



# MARY MAGDALENE

## Production Notes

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## MARY MAGDALENE – PRODUCTION NOTES

### SYNOPSIS

Set in the Holy Land in the first century, MARY MAGDALENE is the story of a young woman who leaves her small fishing village and family to join a new movement. Inspired by its charismatic leader, Jesus of Nazareth, and his teachings, Mary sets out with the disciples on the journey to Jerusalem, where she finds herself at the centre of the founding story of Christianity. MARY MAGDALENE brings a unique and fascinating character to the fore and places her at the heart of the greatest origin story of all.

### BIRTH OF A FILM

The story of Jesus Christ is one that has inspired generations of film-makers, from Pier Paolo Pasolini's *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew* and Martin Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ* to Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*. It's a story that has been told in so many different ways and has aroused such passion, in art and culture and within the worlds of historical and religious scholarship as well as in film. And it's a story so rich and so open to multiple interpretations that it was unsurprising that producers Iain Canning and Emile Sherman, while contemplating the notion of approaching a familiar story in a new and original way, started to consider retelling it from a different perspective. It was an archeological discovery that planted the seed in their minds.

"Obviously, the story of Jesus is one that has been told on numerous occasions by different film makers," says Canning. "The discovery of fragments of parchment in Egypt and Greece which were claiming to be the gospel of Mary Magdalene sparked the idea that it would be interesting to tell the story of a woman within the biblical stories.

"Every generation approaches their own retelling or re-imagining of stories based on the contemporary time," continues Canning. "If you're making a film you've got to have some

sort of contemporary resonance, otherwise it's not going to find an audience. We felt there was room to tell the story of Mary Magdalene - that the female perspective of this particular story of the life and death of Jesus Christ was a new way in to that story and that it would also shine a light on contemporary issues."

"There's always a certain amount of responsibility that you have when you tell stories that are incredibly important to people. But you've got to trust the script, your film-maker and the actors, that they're going to bring something new and fresh to it. We feel like we need to acknowledge that this is an important story for people, and so therefore tell it in the best way possible."

The initial script was written by acclaimed playwright Helen Edmundson who came up with the blueprint and drew together all the relevant texts into a narrative, explains Canning, adding "Philippa Goslett subsequently worked on the script to bring a filmic edge and a little bit more dynamic between the disciples and Mary herself to really bring it to life."

Goslett's desire to right a centuries' old wrong drew her to the project. "I've always been very interested in the story of Jesus and felt that what happened to Mary Magdalene and her identity over the centuries was a travesty," she says. "Here was an opportunity to give a voice to someone who had been silenced for so long. The really exciting idea about looking at the Jesus story from a female point of view was what would that change, how would the key moments from that journey sing out in different ways, and ultimately how could Jesus's message be experienced in a different way from a female point of view."

Producer Emile Sherman adds, "Mary Magdalene had been marginalised for centuries and we wanted to restore her to her rightful place at the centre of the Jesus story, as a key apostle. The story we are telling is really one that goes to the heart of all religions, and in fact to all humanity. Mary recognises that the 'kingdom', or whatever utopia we are striving for, needs to start within ourselves. Our spirit lies within, and it sits in the same place as

love and kindness. Mary's message is as revolutionary today as it has ever been, and it is one we hope will resonate strongly."

Goslett's research took her on a journey into biblical history which presented further complications but also underlined the importance of the story at the heart of the film. "We had a multitude of conversations with rabbis, priests, Jewish historians, biblical scholars and archeologists and everyone we talked to disagreed with each other!" she says. "They each had a distinct take on the Jesus movement and what it meant, so that was fascinating. But what was even more fascinating was that they all agreed, without exception, that Mary of Magdala should be considered as a disciple and an apostle."

Producer Liz Watts continues the story: "The screenplay and the production were influenced by lots of different theological and historical texts, and we had a number of biblical and historical consultants - Jewish, Greek Orthodox, Catholic - on the film, who were really fantastic but who also offered totally different viewpoints - from the Jewish idea of the 1st Century, to the Christian writing and rewriting of the 1st Century, from the Gospel of Mark, primarily, to the Gospel of Mary.

"We're not proposing that this film is trying to be a theological or historical text of any kind," she continues. "The story is up for interpretation and it IS a story that we're telling but we want it to be very respectful of people's faith."

Goslett explains the significance of the Gospel of Mary, which was one of the key texts the filmmakers consulted. "It presents Mary as a key figure within the Jesus movement," she says, "and it takes the form of a debate between Mary and the male disciples which reveals that she has been a close presence next to Jesus, and that she has a unique insight into Jesus's teachings, which she attempts to share with the apostles. The fact that she is a woman and has had this unique insight doesn't go down well with some of the disciples in particular Peter and that creates a fascinating dynamic."

Liz Watts expands. “Mary’s understanding of the Kingdom and what the message of Jesus is, still rests within the Christian tenants of forgiveness, mercy and humanity. In the film, all the disciples have a slightly different understanding of what the Kingdom of God on earth will be - or rather, how it will start. How will Jesus bring the Kingdom in and when? Mary learns through the course of the film that it's a simpler answer that is Jesus’ message – that we have to change from within in order to change the world around us. That she remains by his side through the crucifixion rather than fleeing (which the other disciples did), is also a fundamental difference. From the debate that is shown between Mary and Peter in the film, Mary’s understanding also centres on Jesus’ message of forgiveness. Later, once Jesus had appeared before the other disciples, the other Gospels all agree upon this reappearance to them as his message for forgiveness.”

For Chewitel Ejiofor, who plays Peter, it was that different perspective that was so important: "The Gospel of Mary offers an insight because it's so different to the gospels in the New Testament, in terms of the fighting, the polemics that are involved in being a disciple and the conflicts that Mary creates, and the different perceptions of what a new beginning means, especially in Jerusalem and especially after the crucifixion."

Canning and Sherman also had a keen eye on the film’s eventual commercial prospects. Says Canning "We didn't want to alienate a Christian audience, but at the same time we didn’t want to give in to the idea that a Christian audience wouldn't embrace a film which was in some ways about equality and feminism. We wanted to find the right director to tell the film in a way that wouldn't exclude people.”

Of course, the filmmakers were also aware that the film could stir up controversy around the world in terms of how they are presenting the story. Says Goslett: “We’ve told the story out of order and compressed time and have a very different motivation for Judas from the traditional telling, but the most controversial thing we’ve done is to tell the story from a female point of view.”

Garth Davis, who directed See-Saw's *Lion* starring Dev Patel and Nicole Kidman, which was nominated for six Academy Awards® and won two BAFTAs, was the perfect choice of a director.

"Garth has got a very special soul and the film needed heart and a lot of care for the subject matter," explains Canning. "He also brings a dynamic and fresh perspective to the story. His technique with actors, his ideas around film's potential in terms of scale and ambition, especially in terms of recreating the architecture of the time as closely as possible - all of those elements bring in something fresh for an audience."

It was a perhaps unusual source that motivated Davis to take up the reins. "One of the big inspirations for me for this film was Malala Yousafzai," says the director. "There was something about her story that, for me, mirrored Mary's story. The fact that she was shot in the face by the Taliban because she wanted to go to school, and then won the Nobel Peace Prize and she gave her speech and forgave the Taliban for their actions. That act of forgiveness, that act of love, was something that was at the absolute heart of this film for me. When I read the script, I really thought of how she moved me and how Mary's story is in her. I connect with that spirituality and that love. I also really loved how the script was very human and very relevant."

Davis was also keen to approach the film from a completely new perspective. "I wanted to avoid doing something that had been done before," he says. "Most biblical movies are shot in the desert and there's an etiquette about them. I wanted this to be more relatable, relevant and contemporary and I really wanted to avoid all the stereotypes."

Producer Liz Watts recognised how choosing Davis to helm the film made absolute sense in terms of the sensibilities of the screenplay. "Fundamentally, Garth's a great, immersive film-maker, and he tells stories with a very acute emotional intelligence," she explains. "The story involves a lot of complicated historical elements but is married with a spiritual story at the heart of it. Garth definitely has the ability to tell that kind of a story. He's brilliant with

script and he's brilliant with actors, and this was quite a challenging film in the sense that it was telling a new story from a new angle, but within a very well known story that has been told many times before.

Continues Watts: "This story is about a woman who follows her beliefs and which combines a tremendous amount of history and theology but is ultimately an entertaining story presenting the story of Jesus in a very different way. I didn't know a lot about Mary Magdalene and I was intrigued, and I felt that an audience would therefore be similarly enticed. Really it's a story about a very strong woman that sees herself in a position that is outside of what society thinks she should be."

The success of that central theme largely depends on the actor playing Mary. Davis and the producers required someone with the emotional intelligence and subtle acting style to bring out the character's depth, complexity and spirituality. Davis didn't need to look far to find his Mary.

"I'd just worked with Rooney Mara on *Lion*, and thought she was such a remarkable actress," says the director. "When this project came along, I and everyone involved thought of her because she's got an otherworldly quality. She's connected to somewhere that's very unique and special, and, for me, that was Mary. Mary was not someone who's learning who she is, she already has the light in her, she already has a connection to God but she doesn't yet know how to express it. Rooney always feels as though she's connected to something outside of the room but she's also very strong and she cares about humanity. I thought she would connect to a lot of the film's themes."

