal to both the public and financiers. This strategic direction aims to produce larger-budget films that maintain a bold artistic vision, always with the ultimate goal of bringing our stories to the broadest possible audience.

In parallel, we are committed to nurturing emerging voices and fostering diversity in Canadian cinema. This includes supporting first and second-time directors such as Annick Blanc and Meryam Joobeur, whose distinct perspectives enrich our industry.

Attending new markets and festivals to discover new talents and films, promote Canadian culture, exchange knowledge, and stay up to date with the latest trends and methods in filmmaking and production remains a priority. The success of our initial features has provided access to new funding and co-production opportunities. We have recently been invited to esteemed events like the Bogota Co-Production Market and Fantasia's Frontier, while our films continue to attract invitations from festivals worldwide including Namur, Thessaloniki, BFI London, Sao Paulo, Stockholm, among others.

In pursuit of our vision, we aspire to create larger-budget films that maintain a bold artistic proposition while aiming for ambitious storytelling that resonates globally. These endeavors reflect our dedication to advancing Canadian cinema on both national and international stages, fostering collaboration, innovation, and diversity in storytelling.

Brian Mason

Production company(ies)

Mason Films

Short biography of producer(s)

Brian Mason is a Toronto-based Producer with a focus on feature films. Brian started working in features in 2021 with JoBro Productions on North of Normal, which premiered at TIFF 2022. In 2022, he returned to his birthplace of Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island to line produce Who's Yer Father?, which was nominated for 3 Canadian Screen Awards. Most recently, Brian was the lead producer on Drive Back Home, starring Alan Cumming.

Brian has an extensive history of working in television finance, where he learned from world-class Canadian producers. A CPA, CA trained in the technology, media & telecommunications group at KPMG Toronto, Brian began his career in television at Epitome Pictures and DHX Studios Toronto (now Wildbrain) as the Production Controller, working on Deglassi and a variety of live action youth programming.

Brian then became the Executive in Charge of Finance at Architect Films (now Nikki Ray Media Agency), running the television production finance function for over 10 different series across multiple seasons for HGTV, Food Network, Discovery & Blue Ant.

Filmography of applicant(s) - include title and year and/or a link to your IMDb page

Drive Back Home - Producer - 2024

Who's Yer Father? - Line Producer - 2023

North of Normal - Associate Producer - 2022

<https://www.imdb.com/name/nm11266692/>

Title of qualifying feature film

Drive Back Home

Expected release date in 2024:

September 2024

Through which distribution model is your qualifying film expected to be released:

Festival

Name of theatrical distributor, film festival or streaming service releasing or exhibiting qualifying film:

TIFF is still holding that this is in consideration, which is why this submission is so late. So I will send a follow up on exact film festival release. The film's domestic theatrical distributor is Photon Films and will be streamed on Crave after theatrical release.

Film synopsis

In the winter of 1970, a cantankerous, small town plumber from rural New Brunswick, must drive his beat-up work truck 1000 miles to Toronto to get his estranged, gay brother out of jail after being arrested for having sex in a public park. The two men are then forced to drive back home together at the behest of their hard-nosed mother before they kill each other. Inspired by a true story.

The inspiration: why was this an important film to make?

The film's writer/director, Michael Clowater was inspired by true events that happened to his grandfather and great uncle. As in the movie, the only time Michael's grandfather had ever left New Brunswick was to help his brother, who had been arrested for having sex with a man. Throughout the film, Michael wanted to reflect upon the challenges that people in the LGBTQ+ community may have in connecting to previous generations of their community. We wanted to be able to represent what it would be like to be a gay man in earlier parts of the 20th century.

In the current cultural zeitgeist of Canada, we are battling with all the different elements of our history and who we truly are as a country. This film, through a remarkable performance by Alan Cumming, shines a light on a darker side of this history, where to be gay in the mid-20th century was a crime. This story gives us a look at how our society might have treated a person like Perley Hinson, both through the childhood flashback and in his adulthood in 1970. The ending of the film reflects a goal that we as Canadians should continue to strive towards - the two brothers, who might not quite agree, choose to work together to grow their understanding of each other and connect on a deeper level.

To me, the film is important because I was born in raised in Prince Edward Island and I left for Ontario. I am acutely aware of the dynamics of the changes that happen when some family and friends move away, and others stay home. I see in characters the rift that grows as the realities of life set in and people move along different paths. In that way, for my whole life I have been surrounded by modern Weldons and Perleys. Beyond the thematic importance, I love seeing Canada represented on film, especially the very route I have driven many times from Toronto to the East Coast.

The making-of: how did this film come together? What were the highlights/challenges of producing this film?

After working with Jonathan Bronfman on North of Normal, he put me in touch with Will Woods. Will and I immediately agreed we would like to find a project to take on together, and while we reviewed several options, ultimately Drive Back Home caught our eye. Michael had already spoken to several actors, including Alan Cumming, who we promptly attached to the project. As The King Tide was Will's primary production for the next year, I took on the project as the lead producer, under his mentorship and support. By summer 2022, we had raised most of the funding and could start building up the project for a shoot in 2023. We added Maddy Falle to our producing team, who primarily took on the line producer role.

Getting to work with Alan Cumming was a highlight of the experience. I have been a fan of his ever since seeing him in Goldeneye and X2 as a young boy. It made it that much more amazing that he was extremely professional and easy to work with. The scene where we shot the Saint-Louis-du-Ha!-Ha! bar sequence was a particularly memorable day. His acting was incredible, despite being under considerable bladder duress from having to drink so many fake beers (actually tea)! Alan has been involved in many genres of movies, on Broadway, in scripted TV and most recently in reality TV as a host. Because of his vast experience, I felt extremely lucky to produce a project starring him.

Overall, we had cast and crew with very distinct, creative and industrious personalities that I had the pleasure of working with. They made Drive Back Home an unforgettable project. It gave me the opportunity to expand my network and meet production and post-production crew that I look forward to working with again.

I have a long history of understanding the financials and business aspects of television, but this project really tested my ability to match that understanding up against producing a movie with great creative. COVID was still an issue during production, and we ran into substantial inflationary pressures compared to when we had initially pitched financing the project. Even with so much understanding and knowledge to avoid "stealing from post", it still resulted in some tricky post-production scenarios. Fortunately, we had great partners from Urban Post, Alter Ego, and Long Division, who were able to pull off what this film required.

As an emerging producer, this movie developed my abilities to manage people with very different interests. Trying to handle the reality of running a business against the competing goals of multiple partners and crew members was something that was heightened, given the budget. In the end, we delivered a film that will be very worth it for the audience.

National pride: describe what uniquely defines you as a Canadian producer.

I have always loved this country. Growing up in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, Canada was everywhere. The tourism slogan is even "The Birthplace of Confederation". When the Confederation Bridge was built, I remember feeling a strong connection to the rest of the country. In the 00s, the Canada Day celebrations in Charlottetown (via the Festival of the Lights) were the biggest in the country, short of Ottawa. My parents are proud Canadians who support local and national musicians, and we regularly watched Canadian film and TV. I grew up without cable, which resulted in watching only CBC or CTV. Very occasionally, and depending on the weather, the antenna would pick up Global. After a childhood diet of Mr. Dressup, Fred Penner, Sharon, Lois and Bram, and Sesame Park, I regularly watched Due South, Power Play or North of 60 with my parents, and I loved Royal Canadian Air Farce so much that I used to rent the highlight VHSs from our local video rental store.

It goes without saying that Canada has (and had) its faults- Drive Back Home explores some of them. But I still believe there is so much good in this country. It is a truly beautiful place that is home to some truly incredible people. What I think uniquely defines me as a Canadian, is that I believe we can create amazing homegrown projects that will truly resonate world-wide.

How will this film further your career as a producer?

This film shows my talent at getting a project from script to screen. I have significant experience in Canadian TV, but with some support from my co-producer Will Woods, I was able to quickly understand how to produce a smaller Canadian feature film. We were very fortunate to have an amazing star in Alan Cumming and produce a movie that showed care to a sensitive subject. This project shows a piece of how we can continue to grow the Canadian feature film industry.

What is your next step as a Canadian independent producer?

There are two ways I can see myself moving forward. First, I will make more feature films. I started in features coming over from TV, thinking it would be temporary, but I can see a path where this could be where I mainly work. I have started pitching my next feature project called Closed for the Apocalypse, a romantic comedy set at the end of the world. This movie could be another step towards my goal of more commercial Canadian features. My second path could be to return to TV at some stage. I have had this persistent dream of creating a young adult TV series set in Prince Edward Island called Changing Tides based on a (very) dramatized version about growing up in Charlottetown. My fiancé (wife by the time of AIFF) had a painting done for me of what the main characters would look like, which hangs on the wall of my office. I look at that as my north star to keep on hustling and producing.

Dana Abraham

Production company(ies)

Red Hill Entertainment

Short biography of producer(s)

Bengali-Canadian, Dana Abraham is a multifaceted talent in the entertainment industry, excelling as a multi-hyphenate. Known for his role as an actor, writer and producer in the film "Neon Lights," where he starred alongside Kim Coates (Sons of Anarchy) streaming on Netflix and releasing worldwide in fall 2024. Dana showcased his acting prowess and ability to immerse himself in complex character, Clay Amani. Dana also performed all three duties in "A Hundred Lies," with an all-star Y.A. cast, and produced "She Came Back" starring Amybeth McNulty (Stranger Things) and Colm Feore (Bon Cop, Bad Cop), both released in 2024 theatrically and digitally. Beyond his acting and writing, Dana's creative abilities extend to entrepreneurship as the Co-Founder of Red Hill Entertainment. He crafts and produces engaging and thought-provoking stories, exploring a variety of genres and themes, hyper focused on his visceral experiences in many walks of life. When not focused on his career, he enjoys spending time with his childhood friends, doing his favourite activity: barbecuing. As well as time with his family, boxing, working out, but most importantly time with his fiancé and first child, Alana and York.

Filmography of applicant(s) - include title and year and/or a link to your IMDb page

Neon Lights - 2022 - <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt12572084/> She Came Back - 2024 - <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4632976/> A Hundred Lies - 2024 - <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt14013222/>

Title of qualifying feature film

A Hundred Lies

Expected release date in 2024:

June 7

Through which distribution model is your qualifying film expected to be released:

Theatrical

Name of theatrical distributor, film festival or streaming service releasing or exhibiting qualifying film:

Vortex Media

Film synopsis

A Hundred Lies follows Ricky (Raco), a washed up musician, struggling to make ends meet, while juggling his mother's declining health. Through his fellow bartender, Damian (Abraham), Ricky is given another shot at music. He signs a deal with the independent label, Reaper Records under the guidance of Terrence (McKnight) and they begin making waves in the music scene - for Ricky, a second chance. As life begins taking a turn for the better, Ricky starts making plans for a better medical and living situation that includes his mother, who currently resides at a nursing home. Meanwhile his love life with fellow singer Fiona (Gonzalez), who is looking for her break in the music biz, starts steaming. Everything comes tumbling down when Ricky loses his mother, and takes strides in self-destruction with drug and alcohol abuse. Ricky must find a way to claw himself back before it's too late and he throws away everything and everyone he has worked to build.

The inspiration: why was this an important film to make?

This film is largely inspired by myself, director Rhouzbeh Heydari, and lead actor Rob Raco's experience within the Toronto music scene. We've seen so many friends and musicians get taken advantage of, so far that some of them have lost their lives either to drugs or death. It's a very personal film - we didn't try to sugarcoat anything or pull any punches when it came to showcasing the underbelly of the music and arts industries that filled with corruption - so much so that we had a prominent music distributor that we were partnered with pull out of the project because we were hitting too close to home. Ultimately, we do hope that by producing this film, we have a positive impact on someone who would otherwise get swept up in the mix of it all.

The making-of: how did this film come together? What were the highlights/challenges of producing this film?

The film came together when myself, Rhouzbeh Heydari, and Rob Raco were chatting about life and the music industry, and discovered just how often our friends had been taken advantage of, or had to make some serious consolations in order to find success. That loss of humanity really resonated with us, and felt like a story we needed to tell. I brought this film to my business partner, Qamar Qureshi, who brought the film to our private equity partners and investors, and we were successful in our pitch - they all bought into the idea that this story needed to be told, and we were so blessed to have

them support us financially. Simultaneously, we worked with Grammy nominated and Juno award winning music producer Gavin Brown to produce an original soundtrack that's featured in the film. There were plenty of challenges with this film. We started the process in 2019, and then got hit with a global pandemic. We managed to negotiate with talent and crew, and implemented plenty of safety features to make sure we could shoot comfortably and safely. The delay in production, and the expanded measures increased our budget, and we had to make some concessions we wouldn't have made otherwise, including editing the film ourselves. We then found ourselves seeking distribution towards the end of 2023, and into 2024, where the landscape of distribution was shifting dramatically. After plenty of emails and calls and pitches, we found our partner in Vortex and released the film in June, starting with a sold out premiere at the Carlton that extended into an 8 day run at the theatre, selling out multiple screenings.

National pride: describe what uniquely defines you as a Canadian producer.

We have so many great opportunities as a producer in Canada, and getting to work with the fantastic talent here is really wonderful. As a first generation Canadian, I feel really blessed to get to tell my stories here - I truly believe we have so many to tell, as Canadians. It's something I'm really proud of with *A Hundred Lies* as it doesn't shy away from the fact that it's based in Toronto, where, yes, we do actually still have crime. It's by no means a clean film, and both feels very worldly, but distinctly local. On top of that, I love getting to produce my films in my home town of Hamilton, Ontario. So many productions come here to shoot, but growing up here, I've learned what it's like to be on both sides of the track.

How will this film further your career as a producer?

Releasing this film this summer has been wonderful for my career. It's opened so many doors, and has to date been one of my most successful films garnering extended theatrical dates, and earning an 8.1/10 on IMDb amongst plenty of positive reviews so far. Off the film's success, we're now looking at releasing the sound track, not just as a companion to the film, but something that can also stand on its own. I love to bring a holistic view to releasing my content, and this film exists beyond the screen - it's something I'm really proud of and can't wait to see how far this film can go. The film has also deepened my existing industry connections, but also introduced me to several new partners that I'm currently discussing future projects with - both domestically here in Canada, and internationally.

What is your next step as a Canadian independent producer?

In short - it's onto the next one! With three films under my belt, I'm really honing in on my creative voice. I'm very excited to start leaning even further into my roots and culture, and the next project going forward is a supernatural thriller rooted in South Asian ghost lore, currently titled "Bhoot." The film is something I'm really excited about, getting to speak with partners I met through A Hundred Lies, as well as expanding into new methods for approaching a film's capital stack with an audience first mentality. The scope of this film is much bigger, and it's due largely in part to the success of this film.

