

# **CLOUDBURST**

A Feature Film by Thom Fitzgerald  
Produced by Doug Pettigrew and Thom Fitzgerald

## **PRESS PACKAGE**

# CLOUDBURST

## CREDIT LIST

<b>Cast:</b>	
Stella	Olympia Dukakis
Prentice	Ryan Doucette
Molly	Kristin Booth
Tommy	Michael McPhee
Ynez	Mary-Colin Chisholm
Cat	Marlane O'Brien
Dot	and Brenda Fricker
<b>Crew:</b>	
Writer/Director	Thom Fitzgerald
Producers	Doug Pettigrew
	Thom Fitzgerald
Executive Producers	Sidney Kimmel
	Trudy Pettigrew
	William Jarblum
	Vicki McCarty
	Shandi Mitchell
	Dana Warren
Director of Photography	Thomas M. Harting, CSC
Editor	Angela Baker
Art Director	Keith Currie
Original Score	Jason Michael MacIsaac
	Warren Robert
Costume Designers	James A. Worthen
	Laurie Delaney
Casting Directors	Mark Bennett
	Sheila Lane

## **CLOUDBURST – SHORT SYNOPSIS**

*Cloudburst* is a romantic comedy road movie starring Oscar®-winning actresses Olympia Dukakis and Brenda Fricker as Stella and Dot, an aging couple who escape from a nursing home in Maine and drive to Nova Scotia on a quest to be legally married. While on the lam, they pick up a young hitchhiker, Prentice, played by newcomer Ryan Doucette.

The road is long and rough, and stubborn Stella begins to wonder if she can really take care of frail Dot in their old age. After 31 years, can they keep their family together?

## **CLOUDBURST – LONG SYNOPSIS**

*Cloudburst* is a romantic road movie written and directed by Thom Fitzgerald.

It stars Oscar®-winning actresses Olympia Dukakis and Brenda Fricker as Stella and Dot, an aging couple who escape from a nursing home in Maine and drive to Nova Scotia on a quest to be legally married.

Stella and Dot have been together for 31 years and have faithfully accompanied one another through life's ups and downs. Now in their seventies, Stella is hard of hearing and Dot is legally blind. Dot's prudish granddaughter, Molly (played by Genie Award-winner Kristin Booth), decides the best place for Dot is a nursing home that will provide all the necessities.

This forces Stella and Dot to make a bold decision: they will leave their hometown and make their way to Canada, where same-sex marriage is legal. It's a last-gap bid to stay together. En route to Canada, they pick up a young hitchhiker, Prentice, played by newcomer Ryan Doucette. A small-town boy turned modern dancer, he is returning to Nova Scotia to visit his dying mother.

Despite his bravado, Prentice is a confused and wounded soul who has much to learn from Stella and Dot as they wage their own unexpected battle – after three decades, can they keep their family together?

With equal parts humour and grace, *Cloudburst* explores the important themes of life, death and love through the eyes of this oddball trio.

The film also stars Michael McPhee as Molly's husband Tommy; Marlane O'Brien as Prentice's mother; Randy Bolliver as Prentice's father; and Mary-Colin Chisholm and Steve Arnold as Stella and Dot's helpful neighbours.

Fitzgerald (*3 Needles*, *The Hanging Garden*) originally staged *Cloudburst* as a play in April 2010, at Plutonium Playhouse in Halifax, Nova Scotia. It won the 2011 Merritt Award, Nova Scotia's theatre award, for Best New Play.

*Cloudburst* was filmed over seven weeks in a variety of locations throughout Nova Scotia.

It is presented by Sidney Kimmel Entertainment (SKE), founded by veteran producer Sidney Kimmel in 2004. The Los Angeles-based independent production and finance company specializes in bringing high-profile, quality entertainment projects to contemporary audiences via major studio distribution partners. SKE titles include *United 93*, *The Kite Runner*, and *Lars and the Real Girl* as well as the comedies *Adventureland* and *Death at a Funeral*.

## CLOUDBURST – PRODUCTION NOTES

Director Thom Fitzgerald created the role of Stella for Olympia Dukakis, with whom he previously worked on *The Event* and *3 Needles*. Dukakis, who describes the script as “terrific, funny, moving and outrageous” instantly agreed to play the role.

Brenda Fricker was equally enthusiastic: “It’s a great script. I hate that phrase, a page-turner, but it was. I read it quickly, in one go, and wanted to do it immediately,” Fricker says.

“The film relies on the rapport and the deep love and sense of comfort between these two women, and I was quite sure Olympia and Brenda would be a fantastic on-screen couple, like Redford and Streisand,” muses Fitzgerald.

Their chemistry was evident on set, as they interrupted each other, bickered and kept each other in stitches, much like an old married couple.

“She’s very difficult. She’s lucky she’s Irish, because she’s charming and of course I don’t understand half the things she says because she talks so damn fast,” Dukakis quips.

While *Cloudburst* examines the issue of same-sex marriage – legal in Canada since 2005 – it’s not overtly political. “It is a romantic comedy between two beautiful, older women,” says Fitzgerald.

“I’m in favour of people living anywhere they want, with anyone they want, and the rest should just shut up,” Fricker told a news reporter during the shoot.

Fitzgerald chose the road-movie route, so to speak, because it took his lead characters out of their comfort zones. Amidst the chaos, they are forced to step away from the parts they’ve been conditioned to play for three decades, a frightening yet liberating prospect.

Dukakis says Stella’s growth is tangible over the course of the film. Stella starts as a fighter and brute, but the journey teaches her to find new ways to communicate. Says Dukakis, “She is not coming at things quite like a two-tonne truck mowing down something. She is beginning to find other ways to do things.”

*Two Lane Blacktop* (1971), the story of two car freaks who travel the southern U.S. looking for opponents to drag race, is a classic road flick that inspired Fitzgerald and Director of Photography Thomas M. Harting. “It really showed me how, despite the close quarters inside of a car, you can really achieve a big, wide scope of the open road,” says Fitzgerald.