Iain Canning concurs: "Rooney brings a stillness and grace to Mary Magdalene. She doesn't say very much at the start of the film as her character isn't allowed to express herself, but she has to do a lot as an actress and you get this sense of a burning fire within her waiting to be lit and of wanting to live a life. Rooney can do so much with so little on-screen. It's also quite a physical role, to see her at the centre of the frame commanding the story.

While she brings these incredible qualities of stillness and grace, Rooney also has a fire in her that's waiting to be lit, and that's what the Mary Magdalene character needed."

It was also Mara's great strength that made her perfect for the role. Says producer Liz Watts: "Rooney has a wonderful sense of conviction and resolve, which shows on screen and which the role needed. She does have a slight otherworldly quality as though she's on a quest of some kind, and that encapsulated a lot of what Garth was looking for. She also has a humour but it was the strength that was what we really wanted. Mary had to be a strong woman to stand up and do what she did."

For Mara, the film opened her eyes to a new and different way of reading a belief system that formed an important part of her childhood. "I went to Catholic school so I had a lot of preconceived notions about the story and about religion in general," she explains. "The first time I read the script, it was with a very cynical outlook. Then I spoke with Garth and I understood what kind of film he was making; he got me to look at the story in a different way so the second time I read it, I saw a lot of opportunity and a lot of beauty in it. I thought this was a great opportunity to tell a version of the story that we hadn't seen before.

"Most other films about Jesus are solely about him, and this time the film is about Mary Magdalene," continues Mara. "We still see all of the things that we're used to seeing in biblical films, but we see it through her eyes. And seeing it through her eyes, we get to see it in a very different light. Mary Magdalene is known by most people to be a prostitute, which isn't true; we get to see where she comes from and who she really is."

As she's presented in the film even before she meets Jesus, Mary is a very strong, independent and, in some ways, a modern woman - still unmarried despite being in her early 20s and working with her family of fishermen. As Mara explains, "We first meet Mary while she's living in Magdala with her family and she is very different to everyone in her family. Her family are pushing her to get married and have children, as she's already



considered old, and to do what a woman is expected to do. She's really resistant to that. I think she really loves the fishing work and she feels very connected to God in a way that she can't really understand and that she wants to explore more. She's always felt very different to everyone else and feels she's never been listened to, so when Jesus comes along he's the first person who understands what she's feeling. She's brave enough to leave her family behind and follow him."

Mara could also not resist the opportunity to work with Davis again, a director whose film-making methods really struck a chord with the actor. "I just loved working with Garth the first time. He has such an interesting, unique way about him that I've really never encountered before in any other director or human. He has an incredibly intuitive approach to the casting, the locations and shooting and he really uses his intuition through every step of the process. Because of that, everything always feels really tapped in on a level that you don't always get when you're making a film. For example, the casting is so perfect, and everything's just easier when you have that."

That director and lead actor were so in tune with each other helped the production in fundamental ways. Says Iain Canning: "This was not a luxurious shooting schedule, so to have the director and lead have a short hand and a sense of mutual trust and friendship was fantastic and really helped things move smoothly."

That creative partnership extended to their shared perspective on the film. "Garth wasn't interested in making a religious film, but a spiritual film," says Mara. "Obviously, the most important thing for him was the feminist aspect, telling the story of this woman. Mary was Christ's witness, she was there when he died, she was there for the resurrection. She was an intrinsic part of the story but she's been relegated as a whore, whereas Peter, who denied Jesus three times and misunderstood and misrepresented his message, was sainted and has churches all over the world. She's a whore and he's a saint. That's just incredible."

It was just as obvious to Davis too that he and his lead actor were working in creative

harmony. "Rooney and I are not necessarily religious in any way, so that was a challenge because this would be seen as a religious movie," says the director. "But the thing that we connected to was the spiritual message. And, in some ways, that's the message that's been lost. We're taking people back to the core message of Jesus - that the power is within us, it's not outside of us, it's not about the ideology and the rules and the engagement, it's about listening to what we have inside, and connecting in. That was something that resonated - for me and possibly for Rooney too."

One of the toughest scenes for Mara was the exorcism scene. Before leaving Magdala to follow Jesus, Mary's family call on an exorcist to perform an exorcism on her. It is an act of love, the family believes. Davis explains: "They can't understand Mary's personality or her choices - they just see it as the demon. The tragic thing about the scene is the family are doing it because they think I'll make her better but, in fact, they're just driving her further away. It could have been a very dark and dramatic scene but instead it became something very complex."

"That scene was really brutal, especially because of the way Garth chose to portray the family," says Mara. "He'd created a very loving environment and family. They all care deeply about each other so when the exorcism comes it's that much more heart-breaking. It doesn't feel like a cliched version of the bad guys versus the good guys. They really love her, they think they're doing what's best for her."

While the scene was being shot, the cast and crew underwent a bizarre and unsettling experience. "We all had a copy of one of the ancient texts as we were preparing for the scene," says Davis, "and almost the minute we started walking into the water, the wind just stopped. Completely. There was no movement. And then lightning started breaking all around us. It freaked everyone out! An interesting moment of life mirroring art."

Mary, Jesus and Peter formed the complex triangle at the heart of the film and the casting of the two male leads would make or break the film.

Joaquin Phoenix takes on the formidable challenge of playing Jesus. "I really wanted to bring some reality to the role of Jesus," says Davis, "and to present him as an energetic person. I kept thinking of Joaquin because he's got an incredible sensitivity and is also a very spiritual person and very caring. There was no-one else in my mind so for me, it was 'It's him or I don't know how we're going to make the film.'

"Joaquin is one of the bravest actors around, which makes him perfect for that character," agrees Liz Watts. "He brings a humanist feel to the role. We'd talked a lot about having an actor who could portray a religious faith figure with a great deal of human emotion and depth. And Joaquin has that in spades".

The third part of the triangle is Peter, one of Jesus's disciples played by Chewitel Ejiofor. "Peter was a key figure in Christianity," says the actor. "He was very close to Jesus on this last journey to Jerusalem. And, like all the disciples, he had a complicated relationship with Mary Magdalene. Mary and Peter have a very interesting journey through the story and ultimately he comes to have an enormous respect and love for her."

Ejiofor was drawn to the film because of its ambitions and how it succeeded in turning the tables on received wisdom. "I was very intrigued to see what could be done in this context and genre," he explains. "I thought it would be interesting to look at the story of Jesus from the perspective of Mary Magdalene but I wasn't convinced that it would be very revelatory. But reading it, as I got to understand her journey and her relationship with Jesus, I realised how that plays in to so many contemporary ideas that are so current and pressing, in terms of relationships between men and women and the normalisation of misogyny. That has such a firm root in this narrative, and how we perceive Mary Magdalene is so clearly related to a male-centric way of looking at history, especially biblical history."

Chewitel also responded to the screenplay's focus on realism. "The film attempts to interpret this very well known story from a very centred, real place," he says. "I found that

very exciting. That side of the narrative was new to me - I don't know what it would be like to travel with a group like this, I don't know what the day to day experience would be, I don't know how it feels to witness a miracle. So to really investigate what those things would mean for this group of men was very intriguing. Our conversations initially revolved around removing these narratives from the biblical, ethereal world and planting them in a real, corporeal, grounded world in as honest a way as possible."

Ejiofor describes Peter as "a kind of every man", the figure who audiences can relate to. "We follow the journey that he has with Mary and the discoveries he has with her and we really question ourselves in some of the decisions that he makes later on. I found it a really interesting part, a really vital part of the story, and was really excited by it."

The chance to play alongside two such formidable actors inspired Ejiofor. "I'm a huge fan of both Joaquin and Rooney," he says. "They both have a certain kind of mercurial ability, they're like shape-shifters, chameleons and they both have beautiful lightness paired with great intensity."

"For me, Peter is spiritually disconnected," says Davis. "He's a loving, caring human being, and he wants the world to be a better place but he's disconnected. He can't surrender to the simplicity of what Mary tells him after the death of Christ, and he doesn't have the courage to trust something so simple as the Kingdom being within rather than outside us. He wants the same thing as Mary but, because he's grieving for the man he loves, he can't accept it. He wavers and there's a part of him that really wants to believe it, but he just can't, because his spirituality is polluted by envy."

"This has a lot of relevance with what is happening today," continues Davis, "in discussions on what we need to do to be closer to God. In reality, maybe it's just simpler and that's what Mary's trying to express. That's the whole point of the movie - let's not get caught up in the arguments and the fighting, the hate and revenge, let's just remind ourselves of what really matters and go back to basics."

Peter's conflicts over Mary's beliefs, her relationship with Jesus and her role in the group is one of the film's central dynamics. While Peter believes that Jesus will lead people to a new world order, Mary puts the focus on individual spirituality, that if one changes from the inside it will bring a grander change to the world at large.

"Peter is Jesus's right hand man and is a very dedicated and unwavering disciple," says Ejiofor. "It definitely feels that Peter leads that pack. He believes that the journey they're on will bring a revolution, a seismic shift in the way the world is organised, the way that the planet is run, how human beings interact, everything. It's a cause of concern to him, having a woman on this journey, especially a young woman, not in any way to do with sexuality but because they don't want people to feel that they're there to take away young women from their village communities."

Peter's attitude towards Mary is further complicated by jealousy and wounded pride. "What's so interesting about these characters is that the nature of the conflicts evolve," says Ejiofor. "What starts off as the slightly pragmatic way of not antagonising the communities that they pass through, then turns into something much more deeply rooted in Peter's perception of a woman's place within the group. Mary's emotional, intellectual and spiritual intimacy with Jesus is something that Peter finds very difficult to come to terms with."