Enrique Baniqued, Karen Chapman

Production company(ies)

Explorers & Smallaxx Motion Pictures

Short biography of producer(s)

Enrique Baniqued-Enrique Miguel Baniqued's journey began as an enterprising force at De La Salle University Manila, where he sparked his passion for innovation and entrepreneurship. His move to Toronto in 2019 followed a groundbreaking startup venture, where he transformed everyday products for students and corporations, showcasing his innate talent for revolutionizing the ordinary. Embracing the power of storytelling, Baniqued helped produce the Soul Surfer's Podcast, aiming to spotlight the environmental battle against a looming coal plant in a serene surf town. His dedication made the podcast a catalyst for change, successfully halting construction by early 2021. Today, Baniqued's creative brilliance shines through collaborations with prestigious Toronto entities such as Destination Toronto, the City of Toronto, FIFA WORLD CUP, UFC, TIFF, NHL, The Michelin Guide, The Academy, The JUNOS, and CBC's Family Feud Canada, as well as various local commercial production companies. Inspired by the global resonance of South Korean cinema, he strives to replicate that success with Filipino stories, aiming to bring captivating & entertaining narratives to audiences worldwide. Baniqued's journey exemplifies storytelling's power as a force for change, underscoring his commitment to amplifying underrepresented stories and making the world a better place, one narrative at a time.

Karen Chapman - At the service of every story, award-winning filmmaker Karen Chapman strives to centre work that is grounded in storytelling and impact. Chapman holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Emily Carr University and is an alumnus of the Norman Jewison's Canadian Film Centre's - Director's Lab, the Banff Centre for the Arts, Women in the Director's Chair, and the CaribbeanTales Incubator Pitch Winner, HotDocs Accelerator, The TIFF Talent Lab, TIFF Accelerator and Every Story Accelerator. She is also a recipient of the 2023 Micki Moore Fellowship. Her Canadian Film Centre's thesis film, Measure, premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival in 2019 and won the International Hollywood Foreign Press and Residency Award at the 2020 Golden Globe Awards as well as the CineFilm's Best Overall Film, and Best Directing in 2020 at the Women in Film and Television - Toronto Showcase. Chapman's Quiet Minds Silent Streets premiered at the 2022, Toronto International Film Festival and received the award for best Documentary at Canadian Film Festival along with winning Best Mental Health, Non-Fiction Film at the Yorkton Film Festival and a Silver Medal at the 2024 Anthem Awards.

Filmography of applicant(s) - include title and year and/or a link to your IMDb page

Enrique Baniqued - Producer, Village keeper (2024)

https://www.imdb.com/name/nm12829567/?ref=fn_al_nm_1 Production Manager for -
49 shorts between 2022-2023

Karen Chapman - Producer, Village keeper (TIFF,2024) Director/Writer - Quiet Minds
Silent Streets (TIFF,2022) Director/Writer- Measure (TIFF,2019)

<https://www.imdb.com/name/nm5699878/>

Title of qualifying feature film

Village Keeper

Expected release date in 2024:

September (TIFF)

Through which distribution model is your qualifying film expected to be released:

Festival

Name of theatrical distributor, film festival or streaming service releasing or exhibiting
qualifying film:

Toronto International Film Festival, FNC, VIFF & SJIWFF & more

Film synopsis

Village Keeper is about a family grappling with secrets upholding domestic abuse and unresolved rage that quietly spans generations. Following a devastating tragedy, Jean relocates her children to the community housing project where she grew up, seeking refuge with their grandmother. Jean prides herself on being educated, working hard, and making it out of social housing, but when life's precarious scale tips her fortune right back into poverty, her dream of a home with a white picket fence turns into obsession. Haunted by secrets and scars, she struggles to shield her teenagers from the harsh realities of their environment. When a citywide gun violence spree strikes close to home, Jean is propelled into action. She cleans her community of the remnants of violence, a symbolic act that reshapes her understanding of her past, her family's hidden truths, and her resilience. As Jean grapples with the weight of trauma, the specters of domestic abuse, and mental health challenges, she embarks on a journey to break the cycle of generational pain. Alongside her quest for healing, she fiercely defends her children from a system that threatens their well-being, all while striving to find happiness and peace amidst chaos and adversity.

The inspiration: why was this an important film to make?

This is a lyrical, complicated film, aiming to speak to the cultural and generational shadows of unresolved violence against women and the remnants of rage that it leaves with us. The world we're creating in Village Keeper has a particular kind of nuance and levity, despite being a journey through grief. Rather than being autobiographical, it is observational. We talk a lot about the things that we carry generationally and the things that we pass down generationally. Families never actually talk about issues that lie underneath the surface. Having an opportunity to untangle things has been an honour and now more than ever is the time to have the film be seen by its audience.

The making-of: how did this film come together? What were the highlights/challenges of producing this film?

Village Keeper is a poignant story that delves into the themes of motherhood, exploring the love and strength that mothers embody. Remarkably, our director/producer, Karen Chapman, was eight months pregnant when we began principal photography. Despite the physical demands of pregnancy, Karen never used it as an excuse. Her unwavering dedication and commitment to the project exemplify the resilience and fortitude the film seeks to portray. Karen's experience added a profound layer of authenticity to the film's exploration of maternal strength, making the storytelling even more impactful and genuine. Producer Enrique Miguel Baniqued first met Chapman as a Production Assistant on her film, Quiet Minds, Silent Streets (TIFF 2022). Karen and Enrique found out they were neighbors from that set and kept in touch since. Enrique moved to Canada from the Philippines 4 years ago as a student and now is a permanent resident. As Enrique's time in Canada grew, his knowledge of the industry grew quickly by making the most out of opportunities he both saw and found. Enrique produced Village Keeper at 24 years old, not knowing much about Toronto or its existing film industry but is a testament of an immigrant's pursuit, dedication and what hard work can bear in Toronto.

National pride: describe what uniquely defines you as a Canadian producer.

Enrique-As a Canadian producer what uniquely defines me is being a first-generation immigrant, my unique identity is shaped by a blend of cultural heritage, diverse experiences, and a deep appreciation for the inclusive values of Canada and the opportunities there are for those that seek them.

Resilience and Adaptability: My journey as an immigrant has taught me resilience and adaptability. Navigating a new country and overcoming challenges have equipped me with a tenacity that I bring to every project. This resilience helps me tackle the uncertainties of the film industry with a positive and determined attitude.

Commitment to Diversity: Canada's multicultural landscape deeply influences my approach to production. I am committed to promoting diversity and inclusion, both in front of and behind the camera. I strive to create content that reflects the varied experiences of people from different backgrounds, ensuring that underrepresented voices are heard and celebrated.

Passion for Storytelling: My experiences as an immigrant fuel my passion for storytelling. I am driven to explore themes of identity, belonging, and cultural intersections. These stories not only entertain but also foster understanding and empathy among viewers, bridging gaps between different communities.

In essence, my identity as a Canadian producer is defined by a blend of cultural richness, resilience, a commitment to diversity, a passion for storytelling, and most surprising it made me find a stronger connection to my community versus when i was back home. These elements uniquely position me to create compelling and meaningful content that resonates on both a local and global scale.

How will this film further your career as a producer?

Enrique- Producing "Village Keeper" will significantly advance my career as a producer by:

Showcasing Versatility: Blending mystery, and cultural themes highlights my ability to handle diverse and complex storytelling.

Demonstrating Originality: Bringing an imaginative and culturally rich story to life sets me apart as a creative and innovative producer.

Promoting Diversity: Focusing on multicultural narratives underscores my commitment to inclusive storytelling, appealing to a broad audience.

Building Networks: Collaborating with a diverse team enhances my professional relationships and opens doors to future opportunities.

Creating a Compelling Portfolio of Quality: Successfully producing this film adds a standout project to my portfolio, attracting investors and collaborators.

Attracting Investment: Proving my capability to deliver unique content can attract funding for future projects.

Refining Storytelling Skills: Integrating fantasy with cultural narratives enhances my storytelling techniques.

Expanding Audience Reach: A culturally diverse and fantastical film can resonate globally, increasing my recognition and opportunities.

I am mostly proud of what we were able to make with a budget of \$200k Canadian. In essence, "Village Keeper" will demonstrate my creativity, versatility, and commitment to diversity, positioning me for future success in the film industry.

What is your next step as a Canadian independent producer?

As an independent Canadian producer, my next steps involve a strategic blend of project development, networking, and skill enhancement:

1. Developing New Projects I will continue to focus on developing original content that reflects diverse Canadian stories. This includes: Writing and Refining Scripts: Crafting compelling narratives that showcase unique perspectives. Exploring Various Genres: Experimenting with different genres to appeal to a wider audience. Continuing to grow the existing relationship I have with Karen as she aims to progress her career;

2. Building a Strong Network Networking is crucial for collaboration and growth. My approach will include: Attending Film Festivals: Participating in events like TIFF and VIFF to connect with industry professionals. Joining Industry Associations: Becoming a member of organizations such as the Canadian Media Producers Association (CMPA). Leveraging Social Media: Using platforms to connect with filmmakers, actors, and audiences.

3. Enhancing Skills and Knowledge Continual learning will ensure I stay competitive. This involves: Workshops and Courses: Attending workshops on new film technologies, production techniques, and storytelling. Staying Updated: Keeping abreast of industry trends and changes in the Canadian film landscape.

4. Promoting and Marketing Completed Works Effective promotion will help in reaching a broader audience. Steps include: Film Festivals and Screenings: Submitting films to international and local festivals. Digital Platforms: Utilizing streaming services and social media for wider distribution.

5. Mentorship and Community Engagement Giving back to the community and supporting emerging talent by: Mentoring Young Filmmakers/immigrant: Sharing knowledge and experience with aspiring producers. Community Projects: Engaging in projects that highlight local stories and talents.

By taking these steps, I aim to create impactful, diverse content that resonates with audiences, while establishing myself as a prominent and influential figure in the Canadian film industry.

Harold C. Joe, Leslie D. Bland

Production company(ies)

Orca Cove Media, Less Bland Productions

Short biography of producer(s)

Harold Joe and Leslie Bland have produced and sold features, one-offs, and series for numerous broadcasters including CBC, APTN, Bell Media, Discovery Networks, FNX, Amazon, Super Channel, Hollywood Suite, Telus, Zoomer Media, Knowledge Network, AMI-tv, CHEK TV, Télé Québec, TV 5 Monde, Kwese (Africa), Chill (Russia), RSC (Hungary and Romania), Bytedance (China), NITV Australia, and Maori TV New Zealand.

Harold and Leslie completed the feature documentary *A Cedar Is Life* with the support of Super Channel, CHEK TV, the Canada Media Fund, Creative BC, and the Rogers Documentary Fund. It has been a selection to six festivals in Canada, the US, and Mexico, making its World Premiere at Red Nation International Film Festival, and its Canadian Premiere at the Victoria Film Festival. It is a Jury Award Winner at the Quetzalcoatl International Indigenous Film Festival and won the Audience Favourite Award at the Salt Spring Film Festival. Its theatrical run has featured many sold out screenings, and it has been nominated for two Leo Awards.

Previously they produced the feature documentary *Tzouhalem* with the support of Super Channel, CHEK TV, the Canada Media Fund, and the Indigenous Screen Office. *Tzouhalem* was an official selection to ten film festivals, making its World Premiere at the American Indian Film Festival, and its Canadian Premiere at the Whistler Film Festival. It received two Leo Award nominations, and has since been acquired by APTN, Knowledge Network, and FNX in the USA.

A scripted comedy heist feature *The Great Salish Heist*, with Graham Greene, Ashley Callingbull, and Tricia Helfer attached and inspired by Producer Harold C. Joe's experiences as a Cowichan Archeological Consultant is an official selection to five film festivals so far, picking up awards, selling out venues, and receiving standing ovations. It's currently playing in cinemas across the country.

Another scripted feature, a coming-of-age family dramedy, *Sweet Summer Pow Wow*, with support from Telefilm, the ISO, the CMF, Creative BC, the Shaw Rocket Fund, and Bell Media is currently in post-production.

Filmography of applicant(s) - include title and year and/or a link to your IMDb page

Sweet Summer Pow Wow, Coming of Age Romcom Feature, 2024 (in post-production)

The Great Salish Heist, Comedy Heist Feature, 2024

A Cedar Is Life, Feature Documentary, 2022
Tzouhalem, Feature Documentary, 2021
Muscle Muse, 10 x 30 Lifestyle TV series, 2020
Tips and Tricks for Everyday Living, 5 x 10 Lifestyle TV Series, 2019
Dust n' Bones, Documentary, 2018
The Wine Guys: Grape Escapes, 6 x 30 TV Series, 2017
Ollie and Emma, 6 x 9 Sitcom Series, 2016

Title of qualifying feature film
The Great Salish Heist

Expected release date in 2024:
February 9, 2024

Through which distribution model is your qualifying film expected to be released:
Festival

Name of theatrical distributor, film festival or streaming service releasing or exhibiting qualifying film:
Victoria Film Festival, Oakville Film Festival, Super Channel, and others

Film synopsis

A down-on-his-luck First Nations Archeologist seeking redemption teams up with a group of misfits from the Rez to break into a museum and reclaim sacred artifacts that rightfully belong to their people.

The inspiration: why was this an important film to make?

Xulputstun (Harold Joe) is an archeological consultant and cultural worker for Cowichan Tribes and neighbouring nations, dealing in repatriation of ancestral remains and sacred artifacts. The Great Salish Heist is inspired by Producer Harold C. Joe's experiences as a First Nations Archeological Consultant. The film deals with a very serious subject yet relays the message in an entertaining comedy heist feature.

The making-of: how did this film come together? What were the highlights/challenges of producing this film?

Did not receive Telefilm production financing, so putting the financing together was very challenging, and the producers had to cover over 20% of the budget through producer equity.

National pride: describe what uniquely defines you as a Canadian producer.

Harold and Leslie focus on developing projects with a strong point of authenticity, and producing them in a commercially viable way.

A member of the CMPA, Less Bland Productions is a company dedicated to creating high quality TV series and feature films for distribution in Canada and beyond. A company with original and eclectic tastes, producing scripted features and series, feature docs, and doc series, LBP facilitates Indigenous centered content through its affiliated company First Nations controlled Orca Cove Media.

Orca Cove Media Inc. a CMPA member, produces film, television and digital media projects that have distinctive First Nations content, empowering Indigenous people to share their stories with domestic and international audiences. Orca Cove produces both documentary features and series, as well as scripted series and features.

How will this film further your career as a producer?

The film is the first scripted feature that Harold and Leslie have produced.

