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JOE



A FILM BY DAVID GORDON GREEN

2013 Venice Film Festival
2013 Deauville American Film Festival
2013 Toronto International Film Festival
2013 Zurich Film Festival

RUNNING TIME: 117 Minutes

Synopsis

A gripping mix of friendship, violence and redemption erupts in the contemporary South in this adaptation of Larry Brown's novel, celebrated at once for its grit and its deeply moving core. Directed by David Gordon Green (PRINCE AVALANCHE, PINEAPPLE EXPRESS, UNDERTOW, ALL THE REAL GIRLS), the film brings Academy Award® winner Nicolas Cage back to his indie roots in the title role as the hard-living, hot-tempered, ex-con Joe Ransom, who is just trying to dodge his instincts for trouble – until he meets a hard-luck kid, (Tye Sheridan) (MUD, TREE OF LIFE) who awakens in him a fierce and tender-hearted protector.

The story begins as Joe hires teenaged Gary Jones and his destitute father onto his “tree-poisoning” crew for a lumber company. Joe might be notoriously reckless with his pick-up, his dog and especially with women, but he sees something in Gary that gets to him: a determination, a raw decency and a sense of resilience he can barely believe in anymore. Gary has truly had nothing in life – he's never spent a day at school – yet something drives him to take care of his family, to keep his sister safe when his father turns monstrous, to hang onto hope of a better future. Joe and Gary forge an unlikely bond. When Gary finds himself facing a threat greater than he knows how to handle, he turns to Joe – and sets off a chain of events that play out with the brutal inevitability of tragedy and the beauty of a last stab at salvation.

From a screenplay by Gary Hawkins (THE ROUGH SOUTH OF LARRY BROWN), JOE is based on the novel by the late Larry Brown (Big Bad Love, Facing the Moon), the former Mississippi firefighter renown for his powerful, gothic storytelling and universal themes of honor, desperation and moral rectitude. The producers are Lisa Muskat, Green, Christopher Woodrow and Derrick Tseng. Shot on location in Texas, the film features Nicolas Cage, Tye Sheridan, Gary Poulter and Ronnie Gene Blevins leading a cast made up of a mix of indie actors and non-actors cast off the streets of Austin, Texas.

About The Production

“I’m Joe. I’m your friend. You understand?”
– Joe Ransom

The making of the movie JOE began with the unmistakably raw and resonant voice of the late novelist Larry Brown. He’s been called the king of “grit lit,” a chronicler of the blue collar “Rough South” and one of the most original and moving American writers of the 20th Century. Perhaps only he could have created a story about a small-town ex-con steeped in liquor, firearms and reckless behavior who nevertheless, in a twist of fate, aims to become one kid’s true and honest hero.

The book was published in 1991 to critical acclaim. Publisher’s Weekly called it “immensely affecting,” Kirkus Reviews called it “lean, mean and original,” and it went on to win the Southern Book Critics Circle Award for Fiction. It was the fourth of Brown’s nine books – which also include *Dirty Work*, *Big Bad Love*, *Father and Son* and *Fay* – and, like the rest of his writing, seemed to emerge from his improbable background as a novelist. The son of a sharecropper, he spent nearly two decades working the sweat-soaked life of a firefighter in Oxford, Mississippi. But during that time, he began teaching himself to write, penning endless stories at night, about the lives of the people he knew, lives as fascinating and dramatic as any, but not often seen in the pages of novels, or anywhere.

He wasn’t published until the 1980s, when he became known for a series of short stories exposing this unseen Southern world – a world of dizzying heat and fierce work ethics, of heavy drinking and petty crimes, of bad marriages and darkly comic catastrophes but equally of vibrancy, heart and humanity. The style of his prose was spare and direct yet rhythmic and visceral, pulling readers directly into the lives of his characters.

From the time it was published, people began envisioning JOE as a movie. Its characters were ordinary people, yet they had a touch of the mythic to them. And though it was a dark story of crime and mistreatment, it cracked open to a sliver of hopeful light. But for two decades a film never came to pass. In many ways, it seemed fitting that the film adaptation ultimately was brought to fruition by director David Gordon Green, who also hails from the South (born in Arkansas and raised in Texas), and who made his debut with *GEORGE WASHINGTON*, a searing drama about a group of kids in a depressed Southern town who band together to cover up a tragic mistake.

Since then, Green has gone on to an incredibly diverse career – marked both by critically admired indies and broadly popular Hollywood comedies. But JOE, along with this year’s *PRINCE AVALANCHE*, has taken him back to grittier territory.

In fact, JOE took Green back all the way to his own filmmaking roots, since the screenplay is written by his former film professor at the North Carolina School of the Arts, Gary Hawkins. It was there, in Hawkins’s directing class, that Green was first introduced to Larry Brown’s writing. Hawkins was making his heart-felt ode to Brown’s life and work with the innovative documentary *THE ROUGH SOUTH OF LARRY BROWN*. Those involved on the documentary included not only Green, but also producer Lisa Muskat, director Jeff Nichols (*MUD*, *TAKE SHELTER*) and cinematographer Tim Orr.

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“Along with Jeff Nichols, I was like a glorified production assistant on *THE ROUGH SOUTH OF LARRY BROWN*,” recalls Green. “It was just a great experience and then at one point Larry himself came out and it was great fun to be able to sit around and shoot the shit with this tremendous story-teller.”

The film, which combined narrative recreations of several of Brown’s short stories, along with interviews with Brown and his wife, went on to be named an “Essential Southern Documentary” by *Oxford American Magazine*. Soon after, Hawkins began adapting *JOE*. It went through a variety of incarnations over time, but eventually, he showed the screenplay to Green, who by this point had a full-fledged directing career of his own. Green’s reaction was instantaneous.

“I got very excited when I saw what Gary [Hawkins] had done with the adaptation,” says Green. “It was beautiful and it was faithful. I’ve always loved stories about fathers and sons and I think *JOE* very much is one in its own way. They may not have a blood connection, but Joe Ransom and Gary Jones find themselves very much in that kind of formidable relationship that a father and son can have. I loved that as a man, Joe is someone who is truly a mixed bag – he’s got the good, the bad and the ugly. But this kid, who has it so much worse, moves him to make a real sacrifice. I found it to be a beautiful portrait of how certain relationships in life kind of sculpt out who you really are. It comes around to this very powerful idea that Gary is essentially Joe’s future.”