"Jesus sees something really special in Mary," says Mara. "He really connects to her in a way that he doesn't connect to other people, and Peter's really threatened by that. Peter approaches things in a totally different way than Mary. He's much more pragmatic and structured and she's more empathetic and intuitive. He's used to being the number one and, what's more, she's a woman, which is challenging for him. They really come at things from a different angle. Mary's always the first one to be concerned about how everything is affecting Jesus and how he's feeling. She's always the first one to go to him, to make sure that he's okay, whereas the other disciples are a bit scared of him. She talks to him like a

normal human and that's one of the reasons that he's really drawn to her."

It is because of this conflict that Jesus sends Peter and Mary into the desert. It's an opportunity for the two to finally resolve their issues. "They start to deal with each other," says Ejiofor. "Peter starts to see her as an individual. That's a fundamental part of accepting someone and it's a fundamental part of their journey. He comes to realise that having a woman in the group won't compromise the message of Jesus and that his belief that only violent revolution will achieve change is wrong. What she offers is something that can change things in a much more profound way."

The journey into the desert benefits not only Peter. "Peter and Mary draw something out in each other," says Mara. "They both have lessons to learn from the other. Peter learns mercy from Mary, but Peter challenges her to challenge him and to be strong and to hold her ground. She has to defy him but in doing so and acting on what she feels to be right and true, he gets to learn mercy from her."

Their interpretations of the faith, however, remain very different. "Mary doesn't take the message so literally," says Mara. "The disciples have a literal expectation that this kingdom will actually come and they put all their faith into Jesus, thinking one person is going to change the world and 'He's going to do it for us.' Mary doesn't take it so literally. She understands that it's in all of us, that we all have to change in order for the world to change. And we all have to be good in order for the world to be good. A lot of people wait for one person to follow, and I think that's always really dangerous: whenever you do something in the name of one person, there's always room for things to go in a very dark direction. I think Mary sees it as doing good for the sake of good, not for the sake of one person but for the sake of the collective."

The character of Judas is made flesh by Tahar Rahim. The filmmakers wanted to avoid well-worn caricatures and instead portray the man in a human and sympathetic light.

It was this focus that was one of the main draws for the actor. "I've never seen a Judas like this," he says. "Judas is always the traitor who betrayed Jesus but here he's a human being. Anyone could have done what he did because in the end he's just a family man who worships Jesus more than anyone and is very impatient for change. It made me think of the work of the Israeli writer Amos Oz whose portrayal of Judas is almost exactly the same as the film's. I was also blown away by the script because of its narrative point of view being Mary. And it's a different Mary; it's not Mary the prostitute, it's Mary the disciple."

With the cast assembled, the team moved to Sicily where the film was to be mostly shot. Before any filming began, Davis put his cast through an intense period of rehearsal. Says Canning: "Garth's technique and his process, which originate from his background as an artist are so unique and different and allow the actors to explore a different way of rehearsing. Rather than just redoing and redoing the scenes, Garth approaches it from an emotional and unusually odd angle; actors are taken out of their comfort zone and that probably breeds something quite interesting."

"Garth uses lots of background research," continues Watts. "He gives a lot of research over to the actors and discusses the characters with the actors a lot. Because of the film's grand scope, it can be overwhelming for an actor. Garth worked very closely with Rooney and Joaquin and with all of the cast, grounding everything in a real sense of a naturalism so the characters' motivations and why are we telling this story now became very important."

Rehearsals represent one of the high points of filmmaking for Davis. "They are probably my favourite thing," he says. "The first thing is just getting the actors used to the times and how they lived. So we gave them as much access to the costumes and the props and we asked them to prepare a meal from the times with the ingredients that would have been available and then eat it together. Spending a bit of time in the real location, in the house, and finding out how they would sleep, and letting them own the worlds, and just discovering and bringing that to life - that's really great for an actor."

Davis also took the cast on mountain hikes, acclimatising them to the landscape and habituating them to the clothes and shoes. “How would you sleep the night with just this costume, because that's all they probably would have had? There were a number of problem-solving, practical issues that confronted them and those really opened up their minds.”

“I never rehearse the scenes,” continues the director. “I work on the relationships between the characters. There’s a painting exercise I get them to do, where I put the actors whose characters are close together and ask them to trace each other on large paper and they created paintings of each other from that tracing. The process of painting helped them forge a deeper relationship with each other and when we looked at the paintings, they actually say a lot about their relationship. The actors love that process.”

## THE LOOK AND THE LOCATIONS

Along with producers Iain Canning and Emile Sherman, Garth Davis brought in a team of behind the scenes collaborators which included both the familiar and the new. The director of photography Greig Fraser, the production design team was headed up by Fiona Crombie, and Alexander de Franceschi was in charge of editing, all three having worked with Davis on *Lion* and/or *Top of the Lake*. Among the heads of department working with Davis for the first time were costume designer Jacqueline Durran and hair and make-up designer Marese Langan.

Says producer Iain Canning, the Monty Python film *Life of Brian* became a perhaps unexpected creative inspiration, “Obviously, it’s a comedy but it is incredibly well done. The costumes and the production design are fantastic so you've really got to beat that. The first conversations you have with heads of department on a project like this is how is this going to be different from previous versions of the Jesus Christ story. In terms of costume there's a sort of detail in the fabric and the type of fabrics we've used, in production design we've tried to keep it quite simple, quite layered. We definitely wanted to avoid some of the



cliches and we wanted to come at it from a more historical perspective, rather than necessarily trying to adhere to what people may think is the right production design or costume design, in their head.”

Costume Designer Jacqueline Durran did a great deal of historical research for the design for the film. “I felt when approaching the costumes that it was important to work out some rules for the world of the film, and to find these we looked to the history of Jewish costume, of Palestinian clothing and to what is known of biblical dress. Our aim was to reduce down to the most essential elements and from that point to begin our construction of our world; knowing that it would be part fact, part imagination and part leap of faith but always keeping in mind a respect for the earlier culture whose words and way of life still resonate so strongly today.”

In the process of research, Durran and her team came across the perfect collaborator, “In our creation/re-creation we used as far as possible, hand woven cotton, hemp and wool, with some linen. All embellishment was done by hand. We had the huge good fortune to find a social enterprise, SEP, who work with Palestinian women embroiderers in the Jerash camp in Jordan, who produced amazingly beautiful embroideries for us based on ancient patterns.” SEP is a Social Enterprise, consisting of a team of over 300 artists, whose mission is to bring thousands of refugees above the poverty line. The embroiderers were asked not to use a guiding canvas, to embroider the patterns 'hands-free', in order to recreate the feeling of true Biblical embroideries.

Durran continues, “All the costumes had the same elements; tunic, undertunic, sash, shawl and sandals. The actor chose, through rehearsal and investigation of character, how they would wear their costume. By making each costume piece as simple and true as possible we aimed to bring some life and reality back to a world that can be over familiar and even hackneyed.”

The eight-week production was filmed entirely in southern Italy where locations included

the ancient town of Matera, as well as countryside Puglia, which stood in for Cana and Jerusalem, and Sicily where the production shot the Galilee-set scenes.

The team first spent time researching locations in Israel, touring the main historical locations and consulting with local experts. Says Canning "We weren't only looking at the architecture and landscapes; we were keen to understand the social dynamics of the time - what people ate, what their cooking utensils were, what their homes looked like, the resources they had available. We couldn't film in Israel but when we visited Matera in Italy it had exactly the same atmosphere as Jerusalem, the similarity of the dynamics were incredible. We wanted to help the audience become immersed in the history of the time, rather than trying to recreate it in modern Jerusalem, which looks nothing like it did in Jesus's time. Those Italian and Sicilian locations offered that different geographical dynamic that took us from the Lake of Galilee right through to Jerusalem."

Production Designer Fiona Crombie collaborated closely with costume designer Jacqueline Durran to ensure they were both in sync in terms of colours and tones. "We looked at fabric together and discussed palette before we started," she says. "We had a strong feeling that the beginning of the film should have a contained palette of monochromatic colours, and the natural landscape in Sicily, which is dusty, warm and earthy, tied in beautifully. From the moment Mary leaves Magdala, we're on a road trip through different landscapes. As we travel through the chapters of the narrative, we decided - partly deliberately, partly instinctively - to mark those chapters with different palettes. So we travel from the monochromes of Magdala to Cana, which has a very distinct look in terms of the architecture and the environment, so there's a lot of black and purple and dark colours in the costumes. And our group of disciples, in their earthy colours, stand out against different landscapes like a little snake travelling against the tide."

Crombie was given a very specific brief by Garth Davis, informed significantly by his background in fine art. "One of the key notes from Garth was not to be afraid to be minimal, not to overdo anything, not to overdress, to allow simplicity," she explains.

Because of his artistic background , he's incredibly astute compositionally. I've avoided or tried to avoid as much as possible endless carts and endless pots, to allow it to be simple and about the humans."

Matera, in the southern region of Basilicata, is known as the Subterranean City because of its cave dwellings in the limestone mountainside, and is thought to be one of the oldest inhabited towns in the world, having been habited since Palaeolithic times. Standing in for Cana and Jerusalem, the dramatic locations were a huge inspiration for Crombie. "Matera has an extraordinary and very consistent colour palette; there's something golden about the stone. And the way it's configured is very interesting - the roads snake through the rocky landscape and reveal the landscape in a very gradual way. And, of course, the cave dwellings are quite otherworldly."