What is your next step as a Canadian independent producer?

To continue to build the scripted stream for Orca Cove Media and Less Bland Productions, adding it to the foundation of documentary production activity that has already been established.

Jaze Bordeaux, Ilham Aragrag

Production company(ies)

Universe Pictures

Short biography of producer(s)

Jaze Bordeaux is an award-winning filmmaker renowned for his captivating storytelling as a producer and director. Driven by a passion for bringing thought-provoking and impactful stories to the screen, Mr. Bordeaux is dedicated to developing a diverse slate of feature film projects as an executive producer. In 2024, he made his directorial debut with the powerful drama sport movie "EFC," set in the high-stakes world of women's mixed martial arts. The film has taken the independent film world by storm, garnering 22 award wins, including Best Picture at the New York International Film Awards.

Looking ahead, Mr. Bordeaux has several exciting projects in the works, showcasing his unwavering commitment to storytelling excellence. Among these are the mind-bending science fiction thriller "GENESIS," set in a world where original thought has disappeared, and "MONOPOLI," a high-stakes tale of a secret society of financiers vying for control of the global monetary system. With each new project, Mr. Bordeaux brings his award-winning blend of intelligence, creativity, and passion for storytelling, offering audiences a unique and unforgettable cinematic experience.

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Ilham Aragrag is a dynamic, award-winning producer with a lifelong passion for storytelling and an unwavering commitment to pushing boundaries.

Her journey began in the realms of business strategy and finance, where she honed her ability to craft innovative strategies during her 18-year tenure at the Royal Bank Of Canada. With a keen eye on the ever-evolving film industry, Ilham combines her strategic acumen and deep-seated dedication to inclusivity and creative growth to create captivating films that leave lasting impressions on audiences.

Her rise to prominence is rooted in her Moroccan heritage and diverse experiences in Winnipeg, Montreal, and now Toronto. With an exceptional career marked by strategic brilliance and leadership, Ilham continues to push boundaries. As the founder of Wonder Pictures, she possesses a remarkable talent for identifying emerging trends and nurturing new talent through collaboration.

A champion of bold and unconventional projects, Ilham is not afraid to challenge the status quo. A prime example is her groundbreaking work on "EFC," a pioneering female mixed martial arts film. This trailblazing spirit shines through in her commitment to developing diverse and thought-provoking feature films.

Two upcoming projects showcase Ilham's creative genius: "GENESIS," a riveting sci-fi thriller set in a world devoid of original thought, and "MONOPOLI," a high-stakes tale of secret societies vying for control of the global monetary system.

Ilham is a passionate advocate for original storytelling, standing firm against the industry's reliance on remakes, revivals, and sequels of older IPs. She believes that a treasure trove of untapped and innovative narratives from emerging creators awaits discovery and nurturing.

Through her unwavering commitment to unearth these stories and bring them to the big screen, Ilham is shaping a vibrant cinematic future that enchants audiences with fresh, captivating perspectives, redefining the industry one film at a time.

Filmography of applicant(s) - include title and year and/or a link to your IMDb page
Jaze Bordeaux [imdb.me/jazebordeaux](https://www.imdb.me/jazebordeaux)

Ilham Aragrah https://www.imdb.com/name/nm10902520/?ref=fn_al_nm_1

Title of qualifying feature film
EFC

Expected release date in 2024:
Fall 2024

Through which distribution model is your qualifying film expected to be released:
Streaming service

Name of theatrical distributor, film festival or streaming service releasing or exhibiting qualifying film:
BreakingGlass Pictures, Silk Entertainment

Film synopsis

In this adrenaline-fueled story, the world of women's mixed martial arts is rocked by an explosive showdown between reigning champion Cassady Jones and rising star Alexa Star. The clash of these two titans sends shock waves through the EFC, as the future of the sport hangs in the balance.

The inspiration: why was this an important film to make?

EFC is a groundbreaking film that has not only pushed boundaries in the world of cinema but has also paved the way for more inclusive and diverse representation in the industry. The decision to create EFC was driven by the need to challenge traditional gender roles and stereotypes, particularly within the combat sports genre. At the time of its development, EFC was set to become only the second movie in the drama sport genre to feature a female-led cast in a combat sport role.

Historically, women have been underrepresented in film, especially in non-traditional roles. By placing strong, complex female characters at the forefront of EFC, the film directly addresses this disparity and breaks new ground in the genre. This bold move has helped to challenge stagnant mindsets around women in film and has encouraged other filmmakers to do the same.

The success of EFC has not only demonstrated the demand for more inclusive storytelling but has also highlighted the importance of giving a platform to diverse voices. Through its powerful narrative and compelling characters, EFC pays homage to the resilient and inspiring women who served as inspiration for the story.

By taking on the challenge of creating EFC, Mr. Bordeaux and Miss Aragrah have shown a deep commitment to advancing representation and diversity in the film industry. The film's release in 2024 marked a significant milestone as it became only the third movie in the genre to feature a female-led cast in a combat sports role, following in the footsteps of Halle Berry's groundbreaking film, *Bruised* (2020). Through their work, Bordeaux and Aragrah have made a lasting impact on the industry and has opened the door for more female-driven stories to be told in the world of combat sports and beyond.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cnb0zGjGb-8&feature=youtu.be>

The making-of: how did this film come together? What were the highlights/challenges of producing this film?

The production of EFC was a journey marked by creativity, resilience, and adaptability in the face of numerous challenges. With limited resources and a tight schedule, the team had to "do more with less," finding innovative solutions to various obstacles.

Canadian weather proved to be a significant hurdle, limiting the available production days and forcing the team to adjust their filming schedule on the fly. Moreover, unexpected setbacks, such as a supporting actress losing her voice, resulted in the loss of half of the script. This required swift problem-solving skills and adaptability from both the cast and crew.

Budget constraints were an ongoing challenge throughout the production process. The team had to meticulously allocate resources and prioritize essential elements of the film to ensure the final product would meet Mr. Bordeaux's vision.

During post-production, the COVID-19 pandemic presented additional obstacles. The team had to quickly adapt to remote work and find creative ways to collaborate while maintaining safety protocols. This required flexibility, resourcefulness, and strong communication among all team members.

Despite these challenges, the production team's dedication and perseverance resulted in a powerful and moving film that has resonated with audiences and garnered critical acclaim. The making of EFC is a testament to the tenacity and ingenuity of the Canadian film industry.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qhs3Xs2zLak&t=37s>

National pride: describe what uniquely defines you as a Canadian producer.

Jaze Bordeaux's unique identity as a Canadian producer lies in his unwavering commitment to celebrating diversity, challenging industry conventions, and showcasing the beauty and richness of Canadian culture through his films. By consciously choosing to visually represent Canada in both the stories he tells and the settings he features, Bordeaux has established himself as a proud ambassador for the nation's film industry.

Mr. Bordeaux's films often feature quintessentially Canadian backdrops, such as sprawling landscapes, vibrant cities, and diverse communities, effectively capturing the unique character and spirit of each Canadian city. This visual celebration of Canada not only adds a layer of authenticity to his storytelling but also serves as a powerful reminder of the country's vast artistic potential.

In summary, Mr. Bordeaux's unique identity as a Canadian producer is defined by his commitment to visually representing Canada in his films and creating stories that celebrate the country's rich cultural landscape. Through his work, Bordeaux continues to champion Canadian talent, challenge industry norms, and solidify the nation's position as a thriving hub for innovative and diverse storytelling.

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Ilham Aragrag "Embodying the convergence of my African, Arab-Moroccan, and French-speaking immigrant heritage, I am a tapestry woven from the rich, vibrant threads of diverse cultural legacies and life experiences. Reflecting on my journey, I take pride in the resilience and determination that have shaped me. Looking ahead, I am filled with optimism, fuelled by the conviction that embracing our diverse narratives has the power cultivate a world rich in empathy and understanding.

Recognizing the unique interconnectedness that exists across the diverse array of voices and backgrounds in Canada, I am committed to creating stories that reflect our rich cultural tapestry. By weaving together narratives that represent the breadth of Canadian experiences, I strive to celebrate our shared humanity while honouring the distinct qualities that make our nation a beacon of inclusivity and unity. My work as a producer

aims to foster understanding and empathy, exploring the common threads that bind us while illuminating the vibrant diversity that enriches our national identity. Through the power of storytelling, I seek to cultivate a more inclusive and interconnected Canadian film landscape that resonates both within our borders and on the global stage.

Fundamentally, the essence of my identity as a Canadian producer lies in a personal quest to uncover the universal threads that bind us. Driven by a passion for creating films that celebrate Canada's diverse voices, honour our shared humanity, and showcase the extraordinary beauty and resilience of the Canadian spirit, I am devoted to promoting inclusive narratives that reflect and unite us all."

How will this film further your career as a producer?

The success of EFC has undoubtedly played a significant role in advancing the career of Mr. Bordeaux as a Canadian producer and director. By demonstrating his ability to craft a powerful, genre-defying narrative that challenges industry conventions, Mr. Bordeaux has already garnered attention and recognition both within Canada and on the international stage. A few of these accolades includes the following:

- Best Producer Award by the New York International Film Awards

- Best First Time Director Award by New York International Film Awards

- Best Director of a Sports Film - Best Actor and Director Film Awards - New York

- Best Feature Film by the New York International Film Awards

- Best Feature Film by Rome Prisma Independent Film Awards

The critical acclaim and numerous awards that EFC has received not only validate Mr. Bordeaux's talent as a filmmaker but also serve as a testament to his dedication to inclusive and boundary-pushing storytelling. This recognition has undoubtedly elevated his profile within the industry, opening doors for new and exciting opportunities.

Moreover, the success of EFC has given Mr. Bordeaux a platform to further his commitment to promoting diversity and representation in the Canadian film industry. With his reputation as a visionary and socially conscious filmmaker solidified, Mr. Bordeaux is well-positioned to attract like-minded collaborators, investors, and distributors who share his passion for pushing the boundaries of storytelling.

The triumph of EFC has also provided Mr. Bordeaux with invaluable experience and industry insights, which will undoubtedly inform his future projects and contribute to his continued growth as a filmmaker. With each new endeavor, Mr. Bordeaux can build upon the foundation established by EFC, allowing him to explore new creative territories and continue to make a lasting impact on the Canadian film landscape.

In summary, the success of EFC has been instrumental in advancing Jaze Bordeaux's career by solidifying his reputation as a groundbreaking filmmaker, providing a platform

for his commitment to diversity and representation, and equipping him with the experience and insights necessary for continued growth and success.

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The success of EFC has undoubtedly played a significant role in advancing the career of Miss Aragra as a Canadian producer. By demonstrating her ability to craft a powerful, genre-defying narrative that challenges industry conventions, Miss. Aragra has already garnered attention and recognition both within Canada and on the international stage.

These achievements have contributed to the foundation of solidifying Miss. Aragra's confidence and reputation as a visionary filmmaker, committed to inclusive and boundary-pushing storytelling. This recognition has also elevated her profile, attracting like-minded collaborators, investors, and distributors who share her passion for diverse narratives, opening doors for new and exciting opportunities.

The triumph of EFC has also provided Miss. Aragra with experience and industry insights, which will undoubtedly inform her future projects and contribute to her continued growth as a filmmaker. With each new endeavor, Miss. Aragra can build upon the foundation established by EFC, allowing her to explore new creative territories and continue to make a lasting impact on the Canadian film landscape.

In summary, the success of EFC has been instrumental in advancing Ilham Aragra's career by solidifying her reputation as a groundbreaking filmmaker, providing a platform for her commitment to diversity and representation, and equipping her with the experience and insights necessary for continued growth and success.

What is your next step as a Canadian independent producer?

Both Mr. Bordeaux's and Miss Aragra's next step as a Canadian independent producer involves the strategic development of a diverse film slate in collaboration with fellow talented Canadian filmmakers. This approach allows them to harness the collective creativity and expertise of their industry peers, further cementing their reputation as a force for innovation and inclusivity within the Canadian film landscape.

By assembling a team of like-minded collaborators, they aim to foster an environment where diverse voices and perspectives can thrive. This collaborative spirit not only enriches the creative process but also serves as a testament to their commitment to championing Canadian talent and promoting a sense of unity within the industry.

The film slate itself will be carefully curated to showcase a wide range of genres, themes, and formats, reflecting the rich tapestry of Canadian culture and storytelling traditions. This diverse approach allows them to continue pushing boundaries and challenging societal norms, while also catering to a broad audience and ensuring the long-term sustainability of his work.

In summary, Jaze Bordeaux's Miss Aragrag's next steps as an independent producer involve the development of a diverse and collaborative film slate that celebrates the breadth of Canadian talent and furthers their mission to drive innovation and inclusivity within the industry.

Krista Rand, Laura Adkin

Production company(ies)

Flat Head Films

Short biography of producer(s)

Laura Adkin is a writer/director from Vancouver, Canada who began her career in the film industry over 2 decades ago. Her award winning short films (The Goodnight Kiss; The Ride Home) have played in film festivals across North America. Her feature film debut was produced with the support of Women in the Directors Chair: Story & Leadership, UBCP/ACTRA, Willam F. White (Sunbelt Rentals) and Telefilm Canada. Laura won Best Writer, Best Director and Best Motion Picture at the 2024 Leo Awards with 9 other nominations 3 other wins for the film.

Krista is an award winning producer that has worked in Film /TV for almost two decades strategically gaining experience on both sides of the camera. Her most recent producing credit is the feature film Re: Uniting which won her a Leo Award for Best Motion Picture at the 2024 Leo Awards. The film was nominated for twelve awards and won six. The Austin Film Festival hosted the World Premiere of Re: Uniting and that led to a six week Canadian theatrical run and a week in the US including LA and NYC. Re: Uniting is now available to rent/own on VOD in the US/Canada.

Other accomplishments include her short film Nature Entwined can now be seen on CBC and the award winning feature film Grand Unified Theory which Krista was a Co-Producer on is available on VOD.

Filmography of applicant(s) - include title and year and/or a link to your IMDb page

Krista Rand https://www.imdb.com/name/nm2807329/?ref=fn_al_nm_1

Laura Adkin https://www.imdb.com/name/nm2289780/?ref=fn_al_nm_1

Title of qualifying feature film

Re: Uniting

Expected release date in 2024:

March 15, 2024

Through which distribution model is your qualifying film expected to be released:

Theatrical

Name of theatrical distributor, film festival or streaming service releasing or exhibiting qualifying film:

Vortex Media

Film synopsis

When six best friends from college reunite after 25 years, the secrets they've all kept hidden come bubbling to the surface. One secret that will change them all forever forces them to look at their lives and the choices they've made.

The inspiration: why was this an important film to make?