For Green, that became a central theme, and the source of the film’s final stab at redemption. He explains: “I think when Joe sees that Gary [Jones] is about to make a mistake that would ruin the rest of his life, that’s when he decides he will make that mistake for him and open up something for Gary he might never have had.”

Green was especially exhilarated by the opportunity to bring Larry Brown’s compelling world to younger film audiences, who might never have heard of him, let alone read his books. The only other of Brown’s novels to receive a film adaptation was *BIG BAD LOVE*, directed by Arliss Howard and starring Debra Winger, but that was more than a decade ago.

“Larry’s writing has a very devoted audience, but I also like the idea of maybe bringing a new fan base to contemporary Southern literature. A lot like Cormac McCarthy, Larry’s characters have that mythological edge to them that make them both regional and universal. They’re very much of the earth, they’re a part of specific class and landscape, but they also have a core humanity that you can’t turn away from,” observes Green.

Of course, a film and a novel are two quite different beasts, so while Green was devoted to staying true to the spirit of Larry Brown, he was equally focused on making *JOE* a taut cinematic experience. “There are certain things in the novel that we changed just to make it more convincing on screen,” the director explains. “We expanded the character of Willie Russell, Joe’s rival, to give it a bit more of an ensemble quality. I also added a scene with Wade Jones, Gary’s father, which reveals that there is a bit more of a human being inside his apparent monstrousness. And at the end, we added an epilogue which is not in the novel that brings Gary full circle in a way that I hope brings a satisfying conclusion.”

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Working closely with Green was his long-time producer, Lisa Muskat, who also taught with Hawkins in North Carolina and produced *THE ROUGH SOUTH OF LARRY BROWN*. She remembers that experience not only as opening her eyes to the rich thematic power of contemporary Southern writing, but also as being seminal to their careers.

“It was kind of the moment we were all getting our feet wet,” she recalls. “Gary was an amazing writer and director as well as a great teacher and mentor. There was a lot of talent involved but it was a really exciting kind of outsider filmmaking community. I think we all felt the only way people like us were going to make it out there was to stick together.”

Indeed, she and Green would stick together through many more films, which allowed her an up-close view into his evolution as a filmmaker. “David is someone who is constantly pushing his understanding of storytelling and filmmaking,” she observes. “The one constant is that he always likes the challenge of something new. I think with *JOE*, he was excited to tell a Southern story again and to have the chance to explore on screen a writer we both really admire and respect. We enjoy doing whatever we are most passionate about, and that was very true of this project.”

While preparing the production, Green also consulted with Larry Brown’s widow, Mary Annie Coleman Brown, and their son, Billy Ray Brown. “We talked a lot about Larry’s incredible affection for these characters,” says Green. “His son also told me that every character in *JOE* was based on someone Larry knew. That might account for some of the ambiguity that Larry left in the novel – I think maybe he figured everyone in town already knew who he was talking about and what happened to them.”

Adds Muskat: “David wanted to be as faithful as he could to Larry Brown’s spirit, while at the same time maintaining a theatrical tone for the film. It was wonderful to have Mary and Billy Ray’s support in that. Billy Ray said that he re-reads the novel *Joe* every year to honor his father. And when they visited the set, Billy Ray would say things like ‘that truck looks just like what I always had in my mind.’”

The muscularly lean, minimalist tone of Brown’s writing was something else that Green wanted to translate to the screen – but in his own way. “Larry wrote simply but he also wrote with a lot of detail and a real sense of poetry,” notes the director. “His words create both a sense of character and an atmosphere and that atmosphere is what we most wanted to capture. Then, as the production began, it became like a passing of the torch from Larry Brown to Gary Hawkins to our cast and crew.”

Muskat notes that Green has a sensibility that gives him a reason to carry that torch. She says: “One of the things about David is that while everyone of his characters might have a flaw, he always finds in them a level of aspiration that makes them very human.”

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JOE RANSOM

In a career of wide-ranging diversity, Nicolas Cage has played some of the most memorable characters in recent cinema. From the baby kidnapper in the Coen Brother's RAISING ARIZONA to the romantic baker Ronny Cammareri in Norman Jewison's MOONSTRUCK, to a lover on the lam in David Lynch's WILD AT HEART, Cage's early career culminated in his Academy Award® for the searing role of an alcoholic screenwriter in LEAVING LAS VEGAS. In addition to numerous action blockbuster roles, he has gone on to play twin writers in Spike Jonze's ADAPTATION, an arms dealer in a moral crisis in Andrew Niccol's LORD OF WAR, a Chicago weather man in a mid-life crisis in Gore Verbinski's THE WEATHER MAN and a drug-addled detective in Werner Herzog's THE BAD LIEUTENANT: PORT OF CALL – NEW ORLEANS.

But for all of those roles, he's never played anyone quite like Joe Ransom, a tough Southern working-class who makes an unlikely jab at doing something significant with his life. With his bare-knuckled brawling nature, his ferocious bull dog and his trouble with the law, Joe is in many ways an archetype of rugged masculinity. But that hardened skin gets whittled away the more he gets to know Gary, a kid who needs the kind of chance that Joe has perhaps never had or squandered. Joe's whole life has been surrounded by forces of destruction – even his job running a tree poisoning crew for a lumber company is violating the very environment that sustains him – but in Gary he finds an unexpected means for a kind of atonement.

For Green, Cage was an obvious first choice to take on Joe Ransom in all his light and dark contradictions. “The character of Joe to me is a man who has had an incredibly dark past looking back at his life – and I wanted an actor who could bring a sense of authenticity to that. Nic is someone who really lets the kinks in his armor shine through, which to me is what makes all his performances so interesting and real. There is a strength, but also a vulnerability. He's also a guy who really goes for it. In the twists and turns of his career, Nic has truly been all over the map in the kinds of films he does. But no matter what he does, he always has that ability to let his inner life be accessible to you. He had the humanity and the honesty I was looking for in Joe.”

The only question in his mind was whether Cage would be up for it. “This is probably the lowest budget film Nic has done in his whole career,” Green muses. “But I felt if he was ready to roll up his sleeves and get down and dirty, that was exactly what I was looking for.”