"In the film, Jerusalem is a place of trade with a huge population," continues Crombie. "It represents a counterpoint to where we start the film in Galilee which is lush and beautiful and a very special place. There, we wanted to convey the idea that the town was almost built by hand, where the family has assembled their house themselves, rock by rock."

As a devotee of the environment, Davis was keen to imbue the film with a sense of the natural world. "Garth gave us a note asking that the audience would always be able to feel the walls of the house around Mary all the time," says Crombie. "We wanted to make sure the sense of stillness and silence was there and bring the environment into the interiors. Another element of the film is the theme of darkness and light. You are in the dark and you walk into the light, again and again. The house in Magdala has a very dark interior, but outside it is very bright. Garth was very interested in sharp contrasts between the dark interiors and the bright exteriors."

One of the key locations was the Second Temple on Temple Mount in Jerusalem providing the setting for one of the film's climactic points, where Jesus casts out the merchants and money changers, makes a claim to being the son of God and prophesies about the coming

destruction. In previous cinematic versions, the temple has often been portrayed as a small market whereas the reality was an enormous structure, spanning, as Davis says, “some sixteen football fields”. “I was pretty determined to be accurate, to show Jesus in the middle of the temple, and to capture the scale of it,” he says.

With the scenes of Jesus’s arrival in the temple filmed in Naples, the crew found Piazza del Plebiscito in central Naples which had the grandeur and size and which the crew could shoot from every direction. Davis also wanted to recreate the Passover celebrations in as real a way as possible. “There would have been a beautiful chaos of celebration,” he says. “Prayers, songs, drumming, all sorts of things. We had about 400 extras, who were almost all street cast, many of whom were musicians, and we created this festivity. It was almost like a South American festival. When we filmed that scene, it wasn't about moving extras around; we’d created that world and we placed the key cast in amongst that and it felt as though we'd brought something back to life.”

Certainly everyone involved in the film found inspiration in the locations. As Rooney Mara explains, "I was able to go to Israel before going to the shoot so I saw the places where a lot of the actual events took place and the Italian locations were all really beautiful, had such a great energy and felt really authentic."

One of the hopes of the filmmakers is that MARY MAGDALENE achieves an audience from all constituencies because of its message. "I really hope people slow down a little and listen to themselves after watching this film because that’s one of the messages,” says Garth Davis. “God is in the silences. Stop the ideology and the arguments and the conversations; be in a place of love and listen.”

The director is confident that both Christian and non-Christian audiences will respond to that message. “For a non-Christian audience - and that includes a lot of other different faiths - I hope the film’s themes of family, of continuing through tragedy, of the social dynamics of groups and how we live today will touch a chord. We would feel we hadn’t

succeeded if we'd only made a film that appealed to Christians; we want to bring this incredible story to everyone."

Chewitel Ejiofor and Rooney Mara agree. "The film presents a fascinating narrative in the context of an over-reaching political desire to change the way things are," says Ejiofor. "It shows an example of people who are attempting to improve the world and the issues they face. I don't think it matters whether you're secular or religious. It's an extraordinary story about a tiny group of people who felt they could change the world".

"I told Garth very early on that I didn't want to be in a religious movie," says Mara, "and he wasn't interested in making a religious film either; he's interested in making a spiritual film. I hope that it can reach beyond the merely religious audience. Much in the way that Peter and Mary took very different messages from Jesus's lessons, I hope the two audiences can take different things from the film. If people can put their preconceived notions about religion aside - the way that I had to - they'll find something really beautiful in what Jesus was saying, not as a religious figure but just as a man, as a healer. He was very much a Gandhi or Martin Luther King figure."

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According to Christian Gospels, Mary of Magdala was present at both Jesus' death and burial; and is identified as the first witness to the resurrected Jesus.

In 591, Pope Gregory claimed that Mary of Magdala was a prostitute, a misconception which remains to this day.

In 2016, Mary of Magdala was formally identified by the Vatican as *Apostle of the Apostles* - their equal - and the first messenger of the resurrected Jesus.

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## BIOGRAPHIES

### CAST

#### **ROONEY MARA - Mary Magdalene**

Two-time Oscar®-nominee Rooney Mara began her career shortly after enrolling as a student at New York University. It was during her college years that Mara decided to explore her interest in acting, landing small parts in independent films and eventually moving to Los Angeles to pursue it full-time.

Mara will co-star opposite Joaquin Phoenix's in the upcoming Gus Van Sant film *Don't Worry, He Won't Get Far on Foot*, which premiered at the 2018 Sundance Film Festival. The film is adapted from John Callahan's memoir of the same name, which tells the story of his own paralysis after a car accident at age 21, and how he turned to drawing as a form of therapy. Amazon Studios will distribute the film.

Premiering at the 2017 Sundance Film Festival and going on to receive numerous accolades and critical praise, David Lowery's *A Ghost Story* featured Mara opposite Casey Affleck and was released by A24 Films in July 2017. The film has been recognized as one of the Top 10 Independent Films of 2017 by the National Board of Review. The film is also nominated for the Independent Spirit John Cassavetes Award.

In October 2017, Mara starred opposite Ben Mendohlnson in *Una*, a screen adaptation of David Harrower's Olivier Award winning play "Blackbird." The film, directed by Benedict Andrews, tells the story of a young woman who unexpectedly arrives at an older man's workplace looking for answers. Mara also starred in Jim Sheridan's *The Secret Scripture*, alongside Vanessa Redgrave and Theo James. The Irish film revolves around a woman's extended stay at a mental hospital. Both films premiered at the 2016 Toronto International Film Festival.

In March 2017, Mara starred in Terrence Malik's *Song to Song* alongside Ryan Gosling, Michael Fassbender and Natalie Portman, which opened the SXSW Festival and revolves around two intersecting love triangles, sexual obsession and betrayal set against the music scene in Austin, Texas. Mara also starred in *The Discovery* opposite Robert Redford and Jason Segal for director Charlie McDowell, which was released by Netflix and premiered at the 2017 Sundance Film Festival.

In November 2016, Mara starred in *Lion* with Dev Patel and Nicole Kidman. Directed by Garth Davis, *Lion* is an adaptation of the memoir "A Long Way Home" by Saroo Brierley, which follows a young street kid from Calcutta who lands in an orphanage, only to be adopted to a couple in Australia. The film had its world premiere at the 2016 Toronto International Film Festival and has earned critical praise as one of the seasons top award contenders.

In November 2015, Mara starred opposite Cate Blanchett in *Carol*, directed by Todd Haynes. Based off the controversial romance novel "The Price of Salt," the critically acclaimed drama tells a story about a burgeoning romantic relationship between two women in 1950s New York. The film premiered at the 2015 Cannes Film Festival where Mara won *Best Actress*. Mara was recognized with Oscar®, Screen Actors Guild, Golden Globe®, and BAFTA award nominations for her performance. *Carol* was produced by Film 4 and distributed by The Weinstein Company.

In October 2015, Mara appeared as the role of Tiger Lily in Joe Wright's *Pan*. She co-starred in the film alongside Hugh Jackman, Amanda Seyfried, and newcomer Levi Miller. The film was released by Warner Brothers. Mara also starred in Stephen Daldry's film *Trash*, set in the slums of Brazil with a script written by Richard Curtis. Mara portrayed a government aid worker. The film premiered at the Rome Film Festival in October 2014 and was nominated for a BAFTA Award for *Best Film*.

In 2013, Mara starred in the 2013 Sundance Film Festival competitive entry *Ain't Them*

*Bodies Saints* for writer/ director David Lowery with Casey Affleck and Ben Foster. The drama tells the story of a young mother who struggles to cope with life after her husband is imprisoned for a deadly crime.

Also in 2013, Mara starred in *Side Effects* directed by Steven Soderbergh and opposite Channing Tatum and Jude Law. Mara portrayed a woman who turns to prescription medication as a way of handling her anxiety and depression. The film was released by Open Road Films and was an official entry at the 2013 Berlin Film Festival. In December 2013, Mara appeared in the Academy & Golden Globe® *Best Picture* nominated film *Her*. Directed by Spike Jonze and starring Joaquin Phoenix and Amy Adams, the film tells a story about a man who finds love and companionship with the computerized voice of a personal operating system.

Mara first mesmerized audiences and critics alike in the 2011 David Fincher-directed, U.S. adaptation of the popular Stieg Larsson book *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*. Mara portrayed the female lead “Lisbeth Salander” opposite Daniel Craig and Robin Wright. For this role, Mara was recognized by the National Board of Review for *Breakthrough Performance* as well as earned a Golden Globe® and Oscar® nomination for *Best Actress, Drama*.

Additional film credits include *Tanner Hall*, directed by Francesca Gregorini and Tatiana von Furstenberg; David Fincher’s *The Social Network*; *Youth in Revolt* and *The Winning Season* opposite Sam Rockwell.

In 2016, Mara voiced a character in the first of the three-picture animated series *Kubo and the Two Strings* by LAIKA and Focus Features. Set in ancient Japan, the story follows kindhearted Kubo, who lives a humble life caring for his mother in their village when a spirit from the past catches up with him and he’s forced on the run from gods and monsters. The film also stars Matthew McConaughey, Charlize Theron and Ralph Fiennes.



On the small screen, Mara's credits include memorable guest starring roles on "ER," "The Cleaner," "Women's Murder Club," and "Law & Order: SVU."