Fitzgerald initially staged *Cloudburst* as a stage play, in April 2010, at Plutonium Playhouse in Halifax. Ryan Doucette, who plays the hitchhiker picked up by Stella and Dot, also appeared in that production, which garnered rave reviews.

"There was a moment when I was like: 'I am holding the hand of an Academy Award winner. This is kind of cool.' It's fun to play with them because it ups your game, quickly," says Doucette, on working with Dukakis and Fricker.

Actors Michael McPhee and Marlane O'Brien also starred in both the stage and film productions of *Cloudburst*.

Fitzgerald has become known for creating meaty and insightful roles for women, and has worked with other respected actresses including Lucy Liu, Chl  e Sevigny, Parker Posey, Sarah Polley and Jackie Richardson. He has previously directed six actors to Academy of Canadian Cinema (Genie) nominations, including Seana McKenna, Kerry Fox, Joan Orenstein and Dukakis.

In *Cloudburst*, Nova Scotia – Fitzgerald's home – plays its own leading role. The Maritime province hosts much film production, usually standing in for Maine, Massachusetts, New York or Toronto. Here, it plays itself for a change, its sweeping vistas, breathtaking beaches, quaint port towns on full display.

The ambitious, seven-week shoot took place from June through August 2010 in an array of communities, including Lower Prospect, Grand Pre, Hantsport, Bishopville, Lunenburg, Seaforth, Bedford and Halifax. A particularly dramatic scene was filmed at Blomidon Provincial Park, where the majestic red-sand cliffs rise above the shores of the Minas Basin.

"Nova Scotia really is a beautiful place and has a lot of unique and interesting parts to it," says Fitzgerald. "It is often cast as Maine or New England and you sort of hide what is particular and special about it, so it's thrilling to be able to shoot the Bay of Fundy as the Bay of Fundy, shoot Lunenburg as Lunenburg, shoot the coastal roads as our coastal roads, and really bring a sense of place to this film."

Fitzgerald says his film is not necessarily a cry for equal marriage rights. "That wasn't the starting point for a story," he explains, "Dot and Stella have been together for 31 years so the question of whether they should be allowed to be married seemed easy to answer. Why they might want to be married, and in what ways they already are married, were ideas to explore.

He says women's comedies from the 1980s were a creative inspiration. "In the eighties I loved intelligent comedies featuring women, like *Crimes of the Heart* and *Steel Magnolias*. I also personally know a lot of magnificent, brazen, foul-mouthed aggressive lesbian women, and I think we haven't really seen a movie unfold through that point of view.

## CLouDBURST – IN QUOTES

### ***On Cloudburst, the play:***

"Good theatre gives people an opportunity to look in the mirror and decide if they like what they see. For many of us, a play about a foul-mouthed lesbian, her aging partner and a charming drifter might seem unlikely to cast familiar reflections. But with Cloudburst, Thom Fitzgerald has managed to write the universal within the specific" – *Kate Watson, The Coast*

"Part queer road movie, part domestic drama, and part contemporary issue story, Cloudburst is surprisingly down-to-earth and richly humorous ... the short scenes, comic asides and rapid pacing make the story a brisk and compelling ride. (The) story is a gripping and very human one indeed, one that we all can relate to" – *Ron Foley Macdonald, Infomoney.net*

"Cloudburst is a vital, engaging and worthwhile evening of new theatre for Halifax. I highly recommend it" – *Paul Kimball, The New Review*

### ***On Cloudburst, the film:***

"At its heart it's a road movie, though in a special subgenre, maybe. With both Atlantic Canada and gender issues in its descriptors, one imagines it has both Candy Mountain and Transamerica in its creative DNA, an amazing and unlikely combination of antecedents" – *Carsten Knox, The Coast*

"Terrific, funny, moving and outrageous" – *actor Olympia Dukakis, in The Chronicle-Herald*

"I'd travel over broken glass to work with Olympia" – *actor Brenda Fricker in The Chronicle-Herald*

"It's a great script. I hate that phrase, a page-turner, but it was. I read it quickly, in one go, and wanted to do it immediately" – *actor Brenda Fricker*

"She's very difficult. She's lucky she's Irish, because she's charming and of course I don't understand half the things she says because she talks so damn fast" – *actor Olympia Dukakis, ribbing her Cloudburst co-star*

"There was a moment when I was like: 'I am holding the hand of an Academy Award winner. This is kind of cool.' It's fun to play with them because it ups your game, quickly" – *actor Ryan Doucette, on working with Dukakis and Fricker*

"The film relies on the rapport and the deep love and sense of comfort between these two women and I was quite sure that Brenda and Olympia would be a fantastic on-screen couple, like Redford and Streisand" – *director Thom Fitzgerald*



## **CLOUDBURST – CAST & CREW BIOS**

### **OLYMPIA DUKAKIS (*Stella*)**

Olympia Dukakis is an actress, director, producer, teacher, activist and author.

Her resume includes a multitude of theatre, film and television credits, as well as prestigious awards.

She received an Academy Award in the Best Supporting Actress category, the New York Film Critics Award, the Los Angeles Film Critics Award, and the Golden Globe Award for her work in the 1987 film *Moonstruck*.

Her other feature films include *Mr. Holland's Opus* with Richard Dreyfus; Woody Allen's *Mighty Aphrodite*; *I Love Trouble* with Nick Nolte and Julia Roberts; *The Cemetery Club*, *Steel Magnolias*, and the *Look Who's Talking* movies.

A resident of New York City, she has starred in two other films directed by Thom Fitzgerald: *The Event* and *3 Needles*.

Dukakis taught acting in the graduate school at New York University for 15 years and currently teaches master classes at various universities and colleges throughout the United States.