Meanwhile, Cage was reading Hawkins' screenplay adaptation, and had a visceral reaction to it. “I was hooked right away,” he says. “I knew the power of what he had written.”

Cage and Green met while Green was scouting locations for PRINCE AVALANCHE. “We drove around for a couple of days in a car talking about the characters,” the director remembers. “It was clear that Nic was the perfect age, had the perfect look and had exactly the right physical stature for Joe. And he was ready to get raw and real, to bring all his life experience and vulnerability to the role. At one point he said to me, ‘I'm just here for you. You tell me what you need and I will find a way to do it.’ It became a very collaborative process between us.”

Lisa Muskat said: “Nic made it clear to us that he wanted to be very much engaged in all the discussions, not just about the character but about the movie in general. It was amazing.”

Later, Muskat recalls, Cage accompanied them on many of the location scouts for JOE. “I remember when we were scouting the location for the bridge where we shot the final scene, there was this incredible moment when we were walking around and suddenly Nic started doing some of Joe's lines. Right there in broad daylight, right before our eyes he became Joe completely. It was a thrilling moment.”

Green screened THE ROUGH SOUTH OF LARRY BROWN for Cage who also read the novel to the point that he knew it backwards and forwards, and could quote lines of description. “The novel opened up a whole new voice to me,” Cage says. “When I read the book, I felt it had almost a Hemingway or Conrad kind of grittiness to it.”

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He also felt that Green had the ability to put that grittiness and stripped-down emotion on the screen in its most potent form. “David is really a master of knowing how to get humor out of dark situations,” says Cage. “He also has a very unique approach with actors. He’s very tuned into performance and he always wants to go for subtext, for improvisation – which requires a great deal of trust from an actor . . . but David earns that trust.”

In trying to get to the heart of Joe, Cage approached him as a man constantly trying to keep a rein on his many run-away, wild impulses. “Joe is always in a state of trying to balance himself,” the actor observes. “He would even rather get arrested and go to jail than lose control of himself and maybe kill somebody. But, inevitably, the steam inside him sometimes gets too strong and the pressure goes up and he does something that gets him into trouble. He’s a true outlaw and he’s completely politically incorrect. And yet, at the same time, he becomes an unlikely role model for Gary Jones.”

Joe is certainly no model citizen himself, but he has more in his life than Gary can even imagine, and Joe chooses to share it with Gary. “He’s giving him beer, giving him cigarettes, talking to him about all the beautiful girls he wants to have sex with, but at least he cares in his own messed-up way,” says Cage. “Gary’s not getting any of that at home. He’s only getting beat up and ignored and no one there is listening to him.”

On the set, Cage was fearless in diving into Joe’s full breadth of highs and lows. Recalls Green: “Some of Nic’s suggestions were the craziest things I’ve ever heard – and yet often, extraordinary inventiveness came out of that. Once he stepped into the role, Nic truly made Joe his own. At the same time, he brought a real levity to the set. We were dealing with this really dark material so Nic coming onto the set and doing jokes and impressions added a magical quality that transformed the shoot. And one of the most beautiful things to watch was his connection to Tye Sheridan as Gary, which grew and grew throughout.”

Says Muskat: “One of the most remarkable things in the movie is the way that Nic and Tye as Joe and Gary become two sides of the same person. You see it right from the way the movie opens with this elegant, dream-like cutting between the two character, and their performances build on that portrait of a father-son relationship in which Gary and Joe both realize Gary deserves more than his own father can give him.”

Cage’s rapport with Sheridan allowed the almost paternal friendship and guardianship that unfolds between Joe and Gary to feel palpably real. Cage says that developed organically.

“Tye is a total natural with a very inventive streak. I mean, he’s creative. I mean he comes up with lines and dialogue. And he loves to play,” muses Cage. “In the scene where Gary gets beat up and he comes to Joe’s house looking for help, and he says ‘I could beat him up just as good as you. I’ll pop him right in the eyes,’ I just thought that was so heartbreaking. He’s just this little man-child trying to get somewhere when all the chips are against him.”

To Cage, Joe is able to accept Gary for who he is and where he is because he’s beyond judging people at this point. “Joe doesn’t hold himself above judgment. He holds himself below judgment,” points out Cage. “He will hire anybody for the lumber crew. There’s a line where he says: ‘black, white, red, yellow, I really don’t give a shit.’ I think his feeling is: who am I to judge? And there’s something wonderfully humane about that, too.”

As for the rest of the cast, Cage says: “Everybody was outstanding. They were effortlessly real. I credit that largely to David’s ability to cast a movie, and the care he puts into that.”

Joe also has an intriguing relationship with animals in the film, from dogs to snakes, and especially with the dog living under his house, which becomes an extension of his most primal instincts. “Joe does take his dog very seriously,” notes Green. “He’s a guy looking for the balance in his life, looking for a fair fight but when there’s a dirty job to do, he sends his dog to do it. The dog is kind of his partner in crime, because he can be an animal around him. But the dog also shows a more sensitive side to Joe and we tried to create little moments of him reassuring the dog and connecting with him in a kind of wordless way. When the dog goes missing, it’s heartbreaking for Joe, and you see how much this connection means to him.”

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The deadly cottonmouth snake that Joe expertly handles at the lumber site – impressing Gary – also impressed the entire cast and crew, because it was one hundred percent real. As nervous as it made everyone else, this was not an issue for Cage who quite likes the highly poisonous and unpredictable creatures.

“What happened was they didn’t like the look of the rubber snake and they had another snake, which was not venomous, but his fangs just weren’t big enough, and David really liked the fangs,” Cage remembers. “So I said ‘well heck, we’ll do the cottonmouth snake and I’ll just pick him up.’ And, of course there was a great deal of concern . . . but it worked out. I knew how to hold it. I managed to get him in my hand and it was actually very calming . . . and kind of beautiful.”

He adds: “People misinterpret snakes. They see them as evil. Well, they’re not. They’re actually at the center of every great mythology throughout history. So I think it’s interesting that there’s a snake at the beginning of this story. David likes to get right up against the edge of the imagination and into what might or might not be seen as mythic and mystical.”