When it was time for us to make our first feature we wanted to tell a story that mattered with an underrepresented demographic that was interesting to us. People, especially women, over the age of 40 have amazing and complex stories to tell but are looked over in Hollywood in favor of youth. We knew telling the complicated and relatable experiences of friends in their late 40s would connect with people.

The making-of: how did this film come together? What were the highlights/challenges of producing this film?

Indie film is always challenging and making an indie film during the pandemic created challenges we never could have imagined. But our amazing team came together and used outside of the box thinking to make things work. The happy accident was the fact that because it was the pandemic and we were shooting on an island it was like summer camp. We were all in this little filmmaking bubble together and we were all there to make it happen. I'm not sure any of us will feel that sense of community again. It was very special.

National pride: describe what uniquely defines you as a Canadian producer.

Being Canadian producers who works in BC is challenging. Living and working on sets in Vancouver means we work in a Hollywood system but have the sensibility of a Canadian - wanting to create art but also create community. We have to have a scrappiness that one can only have on the west coast. Our industry is very Toronto/Montreal centric so we out west need to work even harder to be taken seriously. We love being Canadian, We love making movies in Canada and we love the support we get from our government.

How will this film further your career as a producer?

This first feature has already changed our lives. It's given us so much confidence but also put us on the map in Canada and the US as producers who do what they say they will do. We just recently won 6 out of the 12 awards we were nominated for at The Leo Awards. It was an honour to be awarded because the jury is made up of our film/tv community.

What is your next step as a Canadian independent producer?

We love what Reece Witherspoon is doing for women in the US and both of us are inspired by her to do something similar in Canada. Making quality content and getting stories out there for the world to see. Laura's next feature is a female driven revenge heist movie set in Montreal during the St Patrick's day parade. She's excited to work with a Montreal based New York Times best selling author on the project: Out of Luck. Krista has signed onto a genre feature and has 2 half hour grounded comedy series in development.

Madeline Davis

Production company(ies)

Common Knowledge

Short biography of producer(s)

Madeleine Davis is a Canadian producer with over a decade of experience across feature, documentary, and commercial mediums. She is known for her work on *WITH LOVE AND A MAJOR ORGAN* (2023), *FREAKS* (2018), and *DHULPA* (2022). Her work has played at festivals such as South by Southwest, TIFF, Fantasia, and Sitges Film Festival, receiving press from the New York Times, Variety, the Hollywood Reporter, Noisey, GQ, and Director's Library, as well as garnering multiple Vimeo Staff Picks and two Prism Prize nominations. These projects have received support from Telefilm Canada, the Harold Greenberg Fund, Canada Council for the Arts, Women in the Director's Chair, and MuchFACT. She is currently in development as an Executive Producer on Kunsang Kyirong's feature debut *100 SUNSET* and as a Producer / Writer on the feature project *PROVINCIAL WAYS*.

Madeleine holds a Masters in Creative Writing from the University of Cambridge and a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy from the University of British Columbia. In 2019, she founded Common Knowledge, a Canadian company focused on developing black comedy and science fiction feature films. She is an alumnus of the 2024 IFFR Talent Lab.

Filmography of applicant(s) - include title and year and/or a link to your IMDb page

<https://www.imdb.com/name/nm7959925/>

Title of qualifying feature film

With Love and a Major Organ

Expected release date in 2024:

April 12, 2024

Through which distribution model is your qualifying film expected to be released:

Theatrical

Name of theatrical distributor, film festival or streaming service releasing or exhibiting qualifying film:

FilmOption

Film synopsis

In a world where everyone's heart is an object and there's a strong societal pressure to dampen emotion, lonely Virtual Insurance broker Anabel (Anna Maguire) always follows her heart. At odds with this overly pragmatic society, and after a series of devastating emotional blows, she rips her heart from her chest and gives it to a man she's fallen for, the strangely unfeeling George (Hamza Haq). Unburdened by her unique yet cumbersome heart, Anabel finds life easier. George, on the other hand, begins to feel everything, to the shock of his overbearing mother, Mona (Veena Sood). Anabel soon realizes she needs to get her heart back if she's going to survive.

The inspiration: why was this an important film to make?

The thematic focus of the film, which centers on the profound necessity of fostering connections with those around us amidst a progressively fragmented society, was a pertinent concern when we commenced its development in 2018. This relevance only intensified as we continued through the subsequent stages of its creation. The experience of working on the screenplay during the initial Covid-19 lockdown was particularly surreal. Elements that had previously appeared far-fetched, such as conducting therapy sessions via Zoom, became commonplace aspects of daily existence.

The pandemic underscored the urgency of the film's exploration of human connection. The isolation and disruption brought about by the global health crisis imbued these themes with newfound immediacy and significance. The societal shift towards remote interactions and the consequent erosion of physical connectivity accentuated the film's core message. The film's narrative, which delves into the ways individuals seek and sustain relationships in an era dominated by digital communication and physical separation, took on a heightened resonance.

In this context, the film's exploration of connection is not merely a narrative device but a critical reflection of contemporary realities. It examines the paradox of living in an age where technological advancements facilitate unprecedented levels of communication, yet individuals often find themselves feeling more isolated than ever before. The juxtaposition of pre-Covid absurdities becoming post-Covid norms offered a unique lens through which to scrutinize the dynamics of human interaction.

This thematic inquiry is essential, as it addresses the fundamental human need for social bonds and the ways in which these bonds are challenged and reshaped in the modern world. The film's development journey, therefore, was marked by a deepening understanding of these dynamics, driven by the real-world upheavals that mirrored and amplified the narrative's central concerns. As such, the film stands as a timely and poignant commentary on the significance of human connection in an increasingly disconnected world.

The making-of: how did this film come together? What were the highlights/challenges of producing this film?

Our team spent several years developing this project, refining the script and securing the necessary financing. For all of us—the writer, director, and myself as the producer—this is our first feature film. The script had some bold and risky creative elements, and during development, we often faced hesitation from distributors and potential financiers who wanted to see how these elements would be executed before committing. These funding challenges meant that the partners we eventually secured were incredibly passionate about the project and turned out to be the perfect fit.

The long development period allowed the script to evolve and mature into its best form. This extra time gave us the chance to clarify the themes and distill the visions of both the writer and director. The iterative development process helped us thoroughly explore and solidify the narrative and thematic elements, ensuring a coherent and compelling final script.

During this time, we had many discussions and collaborative sessions that helped us align our creative objectives and refine the storytelling approach. This teamwork was crucial in overcoming the inherent risks of the script's innovative aspects, ultimately enhancing the narrative's depth and resonance.

Moreover, the challenging process of securing financing not only confirmed the project's artistic integrity but also strengthened our commitment to seeing it through. The unwavering enthusiasm and support from our partners highlighted the film's potential and reinforced our determination to bring it to life. The collective dedication of the team, along with the invaluable support of our partners, ensured that the final product truly reflected our creative vision.

National pride: describe what uniquely defines you as a Canadian producer.

Over the past decade, I've been lucky enough to work on a variety of feature films, each taking a different angle on what it means to be Canadian. I plan to keep exploring this theme in my future projects. I'm drawn to stories that use strong metaphors to reflect how we live, and I believe that being specific about the setting and time is key to making these stories feel authentic and relatable.

Besides digging into the nuances of Canadian identity, I'm also fascinated by how Canada fits into the global picture. Canada's unique geopolitical position gives it a perspective that can offer fresh insights into universal themes and questions. This unique viewpoint helps Canadian cinema play a meaningful role in global discussions on issues like cultural identity, diversity, social justice, and environmental sustainability.

My approach to filmmaking focuses on creating stories that resonate both locally and globally. By highlighting the specifics of Canadian culture and experience, I aim to touch on universal human experiences, showing how particular stories can speak to broader audiences. This focus not only adds depth to my projects but also makes them more appealing and relevant to a wide range of viewers.

I'm also dedicated to promoting diversity and inclusivity in the Canadian film industry. By working with voices from different cultural backgrounds and communities, I want to make sure Canadian cinema truly reflects our society's diversity. This isn't just the right thing to do—it also makes our stories richer and more authentic.

In short, my work is driven by a passion for storytelling that both celebrates and goes beyond the Canadian experience. By rooting my stories in specific contexts and using Canada's unique global perspective, I aim to create films that are both deeply personal and universally meaningful. This approach, combined with a commitment to diversity and inclusivity, aims to make a significant impact on the cinematic landscape, both in Canada and around the world.

How will this film further your career as a producer?

This film has significantly broadened my horizons, introducing me to the international market in ways I hadn't previously experienced. Traveling to various film festivals with the project and engaging with filmmakers from around the world has been incredibly inspiring. These encounters have fueled my ambition to delve into the world of co-productions, an approach I am now incorporating into the structure of the next feature I will produce. Attending international festivals has provided invaluable insights into different storytelling techniques, cultural perspectives, and production methodologies. This exposure has not only enriched my understanding of global cinema but also highlighted the potential for creative collaborations across borders. By partnering with international talent and production companies, I aim to bring a diverse and multifaceted dimension to my work, enhancing its appeal and relevance to a broader audience.

What is your next step as a Canadian independent producer?

I am currently developing a slate of genre feature films and beginning to explore ideas for television projects. Specifically, I am in development on three distinct films: a satirical horror, a book adaptation, and a science fiction piece. This diverse range of projects allows me to delve into various storytelling techniques and genres, enriching my portfolio. Additionally, I am actively working on securing financing for my next film, which will be structured as a co-production. This approach aims to leverage international resources and talents, enhancing the creative and commercial potential of the project. By embracing co-productions, I seek to bring a multifaceted perspective to

my work, fostering innovative and compelling narratives that appeal to a global audience.

Mike Johnston

Production company(ies)

Studio 104 Entertainment Inc.

Short biography of producer(s)

Mike Johnston is an award-winning Producer and the co-founder of the Vancouver-based production company, Studio 104 Entertainment. Founded in 2019, Studio 104 Entertainment has focused in on director-driven films with diverse narratives that are both critically and commercially appealing to an international marketplace and global audiences. Since 2021, Mike has produced a wide variety of exciting films and feature documentaries all of which has had extended festival runs and have sold in territories around the world. Highlights include Alexander Lashera's The Beehive which was released theatrically in 2023 and Caitlyn Sponheimer's Wild Goat Surf, which was released theatrically in 2024. On the documentary side, Mike produced Josephine Anderson's Curl Power which had it's World Premiere at the Hot Docs Film Festival in 2024, and served as Co-Producer on the ESPN 30 for 30 documentary, I'm Just Here for the Riot with directors Asia Youngman and Kat Jayme, due for release in Summer 2024.

Filmography of applicant(s) - include title and year and/or a link to your IMDb page

2021 - The Beehive (Game Theory Films, CBC Films)

2021 - N'xaxaitkw

2022 - The Interceptors (Telus Originals)

2022 - The Grizzly Truth (Photon Films, Crave)

2023 - Overtime (Telus Originals)

2023 - I'm Just Here For the Riot (ESPN)

2023 - Wild Goat Surf (Vortex Media, Crave)

2024 - Curl Power (Sherry Media Group, Telus Originals)

2024 - Memoria (FilmOption, Crave, CBC Films)

2024 - Delta Dawn (Telus Originals)

2025 - Send the Rain

2025 - Baby Tooth

Title of qualifying feature film

Wild Goat Surf

Expected release date in 2024:

May 3, 2024

Through which distribution model is your qualifying film expected to be released:

Theatrical

Name of theatrical distributor, film festival or streaming service releasing or exhibiting qualifying film:

Vortex Media

Film synopsis

It's 2003, and 13-year-old Rell "Goat" Andreson and her mom Jane are scheming and scrounging their way through another Penticton summer. Having illegally sublet the house they're renting; they're now holed up in an RV park bordering Skaha Lake. From this modest base of operations, Goat befriends an awkward outsider, skateboards, shoplifts, and talks a big game about becoming a world-class surfer... Despite living 700km from the ocean.

The inspiration: why was this an important film to make?

This was an important film to make because I wanted to support Caitlyn Sponheimer's first feature film as well as a film that was such a personal story to her. Caitlyn spent her summers in the Okanagan with her family and the subject matter of the film came from her lived experience and those personal moments with her parent's RV during the summertime. Additionally, putting a focus and spotlight on a small community like Penticton felt like a unique experience - especially when Penticton is such a character in the film and an opportunity to show off the additional beauty of British Columbia.

The making-of: how did this film come together? What were the highlights/challenges of producing this film?

This film came together as Caitlyn Sponheimer approached me to co-produce the project in March 2022 to form a provincial co-production between Quebec and British Columbia. While Cait has originally developed the material independently, due to the nature of the financing and structure required for the project, I took over as the majority producer of the project and shepherded it until completion and delivery to our financing partners. This also allowed Cait to focus on script re-writes and creative changes during pre-production and solely focus on directing during the hectic production phase. Highlights of the film include shooting on location in Penticton and

Tofino, British Columbia and spending Summer 2022 in these unique locations. Challenges include the usual time and money concerns as well as the nature of shooting in a distant location such as this meant that we were largely working with lesser experienced crew and bringing in more folks from Quebec and Vancouver to add value where needed. While these challenges were difficult during the production phase, we had a great time that pulled off a lot of miracles and ultimately put a great story on screen that was representative of the community.

National pride: describe what uniquely defines you as a Canadian producer.

At our company, Studio 104 Entertainment, we have put a unique focus on creating a diverse array of feature films that represent authentic Canadian perspectives while also appealing to a global audience. This unique focus keeps us aligned with our mission to support Canadian creators but also exporting our content worldwide and internationally so it appeals to the largest audience possible. Caitlyn Sponheimer's *Wild Goat Surf*, Josephine Anderson's *Curl Power*, Jenny Lee-Gilmore's *Overtime* and Andy Alvarez's *Memoria* are representative of that strategy and mission.

How will this film further your career as a producer?

This film furthers my career and I continue to put a focus on co-production partnerships both inter provincially and internationally in an effort to build more aggressive financial models for films as well as more diverse relationships for our film projects.

What is your next step as a Canadian independent producer?

The next step for me as a Canadian producer is to build a diverse slate of projects that are largely genre-agnostic that can be both critically acclaimed and commercial viable, and are more appealing to the greater marketplace. *Wild Goat Surf* begins the evolution in this focus and we will continue it with our next projects including Andy Alvarez's *Memoria* and Kaayla Whachell and Hayley Gray's *Send the Rain*.