Her memoir, *Ask Me Again Tomorrow*, was a best-seller. She is a founding member of Voices of Earth, The National Museum of Women in the Arts, and a member of many advocacy organizations.

In *Cloudburst*, Dukakis plays Stella, a domineering lesbian who is nonetheless devoted to her long-time partner.

### **BRENDA FRICKER (*Dot*)**

Brenda Fricker won an Oscar for Best Supporting Actress in 1990, for her performance in *My Left Foot: The Story of Christy Brown*, directed by Jim Sheridan. She was also nominated for a Golden Globe for that role.

The Irish actress went on to leading roles in films including *How About You*, *Closing The Ring*, *Tara Road*, *Inside I'm Dancing*, *Conspiracy of Silence*, *Trauma*, *Omagh*, *A Man of No Importance*, *The Intended*, *War Bride*, *Resurrection Man*, *Painted Angels*, *A Time to Kill*, *Swann*, *Angels in the Outfield*, *Home Alone II*, *UTZ*, and *The Field*. She is currently shooting *Albert Nobbs* with Glen Close, in which she plays the role of Polly.

Her television work in North America has included roles in *Going Down: The Rise and Fall of Heidi Fleiss*, *Torso*, *Cupid & Cate*, *Resurrection*, *Durango*, *Journey*, and *A Woman of Independent Means*.

On British television, Fricker created the role of nurse Megan Roche in *Casualty* for BBC. Her other credits include *No Tears*, *Beautiful People* and *Brides of Christ*.

Her work in theatre includes plays at both the Gate and the Abbey Theatres in Dublin, for the Royal Shakespeare Company, and for the Almeida and Royal Court Theatres in London. Fricker lives in her native city, Dublin.

In *Cloudburst*, she plays the blind and long-suffering Dot, who reluctantly embarks on a journey to Canada to marry her companion, Stella.

### **RYAN DOUCETTE (*Prentice*)**

Ryan Doucette is an Acadian actor, comedian and mime from Clare, Nova Scotia.

He began his career performing sketches at the Café Bric-a-brac at the Université Sainte-Anne. These sketches evolved into his one-man show, *Ryan Doucette: Première Ronde*, which has toured throughout Canada, the United States and France.

Ryan obtained his Bachelor of Arts with a major in theatre from Université Sainte-Anne in 2006.

He has since acted for film, television and radio, including the made-for-TV movie *October 1970* and Radio Canada's *Brio*. He made his English-theatre debut in 2008, in *Vimy* at Eastern Front Theatre.

Ryan has a lead role opposite Olympia Dukakis and Brenda Fricker in the feature film version of *Cloudburst*. He also starred in Fitzgerald's theatre production of *Cloudburst* at the Plutonium Playhouse in April 2010.

A Halifax resident, he is now touring his new show, *Should I Be Doing This?*

In *Cloudburst*, he plays small-town boy turned modern dancer, Prentice.

## KRISTIN BOOTH (*Molly*)

Kristin Booth is a versatile performer experienced in film, television and theatre.

Her feature film credits include Toronto International Film Festival film selections *Defendor*, *Young People Fucking* (ACTRA Award nomination), and *This Beautiful City*, as well as the heist thriller *Foolproof* opposite Ryan Reynolds, *On The Line*, *Detroit Rock City*, *Gossip*, *Cruel Intentions 2* and *Kardia*. For her work in *Young People Fucking*, Booth was awarded the 2009 Genie Award.

She won her first Gemini Award in 2005, for her guest performance in an episode of *ReGenesis* entitled "Spare Parts." She received her second Gemini Award nomination for her portrayal of Connie Lewis in the new CBC series, *MVP*, which also aired on ABC Soapnet. Other television credits include *An American Wife*, TNT's six part mini-series *The Company*, *Prairie Giant: The Tommy Douglas Story*, *Kaw, Burn: The Robert Wraight Story*, *The Salem Witch Trials*, *The Hunt For The Unicorn Killer*, *A Tale of Two Bunnies*, *Jewel*, and *Sleep Murder* opposite Jason Priestley, as well as lead roles in the series *Supernatural*, *The Newsroom* and *Daring and Grace*. Booth stars as Ethel Kennedy in the eight-part miniseries *The Kennedys* for the History Channel.

On stage, Booth appeared with the prestigious Soulpepper Theatre Company. She is based in Toronto.

In *Cloudburst*, Booth stars as Molly, Dot's prudish and meddling granddaughter.

## MICHAEL MCPHEE (*Tommy*)

Michael McPhee is a Halifax based actor and writer. Originally a professional breakdancer in Toronto, he made the move to acting after studying with the legendary American mime Tony Montanaro. Since then he has been featured in numerous film and television shows, including *Darwin's Darkest Hour*, *Haven*, *Nonsense Revolution*, and *G-Spot*.

He has performed on stage or appeared in videos with various musical artists, including Cyndi Lauper, Daniel Bettingfield, and Wide Mouth Mason.

A staple of the Halifax theatre scene, McPhee has written several shows, including *Logan and I*, which premiered at the Queer Acts Festival. His show *In Pink*, toured successfully, and *The Wizard of Uh-Oz*, which he co-wrote with Rhys-Bevan John, earned him a Merritt nomination for Best Supporting Actor. He also originated the role of Jamie in the Governor General award-winning play, *Bone Cage*.

In *Cloudburst*, McPhee plays Tommy, a police officer and Molly's husband.

### **MARLANE O'BRIEN (Cat)**

Dividing her time between Prince Edward Island and Halifax, film and television actress Marlane O'Brien has appeared in feature films including *Looking for Anne*, and *Leaving Normal*, as well as movies of the week *Second Honeymoon*, *Sybil*, and *Candles on Bay Street*.

Her other television credits include recurring roles on *Emily of New Moon* and the animated series *Eckhart*, as well as roles on *G-Spot*, *The True Meaning Of Crumbfest*, *Side Effects*, *The Commish*, *Danger Bay*, *21 Jump Street*, and *MacGyver*.