THE JONESES

To play the role of Gary Jones, the homeless, but defiantly hopeful kid who takes on Joe first as a boss and then as an entirely unlikely mentor in the art of survival, is Texas native Tye Sheridan. Sheridan recently came to the fore in the role of one of Brad Pitt’s sons in Terrence Malick’s epic TREE OF LIFE, a one-of-a-kind experience that fueled his interest in acting. He went on to star in Jeff Nichols’ MUD opposite Matthew McConaughey and Reese Witherspoon before being cast in JOE.

Like Cage, Sheridan had a strong reaction to reading the script. “I just fell in love with it, so I sent David an e-mail telling him how much I liked it and that I wanted to audition. I just liked Gary’s bravery,” he says.

It was Sheridan’s initial meeting with Cage that revealed a spark between the two actors. “The minute I saw them together something immediate happened,” says David Gordon Green. “Nic just got this sly smile on his face and you could see the chemistry developing, the youth and energy of Tye working with Nic’s emotional depth.”

Green was unconcerned that Sheridan had only been in a couple of films. “He had exactly the right amount of experience for this role,” he notes. “He still has that small town quality and an authentic Southern accent and he hasn’t had any of that authenticity ironed out of him yet. He was really able to bring all of his background and himself to this performance.”

Sheridan might have grown up in the South, but his life so far has greatly contrasted with Gary’s – and the chance to explore someone who would normally be invisible to the world really intrigued him. Although there are an estimated 1.5 million homeless kids in America, few are ever seen as major characters in a film, or in the media at all.

“One of the reasons I was so drawn to Gary is because he’s so different from myself,” Sheridan explains. “I come from a good home and have great parents who would do anything for me. And he has nobody there for him. He’s really struggling. And he needs somebody to be his role model.”

That is of course what draws him so powerfully to Joe Ransom, who might not be all that wholesome but who seems to have the courage of his convictions, something Gary can’t help but admire. Right away, Sheridan felt that same kind of push-and-pull in his early readings with Nicolas Cage. Just as he had taken working with Brad Pitt in stride, he felt no intimidation in working with Cage.

“I’ve never gotten nervous because I guess I don’t see big actors as someone I need to impress. I just see them as people,” he explains.

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Sheridan was more focused on what Gary is trying to learn from Joe. “He’s got to step up because no one else is there for him,” he explains. “He’s got to defend himself because no one else is going to. He has to learn to tough it out and get through things. He doesn’t want to end up like his dad. He wants to be something totally opposite. And I think he wants to show his dad that he’s not trash and he really can become somebody.”

Taking the role of Wade Jones, Gary’s father, is non-professional actor Gary Poulter, who tragically passed away in March of 2013. Poulter was cast literally off the Austin streets, while waiting for a bus at Fifth and Congress, headed home for his own father’s funeral. While he was sitting at the bus stop, he happened to see casting director John Williams interviewing locals.

“John just happened to come over and he said, ‘how are you doing?’ I told him, I’ve had better days,” Poulter recalled in an interview during production. “And he said ‘well we’re shooting a movie here in Austin at the end of October and we’re just wanting to interview with different people out here on the street and what have you.’ But I had no idea that it was a movie of this magnitude or that Nicolas Cage was involved or anything else like that.”

Poulter agreed to a videotaped interview, despite his state of grief, but never expected anything would come of it. However, Green was instantly won over. “We were looking for drifters who were real and interesting and Gary had just a beautiful look to him. You could see the lost soul behind his eyes, he was missing part of an ear, and he was just as much interrogating John as John was interviewing him,” recalls the director. “There was something special there.”

Green called Poulter in to read for a smaller role, but he was so impressed, he began to consider him for the far more challenging part of Wade. “He came to the reading on time, he was completely prepared and there was just a great feeling of reality to everything he did,” says Green. “We understood we were about to take a huge risk on a guy who didn’t even have a home address or a driver’s license, but what he did have was a real story. Everything about him was authentic, from the clothes he wore to the music he listened to. And it was astounding to see where he was willing to go in a scene.”

When Poulter got another call for a breakfast meeting, he had no idea what to expect. “My mind went like oh my God, he’s going to bring all these executive producers and all these big shots and . . . they’re going to ask me a zillion freaking questions that I don’t even want to freaking answer. And I was just trying to talk myself out of even showing up, you know. I was dreading it. But anyway, I went, of course. And I’m looking when I get there and there’s some tall dude. I really wasn’t even looking at him. I’m like great, there’s one of them. Then he got about three or four foot closer and it was Nicolas Cage. And he just gave me a big old handshake and he had a big old grin on his face. He said, ‘man I’ve seen all your auditions.’ He said ‘you’re great.’”

Cage and Poulter instantly hit it off. “We talked about the movie briefly and things he’d done. But we really talked about interests and vampires and Dracula and Leonardo da Vinci. I mean the guy is so well versed, you know, I was like, this kid is going to think I’m a total idiot. But we had a really nice time and the three of us ate breakfast and just talked about just anything in general.”

That meeting sealed the deal, but now Poulter had to submerge himself into Wade, a man he called “the most villainous person you’ve ever met in your life.”

He had little experience other than life to draw on. When asked if he ever acted before, Poulter quipped: “I’ve acted like an idiot if you talk to my ex-wife.” He did work once in a non-speaking role on the television show “Thirty something,” but that was nothing like what he was about to embark upon.

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Poulter appreciated the way Green worked with him, allowing him to follow his own instincts. “David’s really, really great because he gives you so much latitude and space,” he said. “The lines just kind of indicate what path he wants you to take. And he really doesn’t care if you’re dead-on, right on the lines or not. He just wants to see the performance and that it’s natural.”

The more he got into the role, the more Poulter appreciated the nature of the story, and its focus on rough-hewn, hard-working, everyday Americans who are so rarely seen on screen. “Not everybody lives a cushy, quarter-million dollar life, you know, there’s some people that are out there struggling and they do the best they can for what they got,” he said.

Wade, on the other hand, isn’t trying to do his best. He’s far gone from that. “As far as evilness goes ... Wade is ruthless and Wade doesn’t care and Wade still lives an existence that has no interest in impressing anybody and wanting to form relationships. And he is so, so selfish. So selfish that he doesn’t have any regard for human life, in trying to get what he wants.”