Ngardy Conteh George

Production company(ies)

OYA Media Group

Short biography of producer(s)

Co-founder of OYA Media Group, Ngardy Conteh George is Sierra Leonean-Canadian award-winning director, producer and editor dedicated to amplifying the voices of systematically excluded communities, particularly those representing the African Diaspora. Recently she co-directed and co-produced 5-part docu-series 'Black Community Mixtapes' (Citytv), winner of three 2024 Canadian Screen Awards (Canadian equivalent to an Emmy). She directed, co-wrote and co-produced TV-hour documentary 'Mr. Jane and Finch' (CBC), winner of two 2020 Canadian Screen Awards. Her first feature length documentary was Sundance Institute Documentary Film Fund supported 'The Flying Stars', about amputee footballers in Sierra Leone coping with PTSD. The film earned best documentary at the BronzeLens Film Festival in 2015 and aired on CBC documentary channel, NHK, DR, and Al-Jazeera. She recently produced 'Bam Bam: The Sister Nancy Story', which made it's World Premiere at the 2024 Tribeca Film Festival and 'A Mother Apart', which had it's world premiere at Hot Docs 2024 earning Top 3 Audience favourite. She has been a Sundance Institute Documentary Film Program Fellow and grantee and a Black Public Media & MIT Open Doc Labs visiting artist fellow. She is also a member of the Directors Guild of Canada. Supporting community, Ngardy is a co-founder and board chair of OYA Black Arts Coalition, a not-for-profit charitable organization that focuses on supporting Black filmmakers and entrepreneurs in the film, entertainment and digital media industry.

Filmography of applicant(s) - include title and year and/or a link to your IMDb page

https://www.imdb.com/name/nm2075341/?ref=tt_rvi_nm_i_5

Title of qualifying feature film

A Mother Apart

Expected release date in 2024:

May 2024

Through which distribution model is your qualifying film expected to be released:

Festival

Name of theatrical distributor, film festival or streaming service releasing or exhibiting qualifying film:

Hot Docs Film Festival

Film synopsis

"My mother's leaving me was the first wound."

Staceyann Chin embodies multiple complex identities — poet, activist, lesbian, Jamaican-American, mother. But the most complicated of all is 'daughter.'

Abandoned by her mother as a child, Staceyann's been seeking her out for decades, travelling the globe in a one-sided attempt to forge a meaningful bond with the woman who brought her into the world.

And now, as the sole parent of nine-year-old Zuri, she wrestles with an all-consuming dilemma – how to mother a daughter when your own mother was missing in action.

In an extraordinary tale of grace and forgiveness, filmmaker Laurie Townsend profiles one woman's inspired and deeply intentional parenting. Catching up with Staceyann as she follows the elusive trail of her mother Hazel, a woman with her own troubled past, *A Mother Apart* takes us to Brooklyn, Montreal, Cologne — and finally to Jamaica where Staceyann and Zuri discover a new sense of home.

A healing journey spanning three generations, the film is punctuated with vivid animation, imagery from personal archives and excerpts from Staceyann's arresting live performances. Her singularly intersectional voice, showcased in the legendary Def Jam Poetry Slam and hit solo shows like *MotherStruck!*, infuses *A Mother Apart* with deep compassion and commanding intelligence.

The inspiration: why was this an important film to make?

This film was important to make due to its personal and socially resonant themes. The inspiration behind the film stemmed from a pivotal intersection of identity and personal exploration. This journey was marked by the director's own struggles with fertility treatments and documenting the Black Lives Matter movement in Toronto. Witnessing mothers and their children engaged in activism sparked curiosity about the intentional choices parents make in raising their children amidst societal upheaval.

Staceyann Chin's story resonated profoundly with the director and myself, as well as my co-producer, Alison Duke. Through Staceyann's courage and resilience, I found a narrative that mirrored my own questions about identity, family, and the transformative power of mothering.

The film became a platform to explore universal themes of maternal abandonment, immigration, LGBTQ+ identity, and feminist activism through Staceyann's experiences. It aimed to challenge stereotypes and celebrate the complexities of motherhood, particularly within marginalized communities. By documenting Staceyann's journey to redefine motherhood on her terms, the film not only honors her story but also serves as empowerment for viewers navigating similar challenges.

The making-of: how did this film come together? What were the highlights/challenges of producing this film?

The making of this film was a deeply collaborative process that began with the director's documentary treatment, which centered on the theme of raising Black children amidst societal conflict and transformation. At its core, the film aimed to explore the complexities and resilience required in nurturing and shaping the future generation within the context of personal and societal challenges. Staceyann Chin's personal biography provided a powerful foundation for the narrative. Her own upbringing in Jamaica, marked by the absence of her mother from infancy, offered a backdrop against which she navigated the complexities of motherhood with her daughter, Zuri.

One of the highlights of producing this film was the opportunity to delve deep into Staceyann's personal journey and parenting philosophy. Capturing intimate moments between Staceyann and Zuri allowed us to portray the bond between mother and daughter, illustrating how love and determination can defy the odds and shape a positive future despite challenging circumstances.

The production also faced significant challenges. Delving into sensitive personal histories required a delicate balance of respect and honesty. Navigating the emotions of Staceyann's past and present, while honoring the complexities of her story demanded careful handling to ensure authenticity without causing harm. These challenges were combined with securing filming locations, coordinating schedules and maintaining production timelines. We also received the greenlight to make this film during the pandemic and had to navigate the complexity of international travel with various restrictions in the US, Germany and Jamaica. We also had to plan for remotes shoots at times where travel was impossible.

National pride: describe what uniquely defines you as a Canadian producer.

As a Canadian producer, what uniquely defines me is my unwavering commitment to authenticity, impact, and inclusive storytelling. At OYA Media, we are dedicated to telling stories that not only entertain but also provoke thought and inspire change. Our mission is deeply rooted in celebrating the power of Black and marginalized communities' experience through narratives that are both compelling and culturally significant.

By collaborating with diverse creatives and partners worldwide, we bring rich perspectives to our projects, ensuring they resonate on a global scale while reflecting the unique Canadian multicultural identity. I am proud to navigate the intersectionality of identities and experiences, including being a Black woman, and a child of Sierra Leone heritage raised in Canada. These diverse perspectives inform my storytelling.

How will this film further your career as a producer?

This film's ongoing festival run has been successful, including accolades such as winning Best Canadian Feature, Audience Award for Best Documentary, and Best First Feature at Inside Out, along with being selected Hot Docs Film Festival for the first time and earning Top 3 Audience Award, marks a significant milestone in my career as a producer.

These achievements validate the film's impact and resonance with audiences and industry professionals alike. Winning awards and receiving recognition at renowned festivals not only enhances the film's visibility but also establishes credibility for me as a producer of compelling and socially relevant content. This recognition serves as a testament to my ability to identify and nurture stories that resonate deeply with diverse audiences.

The film's festival success opens doors to broader distribution opportunities and potential partnerships. It positions me as a producer capable of delivering high-quality, award-winning projects that attract interest from distributors, broadcasters, and streaming platforms. The exposure gained from prestigious festivals like Hot Docs and BlackStar increases the film's marketability and strengthens my professional network within the global film community.

What is your next step as a Canadian independent producer?

As a Canadian independent producer with OYA Media Group, my next step is to continue our mission of telling authentic, impactful, and entertaining stories that resonate globally. Building on our commitment to quality and professionalism, I aim to push the boundaries further by seeking out new projects that not only meet but exceed the high standards we set for ourselves.

One immediate focus will be on expanding our reach through international co-productions and delving into the narrative space. Collaborating with partners worldwide allows us to bring diverse perspectives and fresh narratives to the forefront, enriching our storytelling and broadening our audience base.

Our commitment to social change remains steadfast through initiatives like the OYA Black ArtsCoalition (OBAC). Our non-profit charitable organization plays a vital role in supporting Black artists, creators, and entrepreneurs in the entertainment industry in Canada. Moving forward, I intend to strengthen OBAC's impact by fostering

partnerships, providing resources, and advocating for greater representation of Black voices in media.

Nicole Hilliard-Forde

Production company(ies)

Motel Pictures Inc.

Short biography of producer(s)

Nicole Hilliard-Forde is an Emmy-nominated, Toronto-based casting director, talent development programmer and producer with a background in performance. Nicole has worked in casting for over 20 years and is known for her work internationally as an industry programmer at Toronto International Film Festival in her previous role of Producer, TIFF Rising Stars, a talent accelerator which identifies six actors annually who are poised to break out. Alumnae include Charlie Carrick (Reign), Megan Park (The F Word), Evelyne Brochu (Orphan Black), Johnathan Sousa (Kidnap Capital), Cara Gee (The Expanse), Alexandre Landry (Gabrielle), Julia Sarah Stone (A Worthy Companion), Shannon Kook (The Conjuring), Sophie Desmarais (Sarah Prefers to Run), Aliocha Schneider (Ville Marie), Deragh Campbell (I Used to be Darker), Karelle Tremblay (Les Etres Chers), Stephan James (If Beale Street Could Talk, Race, Selma), Jared Abrahamson (Travelers), Sophie Nelisse (The Book Thief), Somkele Iyaham-Idhalama (93 Days), Grace Glowicki (Her Friend Adam), Mylene McKay (Nelly), and OC Ukeje (The Arbitration).

A strong, creative head of department with a demonstrated ability to manage strict budgets, source talent, employ best practices of the casting industry, negotiate on behalf of producers with agents, managers, solicitors, guilds, collective bargaining units, studio/broadcast partners, and effectively deliver ACTRA administration compliance, within specific, tight deadlines and according to federal and provincial Canadian content rules, in an ever-changing environment.

Nicole is an Honours, BA graduate of Trinity College, University of Toronto and alumna of Norman Jewison's Canadian Film Centre Producer's Residency. Nicole is a member of the Casting Society of America, the Academy of Canadian Cinema & Television, and sits on various talent juries. For a full list of casting credits, please visit her IMDb page.

Nicole Hilliard-Forde celebrates various casting nominations including the 2023 Canadian Screen Awards, CA Nominated, Canadian Screen Award Achievement in Casting for The Swearing Jar (2022); 2022 Casting Society of America, USA Nominated, Artios Award Outstanding Achievement in Casting - Low Budget Feature - Comedy or Drama for The Swearing Jar (2022); 2021 Casting Society of America, USA Nominated, Artios Award Outstanding Achievement in Casting - Low Budget Feature - Comedy or Drama for The Novice (2021); 2020 Canadian Screen Awards, CA Won, Canadian Screen Award' Achievement in Casting for Akilla's Escape (2020); 2007 Primetime Emmy Awards Nominated, Primetime Emmy Outstanding Casting for a Miniseries, Movie or a Special for The Path to 9/11 (2006).

Filmography of applicant(s) - include title and year and/or a link to your IMDb page

Recently, she produced the feature film We Forgot to Break Up starring Lane Webber (Slo Pitch), Daniel Gravelle (Hell of a Summer), June Laporte (You Can Live Forever), Jordan Dawson (Hudson & Rex), and Hallea Jones (Umbrella Academy) directed by Knox, and previous to that, The Other Half starring Tatiana Maslany (Orphan Black) and Tom Cullen (Downton Abbey) which had its world premiere at SXSW Film Festival 2016 in Narrative Competition and was released theatrically by Mongrel Media in Canada, Brainstorm Media in the US and AMBI Distribution, internationally. The film garnered nominations for Best Performance by an Actress in a Leading Role for Maslany and Best Performance by an Actor in a Supporting Role for Henry Czerny at the 2017 Canadian Screen Awards, with Maslany taking home the best film actress prize.

<https://www.imdb.com/name/nm1237910/>

Title of qualifying feature film

We Forgot to Break Up

Expected release date in 2024:

October 15, 2024

Through which distribution model is your qualifying film expected to be released:

Theatrical

Name of theatrical distributor, film festival or streaming service releasing or exhibiting qualifying film:

Northern Banner

Film synopsis

We Forgot to Break Up follows the story of a diverse group of musicians, in the vibrant bar scene of Toronto, who come together to form a band with a mission: to ignite a musical revolution. As they channel their individual struggles and experiences into their music, 'The New Normals' create a dynamic, rock sound that transcends gender and orientation, captivating a changing world. But as they rise to fame, personal and romantic entanglements complicate their journey. 'We Forgot to Break Up' is a heartwarming and fiercely authentic story of music, love, and friendship in the indie music scene circa the early 2000s, as they strive to make their voices heard and forge an unshakable bond that transcends labels. Based on the novel Heidegger Stairwell by Kayt Burgess, the film is set in the late 90's in small town Ontario and Toronto during the

burgeoning indie music scene of the early 00s. It is a song-driven, vibrant, transformative story of the making of a band.

The inspiration: why was this an important film to make?

The story permits the audience to view a transmasculine protagonist who has intersectional identities, whose transness is not their only identity, who is multidimensional, who has agency, and is a fleshed out character. This film is part of a stylistics movement based on the "banalisation de la sexualite" and part of a movement in Canadian cinema reinventing "2000s nostalgia-core", which unabashadly tells the stories of Canadians.

The making-of: how did this film come together? What were the highlights/challenges of producing this film?

Ten years ago I was taking writer meetings sharing our passions for storytelling and this writer recommended I read this book called Heidegger Stairwell. I sought out the book and read it in one sitting. The book was an adrenaline-rush, indie rock, love story, and a gutpunch to my stomach. I had to option the book. So I sought out the author met with them in a cafe, I remember CRYING and they gave me the rights. And so I began my odyssey of adapting the work. I first turned the book into a short film which landed at festivals including TIFF, SXSW and based on audience feedback, I knew I had to make the feature version. Which is what led me to collaborating with Director, Knox.

The film is about a band of misfits who ditch their small town to chase their dreams as indie rock gods in the big city. It's about a small town queer kid who never fit in. It's a searing, heartbreaking, and incredibly sexy love triangle. As the protagonist of the film's star ascends, he is forced to reckon with the fact that when we meet our destiny, there is always collateral damage.

This film is for anyone who has ever been YOUNG or BEEN IN LOVE or HAD THEIR HEART BROKEN or BROKEN SOMEONE ELSE'S HEART but more than that this story is about TRANSFORMATIVE losses.

On set, a near daily refrain from Knox to the art team was.....can we make this dirtier? Can we get more garbage in the shot? I am sure I had my back up against a dumpster every day I was on the set.

One of the first things that our trans consultant on the project noted about the script was how thrilled she was to see a story about a trans man that didn't REVOLVE around him being trans. He was just a human in the world, magnetic, hungry, and flawed.

During the development phase of the adaptation, TRANS POLITICS morphed and evolved QUITE A BIT during this time and as I developed the project it became clear to me how this story needed to be told now. This is a film that people would wish their

younger queer self would have seen. Who doesn't want to watch a QUEER COMMITMENTS set in the late 90s/early 2000s?

National pride: describe what uniquely defines you as a Canadian producer.