In *Cloudburst*, she plays Prentice's conflicted mother.

### **MARY-COLIN CHISHOLM (Ynez)**

Mary-Colin Chisholm is a Halifax-based actress with many film, television and theatrical roles to her credit.

Her film roles include *Trailer Park Boys: Countdown to Liquor Day*, *A Bug and a Bag of Weed*, *Julie Walking Home* and *Deeply*.

On television, Chisholm has appeared in *Haven*, *TV with TV's Jonathan Torrens*, *Made in Canada*, *Pit Pony*, *Black Harbour*, and *Our Daily Bread*.

She has taken on multiple roles in more than 30 radio dramas and serial comedies, and performed as lead in more than 70 productions at major theatres across Canada.

In *Cloudburst*, Chisholm plays Ynez, the helpful neighbour of Stella and Dot.

## **THOM FITZGERALD, DIRECTOR/WRITER**

Thom Fitzgerald is an award-winning writer, director and producer.

Independent and always provocative, Fitzgerald's character-driven films have earned him a place amongst Canada's leading filmmakers.

A native of New York City, Fitzgerald moved to Nova Scotia in the late 1980s to attend university. His acclaimed film, *The Hanging Garden*, was released in 1997, garnering praise from audiences and critics alike.

His most recent films include *3 Needles*, starring Chloe Sevigny, Stockard Channing and Lucy Liu; *The Event*, starring Olympia Dukakis and Parker Posey; and, as executive producer, *Growing Op* and *Nonsense Revolution*.

His feature films include *The Hanging Garden* (1997), *Beefcake* (1998), *Wolf Girl* (2001), *The Wild Dogs* (2002), *The Event* (2003), and *3 Needles* (2005). He has also worked as a director, producer and writer on short films, documentaries, and for television.

*Cloudburst* marks his third outing with Oscar-winning actress Olympia Dukakis, who also starred in *The Event* and *3 Needles*.

Fitzgerald has won more than two dozen international awards including a Genie, the FIPRESCI European International Critics' Prize, the Emerging Master Award at the Seattle Film Festival, and the People's Choice Award at the Toronto International Film Festival. He is a three-time premiere guest of the Sundance Film Festival.

Fitzgerald founded his independent production company, Emotion Pictures, in 1996. It has since become one of Canada's leading and most respected boutique production houses, building a reputation for character-driven movies.

## **DOUG PETTIGREW, PRODUCER**

Doug Pettigrew has been working in film since 2001, as a producer, executive producer and production manager.

The Nova Scotia native – a principal of Emotion Pictures – has teamed with director Thom Fitzgerald on many films, including features, documentaries and shorts.

His credits include *The Gospel According to the Blues*, *Nonsense Revolution*, *The Book Lady: Dolly Parton's Imagination Library*, *Growing Op*, *3 Needles* and *Blood Moon*.

## THOMAS M. HARTING, DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Thomas M. Harting has been a director of photography for features and television projects since 1989.

His 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, South By Southwest, and Seattle film festivals, and he has earned more than 20 awards, including an Emmy. He is a member of the Canadian Society of Cinematographers (CSC).

*Cloudburst* marks Harting's fifth collaboration with director Thom Fitzgerald. They also worked together on *Beefcake*, *The Wild Dogs*, *The Event*, and *3 Needles*.

In addition, he photographed *Mojave*, starring Rider Strong and Erik Christen Olsen in an homage to *Deliverance*, in New Mexico. Other notable titles include the indie features *Looking for Sunday*, *Damage*, and *Enter Nowhere*, as well as movies-of-the-week *In God's Country*, with Kelly Rowan, and *The Robber Bride*, starring Mary-Louise Parker.

Harting's documentary credits include *Blink* and *Life After Tomorrow*. His most recent projects include *Looking for Sunday* and *Enter Nowhere*.

He is based in Vancouver, B.C. and Los Angeles, CA.

## INTERVIEW: OLYMPIA DUKAKIS

Q: Tell me about the character that you play in *Cloudburst*, and why the role appealed to you.

A: Well, she is a very aggressive, loud, stomping kind of person. And I really wanted to do that, and I actually kind of behave a little that way on the set and people think that's how I really am. That I stomp around! But it's really fun to do. She's right in your face and she doesn't mince words and she very much loves her partner, the part played by Brenda Fricker. So that relationship – I liked the relationship, as it was written. I felt that it's like these two women saved each other in some real way. And just the opportunity to work with Thom again. I've done two other movies with him and I really enjoy working with him.

Q: Tell me a little more about that. Because this is the third movie that you've done with Thom. Tell me what it is about him that makes you want to work with him.

A: He doesn't talk a lot. Therefore when he speaks, when he says something to you, you really listen to it. He's very supportive, I find him very supportive – interested in what you've got to say and what you want to do. He doesn't always accept it, but he wants to see it and he wants to hear it, and so it makes me feel that I'm something of a collaborator with him and I'm doing the movie with him as opposed to for him, which is a nice way for a director to be.

Q: I know you haven't finished filming, not even close yet, but tell me a little bit about your favourite scenes.

A: My favourite scenes? Well, I don't know that I have a favourite scene, but of the scenes that I've done, I think my favourite one was the one with Brenda where we're in bed and I have a dildo, an electrical dildo, and I'm tickling her with it and teasing her with it. And then Brenda falls out of bed. It was fun doing that one. I also had a good time with Kristin and Michael ... It was the scene with Michael McPhee: he's a policeman and he's come to take Dottie (Brenda) away, so at a certain point I just jump on his back and start strangling him. That's what I mean, that's what I like about this character – at that age, she has no compunction about being physical and taking on anything in front of her. That's what I like about her, that kind of spirit. She'll take it on, she'll take it on. I know I give people the feeling that I'm like that, but I'm very selective in what I take on. I'm not really very ... I'm careful.

