

# FREMONT

A FILM BY **BABAK JALALI**





# FREMONT

**Directed by Babak Jalali**

91 mins. / Drama / USA / Black & White / English, Dari, Cantonese / 2023

**OFFICIAL WEBSITE**

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## LOGLINE

Afghan refugee Donya lives in Fremont but works at a fortune cookie factory in San Francisco. Seeking connection, she decides to send a message out to the world through a cookie in this offbeat vision of the universal longing for home.

## SYNOPSIS

Each morning Donya (Anaita Wali Zada) leaves her tight-knit community of Afghan immigrants in Fremont, California. She crosses the Bay to work at a family-run fortune cookie factory in San Francisco. Donya drifts through her routine, struggling to connect with the culture and people of her new, unfamiliar surroundings while processing complicated feelings about her past as a translator for the U.S. government in Afghanistan. Unable to sleep, she finagles her way into a regular slot with a therapist (Gregg Turkington) who grasps for prospective role models. When an unexpected promotion at work thrusts Donya into the position to write her own story, she communicates her loneliness and longing through a concise medium: the fortunes inside each cookie. Donya's koans travel, making a humble social impact and expanding her world far beyond Fremont and her turbulent past, including an encounter with a quiet auto mechanic (Jeremy Allen White) who could stand to see his own world expanded. Tenderly sculpted and lyrically shot in black-and-white, Babak Jalali's FREMONT is a wry, deadpan vision of the universal longing for home.







## BABAK JALALI DIRECTOR & CO-WRITER

Babak Jalali was born in Northern Iran and raised primarily in London. His short film, HEYDAR, AN AFGHAN IN TEHRAN, received a BAFTA nomination for Best Short Film in 2006. He developed his debut feature film, FRONTIER BLUES, at the Cannes Film Festival Cinefondation Residence. The film premiered in Official Competition at the 2009 Locarno International Film Festival and went on to receive the Fipresci Award at the San Francisco Film Festival. His second feature, RADIO DREAMS, won the Hivos Tiger Award at the 2016 Rotterdam Film Festival, received the Special Jury Award at the Seattle International Film Festival and won Best Director at the Andrei Tarkovsky Film Festival in Russia. His third feature, LAND, premiered at the Berlin International Film Festival in 2018. FREMONT is his fourth feature film.

### FILMOGRAPHY

LAND - feature film, 110 mins, 2018

As Writer and director. Prod: Asmara Films, The Cup of Tea production.  
68 BERLIN INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL - Panorama

RADIO DREAMS - feature film, 97 mins, 2016

As Writer and director. Production: Butimar Productions  
Winner of the Tiger Award - International Film Festival Rotterdam 2016

FRONTIER BLUES feature film, 96 mins, 2009

As Writer and director. Production: Caspian Films production  
Winner of the FIPRESCI Prize - San Francisco International Film Festival 2010

HEYDAR: AN AFGHAN IN TEHRAN - short film, 18 mins, 2005

As Writer and director. Production: The London Film School  
Nomination for Best Short BAFTA 2006  
Winner Best Student Short - New York City Short Film Festival 2005



## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

This film is about an immigrant in a new country but, of course, there is no uniform immigrant experience. Each individual has different reasons for leaving and each individual has their own dreams and desires for what the future will hold in their new home. Often, one's past dictates their present and for someone starting from scratch somewhere far from home, the past is never really behind them.

With this film I want to look beyond the idea that there are wild differences between humans. In a world where so much is made of imagining differences and exaggerating otherness, it's important to look at universal similarities. An immigrant and a non-immigrant share many of the same hopes, dreams and ambitions. The main character in this film, Donya, a feisty young woman and a former translator for the U.S. military, feels she is where she is due to her own life choices. But this does not mean she does not suffer or feel displaced. She is determined to change things. She wants to be busy. She wants to be at ease. She wants to fall in love. And she wants acceptance. Like most other people.