My journey in the world of cinema traces back to her formative years, where her passion for storytelling and visual arts was ignited. Born and raised in Canada, I was drawn to the transformative power of film as a medium for expression and social commentary.

Inspired by the works of pioneering filmmakers and storytellers, I embarked on a quest to carve out her own path in the industry.

As a media professional of biracial descent, my driving force is to increase opportunities for inclusion in on-screen media. To that end, I am always on the lookout for fresh faces and up-and-coming talent, as well as authentic storytelling. I am part of the generation of children born to one Black parent and one Caucasian parent just before — and after — the Supreme Court's 1967 Loving vs. Virginia decision, which overturned all remaining anti-miscegenation laws in the United States, dubbed the "Loving Generation".

Central to my work is a deep commitment to diversity and inclusion in Canadian cinema. Throughout my career, I have been a vocal advocate for marginalized voices, using my platform to shine a spotlight on stories that are often overlooked or marginalized. My commitment to diversity is reflected in both my choice of projects and my approach to storytelling. I actively seek out stories from diverse perspectives, amplifying voices that have historically been underrepresented in mainstream media.

How will this film further your career as a producer?

- Increase brand recognition and visibility for MPI within the film industry and among target audiences
- Enhance audience engagement and interaction with MPI's content and brand
- Develop targeted marketing campaigns tailored to specific audience segments and demographic profiles to effectively reach and resonate
- Promote MPI's film projects effectively to generate buzz, excitement, and anticipation among audiences
- Enhance MPI's reputation and credibility within the film industry
- MPI is dedicated to providing exceptional film production experiences while nurturing emerging talent in the industry. With a focus on creativity, innovation, and inclusivity, MPI offers a comprehensive range of services covering every stage of the filmmaking process.

- To be recognized as a leading force in independent cinema, known for our commitment to excellence, integrity, and social responsibility, and revered for our ability to amplify diverse voices and drive positive change through the power of storytelling.
- To empower storytellers to fearlessly explore the human experience, push artistic boundaries, and spark meaningful conversations through thought-provoking and commercially viable content that resonates with audiences across cultures and generations.
- To create a vibrant ecosystem where creativity thrives, talent flourishes, and impactful stories find their voice, fostering an inclusive and collaborative community.
- To cultivate a legacy of cinematic excellence by producing films that entertain, enlighten, and enrich the lives of audiences
- To be a catalyst for innovation and disruption in the film industry, leveraging cutting-edge technologies, emerging platforms, and unconventional storytelling approaches to push the boundaries of cinematic expression and redefine the art form for the 21st century.

What is your next step as a Canadian independent producer?

Motel Pictures Inc. (MPI) is a beacon of creativity and innovation in the North American independent film industry. Founded in 2005 by Nicole Hilliard-Forde, MPI has emerged as a dynamic force specializing in developing, packaging, and producing inspiring, provocative, and commercially viable content with a unique voice. MPI has become synonymous with creativity, innovation, and a relentless pursuit of excellence. With over 20 years of experience casting for feature films and television, Nicole brings industry knowledge and a passion for empowering emerging talent to MPI. Her journey from casting director to the helm of MPI exemplifies her dedication to shaping the future of storytelling and fostering a vibrant and inclusive creative community.

MPI's primary focus lies in fostering creativity and empowering emerging talent. Nicole's expertise in casting serves as a cornerstone for MPI's success, enabling the Company to assemble stellar casts that breathe life into its projects. With Nicole's guidance, MPI has cultivated a reputation for discovering and nurturing new talent, providing a platform for fresh voices to flourish. As a forward-thinking company, MPI constantly explores new avenues for growth and innovation. Whether embracing emerging technologies, expanding into new markets, or experimenting with new storytelling formats, MPI remains agile and adaptable in an ever-evolving industry landscape.

Ryan Singh, Nikila Cole, Patricia Scarlett

Production company(ies)

Ryan Singh Productions Ltd.

Short biography of producer(s)

Based in Toronto, Guyanese-born Ryan Singh is an accomplished Producer and Director. His first feature documentary, "Ray of Hope" which he wrote, directed, and produced alongside collaborator Nikila Cole tells the story of the Tamil Genocide in Sri Lanka and its impact on Tamil's living in the Diaspora. It was released in Cineplex Theatres where it had a two-week run. The film has won more than 6 awards globally after 4 festival screenings. Earlier in 2024, Ryan worked as a producer of Deep Blue released in Theatres in Antigua and on CBC GEM's number 1 streaming episode of "The Nature of Things - Butt Seriously" as a co-director alongside Liam O'Rinn. Notable credits include "The Breadwinner," Netflix hits such as "Awake," "Wedding Season," and "Luckiest Girl Alive."

Filmography of applicant(s) - include title and year and/or a link to your IMDb page

Ryan Singh <https://www.imdb.com/name/nm4866634/>

Title of qualifying feature film

Ray of Hope

Expected release date in 2024:

May 10, 2024

Through which distribution model is your qualifying film expected to be released:

Theatrical

Name of theatrical distributor, film festival or streaming service releasing or exhibiting qualifying film:

KW Talkies

Film synopsis

The 26-year armed conflict in Sri Lanka compelled numerous Eelam Tamils to seek refuge in foreign nations, notably in Canada. Among them is Rathika Sitsabaiesan, a former Canadian Member of Parliament, who fled the armed conflict in Sri Lanka with her Tamil family as a five-year-old child. The anguish and tales of the conflict drove

Rathika's advocacy. In 2013, her visit to Sri Lanka rekindled her own traumatic memories, as she was surveilled by the very government accountable for widespread suffering.

"Ray of Hope" delves into the intricate aftermath of trauma within a community that is now breaking its silence, aiming to attain justice for the multitude who have gone missing or perished. The documentary sheds light on how Rathika's experience echoes the larger narrative of Eelam Tamil migrants, exploring the intricate interplay between personal and collective healing and the pursuit of accountability.

The inspiration: why was this an important film to make?

The inspiration for "Ray of Hope" stemmed from a deep commitment to giving a platform to those whose voices are often unheard and to highlight the profound experiences of individuals who have faced conflict and displacement. The film's primary aim was to delve into the human spirit's remarkable capacity for resilience and hope, as exemplified through Rathika's story.

As the producer and director, my vision was to create a film that not only told a powerful story but also immersed the audience in the emotional and visceral experiences of the characters. To achieve this, we employed a combination of stunning visuals, evocative music, and carefully crafted sound design, ensuring that the audience was transported to the heart of the story and deeply impacted by it.

One of the unique aspects of our filmmaking process was the use of non-traditional casting. We believed in the power of authenticity, and to this end, we cast individuals who had a personal connection to the themes of the film, such as those who had experienced conflict or displacement themselves. This approach not only added depth to the storytelling but also ensured that the narratives were represented with the utmost accuracy and empathy.

In terms of language, "Ray of Hope" primarily used English but also included segments in Tamil, French, and American Sign Language (ASL), with English subtitles. This multilingual approach was crucial in preserving the authenticity of the subjects' experiences and conveying the full emotional and cultural context that might otherwise be lost in translation.

The relevance of "Ray of Hope" was further underscored by the ongoing conflict in Gaza. The film resonated deeply with audiences as it mirrored the resilience and hope of those affected by the Gaza conflict. The struggles and perseverance of Rathika and others featured in the film echoed the experiences of many in Gaza, making the film not just a story of personal triumph but a universal narrative of human endurance in the face of adversity.

Ultimately, my vision for "Ray of Hope" was to craft a cinematic experience that was not only visually and emotionally compelling but also deeply authentic. By doing so, we

hoped to foster a greater understanding and empathy for those impacted by conflict and displacement, leaving a lasting impression on our audience and drawing poignant parallels to contemporary events in Gaza.

The making-of: how did this film come together? What were the highlights/challenges of producing this film?

The Making of 'Ray of Hope'

Concept and Inception

11 years in the making, the documentary 'Ray of Hope' was conceptualized as a poignant exploration of hope and resilience in the face of adversity. The aim was to capture the stories of individuals and communities overcoming significant challenges, reflecting the broader themes of perseverance and optimism. This thematic focus aligned with the guiding principles of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and general journalistic principles for documentary storytelling.

Pre-Production

Research and Planning: Extensive research was conducted to identify the subjects and locations that best exemplify the documentary's themes. This included reaching out to community leaders, activists, and individuals with compelling stories of resilience.

Funding and Support: Securing funding was a critical step. The production was supported by the Canadian funding system and the tax systems both provincially and federally. This financial backing was crucial for covering the costs of production, including equipment, travel, and crew. Although there was significant producer investments in this project, these partnerships demonstrate an optimistic outlook for future projects.

Team Assembly: A diverse and experienced team was assembled, including director, producers, cinematographers, and sound engineers. The team's collective expertise and cultural proximity to the subject matter ensured a high-quality production.

Production

Filming Locations: The documentary was filmed in various locations, each chosen for its significance to the stories being told. The team traveled extensively, capturing footage in different countries, communities and environments.

Interviews and Footage: The heart of the documentary lies in its interviews and real-life footage. Interview subjects were selected based on their compelling narratives of hope and resilience. Filming these interviews posed challenges, such as coordinating schedules and ensuring the authenticity, safety and comfort of the subjects.

Technical Challenges: Like any production, technical difficulties arose, including equipment failures, political environments and adverse weather conditions. However, the team's preparedness and adaptability allowed them to overcome these obstacles.

Post-Production

Editing: The editing process was meticulous, involving the careful selection and arrangement of footage to craft a cohesive and impactful narrative. This phase also included integrating music, voiceovers, and other sound elements.

File Recovery Incident: A significant challenge occurred with a file failure, necessitating a recovery process just before a key screening event. Despite this setback, the team managed to recover the files in time, showcasing their resilience and dedication.

Final Touches: The final touches involved color correction, sound mixing, and ensuring the documentary met the highest production standards. The goal was to create a visually and emotionally engaging experience for the audience.

Highlights

Screening Events: Our screenings began in Hamilton, Ontario, where we won of first award (Best Directors) followed by Romford Film Festival, winning two awards (Best Documentary and Audience Choice Award). We have since traveled back to Canada, Washington, DC and Jamaica. One of the highlights in Jamaica was the screening event at the University of the West Indies Mona Campus, despite being moved indoors due to torrential rainfall. The event had a fabulous turnout and featured a spirited talkback session with Rathika Sitsabaiesan and Maya, notable figures in the film. Our co-director recently traveled to Wyoming, where she camped out with other filmmakers in order to save while being able to attend the festival. Despite this challenge, her experience has been incredible. We are now preparing for the Valley Film Festival in LA with a projection to make a bid for the Academy Awards consideration as suggested by some of our film strategists.

Workshop and Festival Participation: As requested, we have begun designing workshops to compliment of cinematic presentations. One workshop titled 'Non-Fiction Storytelling for Social Causes' led by Ryan Singh, which engaged high school participants.

Additionally, Singh's participation in the Black River Film Festival as a featured guest and photographer further elevated the documentary's profile.

Distribution: Ray of Hope received an early Theatrical distribution deal from KW Talkies which saw the presentation of this story on Cineplex Odeon. It is the first story that speaks to the Tamil genocide on a National Cinematic Platform. The film has also received an acquisition offer from CBC.

Challenges Funding support, learning curve, political fallout as the economy of Sri Lanka collapsed, human resources.

File Failure: The file failure incident before the screening event was a significant challenge. The successful recovery of the files showcased the team's technical expertise and problem-solving skills.

Coordination and Scheduling: Coordinating interviews and filming schedules with subjects across various locations required careful planning and flexibility.

Conclusion The production of 'Ray of Hope' was marked by a combination of careful planning, dedicated teamwork, and the ability to overcome unexpected challenges. The documentary's success is a testament to the resilience and creativity of the production team, reflecting the very themes of hope and perseverance that the film aims to convey.

National pride: describe what uniquely defines you as a Canadian producer.

Having live in Canada for more than 31 years, working in the industry for more than 25 years, I have taken the steps to understand every aspect of the business. I especially love the business affairs, a skill I learnt over the last two years working on Ray of Hope. As a Canadian producer, we have the incredible opportunity to align ourselves with stories from around the world that have a Canadian angle or relationship because Canada is such a wonderful melting pot. Watching Canadian content, I love that it shows a perspective that is different from the rest of the world yet can connect with different parts of the world being Canadian. It is that universality that as a Canadian producer I infuse my stories with. Ray of Hope, for example, was forcibly told from a specific Tamil point of view by mostly Canadian Tamils whose journey to Canada started as refugees. Many had to first become an illegal to become legal in Canada. Despite these challenges, they have had to remain resilient, steadfast as they continue to strive in rebuilding their communities here in Canada. It is with this specificity that I bring to the stories that I tell that makes me a wonderful Canadian storyteller and producer. Our film has since received over 36 nominations and 6 awards including best documentary, best directors, best poster, best movie trailer and best documentary by a black producers. But all this could not be done by me alone. As a Canadian producer, it is also my ability to find the right talent in front of and behind the scenes.

Working with my team in telling these stories was incredible. They trusted me and our instinct to be inclusive. Our cultural consultant, Dayana Stanislaus (CMPA Mentee 2022) also became an executive producer not only by the title but because she step in and up to every challenge she was offered. Working on one of my sets is an opportunity for creatives to uplevel and be recognized for the work they offer. We had several students earn both school and work credits. Mentorship is a staple within our community. As a Canadian producer, what I hope to be remembered for is the access I offer others to succeed while being able to tell global stories from a uniquely Canadian perspective.

How will this film further your career as a producer?

Impact of 'Ray of Hope' on My Career as a Producer

Establishing Credibility and Reputation

1. Showcasing My Storytelling Skills: Producing 'Ray of Hope' has allowed me to demonstrate my ability to tell compelling, human-centered stories. This film showcases my expertise in capturing nuanced, emotional narratives, which is a valuable skill in the documentary film industry.

2. High-Profile Collaborations: Working with notable figures such as Rathika Sitsabaiesan and Maya, and securing funding from broadcasters like Tamil Entertainment Television, partners such as CMF, CAVCO, OFTTC, CMPA, RIIPEN, OYA Black Arts Coalition as well as sponsorship from respected organizations like the High Commission of Canada in Jamaica, enhances my credibility and opens doors for future collaborations with high-profile individuals and entities.

Building a Robust Portfolio

1. Diverse Project Experience: Adding 'Ray of Hope' to my portfolio shows my versatility and capability to handle diverse projects. This film complements other projects I've worked on, such as 'Memento: A South African Artventure' and 'H.E.N.R.I.' illustrating my range as a producer.

2. Successful Event Execution: The successful screening and subsequent workshops highlight my organizational and event management skills. These experiences demonstrate my ability to not only produce films but also engage audiences and create impactful events around my projects.