Mara is the Founder of the non-profit organization *Uweze*, which provides critical care and assistance to poverty-stricken orphans in Africa's largest slum in Kibera, Kenya.

### **JOAQUIN PHOENIX - Jesus**

Joaquin Phoenix was born in Puerto Rico and began his acting career at the age of eight. During that time, he made numerous episodic television appearances on *Hill Street Blues*, *The Fall Guy* and *Murder, She Wrote*. He was a regular on the short-lived 1986 CBS series *Morningstar/Eveningstar*, and followed that same year with his first feature film role in *Spacecamp*. The following year, he starred in *Russkies* with sister Summer and Carole King. Two years later, director Ron Howard cast the teenager as Dianne Wiest's son in his popular family comedy *Parenthood*. It wasn't until 1996 that the young actor returned to the fold with a stunning and critically-acclaimed performance opposite Nicole Kidman in Gus Van Sant's *To Die For*. New York Times film critic Janet Maslin hailed the young talent as "an actor to watch for." He next co-starred with Liv Tyler, Billy Crudup and Jennifer Connelly in *Inventing the Abbotts* in 1997. That same year, he co-starred opposite Claire Danes, Sean Penn and Jennifer Lopez in Oliver Stone's *U-Turn*.

In 1998, Phoenix co-starred opposite Vince Vaughn in two very different roles -- as an American jailed in Malaysia for possession of drugs in *Return to Paradise*, and as a dupe to Vaughn's smooth-talking serial killer in the black comedy, *Clay Pigeons*. Phoenix next won acclaim as a street smart adult bookstore clerk who helps detective Nicolas Cage search for the truth behind what appears to be a snuff film in Joel Schumacher's dark thriller, *8mm*.

In 2000, he earned his first Academy Award nomination co-starring opposite Russell Crowe as the complex Commodus in Ridley Scott's Oscar-winning Best Picture, *Gladiator*. In addition to nominations for the Oscar, the Golden Globe and the British Academy (BAFTA)

Award, he received awards as Best Supporting Actor from the National Board of Review and The Broadcast Films Critics Association. He followed that up with Philip Kaufman's Oscar-nominated *Quills* opposite Kate Winslet and Geoffrey Rush in the film based on Douglas McGrath's play about the Marquis de Sade, for which he won the Broadcast Film Critics Award as Best Supporting Actor. Also that year, he starred opposite Mark Wahlberg, James Caan, Faye Dunaway, Ellen Burstyn and Charlize Theron in James Gray's *The Yards*.

In 2002, he starred opposite Mel Gibson in M. Night Shyamalan's film, *Signs*, which earned a half billion dollars worldwide. He reteamed with Shyamalan two years later on the gothic thriller *The Village*.

He provided the voice in the animated film *Brother Bear*. Additional films include Thomas Vinterberg's *It's All About Love*, *Buffalo Soldiers*, *Ladder 49* and *Hotel Rwanda*.

Phoenix narrated the film *Earthlings* for Nation Earth, a video about the investigation of animal abuse in factory farms, pet mills, in industry and research. In 2005, he was awarded the "Humanitarian Award" at the San Diego Film Festival for his work and contribution to *Earthlings*. In 2005 he lent his voice to the documentary, *I'm Still Here: Real Diaries of Young People Who lived during the Holocaust*.

In 2006, Joaquin Phoenix was hailed for his mesmerizing performance as legendary singer-songwriter Johnny Cash (opposite Oscar-winning actress Reese Witherspoon) in James Mangold's riveting biopic, *Walk the Line*. For his performance, he collected his second Academy Award nomination (Best Actor) and won the Golden Globe as Best Actor in a Musical as well as nominations for BAFTA, SAG, BFCA and Chicago Film Critics Awards.

In 2007, the two-time Academy award nominee starred in two features; Sony Pictures' *We Own the Night* where he reteamed with Mark Wahlberg and director James Gray. He then starred in *Reservation Road* for director Terry George. In 2008, working with director James Gray for a third time, he starred in *Two Lovers* opposite Gwyneth Paltrow.

On October 27, 2008, Phoenix announced his retirement from film in order to focus on his rap music, but the announcement turned out to be part of Phoenix's acting role in the mockumentary *I'm Still Here*, directed by his brother-in-law, actor Casey Affleck. The film debuted at the Venice Film Festival and the Toronto International Film Festival in 2010.

When he returned in 2011, it was to star in the Paul Thomas Anderson film *The Master*, opposite the late Philip Seymour Hoffman. That year they both won the Volpi Cup at the Venice Film Festival. In addition, he was nominated for an Oscar, a Golden Globe and a BAFTA. He next starred in *The Immigrant*, co-starring with Marion Cotillard and Jeremy Renner, working with director Gray for a fourth time.

In 2014, he starred in the award-winning Spike Jonze film *Her*, where he falls in love with the voice of a computer, co-starring opposite Scarlett Johansson.

In 2015, he reteamed again with director Paul Thomas Anderson for *Inherent Vice* the Warner Bros. film starring opposite Josh Brolin, Benecio Del Toro, Owen Wilson, Reese Witherspoon and Eric Roberts. That same year he also starred in Woody Allen's *Irrational Man* opposite Emma Stone.

He most recently completed the Lynne Ramsay directed feature film, *You Were Never Really Here*, which tells the story of a former war vet who devotes himself to saving women exploited by sex traffickers and, the Gus Van Sant directed film *Don't Worry, He Won't Get Far on Foot*. He next films the Jacques Audiard film *The Sisters Brothers*.

A social activist, Phoenix has lent his support to a number of charities and humanitarian organizations, notably Amnesty International, The Art of Elysium, HEART, The Peace Alliance (an organization which campaigns for a United States Department of Peace) and is on the board of directors for The Lunchbox Fund.

Phoenix has also directed music videos for Ringside, She Wants Revenge, People in Planes, Arckid, Albert Hammond, Jr and the Silversun Pickups.

### **CHIWETEL EJIOFOR - Peter**

BAFTA Award winning actor, Chiwetel Ejiofor has a breadth of critically acclaimed work across stage and screen.

2018 will see Chiwetel will be seen in Netflix's *Come Sunday* alongside Lakeith Stanfield, Jason Segel and Martin Sheen. Directed by Joshua Marston, the story concerns Evangelist Carlton Pearson (played by Chiwetel), ostracized by his church for preaching that there is no Hell.

It has recently been announced that Chiwetel will voice the infamous character of 'Scar' in *The Lion King* – a CG animated re-imagining of the 1994 Walt Disney classic. Directed by Jon Faveau (*The Jungle Book*), Chiwetel will star alongside Seth Rogen, Donald Glover, Alfre Woodard and Beyonce Knowles.

Chiwetel has also begun work on his untitled directorial debut, which he has adapted from the book 'The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind', written by William Kamkwamba and Bryan Mealer. The film follows 13-year-old William Kamkwamba (Maxwell Simba) who is thrown out of the school he loves when his family can no longer afford the fees. Sneaking back into the school library, he finds a way, using the bones of the bicycle belonging to his father Trywell (Chiwetel), to build a windmill which then saves his village from famine. Joseph Marcell, Aïssa Maïga, Noma Dumezweni, also Lemogang Tsipa also star.

Chiwetel was most recently seen in the much anticipated Marvel film *Doctor Strange* last autumn. The film saw Chiwetel take on the role of Baron Mordo opposite Benedict Cumberbatch, Tilda Swinton, Mads Mikkelsen and Rachel McAdams and was directed by Scott Derrickson. Prior to this, Chiwetel was seen in Jon Hillcoat's crime thriller *Triple 9*. He was supported by a stellar cast including Kate Winslet, Casey Affleck, Gal Gadot, Aaron Paul and Norman Reedus.

Last year Chiwetel was awarded a CBE for services to drama, he also starred in a number of films and returned to the stage in *EVERYMAN*; Rufus Norris' inaugural play as Artistic Director of The National Theatre. 2015 saw Chiwetel in the award winning sci-fi drama *The Martian* alongside Matt Damon, Jessica Chastain, and Kate Mara. The film was hugely successful at the box office, taking over \$300m worldwide and receiving 7 Oscar nominations. Chiwetel was also seen in Craig Zobel's thriller *Z For Zachariah* alongside Chris Pine and Margot Robbie, which premiered at Sundance Film Festival. The story centered on the last three remaining survivors of a nuclear holocaust. Chiwetel starred in another thriller - *Secret in their Eyes* - directed by Billy Ray and co-starring Julia Roberts and Nicole Kidman. The film is adapted from Juan Jose Campanella's Oscar winning Argentinean film, *El Secreto De Sus Ojos*.

Later in the year Chiwetel also starred in *Half of a Yellow Sun* based on the highly acclaimed novel of the same title, the film also starred Thandie Newton and Joseph Mawle.

2013 saw Chiwetel star in Stephen Poliakoff's BBC series "Dancing on the Edge" which gained him a Golden Globe nomination for Best Actor in a Mini Series and an Emmy Award nomination. Chiwetel also returned to the stage in the Young Vic's adaptation of "A Season in the Congo", directed by Joe Wright. His performance, as Patrice Lumumba, received critical acclaim.

In 2011 television audiences saw him in the award winning "The Shadow Line", a thrilling drama for the BBC in which he played lead character 'Jonah Gabriel' alongside a superb cast including Christopher Eccleston, Lesley Sharp and Rafe Spall.