Even though this film looks at the plight of an Afghan translator and her new life in America, the style of the film is not one that is rooted in social realism. Observations of the absurdities of cultural adjustment and feelings of displacement can also be presented through the lens of humor. For although the subjects that are dealt with here can be dark at times, there is humor in darkness too. This element of lightness has always been important to me as a filmmaker. Showing humor in situations that are bleak doesn't underplay the seriousness or depth of a story but rather, it can add layers to the sense of realism. As the saying goes: 'He who cries only has one pain. But he who laughs has a thousand and one pains...'



## Q&A WITH DIRECTOR & CO-WRITER BABAK JALALI

### Can you talk about your filmmaking career leading into *Fremont*?

*Fremont* is my fourth film as a director, but I've also produced three films, including this one, and edited four as well. Although I am based and was raised primarily in London, I have yet to make a film in the UK.

My first feature film, *Frontier Blues*, was made in my hometown of Gorgan in northern Iran, which is right on the border with Turkmenistan. My second film, *Radio Dreams*, was shot in the Bay Area. My third one is called *Land*, and it was shot in Mexico. And this film, *Fremont*, is again shot in the Bay Area.

It was always very important for me to make my first film in my hometown. That was a story I had in my head all the time. I actually wanted to only make films in Iran at that point, and definitely the first one I wanted to be in my hometown. As it happens, I haven't made any other films in Iran, but *Radio Dreams* was about Iranians and Afghans living in the Bay Area. And *Land* was something entirely different, it took place in a fictional Indian reservation.

**With *Fremont* there are no specifically Iranian elements, but it's primarily about an Afghan girl who finds herself living in the Bay Area. I've always been very attached to Afghan people and Afghan culture. We share a language and we share an enormous and intertwined history - a not always pleasant one.**

Growing up in Iran, until I left there, there was a huge Afghan refugee population in Iran, and still is. At a certain point, Iran was home to the biggest refugee population in the world, and the majority of them were Afghans. So growing up, I was raised in a household where I was actually introduced to Afghan culture, which has a very rich history.



**I'd love to talk about the origins of the project, but also the idea of so-called positive stereotyping - which reminds me of the scene in the diner with Jeremy Allen White's character where he says, "Oh, Afghan people are really friendly," and Donya replies, "They are, I'm just a bad example of that." I love that moment because it comes to the theme that she's a human being before anything else. Could you expand on that thought process about making that a central element of the film?**

I have to say, my previous three films have been predominantly about men. The producer of *Radio Dreams*, Marjaneh Moghimi, is an Iranian woman who had lived in the Bay Area for 40 years. We talked about making another film together, and while visiting her, I read a story in the Sacramento Bee about Afghan translators who had come to the United States, and what their living conditions were like.

It was like a week-long report: every day they interviewed different families or individuals, but the translators they interviewed were all men. Some of them had wives, hence their wives were mentioned but never interviewed. It was always about, you know, the men and the struggles they go through, which is of course very real. But the story also mentioned the town of Fremont, which is currently home to the largest Afghan community in the United States.

So Marjaneh and I went to Fremont to meet with some translators, who happened to be men, but they told us there were of course women translators as well. And some of the women openly said that for them the process of working as translators had been even more difficult because some people in Afghanistan consider them to be traitors, but also because as women they run against the more traditional elements of that society by working at all. But on the other hand, the reality is that a lot of the translators I talked to—men and women—they didn't want to be known as Afghan translators, per se. They wanted to be known first as human beings. As an immigrant or refugee coming into a new culture there a lot of times you want to be a human being foremost in order to be able to not just exist, but to have a sense of normalcy.

And that's what aimed for with the character of Donya. She's a young girl, she has a traumatic past she needs to deal with, but she also has aspirational dreams. And those dreams are not about, you know, "winning" or getting a job that pays \$10 million, and calling home saying, "Hey, ma, you know, America did sort me out. Look at me now." It's not like that. No. Her aspirations are on a very normal, basic level.



## **Can you talk about finding Anaita Wali Zada for the role of Donya?**

We got so lucky. I mean, I think Anaita is a jewel. The making of this film was very strange because we were supposed to shoot this in 2020, but of course the pandemic happened and delayed production. And at that time, the Taliban hadn't yet come back into power, so the situation in Afghanistan was very different then. Then what happened of course was in the summer of 2021 the Taliban came back and the whole situation in Afghanistan completely changed.