Q: You choose your battles then?

A: Indeed. That's a good way to put it.

Q: We were talking about the fact that you've been to Nova Scotia before and you're going to be seeing a lot of Nova Scotia during this shoot. What is it about Nova Scotia that you think lends itself to a road movie like this one?

A: The first thing I think, in terms of the locations, is just how incredibly beautiful (it is). We were in Lower Prospect and every day I'd just come out of my little Winnebago and take in that cove and just the topography, the stones, and the rocks, and the water, the changing colours – it's just beautiful. It was just wonderful being there. I was like a tourist, actually, for two weeks, hanging out. I just loved it.

Q: You were just talking about the fact that this is a very meaty kind of role that you can really throw yourself into ...

A: Right. Throw is good – throw myself into is good.

Q: There's a lot of debate about the lack of roles for mature actresses. Tell me your thoughts about that.

A: Well, it's true. It is true. But I think if you put your mind to it, I think you can develop and work and find scripts. I know this one has been in the making for a while and I know it had to do with the fact that Thom and I have worked together before and we waited a while to do this. All of these independent films have their growing problems and aches, and this one was not an exception. Thanks to Thom and Doug (Pettigrew) they managed to get it going.

Q: Shooting a road movie is obviously a challenge in itself. Tell me about that – about some of the challenges of shooting a movie that's supposed to be a journey.

A: Physically, just getting in and out of the car endlessly (is a challenge). Trying to figure out what you're going to have in the car. But I've done two other road movies, so I've sort of learned what I bring in the car with me so I can (do it). The fun about a road movie is to figure out what it is that makes the changes happen, because a character starts out one way in the beginning and then on the road – because of those new experiences, because they've changed their location, they've changed their routine – other things begin to happen. So we did a couple of scenes where I began to behave slightly differently from the way I was in the early part, and I talked about it with Thom. I said 'We have to keep our eye out – where are these changes happening? This woman is not the same. She is not coming at things quite like a two-tonne truck mowing down something. She's beginning to find other ways to do things.' And that happened in a couple of the scenes we did. So that's the fun of it – seeing what does going on the road do? How does it change you? What does it mean, that kind of thing.

Q: She's definitely out of her comfort zone.



A: Right. She has to find other ways to handle situations. She can't just jump on somebody and start strangling them any more. She has to come up with alternative behaviour.

Q: Is there anything else you would like me to ask you about?

A: Ask me about working with Brenda.

Q: I would love to ask you about working with Brenda. You just mentioned that you worked together about eight years ago, that was when you first met. Have you been in touch since that time?

A: Yes, we have.

Q: And now you're reunited?

A: That's good – reunited is good. Do you hear that, Brenda? We're reunited. We met in Borneo, of all places. And this movie – for a year and a half, two years, as we thought we were getting close – we'd be talking to each other and e-mailing each other. I forgot really how difficult she is to work with. I forgot that. Sometimes you forget – you look back and you look at things through rose-coloured glasses and then the reality hits you. She's very difficult. Everybody feels that way on the set, but we try to do our best because we're all professionals. She's lucky she's Irish, because she's charming and of course I don't understand half the things she says because she talks so damn fast. And she sings all the time ... I don't know what the woman is saying half the time.

## **INTERVIEW: BRENDA FRICKER**

Q: How are you doing?

A: I'm fine thanks. A bit tired.

Q: I had heard on the set about you doing your own stunts. Tell me about that.

A: That's a lie. I don't do my own stunts. First, the insurance wouldn't let me and second I wouldn't have the courage. But if there's something to be done that I think I can do, where the director might think a stunt person is necessary, I'll have a go.

Q: So tell me about that in this film.

A: I fell out of bed. And I do that regularly, so I wouldn't really regard it as a stunt.

Q: you do it regularly on your own time?

A: All the time.

Q: Also in this movie, you play somebody who has lost their vision and can no longer see.

A: I'm 75, blind and a lesbian – and in love with Stella.

Q: So tell me about preparing for that.

A: There isn't really anything ... for being blind I walked around my house in Dublin with my eyes closed and got covered in bruises. But there's nothing much you can do. Being in love with Olympia demands acting way beyond my capacity.

Q: Was there no preparation you could do for that?

A: No. She's far too difficult. I couldn't possibly handle that. She plays this character who is very forceful, very loud, very uncouth, and I think she kind of uses that to pretend that she's acting, but she's like that in real life. That's the impression I get anyway.

Q: So how about working with her, how has that been?

A: Loud. Loud. My eardrums are suffering.

Q: And what about the relationship between your character and her character?

A: Well, I'm very quiet, so she does all the talking and the shouting.

Q: But there's a lot of humour in the film.

A: It's a great script. Thom Fitzgerald has written a great script. I hate that phrase, a page turner, but it was. I read it quickly in one go, and wanted to do it immediately.

Q: Tell me a little bit more about that, because you were saying that Olympia's character is larger than life and your character is a bit more quiet.

A: No – Olympia's character is Olympia.

Q: So what about your character?

A: Is me. Very quiet. Very retiring. Very polite. Very easy to get on with.

Q: So why did it appeal to you?

A: No acting required.

Q: I can hear laughter coming from the back of the room. Why is that?

A: I don't know – they're bored.

Q: I asked Olympia about this and I'll ask you about it too, about the lack of good roles for mature actors. What are your thoughts about that?

A: Well, she's right. There aren't that many. Shakespeare, if you want roles for women, would be the first place to go. But I think it's getting better. I think it is certainly, in Ireland, it is getting better. There are a couple of young writers coming up who are writing for women. But it's not great – I mean every film in Ireland has 300 men and one 20-year old girl in it. It is tough.

Q: Thom seems to have a knack for writing those meaty, female roles.

A: Thom is a darling and he has a knack for that. He gets female humour, which is unusual and lovely.

Q: Tell me a little bit more about the humour in this film.