Chiwetel has also appeared in a number of films including *Salt*, alongside Angelina Jolie and Liev Schreiber and in 2009 he starred in Roland Emmerich's action feature, 2012 opposite John Cusack, Danny Glover and Thandie Newton. The same year his performance in *Endgame*, Channel 4's moving drama set in South Africa, earned him a Golden Globe nomination for the 'best performance by an actor in a mini-series or a motion picture made for television'.

2014 was another memorable year for Chiwetel and saw him star in Steve McQueen's Oscar winning *Twelve Years a Slave*. Chiwetel played the role of 'Soloman Northup' which gained him Oscar, Golden Globe and SAG nominations and won him a Best Actor BAFTA. Chiwetel balances his film and television commitments with his theatre work. In 2008 he was seen in three very different roles; his performance in the title role of Michael Grandage's "Othello" at the Donmar Warehouse alongside Kelly Reilly and Ewan McGregor was unanimously commended, and won him the 2008 Olivier Award for 'Best Actor', the Evening Standard Theatre Award for 'Best Actor', as well as nominations for the South Bank Show Awards 2009 and the What's On Stage Theatregoers' Choice Awards. His other stage credits include Roger Michell's "Blue/Orange" in 2000 which received an Olivier Award for Best Play, and the same year Tim Supple's "Romeo and Juliet" in which Chiwetel took the title role.

In 1996, Chiwetel caught the attention of Stephen Spielberg who cast him in the critically acclaimed *Amistad*, starring alongside Morgan Freeman and Anthony Hopkins. He returned to the big screen in Stephen Frears' 2001 thriller *Dirty Pretty Things* for which his performance as 'Okwe' won him the Best Actor Award at the British Independent Film Awards, the Evening Standard Film Awards, and the San Diego Film Critics Society Awards. In 2003, he co-starred in three films: Richard Curtis' *Love Actually*, *Slow Burn* and Woody Allen's *Melinda and Melinda*. 2008 saw Chiwetel star in Ridley Scott's *American Gangster*, opposite Don Cheadle in *Talk to Me*, and in David Mamet's *Redbelt*. Chiwetel's other film credits include *Kinky Boots* (2005) in which he played the loveable drag queen 'Lola', the urban drama *Four Brothers* alongside Mark Wahlberg, Spike Lee's heist film *Inside Man* alongside Clive Owen, Jodie Foster and Denzel Washington, and the Oscar nominated *Children of Men*, again alongside Clive Owen.

In addition to his acting career, Chiwetel has also directed two short films including the recent *Columbite Tantalite* which he also wrote, which starred Tom Hughes. The short screened at a number of short film festivals including the Palm Springs Short Film Festival, and also the short film *Slapper* which was screened at the 2008 Edinburgh Film Festival.

## **TAHAR RAHIM – Judas**

Rahim is best known for his starring role as Malik El Djebena in the 2009 award-winning French movie *A Prophet* by Jacques Audiard, for which he won a Cesar.

In 2011, he played the prince of the Seal people in Kevin Macdonald's *The Eagle*.

His first role was in the television series *La Commune* written by Abdel Raouf Dafri. Dafri also penned the first draft of the script to *A Prophet*. Rahim also starred in Chinese director Lou Ye's film *Love and Bruises*, an adaptation of the banned biography of Jie Liu Falin.

He also starred in *Des hommes libres* (Free men), the biopic of Si Kaddour Benghabrit, founder of the Great Mosque of Paris, directed by Ismaël Ferroukhi, in Fatih Akin's *The Cut* and *Heal the Living*, directed by Katell Quillévéré.

He recently starring in the European crime drama television series *The Last Panthers*, written by Jack Thorne and co-starring with Samantha Morton and will next be seen in the upcoming series *The Looming Tower*, alongside Jeff Daniels and Peter Sarsgaard.

## **DENIS MENOCHET - Daniel**

Denis Ménochet has over a decade of experience in film, TV and theatre. He has appeared in an array of films most notably Quentin Tarantino's Oscar winning film *Inglourious Basterds* (2009) alongside Brad Pitt and Diane Kruger, Ridley Scott's *Robin Hood* (2010) alongside Russell Crowe and Cate Blanchett and *Hannibal Rising* (2007). His other TV credits include *Special Forces* (2011) again with Diane Kruger and the Golden Globe® nominated *Coco Chanel* (2008).

He was most recently seen in *The Program* directed by Stephen Frears and in Justin Kurzel's

*Assassin's Creed*, alongside Michael Fassbender and Marion Cotillard.

He will next be seen in José Padilha's *7 Days in Entebbe* with Rosamund Pike and Daniel Bruhl.

Menochet has also appeared in TV productions such as ITV's *Poirot: Murder on the Orient Express* alongside David Suchet.

### **ARIANE LABED - Rachel**

Ariane Labed was born in Athens to French parents. She grew up in Greece and Germany until her family moved back to France.

She studied dance until her teens before taking up drama studies at Provence University, where she co-founded the Vasistas theatre company, serving as actor, co-director and choreographer.

Following a joint project on Faust at the National Theatre of Greece in Athens, Ariane decided to stay in Greece, making her debut in the film business.

She starred in *Attenberg*, a feature film directed by Athina Rachel Tsangari, for which she was awarded the Volpi Cup for Best Actress at the Venice Film Festival.

She then worked with director Yórgos Lánthimos, starring in his film *Alps*, which was also awarded at the Venice Film Festival the following year.

Ariane went on to feature in a range of French and international projects (shot in different languages), including Richard Linklater's *Before Midnight*, *Love Island* by Jasmila Žbanić, *The Forbidden Room* by Guy Maddin, *Fidelio*, *Alice's Journey* by Lucie Borleteau—for which she won Best Actress award at the Locarno Festival and was nominated for a César award—*The*



*Lobster* by Yórgos Lánthimos (winner of the Jury Prize at the Cannes Film Festival), *The Stopover* by Delphine and Muriel Coulin (winner of Best Screenplay at Cannes' Un Certain Regard), *Despite the Night* by Philippe Grandrieux, *Assassin's Creed* by Justin Kurzel (co-starring Marion Cotillard and Michael Fassbender).

She also appeared in the British television series *Black Mirror*.

She continued her theatre work with her company and returned to the stage in Frank Wedekind's *Lulu*, directed by Athina Rachel Tsangari at the last Salzburg Festival.

Ariane will soon star alongside Rooney Mara and Joaquin Phoenix in *Mary Magdalene* by Garth Davis and in *The Souvenir: Part 1* by British director Joanna Hogg, co-starring Robert Pattinson.

## **CREW**

### **GARTH DAVIS - Director**

Garth Davis was the co-director of the first series of the acclaimed *Top Of The Lake* with Jane Campion (*The Piano*) for See-Saw Films and starring Elisabeth Moss, Peter Mullan, David Wenham and Holly Hunter, for which he received Emmy and BAFTA nominations. He followed with six-time Academy Award® nominated *Lion*, winner of two BAFTA Awards, starring Dev Patel, Academy Award®- winner Nicole Kidman and Academy Award®-nominee Rooney Mara, also produced by See-Saw Films.

Garth is internationally renowned for some of the most memorable and awarded commercials. His recent work has won gold at the London International Award show, the prized Gold Lion at Cannes, and in 2010 he received a finalist nomination from the DGA (Directors Guild of America) for best commercials director. Originally a fine artist and designer, Garth has explored all forms of filmmaking. His dramatic work has included the

festival hit documentary *Pins*, the Dendy Award winning short film *Alice*, and the highly acclaimed TV series *Love My Way*.

## **IAIN CANNING - Producer**

Joint Managing Director – See-Saw Films

Academy Award®-winning producer Iain Canning co-founded See-Saw Films with Emile Sherman in 2008 and has produced a number of prestige projects, including the six-time Academy Award® nominated *Lion*, winner of two BAFTA Awards, starring Dev Patel, the Academy Award®-winner Nicole Kidman and Academy Award®-nominee Rooney Mara.

Canning won his Academy Award in 2011 for *The King's Speech* directed by Tom Hooper. The multi-Academy Award®-winning film stars Colin Firth and Geoffrey Rush.

Among See-Saw's prestigious line up of upcoming film projects are *Mary Magdalene* starring Academy Award®-nominees Rooney Mara and Joaquin Phoenix, John Cameron Mitchell's *How To Talk To Girls At Parties* starring Elle Fanning and Nicole Kidman and Academy Award®-winner Steve McQueen's *Widows* starring Academy Award®- winner Viola Davis, Michelle Rodriguez, Elizabeth Debicki, Cynthia Erivo, Liam Neeson, Colin Farrell and Robert Duvall to be distributed by Twentieth Century Fox.

Canning also produced Jane Campion's Emmy Award-winning TV series '*Top Of The Lake*' which was the first project produced under See-Saw Films' new TV Division. The follow up production, '*Top Of The Lake: China Girl*', also directed by Campion, premiered at the 2017 Cannes Film Festival to widespread critical acclaim and received a 2018 Golden Globe nomination for Best Television Limited Series or Motion Picture Made for Television. The show recently broadcast on BBC2 and iPlayer in the UK, BBC First in Australia and Sundance TV in the US and continues to roll out around the globe. Starring Elisabeth Moss who reprises her Golden Globe® winning role as Detective Robin Griffin, '*Top Of The Lake: China*

*Girl*’ also stars Nicole Kidman and Gwendoline Christie.