Through this time, the film had been dormant, so we had stopped the casting process. Unfortunately in January 2022, our producer Marjaneh Moghimi fell very ill. So the other producers and I decided to move quickly on the project to show Marjaneh that we were making the film. At the end of March we went to Oakland and we started prepping, but we didn't have a cast, we didn't have a crew - it was just me and the other producers.

All my films so far have been cast with non-professionals, so the process was about finding a non-professional who was willing to do the work. So we held open casting calls, and we did a lot of video calls with people who were living in places like Arizona and Montana and Virginia and San Diego. But we just weren't finding anyone who could carry every single frame of the film.

In the middle of the production we received an email from Anaita saying that someone, another Afghan, had told her about the film, and she was interested. She lived in the Washington, D.C. area but she had literally come on an evacuation flight seven months prior. She told us her story, which is not the same as Donya because she was not a translator, but having recently gone through an evacuation process, the parallels were still amazing. From the moment we spoke, she was so determined and she was so genuine.

It was Anaita's first time in front of the camera as an actor; it was her first time finding herself even remotely in this kind of situation. Like, she's surrounded by forty strangers... and she took it in stride, she was incredible. She was just a complete natural. I think it really helped that the first two days of the shoot were with Jeremy Allen White. Jeremy was good as gold with her; he was very supportive. Same with Gregg Turkington, who was amazing with her. But ultimately she is just unbelievably talented. She's very gifted. She's so determined. And she is only 23.



**Coming as you did to the film's subject matter and being open about being Iranian-born and are not familiar with a culture that is not your own, but is still close to your own, what were some of the things that you had to adjust for or learn?**

There were times where I kind of thought twice because of the cultural restraint. Certainly I didn't know all of the colloquialisms, even though the actors and I speak the same language. But if someone is a native speaker of one of those languages, they could immediately tell who is Iranian and who is Afghan, because of the accents and dialects. So there's some things where I would defer to the actors on how to say their lines in a more colloquially authentic way. Also regarding certain actions, like, for example, I asked Anita if she would be comfortable drinking a beer in front of the camera. And she said no, but suggested that instead she should accept the beer but put it on the side.

**Can you talk about how you imagined Donya during the writing process? Typically when you're describing somebody who is often alone and actively avoiding talking about her trauma, who is hearing the advice of a lot of people who are supportive, but who she is ultimately not very close to, you'd assume that person is passive. But Donya does not feel passive, she has such a presence. How did you create that?**

I wrote the film with Carolina Cavalli, who was with me when we went to Fremont on the original trip and has been involved with the film since then. So every draft we wrote, we wrote together. She's a brilliant writer. And also I have to say, I have to be honest here, it was it was very beneficial to have a female co-writer on this because the main character is a woman, and there were times where I would write stuff and Carolina would actually say, "well, I don't think she would do this."

What Carolina and I mainly talked about for Donya is the fact that she's been uprooted and finds herself in a strange land, right? But she is that same person as she was in Afghanistan. You know, I think trauma changes you and I think grief changes you; I think happiness, success, all these things change you in some way. But I don't think they alter your personality. And I don't think, in the time span of a film, in this compressed period that we show in the story, some kind of eureka moment happens. I didn't want to show the light bulb going off, or for Donya to suddenly start being more confident in the way she speaks or more reserved in the way she acts, or anything like that.

We see little shifts of course, but little shifts eventually get you somewhere, wherever that may be.



**Can you talk about the choice to film this in black-and-white? What are some of the visual choices you made to emphasize the tone and specificity of what you'd written?**

I'm really glad we did it in black-and-white but the idea wasn't there from the beginning. It was an idea that actually came to me suddenly, really just before pre-production, that I then felt very strongly about. It was after the period when Marjaneh Moghimi fell ill and we decided that we had to produce the film quickly. Laura Valladao, who is the brilliant Director of Photography on the film, this was our first project together, but I asked if she thought she could do it in black-and-white and she was totally into the idea.