Dark as his own character might be, he saw a glimmer of optimism in Gary’s breaking away from Wade. “As far as my character goes, he’s not going to make the best of anything, ‘cause you got alcoholism, you got violence, there’s a whole lot of things going on. But even as bad as things are, especially for Gary, relationships can ensue. And there’s a hint of hope in that – no matter where people come from or the desperate situations that they’ve been in.”

Green was grateful for having happened upon Poulter. “I got closer and closer to him during production,” he notes. “I think he was a born talent and he gave us a very unique voice for our movie. It was a crazy experience to take a guy off the street into such an intense character role. But in Gary, we all found incredible humanity from someone who you might normally just pass on a street corner. As we were wrapping, we really thought he would go on to have a very interesting career, but he passed very quickly and unexpectedly.”

No one could have foreseen that Poulter would not see his performance hit theatres, but Poulter hauntingly said during his production interview: “I’m really just enjoying this experience and it’ll be something I’ll be able to talk about till the day I die. When people think I’m a liar, I’ll say, ‘Oh yeah? Well here, check that little DVD there, buddy.’ And that’s one way I can put my print on this earth for longer than a week after I die, because a hundred years from now, somebody will be able to go into the archives somewhere and probably find this, you know. So, I will live on.”

Green cast a number of additional roles with colorful locals who are non-actors, including Brian Mays who was cast as Junior straight out of a nearby BBQ joint. The members of Joe Ransom’s lumber crew were all day laborers. Rounding out the cast are actors Ronnie Gene Blevins as Willie Russell, Sue Rock as Merle and Adriene Mishler as Connie.

“David has an amazing track record at casting, he’s a natural at finding charismatic people and putting actors together,” observes Lisa Muskat, “We were very fortunate that the film’s financiers completely supported this kind of casting process.”

Green notes that the mix of actors and non-actors results in something unpredictable and dynamic for all involved. “The authenticity of the cast on this movie was amazing. People really brought who they were to it,” Green concludes. “I think Nic was also very excited about the opportunity to work in this way. It forces you to be honest, and Nic just leapt right into that.”

LARRY BROWN AND THE “ROUGH SOUTH” GENRE

Larry Brown’s South is a place of stultifying heat, back-breaking-outdoor work and hardscrabble country living on the edge of crime, poverty or both – a place rife with both ordinary people and age-old mythologies. It’s a down-and-dirty version of the modern South devoid of any romantic notions, yet thick with Southern gothic themes of flaws, decay, the sinister and the darkly illuminating. He fits into the category of writers who writes about what has been called the “Rough South,” a phrase used in the title of Gary Hawkins’ documentary about Brown, but also one that seems to define an evolving genre of literature and films. The literary line is one that extends from William Faulkner and Flannery O’Conner to Cormac McCarthy, Harry Crews, Barry Hannah, William Gay, Tom Franklin and more – each of whom writes about the shadiest, strangest corners of Southern life with raw honesty and acid humor. Yet Brown’s South has its very own feel to it, with the way he knots together the harsh and the heartfelt into one singular experience of the world.

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Though Brown set the story of JOE in his native Mississippi, Green took the production to his own native Texas. He did so in part because he wanted to set the film in a kind of Southern ‘anywhere’ and in part because he knows Texas cinematically in the way that Brown knew Mississippi as a writer.

Then, to bring the atmosphere of JOE to life, Green and producer Lisa Muskat brought in an artistic crew of long-time collaborators including cinematographer Tim Orr, editor Colin Patton and composer David Wingo, along with production designer Chris Spellman.

In terms of the look he and Tim Orr created for JOE, Green says: “We wanted it to be beautiful and we also wanted it to be very dark, because you don’t see a lot of films shot like that anymore. We really took advantage of shooting in lots of low-light situations and using a lot of mixed lighting sources.”

He goes on: “You could certainly pretty all this up but that’s not what we wanted. What we wanted was to find lovely ways of capturing all the decay and rust of these run-down places. We didn’t want to overly glamorize this world nor to create some kind of cartoon Southern cliché, which you see a lot. We were going for something gritty and down to earth and the idea was to always keep it real.”

The emphasis on darkness meant chasing certain lighting conditions. “One of our biggest considerations during production was always what time of day we would shoot,” notes Green. “We were most concerned with forging a certain kind of atmosphere. There’s an emotion to the scenes that comes from more than just the dialogue.”

Muskat concurs. “David, Kim and Chris found so many wonderful spaces that create the atmosphere of the movie,” she says. “A real highlight for me was watching their creative process, and some of the magic moments that came out of that. I love that so much of the shoot took place in very authentic locations – for example Gary’s house, which was a real house that we found pretty much in the same state of disrepair that you see in the film. I think that really affects the audience and David always goes for that realism even if it makes the shooting itself more challenging. You just can’t recreate the kind of feeling he captures with a set, the feeling that ‘yes, people really do live like this.’”

That rawness, Muskat notes, is a defining quality of Green’s work. “He’s a director who follows his intuition, no matter what kind of movie he’s making. It’s in his nature to always take the risk,” says the producer. “What’s interesting about him is that he’s not really ever going after perfection – there’s something more visceral that he wants to convey to his audience.”

Muskat also notes that leading independent motion picture studio Worldview Entertainment gave Green the kind of artistic freedom needed to follow those wide-ranging instincts. “With Worldview we had a combination of autonomy with real financial and moral support. It was the opposite of a lot of other experiences,” she comments.

From Worldview and Muskat to the devoted crew and the handpicked cast, Green was gratified to have every element of the film working in synchronicity. “This was an incredibly collaborative group,” observes Green. “I had great expectations of everybody and they all came prepared to meet them – and it was a really positive experience. It was a family-like environment and I think that also goes towards making these characters feel that much more real.”

The reality of the characters in JOE is something that kept Green, Cage and the entire cast and crew on their toes, in part because they are each so complicated in their reactions to the things that happen in the film, the way that real people are.

“I think for me, what sets JOE apart as so distinctive is that the story has always been, from the start, more thought-provoking than it is clear-cut to me,” Green summarizes. “What drove the film was not a search for authoritative answers but a deep curiosity and an excitement about letting these characters live on screen.”