Other TV projects include ‘*Love, Nina*’ written by Nick Hornby, directed by S.J. Clarkson and starring Helena Bonham Carter and See-Saw’s live action television series ‘*The Legend of Monkey*’ produced for Netflix, ABC Australia and TVNZ set for broadcast in 2018. See-Saw is also in pre-production on ‘*The North Water*’ for the BBC to be written and directed by Andrew Haigh (*45 Years*), adapted from the novel by Ian McGuire.

Canning’s earlier film productions include Steve McQueen’s *Shame* starring Michael Fassbender and Carey Mulligan, which received the FIPRESCI Award for Best Film at the 2011 Venice Film Festival, and also garnered the Volpi Cup Best Actor award at Venice for Fassbender, director Justin Kurzel’s *Macbeth*, *Mr. Holmes* directed by Bill Condon and starring Ian McKellen, *Life* directed by Anton Corbijn and *Slow West* starring Michael Fassbender and Kodi-Smit McFee, which was awarded the Grand Jury Prize at the Sundance Film Festival 2015. Rounding out Canning’s productions are the international hits *Oranges And Sunshine* starring Emily Watson and *Tracks* directed by John Curran.

Prior to founding See-Saw, Canning executive-produced the award-winning films *Hunger* directed by Steve McQueen and Anton Corbijn’s *Control*.

Outside of See-Saw, Iain is a Trustee for Arnolfini. Based in Bristol, Arnolfini is one of Europe’s leading centres for the contemporary arts and was nominated for Museum of the Year in 2016.

## **EMILE SHERMAN - Producer**

Joint Managing Director – See-Saw Films

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Sherman won his Academy Award in 2011 for *The King's Speech* directed by Tom Hooper. The multi-Academy Award®-winning film stars Colin Firth and Geoffrey Rush.

Among See-Saw's prestigious line up of upcoming film projects are *Mary Magdalene* starring Academy Award®-nominees Rooney Mara and Joaquin Phoenix, John Cameron Mitchell's *How To Talk To Girls At Parties* starring Elle Fanning and Nicole Kidman and Academy Award®-winner Steve McQueen's *Widows* starring Academy Award®- winner Viola Davis, Michelle Rodriguez, Elizabeth Debicki, Cynthia Erivo, Liam Neeson, Colin Farrell and Robert Duvall to be distributed by Twentieth Century Fox.

Sherman also produced Jane Campion's Emmy Award-winning TV series '*Top Of The Lake*' which was the first project produced under See-Saw Films' new TV Division. The follow up production, '*Top Of The Lake: China Girl*', also directed by Campion, premiered at the 2017 Cannes Film Festival to widespread critical acclaim and received a 2018 Golden Globe nomination for Best Television Limited Series or Motion Picture Made for Television. The show recently broadcast on BBC2 and iPlayer in the UK, BBC First in Australia and Sundance TV in the US and continues to roll out around the globe. Starring Elisabeth Moss who reprises her Golden Globe® winning role as Detective Robin Griffin, '*Top Of The Lake: China Girl*' also stars Nicole Kidman and Gwendoline Christie.

Other TV projects include '*Love, Nina*' written by Nick Hornby, directed by S.J. Clarkson and starring Helena Bonham Carter and See-Saw's live action television series '*The Legend of Monkey*' produced for Netflix, ABC Australia and TVNZ set for broadcast in 2018. See-Saw is also in pre-production on '*The North Water*' for the BBC to be written and directed by Andrew Haigh (*45 Years*), adapted from the novel by Ian McGuire.

Sherman's earlier film productions include Steve McQueen's *Shame* starring Michael Fassbender and Carey Mulligan, which received the FIPRESCI Award for Best Film at the

2011 Venice Film Festival, and also garnered the Volpi Cup Best Actor award at Venice for Fassbender, director Justin Kurzel's *Macbeth*, *Mr. Holmes* directed by Bill Condon and starring Ian McKellen, *Life* directed by Anton Corbijn and *Slow West* starring Michael Fassbender and Kodi-Smit McFee, which was awarded the Grand Jury Prize at the Sundance Film Festival 2015. Rounding out Sherman's productions are the international hits *Oranges And Sunshine* starring Emily Watson and *Tracks* directed by John Curran.

Prior to co-founding See-Saw, Sherman produced acclaimed feature films including *Candy* starring Heath Ledger and Geoffrey Rush, *Disgrace* based on J.M. Coetzee's Nobel Prize winning novel and, as co-executive producer, *Rabbit-Proof Fence* starring Kenneth Branagh and directed by Philip Noyce.

In addition to his Managing Director role at See-Saw Films, Sherman is a director of Fulcrum Media Finance, a subsidiary of the company. Fulcrum Media Finance is a specialist film and television financier, providing cashflow for the Australian Producer Offset, Location and PDV Offsets as well as the New Zealand Screen Production Grant and the United Kingdom Film Tax Credit. Fulcrum has provided over \$200 million in finance to film and television projects to date.

Sherman is also a director of animal protection institute, Voiceless ([www.voiceless.org.au](http://www.voiceless.org.au)) and a director of the Sydney Writers' Festival one of the world's leading international writers' festivals ([www.swf.org.au/about-us](http://www.swf.org.au/about-us)).

## **LIZ WATTS - Producer**

Liz Watts is an independent producer and founding partner of Porchlight Films based in Sydney and her most recent work includes *Mary Magdalene*.

Liz recently produced for ABC Television the 6 part comedy series with creator Nakkiah Lui, *Kiki and Kitty* which aired in December 2017, and is Executive Producer on the US series adaptation of *Animal Kingdom* for TNT (John Wells, Jonathan Lisco) currently airing with a

third season on order.

Liz's feature credits as Producer include the feature film *Animal Kingdom* (2010, Director David Michôd, nominated for an Academy Award and Golden Globe in 2011), *The Home Song Stories* (2007, Director Tony Ayres), *Little Fish* (2005, Director Rowan Woods), Cannes and Sundance selected *Jewboy* (2005, Director Tony Krawitz), and *Walking On Water*, (2002 Director Tony Ayres). Liz also produced German Australian co-production *Lore*, directed by Cate Shortland, and *Dead Europe*, directed by Tony Krawitz, with Emile Sherman & Iain Canning, both of which premiered at Festival Special Presentation Toronto International Film in 2012.

Liz's feature *The Rover*, reteaming with writer/ director David Michôd, premiered in Official Selection Cannes Film Festival in 2014 and starred Guy Pearce and Robert Pattinson, and sold in over 35 territories worldwide.

Liz also executive produced *The Kettering Incident* (2015), an 8 part TV series for Foxtel, the feature film *Jasper Jones* (2017) directed by Rachel Perkins adapted by Shaun Grant from the Craig Silvey novel, *The Hunter* (2011, Daniel Nettheim), starring Willem Defoe, *Lou* (2010 Belinda Chayko, starring John Hurt), and *Prime Mover* (2009 David Caesar).

Liz's other credits include *Laid* (ABC TV, Marieke Hardy & Kirsty Fisher), *Martha's New Coat* (2003, SBS, Rachel Ward), *Delivery Day* (2001, SBS, Jane Manning); documentaries including *Buried Country* (2000, SBS); *The Pitch* (1998, ABC) and *Island Style* (1999, SBS).

## **PHILIPPA GOSLETT – Screenplay**

Philippa actively enjoys and excels at working and collaborating with directors - and her two most recent collaborations – *How To Talk to Girls at Parties* and *Mary Magdalene* pay testimony to that and is why she is much in demand as a writer.

Philippa's first feature, *Little Ashes*, starred Robert Pattinson as Dali and explored the intense relationship between Dali and Lorca. *How to Talk to Girls at Parties*, also produced

by See-Saw Films was directed by John Cameron Mitchell and stars Elle Fanning and Nicole Kidman. Other film projects in development include a feature for Pulse/Film4.

Philippa is also currently writing pilot television scripts for Tiger Aspect/C4 and The Forge/Pinewood.

### **HELEN EDMUNDSON – Screenplay**

Helen's plays include *The Clearing*, first staged at The Bush Theatre, *Mother Teresa is Dead* at The Royal Court, *Mary Shelley*, first staged at West Yorkshire Playhouse by Shared Experience in 2012 prior to a national tour, and *The Heresy of Love* at the Royal Shakespeare Company.

She has written a number of adaptations for Shared Experience Theatre: *Anna Karenina* and *Mill on the Floss*, which toured nationally and internationally, *Gone to Earth*, *Orestes*, and *War and Peace*, first staged at The National Theatre.

Other work includes; *Coram Boy* at The National Theatre and on Broadway, *Zorro* at The Garrick Theatre and on tour, a new version of Calderon's *Life is a Dream* at The Donmar Warehouse, and a musical adaptation of *Swallows and Amazons*, written with composer Neil Hannon staged at the Bristol Old Vic and in the West End.

Helen has been the recipient of many awards, including a John Whiting Award for *The Clearing*, a TMA Award for *Anna Karenina* and Time Out Awards for *Mill on the Floss* and *Coram Boy*.

### **GREIG FRASER - Director of Photography**

Greig Fraser is renowned internationally as one of Australia's most talented cinematographers. He is a member of both the prestigious American Society of

Cinematographers and the Australian Cinematographers society.

He began his feature film career in 2005, winning the AFI for Best Cinematography for *Jewboy*, directed by Tony Krawitz. In 2009 he received awards from AACTA, ACS and the British Independent Film Awards for his work on Jane Campion's *Bright Star*. In 2010, he shot *Let Me In*, the American adaption of the acclaimed Swedish vampire horror *Let the Right One In*.