I think that in talking about the different groups and communities in the film, we could decenter the differences in color and things like that. We could just wipe that away and show everyone in black-and-white. But more than a pre-planned intellectual or artistic reasoning, I became really adamant that I saw this project in black-and-white, and then it became more about finding ways to justify that need. I was very lucky to have producers who were supportive. And we even had the approval of Marjaneh before she went.

We also talked a lot about the look of the film. A lot of it is done in static shots, which is an important element to me. For example, in the scenes with Donya and Dr. Anthony (Gregg Turkington), I wanted to keep the visual style pretty uniform in switching back and forth between them. Also, in the factory, we wanted to show the workplace, people at work, with static shots. We switched to handheld in the karaoke scene, which was a bit more dreamy, with softer movements while Donya is walking. And Laura was very precise, and we were on the same wavelength from the beginning, so I had total trust in her. We could work together in that way. Also, the aspect ratio is quite boxy, and that affected the production design clearly, with what can fit in the frame. Our production designer, Rob Riutta, was also on board and did a great job. The whole team was really, really good to work with.





## Q&A WITH ACTOR ANAITA WALI ZADA

**This is your first time acting but you obviously had a life before you met with Babak and the crew, so can you tell me a little bit about yourself and where you were before you got involved with this film?**

I came to the U.S. from Afghanistan with my sister in August 2021. I live in the Washington, D.C. area, and I have family back in Pakistan. I started to study English when I got here and after a few months, my friend, the one who helped me to come to the U.S., sent me an email with the casting call for *Fremont*. So I sent an email to Babak, he got back to me, and after two Zoom calls we decided to make a contract. And that was it. And I have to say, I wanted to try to see what it's like to be an actress, because that is one way I can do something for my people in Afghanistan. So acting in *Fremont* was part of my new adventure in the U.S.

**So your friend sent you this casting call, did you know about the script or about the filmmaker or anything going into it?**

I just read some parts of his email, that the movie was about an Afghan woman, and that she had been a translator and she came from Afghanistan to the United States. And I thought, we have the same experience. All of us, everyone who came from Afghanistan, they lost everything they had. I'm 23 now, and I lost everything from my childhood. I remember all of us were trying to find ways to do something for ourselves, and then for our people, especially women in Afghanistan. I had wanted to do this since I was a child. So when I read about this movie and the casting call, I thought, this is my chance, I want to do something. That was the reason I wanted to try to be an actress, and to be a voice for the women in Afghanistan.

**What was that meeting like, when you met on Zoom? Because the way you said it makes it sound like you read once and then you were both like, okay let's do this. Was it really that quick? And if so, you know, what made you both comfortable moving forward so quickly?**

Actually the first day I had the Zoom meeting with Babak, I started speaking in English, but he said that we should talk in Persian. So we are speaking in the same language, and that was one thing that made me comfortable. When I learned that he was Iranian I thought it would be helpful for me, because we could get to know each other easily, we would understand each other. And he was really supportive. When we got to the first call we had on-set, there were some English words I couldn't pronounce, and he was the one who taught me how to pronounce them correctly. The film crew had a lot of experience and everyone was supportive and kind. I consider them friends now.

One thing that I really loved about the way that Donya's story is told, is the people around her are mostly supportive, but they also don't save her. They offer a bit of advice, but then she has to still figure things out for herself. Can you talk more about the kind of person she is? Like what is her personality, how does she respond to the things that are happening?

My life in some ways is similar to the life of the character Donya. Both of us are newcomers to America – living thousands of miles from family and home, suddenly in a new country, starting from nothing, trying to make friends, trying to navigate through the complex immigration process to become a fully recognized U.S. citizen, none of it is easy.

One thing about Donya's personality is that she is strong. She doesn't want to share her loneliness with others, like even with her psychiatrist, Dr. Anthony. Sometimes she wants the company of other people, and sometimes she wishes she could get away.



**Is there anything that Donya does as a character that you, as Anaita, would never do or did not like?**

At one point in the film, Donya decides to share her phone number in a batch of fortune cookies and one of those cookies ends up being opened by her boss. I would not do that in real life because you never know what's coming for you if you give out your phone number! Yet, I like her bravery and boldness. In another scene, Donya is supposed to shout. It was my first time shouting as I was taught to be quiet growing up. Babak was surprised when I said this was my first time shouting! I learned that from Donya.