About The Cast

Academy Award®-winner NICOLAS CAGE (Joe Ransom) is one of the most versatile actors of all time, equally known for his poignant portrayals in both drama and comedy. Cage most recently lent his voice to the DreamWorks animated film THE CROODS, which follows a family through their prehistoric era adventures. The film also features voices from Emma Stone, Ryan Reynolds, Catherine Keener, and Cloris Leachman. Last year he starred in STOLEN, which reunited him with CON AIR director Simon West, the 1997 blockbuster action thriller. Upcoming, Cage stars in THE FROZEN GROUND with Vanessa Hudgens and John Cusack.

In 2011, Cage was seen in the comic book sequel, GHOST RIDER: SPIRIT OF VENGEANCE, as well as DRIVE ANGRY with Amber Heard, SEEKING JUSTICE with January Jones, TRESPASS with Nicole Kidman, and the Charles Roven produced epic, SEASON OF THE WITCH, which filmed on location in Budapest. He also starred in THE SORCEROR'S APPRENTICE, Cage's seventh collaboration with Jerry Bruckheimer. In addition, Cage starred in the action comedy, KICK-ASS, produced by Matthew Vaughn.

In the 2009 critically acclaimed film BAD LIEUTENANT: PORT OF CALL NEW ORLEANS, Cage plays a drug and gambling addicted detective in post-Katrina New Orleans. Prior to this film, Cage lent his voice to two animated features: the Jerry Bruckheimer produced family adventure G-FORCE, and the Summit Entertainment family adventure, ASTRO BOY. Cage also starred in Summit Entertainment's sci-fi thriller KNOWING, and the Pang Brothers directed BANGKOK DANGEROUS, an action thriller.

Cage starred in the worldwide box office success NATIONAL TREASURE: BOOK OF SECRETS. It marked Cage's fifth collaboration with producer Jerry Bruckheimer following THE ROCK, CON AIR, GONE IN 60 SECONDS and NATIONAL TREASURE. His memorable performance as an alcoholic drinking himself to death in the drama, LEAVING LAS VEGAS, directed by Mike Figgis, earned him an Academy Award® as well as Golden Globe® and Best Actor awards from the New York Film Critics Circle, the Los Angeles Film Critics Association, the Chicago Film Critics and the National Board of Review. Cage further solidified his leading man status when he received Academy Award, Golden Globe, Screen Actors Guild, and British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) nominations for his dual role as twin brothers 'Charlie' and 'Donald Kaufman' in Spike Jonze's quirky comedy, ADAPTATION, which also co-starred Meryl Streep and Chris Cooper.

In addition, Cage portrayed 'Johnny Blaze' in GHOST RIDER based on the Marvel Comic book character, directed and written by Mark Steven Johnson. The film immediately set a new record as the highest-grossing opening film for the President's Day weekend in 2007. Cage's other starring roles include that of Neil LaBute's THE WICKER MAN and Oliver Stone's WORLD TRADE CENTER, both released in 2006, and Gore Verbinski's THE WEATHER MAN and Andrew Niccol's LORD OF WAR, released in 2005. He was also heard as the voice of 'Zoc' in the animated film THE ANT BULLY.

In fall of 2002, Cage made his film directorial debut with SONNY, where he cast an impressive group of actors, including Golden Globe winner James Franco, Mena Suvari, Brenda Blethyn and Harry Dean Stanton. The film was accepted at the 2002 Deauville Film Festival.

Cage's many other films include NEXT, MATCHSTICK MEN, WINDTALKERS, CAPTAIN CORELLI'S MANDOLIN, THE FAMILY MAN, BRINGING OUT THE DEAD, EIGHT MILLIMETER, SNAKE EYES, CITY OF ANGELS, FACE OFF, KISS OF DEATH, GUARDING TESS, IT COULD HAPPEN TO YOU, RED ROCK WEST, HONEYMOON IN VEGAS, JOEL AND ETHAN COEN'S RAISING ARIZONA, VAMPIRE'S KISS, PEGGY SUE GOT MARRIED, VALLEY GIRL, RACING WITH THE MOON, THE COTTON CLUB and RUMBLE FISH.

It was Cage's portrayal of a tormented Vietnam vet in BIRDY that first established him as a serious actor. Directed by Alan Parker, Birdy won the jury prize at Cannes. Cage then received a Golden Globe nomination as Best Actor for his role as Cher's lover in MOONSTRUCK. David Lynch's WILD AT HEART, starring Cage and Laura Dern, won the Palme d'Or at the 1990 Cannes Film Festival.

Some of Cage's other honors include a 1993 Golden Globe nomination for his role in HONEYMOON IN VEGAS, the prestigious Lifetime Achievement Award from the Montreal World Film Festival in 1996, the first ever Distinguished Decade in Film Award at ShoWest in 2001, and the prestigious American Cinematheque honored him in 2001.

About The Cast

In 2009, Cage was appointed a Goodwill Ambassador for Global Justice for the United Nations. He traveled to Africa to undertake a mission with the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime in Gulu, Uganda, Mombasa, Kenya and Nairobi, Kenya. Here he met with child soldiers, gang members, inmates, Kenyan judges and magistrates to help stop human trafficking, child slavery and kidnapping. Cage is also a Luminary for Amnesty International and helps with their focus on human rights.

Apart from a few school plays, 15-year-old TYE SHERIDAN (Gary Jones) had almost no acting experience when he was cast in Terrence Malick's TREE OF LIFE. Since then he has emerged as one of Hollywood's most sought after young talents.

Sheridan was most recently seen in Jeff Nichol's upcoming film MUD opposite Matthew McConaughey and Reese Witherspoon. He stars as a Mississippi River teenager who befriends a fugitive (Matthew McConaughey) trying to reunite with his troubled soul mate (Reese Witherspoon). His first appearance on screen was in Terrence Malick's THE TREE OF LIFE where he starred alongside Brad Pitt, Sean Penn and Jessica Chastain. Tye plays the sensitive youngest son to Chastain and Pitt in this breathtaking film about growing up with a disciplinarian father. THE TREE OF LIFE won the 2011 Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival, the 2011 Gotham Award for Best Picture, and three Academy Award® nominations. Tye was featured in indieWIRE's "Top twenty- five Filmmaker and Actors" of 2011, and won the Marcello Mastroianni Award at the 2013 Venice Film Festival for Best Young Actor.