A: I can't describe humour. It's too spontaneous. It just happens.

Q: Dottie, your character, has something of a dry sense of humour. She's used to dealing with Stella all the time.

A: She's frightened out of her life of Stella – that if she opens her mouth, she'll get shouted at. So she has to learn to be subtle.

Q: Lastly, tell me about your favourite scene in the film, either that you've shot or that will be shot.

A: I really don't have favourites. I'm not a person for favourites. I mean ... my favourite book is always the last book I've read. This is my favourite kind of film. And we haven't shot all of the scenes and there are some I'm a bit nervous about that are coming up. I haven't really got a favourite. The whole play is my favourite. All the scenes are great.

Q: You say you're nervous about certain scenes?

A: Well, there's one where we have to get into the Atlantic Ocean, in the freezing cold – and I think in the original script it said we get into the water up to your neck but now I'm told it's only up to your ankles. But I don't believe them.

Q: And I think there's some falling down into the Atlantic Ocean?

A: Yeah, the tide comes up or whatever and this is a place where that genuinely happens, so you better not hang around.

Q: Is there anything else you'd like to add?

A: Just to thank Thom and Doug for everything. Doug has been so helpful because I'm here away from home and a bit homesick, and he's just been so very thoughtful, as has Thom.

Q: Is this your first trip to Nova Scotia?

A: All my life I've wanted to come here and I hit 65 and I thought I'd missed it, and here I am.

Q: Seriously?

A: Absolutely, because my father was an angler and he always wanted to come here. It's so beautiful. You know, it's just ... I'm not supposed to be seeing anything because I'm blind, and we're filming these magnificent sunsets and they're just beautiful.

## INTERVIEW: RYAN DOUCETTE

Q: So tell me a little bit about how it feels, as a young actor, to be working with Brenda and Olympia, two Academy Award-winning actresses.

A: It feels great, I guess, to even have the opportunity to do it, you know what I mean. It's a lot of fun to play with them. I remember the first day of shooting, we were doing actually the last scene of the movie and I was holding Olympia's hand and there was a moment where I was like 'I am holding the hand of an Academy Award winner. This is kind of cool.' So it's great to have that opportunity and it's fun to play with them because it ups your game, quickly, and you don't have the chance to actually react to it, you just go there. We were filming a scene and we're in the truck, and there are two separate scenes: one where I'm only playing with Brenda and one where I'm only playing with Olympia, and it really, I just had to react immediately to what they were doing, so it was kind of easy for me to play because it's so easy to play with them ...

Q: So did you develop a rapport with them right off the bat?

A: I think so. I don't know. It's kind of weird to see because they knew Thom, they've worked with Thom for a while and I've just done the play with Thom, so right when we jumped in the scene there would already be these inside jokes with Thom – so trying to figure it out, blah, blah, blah, but I think it works well. You know, like I said, they're very easy to work with, for me anyway. I didn't expect – I had no expectations – so when you get in there and they go 'Here's your scene, here's your work,' you do it and you don't think about it. You just kind of go ahead. Right? When the camera starts, then all the energy comes spewing out, so it's fun to see.

Q: You mentioned the play and I wanted to ask about that, about how playing this character in the stage play, based on the same script, has prepared you for this. Or has it?

A: It has, immensely, actually, because in film you don't really have a chance to explore, you don't have time to explore the same scene over and over and over again, you rehearse it twice and then you start shooting. So you actually have to go in your own room with the script and you're alone in your own mind, maybe a couple of questions here and there, but in the play you really have time to explore and experiment all of the angles. And so when we were doing the play, Thom would always be like 'Try this, try this, oh that didn't really work' ... and it makes you try out things you don't necessarily have a chance to on film. So for me, it's great to have had the play first and then this, because I already know where I'm going in each scene, which is quite nice, I think.

Q: I'm going to ask about the scene that you're filming today ... tell me a little bit about this scene.

A: Well, the scene we're filming today it's me actually doing a toast, a drunken toast, to the two ladies that are getting married, 'cause throughout the journey I get to know them better and I actually discover who they are and how amazing they are. And they listen to what I'm saying and kind of discover or prepare for this huge step they're about to make. And it's this speech – Thom wrote it – in a way it's very nice because when you say it or when you play it you actually can ... Prentice discovers himself. He's like 'Oh, wow' and like all these things are going on. He's discovering himself in his drunken state – as one could discover himself, I guess. And the two old ladies, same thing, they're like 'What's he saying? Oh yeah, that's true.' And they're kind of preparing themselves, and one of them is like 'Oh yeah, this is gonna be great' and the other one is like 'I don't know.' And the roles kind of switch and yeah, so it's going to be a lot of fun to play because playing a drunken boy is always a blast ... 'cause usually, sometimes, when you're drunk the truth sometimes comes out, if you want it to or not. Different situations arise in which you just blabber on drunkenly and people kind of accept it, so I think it's going to be fun to play.

Q: And in some ways he's very innocent and that kind of comes out in that speech – he's talking about love from a certain place.

A: Yeah, well Prentice I find he's a very young boy but in a ... grown-up type of body, I guess, so he tries to portray this super like 'I'm cool, I know everything and I can do whatever' but at the same time he is completely lost and confused, in the beginning anyway. As road movies go, you discover who you are and what you want, so in the end he's finally grounded and discovers more about himself. Yeah, he's very innocent. He doesn't know what he wants. He thinks he does, he thinks he knows it all, but at the same time he's this kind of confused little puppy and needs these two ladies to take care of him.

Q: So in the film you play a modern dancer. Had you had some dance training, or how did you prepare for that?