In 2012 he worked on the Palme d'Or nominated *Killing Them Softly*, directed by Andrew Dominik and starring Brad Pitt. That same year he shot Kathryn Bigelow's Oscar nominated action thriller, *Zero Dark Thirty*, receiving wide praise for his cinematography.

Most recently he worked with on Garth Davis on *Lion* for which he received an Academy Award nomination, a BAFTA nomination and received an ASC Award.

His work has also been seen in the recent instalment in the Star Wars franchise, *Rogue One* and Bennett Miller's Academy Award nominated *Foxcatcher*, starring Steve Carrell, Mark Ruffalo and Channing Tatum. Other film credits include *Out of the Blue* (2006), *Last Ride* (2009), *The Boys are Back* (2009), *Snow White and the Huntsman* (2012) and *The Gambler* (2014).

Greig is currently shooting *Backseat* for Adam McKay, starring Christian Bale and Amy Adams.

### **FIONA CROMBIE - Production Designer**

Fiona recently completed work on Yorgos Lanthimos' next feature *The Favourite*.

Fiona has worked with Justin Kurzel several times, including *Macbeth* and *Snowtown*, both of which were selected for the Cannes Film Festival. Other recent credits include *Una* for director Benedict Andrews starring Rooney Mara, *Truth* starring Cate Blanchett and



selected for London and Toronto, and Jane Campion's *Top of the Lake*.

### **JACQUELINE DURRAN – Costume Designer**

Costume designer Jacqueline Durran's most recent work on Joe Wright's *Darkest Hour* and on Bill Condon's *Beauty and the Beast* have both received nominations for the Academy Award for Best Achievement in Costume Design and BAFTA nominations for Best Costume Design.

Durran most recently completed Mike Leigh's upcoming *Peterloo*, their seventh film together. Other collaborations with Leigh include *Mr Turner*, *Another Year*, *Happy-Go-Lucky*, *All or Nothing*, which was her first film as a costume designer, and *Vera Drake* for which she won a BAFTA.

She won an Academy Award® and BAFTA for her work on Joe Wright's *Anna Karenina* and had previously been Academy Award® and BAFTA nominated for *Pride and Prejudice* and *Atonement* which were also directed by Wright. She also worked with Wright on *Pan*.

Earlier, she worked for several years with costume designer Lindy Hemming, assisting her on Mike Leigh's *Topsy-Turvy* for which Hemming won an Academy Award®. Other film projects include David Mackenzie's *Young Adam*, Tomas Alfredson's *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* and Richard Ayoade's *The Double*.

### **SEE-SAW FLIMS**

Academy Award®-winning producers Emile Sherman and Iain Canning founded See-Saw Films in 2008. See-Saw is a worldwide company specialising in international Film and Television production with offices in London, Sydney and Los Angeles.

See-Saw's recent productions include the highly acclaimed *Lion* (Garth Davis) starring Dev Patel and Nicole Kidman, which was nominated for six Academy Awards® and won two BAFTAs.

See-Saw's upcoming film projects include *Mary Magdalene* (Garth Davis) starring Academy Award®-nominees Rooney Mara and Joaquin Phoenix, John Cameron Mitchell's *How To Talk To Girls At Parties* starring Elle Fanning and Nicole Kidman and Academy Award®-winner Steve McQueen's *Widows* starring Academy Award®-winner Viola Davis, Michelle Rodriguez, Elizabeth Debicki, Cynthia Erivo, Liam Neeson, Colin Farrell and Robert Duvall.

Previous productions include the Tom Hooper directed, multi-Academy Award®-winning *The King's Speech* including Best Picture starring Colin Firth, Geoffrey Rush and Helena Bonham Carter; *Tracks* (John Curran) starring Mia Wasikowska and Adam Driver; Justin Kurzel's *Macbeth* starring Michael Fassbender and Marion Cotillard; Anton Corbijn's *Life* starring Robert Pattinson and Dane DeHaan; John Maclean's *Slow West* starring Kodi Smit-McPhee and Michael Fassbender; Bill Condon's *Mr Holmes* starring Ian McKellen and Laura Linney; and Steve McQueen's *Shame* starring Michael Fassbender and Carey Mulligan which received the FIPRESCI Award for Best Film at the 2011 Venice Film Festival, and also garnered the Volpi Cup Best Actor award at Venice for Fassbender.

See-Saw's first television series *Top Of The Lake* (Jane Campion) starring Elisabeth Moss and Holly Hunter was nominated for eight Emmys and two Golden Globe Awards including a win for Moss for Best Actress in a Miniseries or Motion Picture Made for Television. The second instalment, *Top of the Lake: China Girl* (Jane Campion, Ariel Kleiman) also starring Elisabeth Moss with Nicole Kidman and Gwendoline Christie premiered at the 2017 Cannes Film Festival to widespread critical acclaim. The See-Saw produced show debuted in the UK on BBC Two and is available in in the US on SundanceTV and Hulu.

Other TV projects include *Banished*, the series produced for BBC Two written by Jimmy McGovern; and *Love Nina*, a series produced for BBC One written by Nick Hornby and starring Helena Bonham Carter.

Upcoming television projects include the live action series *The Legend of Monkey* produced by See-Saw for Netflix, ABC Australia and TVNZ which is currently in post-production.

## PORCHLIGHT FILMS

Porchlight Films is an independent production company based in Sydney Australia, established by three producers: Liz Watts, Vincent Sheehan and Anita Sheehan. Porchlight produces premium cinema and television drama, working with local and international partners to take content to a worldwide audience.

Porchlight's feature films include David Michôd's acclaimed *Animal Kingdom* (2010) starring Academy Award® nominee Jacki Weaver, which won the World Cinema Jury Prize at Sundance; *The Hunter* (2011) starring Willem Dafoe, David Michôd's *The Rover* (2014) starring Guy Pearce and Robert Pattinson, which enjoyed Official Selection at the 2014 Cannes Film Festival; and *Jasper Jones* (2017), directed by Rachel Perkins based on the best-selling novel of same name.

Other features include the German- Australian co-production *Lore* (2012) directed by Cate Shortland; the adaptation of Christos Tsiolkas' novel *Dead Europe* (2012), directed by Tony Krawitz in partnership with See-Saw Films; *The Home Song Stories* (2007), starring Joan Chen, directed by Tony Ayres; Cannes and Sundance selected *Jewboy* (2005) directed by Tony Krawitz; and Rowan Woods' *Little Fish* (2005) starring Cate Blanchett.

Among their television productions, Porchlight produced the 8-part mystery series *The Kettering Incident* (2016), starring Elizabeth Debicki with Foxtel & BBC Worldwide for sales; two seasons of the comedy series *Laid* (2010-11) for ABC Television, and most recently Nakkiah Lui's comedy series, *Kiki and Kitty* for the ABC. Porchlight is also executive producer on a number of titles including the three-season adaptation of *Animal Kingdom* produced by John Wells and Jonathan Lisco for TNT.

Porchlight Films is currently prepping Justin Kurzel's next feature *True History of the Kelly Gang*, and David Michôd's *The King*, partnering with Jeremy Kleiner and Dede Gardner of Plan B, as well as television titles including Peter Duncan's new series *Fallout*.



## CAST

### Main title cast:

Rooney Mara	Mary Magdalene
Joaquin Phoenix	Jesus
Chiwetel Ejiofor	Peter
Tahar Rahim	Judas
Ariane Labed	Rachel
Denis Menochet	Daniel
Lubna Azabal	Susannah
Tchécky Karyo	Elisha
Charles Babalola	Andrew
Tawfeek Barhom	James
Ryan Corr	Joseph
Uri Gavriel	Phillip
Shira Haas	Leah
Tsahi Halevi	Ephraim
Michael Moshonov	Matthew
David Schofield	Thomas
Irit Sheleg	Mother Mary
Jules Sitruk	Aaron
Zohar Strauss	John
Lior Raz	Magdala Community Leader
Hadas Yaron	Sarah
Roy Assaf	Temple Priest

### Additional Cast In Order Of Appearance

Valentina Cernelutti	Midwife
Giulia D'Amico	Joseph and Sarah's Daughter
Davide Cacioli	Rachel and Daniel's Son
Silvia Bresciano	Rachel and Daniel's Daughter

Massimiliano Cutera	Exorcist
Maria Mutolo	Blind Girl
Jacopo Olmo Antinori	Magdala Man
Maria De Lucia	Susannah's Maid
Theodoros Theodoridis	Lazarus
Sarah-Sofie Boussnina	Martha
Valeria Belardelli	Pregnant Woman In Ghost Village
Roberto Sgarbi	Roman Soldier In Ghost Village

## **CREW**

Director	Garth Davis
Producers	Iain Canning, Emile Sherman, Liz Watts
Writers	Helen Edmundson and Philippa Goslett
Director Of Photography	Greig Fraser
Editors	Alexandre De Franceschi, Melanie Oliver
Music by	Hildur Gudnadóttir and Jóhann Jóhannsson
Casting Director	Jina Jay
Production Designer	Fiona Crombie
Costume Designer	Jacqueline Durran
Sound Designer	Robert Mackenzie
Hair and Make Up Designer	Marese Langan

Focus Features presents, in association with Film 4 and Filmnation, a See-Saw Films and Porchlight Films production