



PRODUCTION NOTES

PROMO <https://vimeo.com/371406175/549f901097>

SHORT SYNOPSIS

When conservative, Texas church-choir director Maybelline (Jacki Weaver) inherits her recently deceased son's drag club, she surprises her closed-minded husband and everyone else she knows by moving alone to San Francisco to save the club from bankruptcy. In this raucous, racy new environment, she begins to open up and find new meaning for her life, even becoming a mother-figure to the club's flamboyant performers ...until a surprise visit threatens to upend her new life. Thom Fitzgerald's lyrical comedy-drama boasts a fiery supporting cast, including Lucy Liu, Adrian Grenier, Mya Taylor (Tangerine, PSIFF 2015) and drag superstar Jackie Beat.

FULL SYNOPSIS

Maybelline (**Jacki Weaver**), a middle-aged homemaker and choir director of her conservative church, has spent her entire life in rural Texas. Despite her unconditional love for her only son, she is deeply conflicted that the values held by her community and her domineering husband strongly reject his lifestyle - that of a flamboyant drag queen in San Francisco.

Soon after receiving the sad word that her son died of a drug overdose, Maybelline defies her husband and travels to San Francisco where she meets Nathan (**Adrian Grenier**), her son's life partner, and Sienna (**Lucy Liu**), a free-spirited single mother who was his closest friend. Maybelline is shocked to learn that because her son died without a will, she has inherited the drag nightclub of which he was both owner and star performer. When she discovers the club is on the verge of bankruptcy, she impulsively decides to help salvage it, while moving in with Sienna, who struggles to make ends meet.

Maybelline embarks on a kaleidoscopic journey of discovery as she befriends the colorful performers at the nightclub. Before long, she becomes de facto "den mother" to the drag queens. Maybelline's abundant common sense and intuition provide solid business skills, while her tenure directing her church choir, where outsized diva behavior is the norm, turns out to be perfect experience for directing drag queens. She formulates the idea that, with a few accommodations, a drag show can be a highly successful tourist attraction.

Maybelline soon embraces the atmosphere of diversity characterized by the city of San Francisco, while a chance meeting stirs long dormant feelings of romance and passion. A showdown with her husband leads to a major decision.

DIRECTOR STATEMENT BY THOM FITZGERALD

Stage Mother boldly incorporates elements of classic Hollywood with a contemporary queer twist to create a story that's fresh and unique. It's foremost a comedy about a woman forging a new life for herself after a shattering loss, with prominent elements of a golden age "women's picture" like *Mildred Pierce* or *Stella Dallas*, all wrapped up in a backstage musical like *Cabaret*, *Top Hat*, *Gypsy*, *Priscilla Queen of the Desert*, and a generation of Mickey and Judy musicals—shows about putting on a show.

I'll aim for the sharp balance of humor and drama that characterize a number of small British films that focus on mature protagonists in exotic new surroundings, like *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* or *Shirley Valentine*, and especially those that focus on conservative straight characters coming to embrace the LGBT community, as in *Pride* and *Kinky Boots*. All of those films have in common a fish-out-of-water theme, in which India, Greece, or a British coal mining town represent an exotic locale to the heroes, just as a San Francisco drag club is exotic to Texas belle Maybelline. Maybelline is a terrific role that blends *Streetcar's* Blanche Dubois with *Gypsy's* Mama Rose, on a journey of deep regret and joyous self-discovery, but this time immersed in the magical and seedy world of drag. Jacki Weaver possesses the complex emotional palette to play a grieving mother who will stop at nothing to put on a successful drag show, as evident in the maternal warmth she displayed in *Silver Linings Playbook* and the steely strength she exhibited in *Animal Kingdom*.

The look of the film will reflect the worn patina of working class San Francisco in sharp contrast to the glitter and bright color of a drag show. The film's sound will play on nostalgia and timeless reinvention, as Maybelline draws new performances of old standards from her diverse cast of drag queens.