A: Well, I am an awful dancer. I can't dance to save my life. But in the play we needed to just, there's a couple of scenes in which I dance, and Cory Bowles kind of trained me to find these little things that modern dancers do. And so that was fun to try out and whip out and yes, so we choreographed something, I don't know exactly what it is. Thom named it something. I forget what he named it: The Monster, The Damsel and The Hero? Anyway, it's a weird dance and it's OK. But I've done a lot of gymnastics and miming and stuff and (other) things that I've done in the past, so I think that kind of made me more limber so I could perform these moves that I needed to learn in two days that people learn in 50 years. They're like 'OK, try to do this and fly and tame your soul as it pours out of your body' and I was like 'OK.' So that's the only training I got for the whole thing. It's like making fun of people – whenever I do a photo shoot, I have to act like a

model and kind of make fun. I will play the model role, so I just played the modern dancer role – it's a lot of fun to play, I guess.

Q: Let's talk some other scenes in the film. I know you're just getting going, but tell me about either some of your favourite scenes to date, or the ones you're looking forward to.

A: It's hard to pick a favourite scene, it's really hard. But one we just shot was the border crossing ... that was fun for me to play because it's the lying of it all. Because we need to cross the border and we had to make this whole, big story and Stella was there and she was like 'OK, you're going to say this' and then she screws me over by saying something else completely. And it's so much fun because Thom is open to actually just trying new things, so we would always try something out and then it would be 'Let's try this way' – so playing that, the pleasure of lying, of crossing the border, the sneakiness, the 'We can make it, we can make it' and having her screw me over. It was all over the place -- it was a lot of fun to shoot. But a favourite scene – I don't know. It's hard to say. As far as what we're going to shoot, there are going to be some good ones. I know there's a lot of good scenes to shoot and I'm eager to get there.

Q: One of the scenes that struck me as kind of juicy, in terms of what Prentice does, and quieter, is when go back to see your Mom. You have a complicated relationship with her, and it's something you portray not necessarily through what you say.

A: That scene is heavy, compared to the rest of Prentice's scenes, I guess. But it's not, yeah, I guess it's really easy ... well it's not easy to play, but it's fun to actually see some sort of change in the character. He actually is home because usually when you're home you are comfortable. Usually. In life, you go home – family, friends, drinking, whatever – and you're comfortable. But here he's not comfortable, he's really walking on eggshells and finally when he gets the information that he's going to get, it really hits him in the face. And I like that, that shock of him finally being completely and utterly vulnerable compared to what he was two or three days ago, of him being a confident, modern dancer type: 'I am amazing' but when he finally gets home he's actually ... a little boy, crying. I like that arc, it's nice.

Q: I guess the only other thing was about Nova Scotia. You're from Nova Scotia, but does shooting this film bring you a new perspective on it?

A: I guess not a new perspective. The perspective is the same, but I'm just happy that it's actually being shot here as it is, in Nova Scotia. You actually see Nova Scotia – because I love this province. It's amazing. I like the way you can go from one end to the next, and it's completely different. I mean, you don't even have the same view. I drive a lot, I love to drive, I'll just drive for like six hours for no reason, and I'm so happy that Thom chose Nova Scotia for this movie, so you

can actually see all of these places and what they have to offer, as they are. If you go to ... well, we're going to shoot in Lunenburg and you'll see Lunenburg as Lunenburg, as it is. You see these sunsets as I get to see them everyday and some people might not, so you get to really see that richness of the province. So no, the perspective is exactly the same – I'm just happy that somebody else can see it, I guess.

Q: So is there anything else you wanted to add or talk about?

A: No, I don't think so. I'm really happy that Thom gave me the chance to do this movie. He worked hard for me to get it and I'm really, really happy and I don't think I say it often enough, because it's a great opportunity and I'm quite happy with the role, I'm quite happy with the movie. It's great. I'm quite psyched to see the end product, and I'm quite happy that he chose me to be part of the whole project thing.

Q: Did you know when you started doing the play that you would also have the role in the film?

A: No, I didn't. Not at all, actually. He chose me for the play. Yeah, I got the call saying 'You're in the play.' And I was like 'That's great.' And we rehearsed and then we starting talking about the movie and blah blah blah and I was like 'How would that work?' because film for me is still quite new. I've done a lot of theatre and some movies here and there but nothing this big, and so he was like 'Are you interested?' and finally we talked about it and, yes, so he gave me the chance to do it. But when I was doing the play I had no idea, not even a little bit of a clue.



## INTERVIEW: THOM FITZGERALD

Q: Why were Olympia and Brenda the right actors to play these roles?

A: (gulp) Good question. Well, I was looking for two great actresses who have a great warmth on screen, but also a great sense of strength, which these characters have. But the main thing was my imagination about their chemistry, because the entire film relies on the rapport and deep sense of comfort between these two women. I was quite sure that Brenda and Olympia would be a fantastic on-screen couple, like Redford and Streisand.

Q: The characters are very different from each other. One is sort of over the top; the other more understated.

A: Well, Stella and Dotty are sort of a classic 1950s butch-femme couple, so they have their sort of iconic roles they each play in the relationship. Stella is a loudmouth; Dotty is more retiring. But over the course of the film, they each actually grow a bit into themselves. It's quite a journey, quite a trip, so I think they actually step away from the roles they were taught to play in their youth. They learn to escape the confines of their identities a little bit.

Q: Some of that comes from the fact they're on the road and it is a road movie ...

A: Stella and Dotty have been in the same situation for many, many years in their little house by the sea. Things have been very much the same for a long time and they're very comfortable in that cottage. But time changes everything, and what's hard to face is that their life as they know it together is going to come to an end. But I think stepping away from it also is very freeing for them, very liberating – getting out onto the open road, going to another country. It sort of forces them to set aside all of the rules they've played by for 30 years, and that reinvents their relationship along the way.

Q: But surely there are challenges involved?