**Can I ask, what are your dreams? What are some of the things that you still hope for? And what are some of the dreams that maybe have to wait because there was such a big shift in your life?**

I am a young woman from a country in which women are now banned from education, employment, travel, music, style, and the ability to own a business – even a small business. I want every woman to be free to live their life the way they deserve. I hope and I believe that one day in Afghanistan, once again women can go to school, laugh loudly, sing songs, get jobs, and wear what they want to wear. I have concerns about the safety of both women and the progressive men working for women's rights.

One change is that now I want to be an actress. When I was in Afghanistan, I was studying international relations as a part of political science studies. And now, everything has changed, so I'm going to continue working in film and to be a voice for Afghan women.

**What message do you want the audience to take away after watching *Fremont*?**

Don't forget Afghanistan! People there are still suffering, they are cold, hungry and without hope. It's an emergency. Of course, there are problems worldwide, but please keep your thoughts on Afghanistan, where women's rights have disappeared. Talk about Afghanistan with your friends. Follow the news. And support Afghans who have recently arrived in your town or city. The story is far from over.







# FREE SOIL, FREE MEN, FREMONT

*Fremont* takes its title from its central setting: Fremont, California, a vibrant and diverse community in the East Bay and the most populous city in Alameda County.

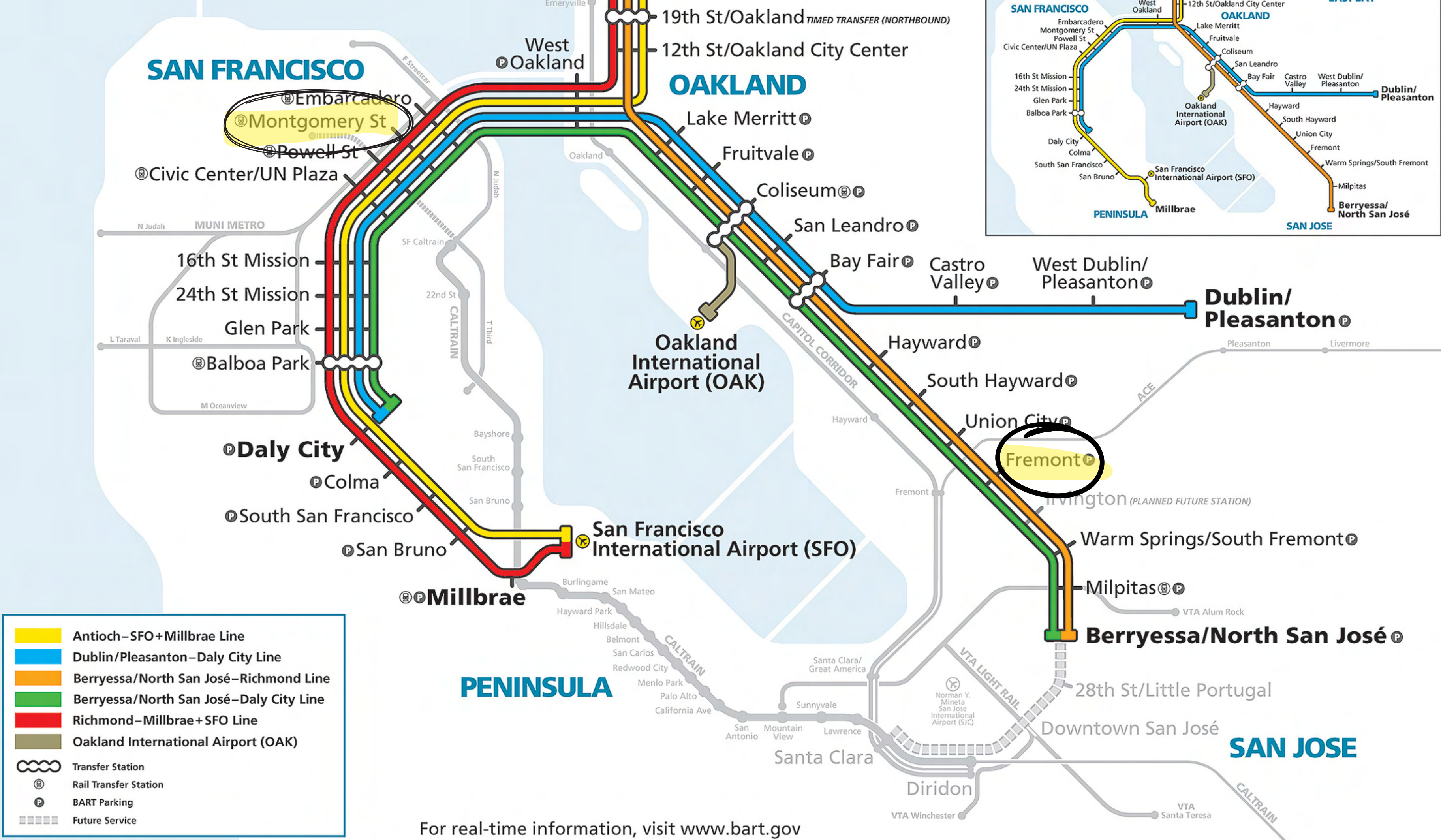
Fremont is situated on the historic lands of the Ohlone tribe, who were gradually displaced by Spanish missionaries beginning in the late 18th century. The area, along with the rest of modern-day California, was annexed into the United States following the conclusion of the Mexican-American War in 1848.