Stage Mother is a comedy with emotional resonance. I bring to the production some firsthand knowledge of both the drag world and the struggle of a religious mother who came to terms with her son's alternative sexuality. Maybelline's journey of growing closer to her estranged son, posthumously, echoes my own experience of seeing my brother's home and many aspects of his life for the first time only after his death. I witnessed my mother getting to know my brother better after he died. Like Maybelline, I'm also a bit of a diva who broke free of the church choir, ran away from home and then used what I learned in church to mount an entertaining show. The resonance of these elements give me an insight into Maybelline's journey. I see *Stage Mother* as a chance to create a work that is deeply meaningful and rapturously fun.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

Thom Fitzgerald, Director

Thom Fitzgerald is a writer, director and producer of film, television and theatre. Films include *The Hanging Garden*, *Beefcake*, *3 Needles* and *Cloudburst*. Thom has received honors from the Canadian Academy of Cinema and Television, the US Academy of Television Arts and Sciences, the Writers Guild of Canada and Directors Guild of Canada. His films have thrice premiered at the Sundance Film Festival, and have won prizes at the Toronto International Film Festival, the Berlin International Film Festival, and more than fifty other festivals worldwide.

J. Todd Harris, Producer

J. Todd Harris is founder and CEO of Branded Pictures Entertainment based in Los Angeles. He has been a producer or executive producer nearly 50 features films, including *The Kids Are All Right* and *Bottle Shock*. Most recently he was an executive producer on Aaron Sorkin's *The Trial of the Chicago 7* and *12 Mighty Orphans*. For the stage, he produced *Heathers The Musical*, *Doctor Zhivago* and *American Psycho*. He's currently developing *Soul Train*, *The Buena Vista Social Club*, *Death at a Funeral* and a show based on the life and work of Maya Angelou. He's a founding board member of the Napa Valley Film Festival and a 20-year member of the Motion Picture Academy. He joined the Broadway League in 2015 and Producers Guild in 2016. Originally from New York, he has a BA and MBA from Stanford University.

Anne Clements, Producer

Anne Clements is an independent film and television Producer whose credits include *QUINCEANERA* (Sony Pictures Classics) which won the Sundance Audience & Jury Award, Humanitas Prize and John Cassavetes Award for Best Feature at the Independent Spirit Awards, *PEDRO* that premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival, Berlin International Film Festival and President Bill Clinton introduced the film when it aired simultaneously on MTV, MTV Tr3s, LOGO and MtvU and the comedy feature *PING PONG PLAYA* (IFC) by Academy Award winner Jessica Yu. *PING PONG PLAYA* had its world premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival. *QUINCEAÑERA* and *PING PONG PLAYA* earned Clements a Producer's Award nomination at the 2008 Independent Spirit Awards. Other feature credits include the action comedy *HOLLYWOOD ADVENTURES* (Enlight Media) starring Zhao Wei, Huang Xiaoming and Tong Dawei that she produced along with Bruno Wu, Justin Lin and Perfect Storm Entertainment, *MILES* a romantic comedy that stars Molly Shannon, Paul Reiser and Missi Pyle, the teen heist movie *COIN HEIST* for Netflix. Anne recently executive produced the drag queen comedy *HURRICANE BIANCA: FROM RUSSIA WITH HATE*. The film stars Bianca Del Rio who won the sixth season of "RuPaul's Drag Race" as well as Rachel Dratch and Wanda Sykes.

Brad Hennig, Writer/Producer

Brad Hennig is a writer/producer based in San Francisco. He wrote and produced the 2013 feature film comedy *The Hot Flashes*, starring Brooke Shields, Wanda Sykes, Daryl Hannah, and Virginia Madsen. Hennig won or placed in seven national screenwriting competitions, including the Austin Film Festival Screenplay Competition and the Final Draft Big Break competition. He has also developed ad campaigns for Visa and Apple, and has also written freelance articles that have been published in the Huffington Post, Fast Company, and the San Francisco Chronicle.