Expanding My Professional Network

1. Networking Opportunities: Participation in events like Content London, TIFF, BANFF, CANNES and the Black River Film Festival and leading workshops allows me to network with other professionals in the industry. These connections have led to future collaborations, mentorship opportunities, and increased visibility in the film community.

2. Industry Recognition: The positive reception of 'Ray of Hope' can lead to recognition within the industry, potentially earning me 6 awards or over 36 nominations that further validate my work and attract new opportunities.

Enhancing My Skills and Expertise

1. Problem-Solving Abilities: Overcoming challenges such as funding shortfalls, the collapse of a Sri Lanka's economy, a divided community and adverse weather conditions demonstrates my resilience and problem-solving abilities. These experiences make me a more adept and reliable producer, capable of handling unexpected issues during production.

2. Technical Proficiency: The technical skills required to produce 'Ray of Hope,' including filming, editing, and file management across continents, contribute to my overall

expertise. Mastery of these skills enhances my ability to deliver high-quality projects in the future.

Opportunities for Future Projects

1. **Securing Funding:** Successfully producing a well-received documentary can make it easier to secure funding for future projects. Demonstrating that I can deliver a compelling and impactful film increases the confidence of potential investors and sponsors.
2. **New Project Invitations:** The success of 'Ray of Hope' has led to invitations to work on new projects, both documentary and narrative. My proven track record makes me an attractive candidate for a wide range of productions.

Personal and Professional Growth

1. **Creative Fulfillment:** Working on meaningful projects like 'Ray of Hope' provides a sense of creative fulfillment, which inspires and motivates me to continue pursuing impactful stories. This passion and dedication are essential for long-term success in the industry.
2. **Mentorship and Leadership:** Leading workshops and engaging with younger filmmakers positions me as a mentor and leader in the industry. This role not only enhances my reputation but also contributes to the development of the next generation of filmmakers.

Conclusion

Producing 'Ray of Hope' is a significant milestone in my career. It enhances my credibility, expands my professional network, and showcases my ability to tell powerful stories. The skills, experiences, and recognition gained from this project will undoubtedly open new doors and further establish me as a talented and reliable producer in the film industry.

What is your next step as a Canadian independent producer?

To commemorate the 15th anniversary of the end of the war in Sri Lanka against the Tamil people, Ryan Singh Productions Ltd, completed "Ray of Hope," releasing it theatrically. It was the first film to play on Cineplex screens that speaks about the genocide of the Tamil people who came to Canada. Following the theatrical screening, the film burst onto the festival circuit, generating 6 award wins from 36 nominations and exciting audiences in over 5 countries. We are riding the wave of this successful story.

Generating this much excitement, the company is poised to continue its relationship with producing partner MBI Productions while attracting early interest from foreign partners Australian company Resonant Blue Studios and UK-based company Little Black Book.

With a strong market presence in sales, packaging, and production delivery, Resonant Blue Studios, with principal Tim Levy, is a fantastic new collaborator with co-production experience.

Little Black Book's UK presence is an important partner in attracting some of our principal cast with Guyanese presence. Guyana and Guyanese investments are an important new venture since the country has now discovered oil off its shores and has an aggressive mandate for global presence in all areas. Recent productions such as Arnold Schwarzenegger's "Fubar" (Netflix) and Steven Soderbergh's "Full Circle" (HBO Max) have both set their recent series against the backdrop of Guyana, while Joseph Gordon-Levitt and Leonardo DiCaprio have projects in development to be shot in Guyana. Now the country can position itself to its former cinematic glory experienced 60 years earlier when it became independent from Britain in 1966.

With her previous novel, "The Breadwinner," having achieved huge success with 4 Canadian Screen Awards, a Golden Globe, and an Academy nomination, Deborah Ellis' new book is an exciting intellectual property to adapt for cinema. This project is poised to catapult her novelist career into the screenplay arena, teaming with writers Shirvington Hannays and Ryan Singh, with story editors Patricia Scarlett and Diane De La Haye, both with an impressive background in award-winning story development to transform "The Greats" from a story of destitution into a story about unrequited love.

Rounding out this collaboration are production designer June Charles, DOP Roger Singh, and composer Andres Galindo Arteaga, whose impressive body of work and previous working relationship complement the development of this ambitious project.

With a solid story, team, and international partnership, we trust that our financing endeavor will breathe success.

Sonia Suvagau

Production company(ies)

Imagine Freedom Films Inc.

Short biography of producer(s)

Sonia graduated with honors from Simon Fraser University's School for the Contemporary Arts in Vancouver, Canada, earning a BFA in Film. She has made significant contributions to the film industry, including her original documentary mini-series on happiness, "Ecstatic!" (2013) for Vision Television, and the feature fiction "Unidentified Female Object" (2022). In 2021, after intensive Meisner training at the Robyn Kay Studio, from Toronto, and leading roles in two successful plays, Sonia co-wrote and starred in the award-winning feature film "Box of Freedom." The film premiered on Romanian national TV, Romania, and in June this year, it aired on OMNI Television Canada. "Box of Freedom" is also available for streaming on Amazon Prime in the US and UK.

Recently, Sonia completed touring festivals with her first solo narrative feature, "Unidentified Female Object," which she wrote, directed, and starred in as the lead character, Aurora. Her second narrative film, "Virgins by Choice," created alongside Adriana Villi, showcases the power of women supporting each other both on and off the screen.

Filmography of applicant(s) - include title and year and/or a link to your IMDb page

Sonia Suvagau Filmography

Virgins by Choice (Feature Fiction, 2024)

Unidentified Female Object (Feature Fiction, 2022)

Inward Edward (Short Fiction, 2017)

Our 1/4 Life Crisis (Feature Documentary, 2015)

Connected: A Film About Autistic People (Feature Documentary, 2015)

Ecstatic! (TV mini-series, 2013)

Rose Colored Glasses (Feature Documentary, 2012)

Salvation (Short Fiction 2010)

Title of qualifying feature film

Virgins by Choice

Expected release date in 2024:
September 2024

Through which distribution model is your qualifying film expected to be released:
Festival

Name of theatrical distributor, film festival or streaming service releasing or exhibiting qualifying film:
n/a

Film synopsis

In a desperate act to heal their broken hearts, two girlfriends vow to give up sex for a year only to discover that true love has no timeline. After her divorce, Luna struggles to overcome the narcissistic abuse that haunts her mind and her newly discovered bisexuality. Meanwhile, 40-year-old Lily finds herself single again after a broken engagement. She's ready to forsake her faith, finding love and her virginity. These two best friends embark on a journey to heal.

The inspiration: why was this an important film to make?

Virgins by Choice was an important film to make for several reasons:

1. Representation and Visibility: Bisexuality: Luna's journey of coming to terms with her bisexuality provides representation for bisexual individuals. It's important for media to reflect the diverse experiences and identities within the LGBTQ+ community, helping to normalize and validate these experiences. Age and Sexuality: Lily's story of being a 40-year-old virgin breaking away from traditional expectations offers a narrative that is rarely seen in mainstream media. This highlights that exploring one's sexuality and finding love is not confined to a specific age group.
2. Healing from Abuse: Narcissistic Abuse: Luna's struggle with the aftermath of narcissistic abuse addresses a critical yet often underrepresented issue. By bringing this topic to light, the film can provide solace to survivors and raise awareness about the impacts of such abuse.
3. Female Friendship and Empowerment: Support Systems: The strong bond between Luna and Lily underscores the importance of friendship and support systems in personal healing and growth. Highlighting female friendships as central to the narrative challenges the often male-centric focus of traditional romance stories.
4. Sex Positivity and Personal Choices: Abstinence by Choice: The friends' decision to give up sex for a year by choice emphasizes the idea that sex positivity includes

respecting personal boundaries and choices. It challenges the societal pressure to conform to certain sexual behaviors and timelines.

5. Exploring Faith and Identity: Spiritual Journey: Lily's contemplation of forsaking her faith adds depth to her character and explores the complex relationship between faith, identity, and personal choices. This can resonate with viewers who have experienced similar struggles.

6. Breaking Stereotypes: Non-traditional Romances: The film challenges traditional romantic and sexual narratives, portraying love and self-discovery as complex and multifaceted journeys that do not follow a prescribed path. This broadens the understanding of what constitutes a fulfilling and meaningful life.

Overall, "Virgins by Choice" addresses several important themes and issues, making it a significant addition to contemporary cinema. It offers nuanced portrayals of love, identity, and healing, contributing to a more inclusive and empathetic representation of human experiences.

The making-of: how did this film come together? What were the highlights/challenges of producing this film?

Producing "Virgins by Choice" with a limited budget, constrained weekend-only filming schedule, and a team with varying levels of experience fostered creativity, innovation, and resourcefulness. It encouraged meticulous planning, efficient use of resources, and strong team collaboration. These challenges created opportunities for learning, growth, and developing a distinctive and authentic voice in filmmaking.

National pride: describe what uniquely defines you as a Canadian producer.

I have a deep appreciation for Canada's diverse cultural heritage and inclusive society. Having immigrated to Canada at a young age and earning a BFA in film from Simon Fraser University, my journey is a testament to the opportunities and support available in Canada for young filmmakers to thrive and contribute to the cultural landscape. My background and education have equipped me with the skills and perspectives to tell diverse and compelling stories, reflecting the mosaic of experiences that define Canada. As a Canadian producer, my work likely emphasizes themes of multiculturalism, inclusivity, and the exploration of identity. By creating content that resonates with a wide audience and highlights the unique aspects of Canadian life, I contribute to the national narrative and fosters a sense of pride and unity among Canadians.

How will this film further your career as a producer?

"Virgins by Choice" with its engaging story of two friends healing from heartbreak and personal struggles, can significantly boost the producer's career. It tackles relevant

themes like mental health, sexuality, and faith, which resonate with modern audiences. Featuring strong female leads, it promotes empowerment and diversity, appealing to critics and film festivals. The relatable and emotionally charged narrative ensures broad market appeal, while its unique approach can attract talented actors and producers enhancing my reputation and opening doors to future projects.

What is your next step as a Canadian independent producer?

As a Canadian I am looking for co-production opportunities to understand potential partners and benefits. I intend to network at international film festivals and industry events organized by CMPA. Seek funding from Telefilm Canada, CMF, and provincial commissions. Consult legal and financial advisors for international co-production insights and take advantage of Canadian tax incentives. Build an experienced team and create a solid marketing plan to attract interest and support for my future film projects.

Taylor Olson

Production company(ies)

Afro Viking Pictures

Short biography of producer(s)

Taylor Olson (he/they) is a queer former hockey player-turned filmmaker living with invisible disabilities. The Canadian Screen Award nominee is based in Kijipuktuk/ Halifax, N.S. Taylor's feature film debut Bone Cage was released to critical acclaim; sweeping the awards at the FIN Atlantic International Film Festival and earning over 30 additional accolades at festivals around the globe. Bone Cage appeared in competition at Camerimage, competed in the Forward Future section of the Beijing International Film Festival, and toured numerous US festivals before being nominated for two Canadian Screen Awards for Adapted Screenplay & Supporting Actress. Olson premiered his sophomore feature film as a writer/director/producer Look At Me at the Slamdance Film Festival. For television, Olson has directed on six episodes of This Hour Has 22 Minutes on CBC, three seasons of the documentary series Disrupt for AMI, and screened their AR series Alone Together at festivals such as the Reykjavik International Film Festival and the International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam. As a creator, Olson released his first two short-form comedy series King & Pawn and 2GETHER 4EVER for Bell Fibe TV1. Olson likes to explore themes of masculinity, queerness, and the ways the two intersect.

Filmography of applicant(s) - include title and year and/or a link to your IMDb page

<https://www.imdb.com/name/nm6569972/>

Title of qualifying feature film

Look At Me

Expected release date in 2024:

Festival release was Jan 22nd, 2024 at the Slamdance Film Festival. Theatrical release through Northern Banner is set for Feb 2025.

Through which distribution model is your qualifying film expected to be released:

Festival

Name of theatrical distributor, film festival or streaming service releasing or exhibiting qualifying film:

Festival release was Jan 22nd, 2024 at the Slamdance Film Festival. Theatrical release through Northern Banner is set for Feb 2025.

Film synopsis

A fictional autobiography about an insecure, awkward and lonely bisexual actor who goes on an unwitting journey of self-love in the midst of an eating disorder relapse.

The inspiration: why was this an important film to make?

My first memory is the shame of being called fat by my Aunt when I was five years old. Since then I've struggled with my self image, and eventually bulimia. I've been bulimic since I was thirteen years old and have never been 'cured'. However, I have been on an ongoing, refreshing, failing, and - at times - unwitting journey towards something resembling self-love, and bonus, my bulimia is in frequent remission (woohoo!). LOOK AT ME is the movie I've been eager to make since I started making short films. I am so grateful this film exists. I was inspired by the Tribeca & Rotterdam hit I Am A Sex Addict where the filmmaker plays himself in the most honest, uncomfortable, and vulnerable work I'd seen at that point (six years ago). I saw an opportunity to adapt my play 'Heavy' to the screen and tell my own story as honestly and with as much vulnerability as I could. Allowing my journey towards self-love to hopefully impact and ignite someone on their own journey to loving themselves. We had a ridiculous amount of fun making this film; we laughed, we cried, and we reflected on our relationships with ourselves and each other. I hope LOOK AT ME can do for you what it did for us.

The making-of: how did this film come together? What were the highlights/challenges of producing this film?

This film was shot in five chapters, five sequences, over two years. Funded on a shoe-string budget through the Canada Council for the Arts and Arts Nova Scotia, as well as regional tax credits for a budget of \$122,000, this film was both a joy and challenge to make. The five sequences allowed the story to breath, using time as plot, to witness four seasons of the year as we follow our lead through a year in their life as their body changes physically in between each sequence to match their digression in the midst of an eating disorder relapse. This allowed for great creative freedom, however, the challenge was shooting essentially five sizeable short films over the course of a year with the same crew, cast and five pre-production and wrap periods. However, this approach was incredibly fulfilling to see the story come to life piece by piece organically. With such a small film it was a joy to premiere at Slamdance Film Festival and land distribution for a theatrical release.

National pride: describe what uniquely defines you as a Canadian producer.