Tye currently lives in Elkhart, Texas with his family.

About The Filmmakers

David Gordon Green

Director/Producer

David Gordon Green garnered the Best First Film Award from the New York Film Critics Circle and the Discovery Award at the Toronto International Film Festival with his directorial debut film, *GEORGE WASHINGTON*. The film also landed on the annual top-10 lists of Roger Ebert, The New York Times and Time Magazine.

Since his debut film, other credits include: *ALL THE REAL GIRLS*, *SNOW ANGELS*, *PINEAPPLE EXPRESS*, *YOUR HIGHNESS* and the HBO series “Eastbound and Down.” His recent film *PRINCE AVALANCHE* received the award for Best Director at the 2013 Berlin Film Festival.

Gary Hawkins

Screenwriter

Gary Hawkins was born and raised in Thomasville, North Carolina. While remaining true to his Southern sensibility, he has explored through prose and cinema, fiction and nonfiction, subjects as diverse as female surf cultures, the current state of Russian ballet, small town pony league baseball and the effect of Scriabin on Mose Allison’s left hand. His *ROUGH SOUTH* bios of Harry Crews and Larry Brown have won numerous awards, including the Emmy Award. He recently adapted Larry Brown’s *JOE* for the screen, a film directed by David Gordon Green and starring Nicolas Cage and Tye Sheridan. He is following up *JOE* with two projects – an original romantic comedy set in Shanghai and a second adaptation based on a one-hundred-year-old French novel set in Paris.

Lisa Muskat

Producer

Lisa Muskat’s first feature film as producer was David Gordon Green’s critically acclaimed debut film, *GEORGE WASHINGTON*. Along with her continued work with Green, Lisa has produced films with Ramin Bahrani (*MAN PUSH CART, CHOP SHOP*), Gary Hawkins (*THE ROUGH SOUTH OF LARRY BROWN*), Arielle Javitch (*LOOK, STRANGER*), Jeff Nichols (*SHOTGUN STORIES*), Todd Rohal (*NATURE CALLS*) and Craig Zobel (*COMPLIANCE*), with premieres at Sundance, SxSW, Berlin, Toronto, Venice and the Cannes film festivals. Lisa continued to collaborate with Green on *PRINCE AVALANCHE*, starring Paul Rudd and Emile Hirsch, and in fall 2013, Lisa will produce *MANGLEHORN*, starring Al Pacino, written by Paul Logan and to be directed by Green as well. Lisa has teamed with Green and Chelsea Pictures on a number of highly acclaimed commercials including Chrysler’s: “It’s Halftime in America” with Clint Eastwood and the Obama campaign spot “For All”. Lisa is the recipient of the Sundance Producing Fellowship and was named by both *Variety* and *Deadline Hollywood* as a “Producer to Watch”. Prior to producing, Lisa taught at the North Carolina School for the Arts and holds a Masters from UCLA School of Film and Television.

Derick Tseng

Producer

DERICK TSENG (Producer) has been involved in NY film and television production for 25 years, first as union lighting technician, then as 1st AD and production manager, later as line producer and producer. He has produced, among other projects, David Gordon Green’s *PRINCE AVALANCHE*; Todd Solondz’s *DARK HORSE, LIFE DURING WARTIME* and *PALINDROMES*; Nate Meyer’s *SEE GIRL RUN*; Bertha Pan’s *ALMOST PERFECT*; and Comedy Central’s “Stella.” Tseng has co-produced or line produced numerous feature films, including Adrienne Shelly’s *SUDDEN MANHATTEN*, Kevin Smith’s *CHASING AMY*, Brad Anderson’s *HAPPY ACCIDENTS*, Peter Lauer’s *CRY BABY LANE*, Patrick Stettner’s *THE BUSINESS OF STRANGERS*, Bertha Pan’s *FACE*, David Gordon Green’s *ALL THE REAL GIRLS* and *SNOW ANGELS*, Fenton Bailey and Randy Barbato’s *PARTY MONSTER*, Steve Buscemi’s *LONESOME JIM*, Robert Altman’s “Tanner on Tanner,” David Wain’s *THE TEN*, Clark Gregg’s *CHOKES* and Andrew Lau’s *REVENGE OF THE GREEN DRAGONS*.

Tseng was born in Queens, NY. He attended New York University’s Graduate Film Program, and holds an M.A. in English and Comparative Literature from NYU and a B.A. in English and Art History from Columbia University. He currently lives in Brooklyn.

About The Filmmakers

Christopher Woodrow

Producer

Christopher Woodrow is Chairman and CEO at Worldview Entertainment, a leading independent motion picture studio that finances, produces and acquires theatrical quality feature films for worldwide distribution. He is responsible for guiding the strategic vision of the company, and oversees the global development of its brand and franchise. Mr. Woodrow has played a principal role in securing over USD 125 million in financing for the company, and has significant expertise in structuring and investing in filmed entertainment transactions.

Mr. Woodrow has financed and produced numerous notable feature films including Daniel Espinosa's crime thriller, CHILD 44, starring Tom Hardy, Noomi Rapace and Gary Oldman; Alejandro González Iñárritu's comedy, BIRDMAN, starring Michael Keaton, Emma Stone, Naomi Watts, Zach Galifianakis and Edward Norton; Eli Roth's horror thriller, THE GREEN INFERNO; James Gray's period drama, THE IMMIGRANT, starring Marion Cotillard, Joaquin Phoenix and Jeremy Renner; Guillaume Canet's crime thriller, BLOOD TIES, starring Clive Owen, Billy Crudup, Marion Cotillard, Mila Kunis, Zoe Saldana and James Caan; and William Friedkin's black comedy, KILLER JOE, starring Matthew McConaughey, Emile Hirsch, Juno Temple, Gina Gershon, Thomas Haden Church.

Prior to this, Mr. Woodrow was Managing Director at Prospect Point Capital, an investment company focused on structured finance and venture capital opportunities in media and entertainment. He was previously a Vice President at Citigroup Global Markets, where he managed over USD 100 million in equity, debt and alternative assets for clients consisting of institutional investors, high-net-worth individuals and entertainment personalities. Mr. Woodrow also worked in investment banking and portfolio management capacities at Oppenheimer & Co. and CIBC World Markets.