A: Well, I have watched a great number of road movies in preparation for directing this road movie, and one thing about shooting in a car, of course, is that it's incredibly intimate. There's no such thing as a wide shot in the interior of an automobile, so really it is even more about the actors because every shot is going to include all of the cast. It's very hard to just show one part of the inside of a car, so really the relationship, the blocking, the pacing and timing of the scenes becomes all important. A lot of the scenes will simply have to play as one shot inside of a truck. So it's a bit of a different approach, it brings a lot more of theatre or an older way of approaching film, where the scenes really have to be prepared before you start to run your camera.

Q: You mentioned watching some road movies in preparation. What did you see that you liked and didn't like?

A: I'm not going to speak ill of other people's movies! One film that I watched for inspiration was called *Two Lane Blacktop*. Bingham Ray pointed me toward that movie. It was a 1971 film and I think a classic of the genre, and it really showed me how, despite the close quarters inside of a car, you can really achieve a big, wide scope of the open road, and that is certainly what the cinematographer Tom (Harting) and I are talking about and trying to achieve ... trying to achieve that same scope and scale in our small little road movie. Road movies have their own visual vernacular. Of course, *Thelma and Louise*, *Driving Miss Daisy*, *Priscilla*... there are little visual references throughout.

Q: Nova Scotia is playing its own role in this movie. It's where you are on the road. Can you talk about what it lends to that?

A: It's really nice as a filmmaker to be able to cast Nova Scotia as Nova Scotia. It really is a beautiful place and has a lot of unique and interesting parts to it. You know, Nova Scotia is often cast as Maine or New England and you sort of hide what is very particular and special about it, so it's thrilling to be able to shoot the Bay of Fundy as the Bay of Fundy, shoot Lunenburg as Lunenburg, shoot the coastal roads as our coastal roads, and really bring a sense of place into this film. And it is a film very much about place, because these are characters who have been in one place for so long and they're going to a new place that's – if it's not a big change in landscape, for them it's a big change in culture, because crossing the border in their minds is a certain kind of freedom, freedom to do something that they can't do at home.

Q: Same-sex marriage is still a controversial topic in some places. Do you think *Cloudburst* is a controversial film?

A: I don't think *Cloudburst* is a terribly controversial film in that it's a romance – it is a romantic comedy between two beautiful, older women and that may not be the kind of character we see very often on screen, but I think that they are very familiar. People will find it pretty easy to relate to Stella and Dotty. That said, of course it will piss off some people. Any movie pisses off somebody, and lesbians piss off some people. I don't pretend my movie is going to change anyone's mind...

Q: And do you think they'll understand why they feel this need to take this step at this time in their relationship?

A: For Stella and Dotty, marriage becomes a goal. It was not something that was ever an option for them for the first several decades of their relationship, so it's an idea that takes some getting used to, but they do think that it'll make a difference in their lives. It's something that becomes very important to them in

their efforts to stay together as a couple. So they go on quite a journey to be able to get married and then I'm trailing off because I don't want to give a way the ending ... but one of the most interesting parts of the story for me is that Stella and Dot have strong feelings about marriage. Dot was married to a man when she was young, and describes her first marriage as "like having a brain clot." They never expected to be able to be married, and that reflects life for older lesbian and gay people. For a lot of gays and lesbians there was a lifetime of sour grapes regarding marriage—they couldn't have it so they didn't want it. Whether to get married is certainly not a simple question for Stella and Dot.

Q: Olympia and Brenda both spoke today about this knack you have for writing really compelling female characters. Tell me about that.

A: Well, I'm not really aware of a knack for writing female characters. I approach, I guess, a situation that I think is inherently dramatic or inherently comedic and I think that, I suppose, I'm drawn to women characters because there's a certain way that women relate to the world that is more interesting to me than the way male heroes relate to the world. It's more complicated. There are more levels and layers of understanding, I think, to a woman in conflict, because brute strength is not always the answer to solving the problem, as it so often with men. But I just like characters immersed in contradiction... I don't know if that is a female trait but it is a very human one.

Q: Let's talk about the scene you're shooting today.

A: Well, there's a very important moment in the film in a bar -- an old salty tavern in Lunenburg -- where Prentice decides to make his best man's toast. And we really get to see, at that moment in time, how each of the women really feels about that giant step they're about to take. So it's a really interesting moment where the actresses get to play very quietly, and without words, their inner feelings, because Prentice is doing all of the talking and they are simply really having to think about what he is saying.

Q: Tell me about Prentice.

A: Stella is sure they're being chased by the police, who are looking for "two old broads." Prentice is a young hitchhiker picked up by Stella and Dot, who imagine his presence will throw off their scent. So Prentice is a disguise.

Q: What about some of the other scenes that are particularly exciting or challenging?

A: What we see in the film is that Stella and Dotty have a very dependent relationship and a very intimate relationship. Dotty is blind and Stella acts very much as her eyes, so she describes the world to Dotty, even the familiar world of their little house and their little cove. Dotty relies on Stella to describe what's

happening outside on the horizon, and Dotty has lived in the cove for a very long time so she can actually see everything in her mind that Stella is describing – and it really speaks to a very heightened sense of intimacy between these two characters.

Q: Talk about Ryan Doucette.

A: Ryan is a lot like Prentice. He's from a small Nova Scotia town and he left to become an artist. Prentice is a modern dancer and Ryan is a mime. I cast Ryan in the stage production and there was no looking back... I couldn't imagine a different Prentice. He was wonderful on stage and he was able to bring the essence of that performance to the screen. It's very easy to sympathize with Ryan, he's very sweet. But he's also got a bit of the devil in him. He's very special to me.

Q: Talk about Olympia Dukakis.

A: I wanted to write a character as impassioned as Olympia is. She's a fighter and a thinker. I can't really put words to how much I admire the woman. I feel like every time I work with her is a gift. I learn about acting, about storytelling, and about life.

Q: Talk about Brenda Fricker.

A: Brenda is as sweet, feisty and vulnerable as Dot. She has a brilliant wit and sophisticated humour at all times. I was a bit in awe of her. And her performance in the film still takes my breath away. She was brave, bold and lovely.