I'm proud to be a Canadian producer. As we all know Canadian film was given a bad rap in the past, however I believe we create world class, beautiful films unique to our experiences. I love telling stories that uniquely reflect my own upbringing and life, but also specifically the Nova Scotian experience. Nova Scotia can be a forgotten region in the Canadian landscape and it is a privilege to bring our stories to life authentically (instead of stereotype - lobsters and fishing boats). Our industrial landscape, our rural roots, bring both hardship and joy through the many artists who spring up out of the economic hardship our province often faces. It is a privilege to represent our province and country. I also feel privileged to live in a country where we are encouraged to tell stories about our own lived experiences and I have specifically been blessed to regularly tell stories about my own queerness and history with invisible disability. I see our industry in Canada working towards uplifting voices from all walks of life and I am proud to be a part of that mosaic.

How will this film further your career as a producer?

Look At Me has been a significant milestone in my career as a producer. The first funded feature I have capital P produced, this project has allowed me to showcase my skills in navigating complex themes with sensitivity and authenticity as a leader, while also demonstrating my ability to work creatively within constraints such as a modest budget and unique production schedule.

The success of "Look At Me" in premiering at a prestigious festival like Slamdance and securing distribution for a theatrical release has already opened doors for me within the industry.

Moving forward, Look At Me will serve as a calling card for the type of stories I am passionate about telling and my ability to bring them to fruition - I can now help other artists tell their stories in a producing capacity with the recognition from bodies like Telefilm Canada. It has paved the way for future opportunities as a producer, enabling me to take on new projects that align with my artistic vision - being a part of creating a Canadian culture of kindness, courage and inclusion.

What is your next step as a Canadian independent producer?

As a Canadian independent producer, my next step is to continue building on the momentum and success of Look At Me while also diversifying my portfolio. I plan to leverage the experience and recognition gained from this project to pursue new and ambitious ventures that challenge me creatively and push boundaries in storytelling.

One of my key goals is to collaborate with a diverse range of talented filmmakers to bring fresh perspectives and voices to the forefront. I aim to champion stories that are

inclusive, thought-provoking, and resonate with audiences both locally and, ideally, globally.

Additionally, I am excited to explore different genres and formats, allowing me to experiment with storytelling techniques and expand my creative horizons. Whether it's tackling a new genre, exploring innovative distribution models, or delving into emerging technologies, I am eager to embrace the ever-evolving landscape of the film industry.

Above all, my commitment remains unwavering in telling stories that are authentic, impactful, and reflective of the rich tapestry of Canadian experiences. By staying true to my artistic vision and continuing to collaborate with passionate creatives, I look forward to forging a path that not only amplifies Canadian cinema but also contributes meaningfully to the cultural conversation on a global scale.

Ideally, this next step will come to life with a 1.5 million dollar feature currently in development which will be submitted to the regional stream at Telefilm next year.

Julie Baldassi

Production company(ies)

Younger Daughter Films Inc

Short biography of producer (or producer team)

Julie Baldassi is a Toronto-based producer whose work has been selected or awarded at Sundance, Tribeca, SXSW, Hot Docs, DOC NYC, Toronto International Film Festival, and others. Most recently, she produced *Darkest Miriam* starring *Severance*'s Britt Lower, written and directed by Naomi Jaye and Executive Produced by Charlie Kaufman, which premiered at Tribeca; and the Mi'kmaw coming of age drama, *Wildhood*, which premiered at TIFF and garnered a Canadian Screen Awards' Best Supporting Actor win and 6 nominations including Best Picture. Upcoming projects include *Apparatus*, the debut feature film by Sofia Banzhaf; *The Visitors*, an indigenous sci-fi from Michael Greyeyes, as well as the debut doc feature from Charlie Tyrell, with support from Field of Vision and Cinetic Media. She has produced several acclaimed short films including Charlie Tyrell's autobiographical doc short *My Dead Dad's Porno Tapes*, which was shortlisted for an Academy Award in 2019.

Filmography of applicant(s) - include title and year and/or a link to your IMDb page(s)

<https://www.imdb.com/name/nm8216853/>

Name of qualifying feature film

Darkest Miriam

Expected release date in 2024:

June 2024

Through which distribution model is your qualifying film expected to be released:

Festival

Name of theatrical distributor, film festival or streaming service releasing or exhibiting qualifying film:

Tribeca

Film synopsis

Librarian Miriam Gordon (Lower) lives in a fog of grief while working amidst marginalized members of the public who populate the Allen Gardens branch of the Toronto Public Libraries. When a burgeoning love-affair with Janko, a younger foreign cab driver (Mercier), coincides with her receiving a series of oddly threatening letters addressed to her, Miriam's sheltered existence is cracked open.

The inspiration: why was this an important film to make?

As a producer I was drawn to this project because of its unflinching portrayal of personal struggle and resilience, alongside the peculiar and wry perspective of our constant observer Miriam. Reading the script for the first time, it made me chuckle and gutted me in the same swoop, and I wanted to produce the film from the first pages. I felt I had found a beautiful story with a strong voice from Naomi Jaye.

At its core, "Darkest Miriam" is a story about confronting inner demons and the journey towards self-acceptance. It is a story about a woman who finds her bravery. Britt Lower's portrayal of Miriam was vital. Her ability to convey the nuances of Miriam's emotional and psychological struggles adds a layer of authenticity and depth to the film.

Naomi Jaye's vision as the director was another driving force behind my commitment to this project. Naomi's unique storytelling approach, characterized by its sensitivity and insight, brought out the essence of Miriam's journey. Her ability to navigate the fine line between despair and hope, darkness and light, ensures that "Darkest Miriam" is not just a film but an immersive emotional experience.

This was also my first film as a lead producer, and I was inspired to tackle this project from a producing and business perspective as much as from a creative and emotional level. I have produced films alongside excellent producing partners (Gharrett Paon) and worked under fabulous mentors (Damon D'Oliveira, Karen Harnisch), but this was my first time taking a project from first option all the way to completion. It was an important experience for me as a producer to really hold the reins and figure out how to package this film in a way that would stand out.

The making-of: how did this film come together? What were the highlights/challenges of producing this film?

The journey to bring "Darkest Miriam" to life was a challenging and rewarding process through which I evolved immeasurably as a producer. I was deeply passionate about producing Naomi's adaptation of Martha Baillie's experimental novel, **The Incident Report**, into a cinematic experience. However, translating this unique literary work into a compelling film came with its own set of challenges.

The biggest challenge was raising financing for a film based on such an unconventional source material. **The Incident Report** is a novel that defies traditional narrative structures, making it a risky proposition for potential investors. Our initial breakthrough came when we received enthusiastic support from Telefilm Canada. Stephanie Azam, Melissa Amer, and James Luscombe saw the potential in our project and provided our first piece of financing, giving us the momentum we needed to push forward.

In the midst of our financing efforts, we discovered a fascinating connection that would prove to be a game-changer for the film. We learned that Martha Baillie had a personal connection to the renowned filmmaker Charlie Kaufman through their mutual friend, the poet Eva H.D. Kaufman, a fan of Martha's work, graciously agreed to come on board as Executive Producer when we approached him. His involvement brought a new level of credibility and interest to our project, opening doors with both financing and casting partners that had previously been closed.

With Kaufman's endorsement, we were able to collaborate with his casting directors, Rori Bergman and Karlee Fomalont. Despite facing a few unsuccessful offers to lead actresses, Rori and Karlee's introduction to Britt Lower proved to be serendipitous. Britt, fresh from her leading role in Apple's **Severance**, connected deeply with Naomi Jaye's script and vision. Her enthusiasm and commitment to the role of Miriam were instrumental in moving the project forward.

Securing Britt Lower was a significant highlight, as it not only strengthened our cast but also attracted further interest and support. Canadian distributor Game Theory Films came on board, providing additional financing and helping us close the funding gap. Alongside Game Theory Films, we garnered support from several small equity investors who believed in the project's potential and were eager to see it succeed.

On another level, an abundance of highlights and challenges were brought on by the fact that I became a mother during the process of making this film. I had my son shortly before our Telefilm application, and brought on my incredible producing partner Brian Robertson to fill in the gaps while I navigated my new role. By the time we shot the film my son was 2, and I became initiated into the world of childcare-producing work that every film-parent must navigate in the background of our film-producing jobs, as we work jobs that are often antithetical to caring for small children. My husband shot the film, which meant that both of my son's parents were away from home for 14 hour days for 4 weeks straight. We made it through the shoot with support from daycare, a new nanny, my mother, a few friends, and again the support of my producing partner Brian and our line producer Dean Perlmutter who filled in the gaps when I needed to come late to set. Stitching together this care, while supporting my son as a small human, is truly akin to the work we do as producers navigating logistics while holding close creative priorities, and I consider it as a pivotal task in getting this film made.

[National pride: describe what uniquely defines you as a Canadian producer.](#)

As a Canadian producer, my work is implicitly rooted in the diverse cultural tapestry of Canada, and strive to tell stories that authentically represent the various communities within our nation. This commitment to authentic representation and community engagement is a cornerstone of my identity as a Canadian producer.

In my first feature film *Tenzin*, directed by Michael LeBlanc and Josh Reichmann, we focused on the exiled Tibetan community in Parkdale. This project was a profound journey, as we and the directors spent years immersing ourselves in the community to understand their struggles and celebrate their rich culture and religion. Our approach involved attending cultural events, protests, and friendly dinners, allowing us to build genuine relationships. The film's cast, who co-wrote the script with Michael and Josh, became our friends, reflecting our deep commitment to respectful and authentic representation.

Wildhood, my second feature film as a producer, highlights the intersection of queer and Indigenous identities. The film was written and directed by Bretten Hannam, and I produced it alongside Gharrett Paon as an Ontario-Nova Scotia co-production. Supporting Brett to tell his story was an enriching and educational experience. I was

bolstered to see the response from indigenous audiences, often seeing their stories on screen for the first time.

Similarly, *Darkest Miriam*, directed by Naomi Jaye, delves into the life of a woman navigating her existence in a Toronto public library and Allen Gardens Park, amidst the substantial encampment community. To ensure we portrayed this community with accuracy and sensitivity, we collaborated with a community and mental health consultant and received guidance from a social worker familiar with the park's dynamics. This meticulous attention to detail underscores our dedication to telling stories that matter, with integrity and respect for the subjects involved.

When I look at the evolution of my career, I notice a definite trend in my produced work which I believe reflects the recent evolution of Canadian cinema in general. My first feature film (as co-producer) was Daniel Warth's *Dim the Fluorescents*, which won the 2017 Slamdance Dramatic Grand Jury Prize. Around this time I began working with filmmaker Charlie Tyrell, and our film *My Dead Dad's Porno Tapes*, Charlie's poignant exploration of his relationship with his late father, premiered at Sundance in 2018 and was later short-listed for an Academy Award. Then came *Tenzin*, *Wildhood*, and *Darkest Miriam*. Looking forward, I'm producing Canadian actor/writer/director Sofia Banzhaf's *Apparatus*, a critique of toxic masculinity from a female perspective; and *The Visitor*, an Indigenous sci-fi film written and directed by the acclaimed Indigenous actor Michael Greyeyes. Interestingly, reflecting on the evolution of our work is akin to reflecting on the recent evolution of Canadian film itself. Our country's cinematic landscape has shifted from focusing predominantly on personal dramas (often by male filmmakers) to embracing a greater diversity of voices. The future of Canadian film, in my view, lies in nurturing new storytellers and ensuring that all communities see themselves represented on screen in a genuine and nuanced manner.

What uniquely defines my work as a Canadian producer is my commitment to authenticity, community engagement, and diversity in storytelling. My films aim to capture the essence of the communities portrayed, fostering empathy and understanding through cinema. I'm proud to contribute to the rich and evolving tapestry of Canadian film, and look forward to continuing this journey by championing stories that reflect the true diversity of our nation.

How will this film further your career as a producer?

Darkest Miriam has been a pivotal project in my career as a producer, serving as my first feature film where I took on the role of lead producer. This project was a valuable experience that significantly honed my producing skills, particularly in developing, packaging, and financing a film.

One of the key aspects of my growth was gaining a deeper understanding of how Canadian funding mechanisms intersect with the international film marketplace. Navigating these complexities was a challenging but rewarding process that equipped me with the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively leverage resources and partnerships on a global scale. This experience has been invaluable in preparing me to handle future projects with greater efficiency and insight.

A major strategic decision for Darkest Miriam was to focus on discovering emerging U.S. stars and pairing them with a talented Canadian cast to maximize the film's appeal to global audiences. Working with these actors taught me how to balance international market demands with artistic integrity, a skill that will be crucial in future projects.

Moreover, working on Darkest Miriam solidified my producing partnership with my producing partner Brian Robertson (who was over-qualified for the "emerging" category, otherwise he would be my co-applicant). Brian and I now have a shared slate of 3 upcoming films, and have found that our skills and strengths complement each other well. We both have similar taste in films, and in how to achieve them as filmmakers. Together we share a commitment to strong, compelling storytelling and a focus on authentic representation, and strive to bring out the best in each project, ensuring that the stories we tell are both powerful and meaningful.

The skills and insights I gained from Darkest Miriam will be instrumental as I strive for excellence in my producing career. This experience has prepared me to take on more ambitious projects and has solidified my commitment to supporting diverse and compelling storytelling in the film industry. Moving forward, I am excited to apply these lessons and continue contributing to the vibrant landscape of Canadian and international cinema.

What is your next step as a Canadian independent producer?

As a Canadian independent producer, my next steps involve continuing to produce feature films that are impactful with audiences and perform well in sales. Given the current sluggishness in the global marketplace, I am strategically pivoting into international co-productions to maximize opportunities and reach. My next feature, the debut film from actor/writer/director Sophia Banzhaf, has received funding from Telefilm Canada and is being set up as an Ontario-Saskatchewan-Belgium co-production. This project exemplifies my commitment to creating films that resonate both artistically and commercially on a global scale.

In addition, I am producing the debut feature written and directed by Michael Greyeyes, an Indigenous sci-fi film that is well-positioned for a treaty co-production and government-funded equity. This project excites me creatively for its potential to be both culturally relevant and incredibly engaging to audiences. Its genre-leaning nature also makes it a strong sales title, showcasing the kind of projects I aim to champion as a producer.

On a broader level, my next steps involve finding ways to make my career more sustainable, both for myself and industry-wide. I am focused on growing my company and hiring employees, as well as developing financing strategies that don't rely on reinvesting my fees to close financing. Longer terms, I am particularly interested in working with others in the industry to foster a culture of equity investment from the private sector in Canada, similar to what exists in the U.S. This shift could provide greater financial stability and growth for producers like myself.

Another long-term goal is to establish infrastructure that allows producers to directly benefit from major charitable donations, similar to other arts sectors in Canada.

Additionally, I am eager to see how Bill C-11 impacts the funding landscape and plan to strategically leverage its opportunities to benefit my projects.

These steps represent the direction I want to take my work: producing films that are both impactful and financially successful while building a more sustainable and supportive industry for Canadian independent producers.