Tim Orr

Director of Photography

A native of North Carolina, studied cinematography at the North Carolina School of the Arts School of Filmmaking alongside fellow classmate David Gordon Green. He has directed photography on all of Green's features, which include PINEAPPLE EXPRESS, SNOW ANGELS, ALL THE REAL GIRLS and GEORGE WASHINGTON, for which Orr was nominated for an Independent Spirit Award.

In addition to his work with Green, Orr has served as Director of Photography on Mike White's directorial debut YEAR OF THE DOG, Peter Sollett's award winning debut RAISING VICTOR VARGAS, and Mark Milgard's DANDELION, for which Orr was again nominated for an Independent Spirit Award. His additional film credits include Jody Hill's OBSERVE AND REPORT, Clark Gregg's CHOKE, TRUST THE MAN, IMAGINARY HEROES, LITTLE MANHATTAN, SALVATION BOULEVARD, and SEEKING A FRIEND FOR THE END OF THE WORLD. Upcoming releases include: STUCK IN LOVE and PRINCE AVALANCHE. He is currently shooting the big screen adaptation of THE WORLD MADE STRAIGHT.

Colin Patton

Editor

Colin Patton has worked with director David Gordon Green on five feature films, beginning with PINEAPPLE EXPRESS in 2007. Prior to JOE, he edited the 2013 Sundance favorite and Berlin Silver Bear winner PRINCE AVALANCHE. He also served as an additional editor on Green's YOUR HIGHNESS and THE SITTER, and on LOOK, STRANGER, directed by Arielle Javitch. His other postproduction credits include KNOCKED UP, FUNNY PEOPLE, and BORAT: CULTURAL LEARNINGS OF AMERICA FOR MAKE BENEFIT GLORIOUS NATION OF KAZAKHSTAN. Patton grew up in Seattle, Washington, and is a graduate of Columbia University.

About The Filmmakers

Chris Spellman

Production Designer

Chris Spellman's films as Production Designer include Seth Rogen and Evan Goldberg's THIS IS THE END, Lorene Scafaria's SEEKING A FRIEND FOR THE END OF THE WORLD, Jay and Mark Duplass' JEFF, WHO LIVES AT HOME, Jody Hill's OBSERVE AND REPORT, David Gordon Green's PINEAPPLE EXPRESS and Greg Mottola's SUPERBAD. He was also the Production Designer of the live-action portions of THE SPONGEBOB SQUAREPANTS MOVIE, directed by Stephen Hillenburt and Mark Osborne. He has also designed film projects directed by James Franco.

Born in New Orleans, he moved to Los Angeles after college. There, he met Production Designer Dennis Gassner and Set Decorator Nancy Haigh, who served as his mentors on numerous collaborations. He became a Set Decorator on works from such filmmakers as Joel and Ethan Coen's THE BIG LEBOWSKI and THE MAN WHO WASN'T THERE; Robert Altman, on DR. TAND THE WOMEN; Paul Thomas Anderson, on MAGNOLIA; Michael Mann, on THE INSIDER; Judd Apatow, on KNOCKED UP, as well as episodes of "Freaks and Geeks" and "Undeclared"; and Peggy Rajski, on the Academy Award-winning short film TREVOR.

Spellman's feature credits as Set Decorator also include Albert Brooks' LOOKING FOR COMEDY IN THE MUSLIM WORLD; Peter Segal's ANGER MANAGEMENT; Jake Kasdan's ORANGE COUNTY; Rob Cohen's XXX; George Armitage's GROSSE POINTE BLANK; Joe Johnston's OCTOBER SKY; and Frank Oz's THE INDIAN IN THE CUPBOARD.

Jill Newell

Costume Designer

Jill Newell has worked as a costume designer in television commercials, network programs and award winning feature films. Her design interests have a distinct sense of naturalism in a variety of genres; from the urban textures of RAISING VICTOR VARGAS, SHERRYBABY, 12 ROUNDS and Werner Herzog's BAD LIEUTENANT, to portraits of small town life in the TV series "Everwood" as well as David Gordon Green's UNDERTOW, PRINCE AVALANCHE and upcoming film JOE. The comedic approach of her design can be noted in the Steve Coogan vehicle HAMLET 2 and multiple seasons of the HBO series "Eastbound and Down."

About The Filmmakers

Karen Malecki

Costume
Designer

Karen Malecki is a costume designer based in New York City. Originally from St. Clair Shores, Michigan, Malecki grew up drawing, painting and writing. After attending the Fashion Institute of Technology, Malecki worked in the garment industry where she learned design and fit from the inside out. Since then she has worked in television, film and commercials on both coasts. Currently the costume designer on the USA Network's "White Collar," other recent projects include COMPLIANCE and TAKE SHELTER.

David Wingo

Composer

DAVID WINGO (Composer) got his start in film scoring on David Gordon Green's debut feature GEORGE WASHINGTON, collaborating on the score with Michael Linnen. The movie went on to win numerous awards, quickly gaining a reputation as one of the more astounding debuts in modern American cinema and eventually was released on DVD by the Criterion Collection. Wingo and Linnen collaborated again on Green's Sundance Award winning follow up ALL THE REAL GIRLS and since that time Wingo has worked with Green on a majority of his other films. His score for the Jeff Nichols film TAKE SHELTER, which won the Grand Prix prize at the Cannes Film Festival, landed him a Discovery of the Year Award nomination at the World Soundtrack Awards. Wingo's two most recent films he scored, Jeff Nichols' MUD and David Gordon Green's PRINCE AVALANCHE (which he co-composed with the Austin band Explosions in the Sky), both had their North American premieres at the 2013 Sundance Film Festival. MUD was released in April to widespread acclaim and PRINCE AVALANCHE is being released later in the summer and has been garnering worldwide praise as well, winning Green the Silver Bear Award at the Berlin Film Festival. Wingo has also been active with his band Ola Podrida since 2006, putting out three full length LPs and touring the U.S. and Europe multiple times, sharing the stage with such acts as Fleet Foxes, She & Him, Beach House, and Explosions in the Sky.