Thomas M. Harting CSC, Director of Photography

Based in Los Angeles, CA and Vancouver, B.C., Thomas M. Harting has been an award-winning Director of Photography for features and television since 1989. His international resume

includes features lensed in Europe, Africa, Asia, Canada, and the U.S. His work has been seen at the Sundance, Toronto, Berlin, San Francisco, Los Angeles, SXSW, and Seattle International Film Festivals. Recent awards include a Gemini Nomination for the CTV Telefilm "In God's Country" as well as Best Cinematography at the Atlantic Film Festival for "3 Needles". He has earned various other awards including an Emmy. He is an active member of the Canadian Society of Cinematographers (CSC). Thomas has lensed a broad spectrum of talent including Olympia Dukakis, Brenda Fricker, Lucy Liu, Stockard Channing, Chris O'Donnell, Sandra Oh, Chloe Sevigny, Burt Reynolds, Mary Louise Parker, Carrie Fisher, Sarah Polley, Stone Cold Steve Austin, Parker Posey, Brian Austin Green, Monique, Milo Ventimiglia, and Jenna Fischer. His documentary work includes the feature "Life After Tomorrow", starring Sarah Jessica Parker, and the award-winning PBS documentary "Blink".

Yaniv Dabach, Editor

Born in Israel to a Brazilian mother and an Israeli/Syrian father, Yaniv Dabach is a feature film and television editor. Dabach studied at the School of Visual Arts (SVA) in New York City where he directed and edited *With You!*, a feature documentary focusing on his personal experience of playing rugby in the only gay team in NYC; his film won a National Board of Review student award. After editing a short documentary for the Obama Campaign, Ross Katz (*Lost in Translation, In the Bedroom*) enlisted Dabach to edit a Hindi- language feature directed by Dev Benegal: *Road, Movie*. *Road, Movie* premiered to glowing reviews at festivals worldwide, including Toronto, Berlin, Tribeca, and Tokyo. Dabach has cut a variety of television documentary/reality projects, including National Geographic's *The Last Days of Osama Bin Laden* and the Food Channel's *Guy's Grocery Games*, as well as the scripted shows as *The Oath* on Crackle. Amongst the narrative features he has edited are *Miles*, *Affairs of State*, *Social Animals*, and *Shoplifters of the World*.

CREDITS

Director: Thom Fitzgerald

Producers: J. Todd Harris, Anne Clements, Brad Hennig, Laurie Kraus Lacob, Doug Pettigrew

Screenwriter: Brad Hennig

Cinematographers: Thomas M. Harting CSC

Editor: Yaniv Dabach

Music: Warren Robert

Cast: Jacki Weaver, Lucy Liu, Adrian Grenier, Jackie Beat, Mya Taylor (Tangerine)

Country: USA

Language: English

Year: 2019

Running Time: 93 minutes

Premiere Status: World Premiere

Director Filmography: Cloudburst (2011), 3 Needles (2005), The Event (2003), The Hanging Garden (1997)

Primary Company: Film Mode Entertainment

SOUNDTRACK

1. Dukes - by Repartee
2. Love Will Lead You Back - by Taylor Dayne
3. Hymn for Him (Original Song) – by Cast
4. So Hard To Handle - by Village Sound
5. Queer Things - by Ruth Wallis
6. Do You Wanna Touch Me? - by Joan Jett
7. Hurry It's Lovely Up Here - by Sharon Azrieli
8. Take Your Mama Out - by Scissor Sisters
9. He Ain't Mr. Right (Original Song) – by Cast
10. Finally – by Cast (original song by CeCe Peniston)
11. Beautiful To Me (Original Song) – by Cast
12. Love Will Lead You Back – by Cast
13. Total Eclipse of the Heart - by Bonnie Tyler
14. Total Eclipse of the Heart – by Jacki Weaver

FILM CONTACT:

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