The city itself was not incorporated until 1956, when five towns (Irvington, Centerville, Mission San Jose, Niles, and Warm Springs) joined together to form Fremont. The new city was named after John C. Frémont, the colorful and controversial figure who served variously as US army commander, California's military governor, and one of the state's first US senators. Frémont ran unsuccessfully as the Republican Party's first presidential nominee in 1856, with an anti-slavery platform and the memorable campaign slogan "Free Soil, Free Men, Frémont."

The city of Fremont itself has long been at the crossroads of economic opportunity and demographic change. Its proximity to Silicon Valley has brought high-tech manufacturing to working-class Fremont: the first Mac computer was built at an Apple plant in Fremont in the 1980s, and Tesla operates a major manufacturing hub there today. Yet Fremont has also been treated as a bedroom suburb for the greater Bay Area—a calmer, quieter, cheaper alternative to the hustle and bustle of San Francisco. Until 2017, Fremont was the southern terminus for BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit), the commuter train that brings Donya into San Francisco for her job at the fortune cookie factory. (BART has subsequently expanded south to Warm Springs, Milpitas, and Berryessa, but for generations of Bay Area commuters, Fremont was the literal and figurative end of the map.)

Fremont today is roughly half Asian, with many different communities represented, including sizable Indian, Chinese, Filipino, and Vietnamese populations. Notably, Fremont can also claim, by general consensus, the largest Afghan population in the United States, with a short stretch of Fremont Blvd. dubbed Little Kabul. The Afghan diaspora of Fremont did not settle all at once; successive waves of migration have reinforced each other, with Afghans refugees displaced by the Soviet invasion of 1979, the Taliban regime in the late 1990s, and, most recently, the withdrawal of US forces in 2021. While *Fremont* is a work of fiction, Donya's story reflects the social texture of a real immigrant community perched between the pressure to assimilate and the will to survive.







# CAST

<b>Donya</b>	Anaita Wali Zada
<b>Joanna</b>	Hilda Schmelling
<b>Fan</b>	Avis See-tho
<b>Salim</b>	Siddique Ahmed
<b>Mina</b>	Taban Ibraz
<b>Suleyman</b>	Timur Nusratty
<b>Ricky</b>	Eddie Tang
<b>Lin</b>	Jennifer McKay
<b>Amaya</b>	Divya Jakatdar
<b>Dr. Anthony</b>	Gregg Turkington
<b>Aziz</b>	Fazil Seddiqui
<b>Molly</b>	Molly Noble
<b>Daniel</b>	Jeremy Allen White
<b>Jason</b>	Enoch Ku



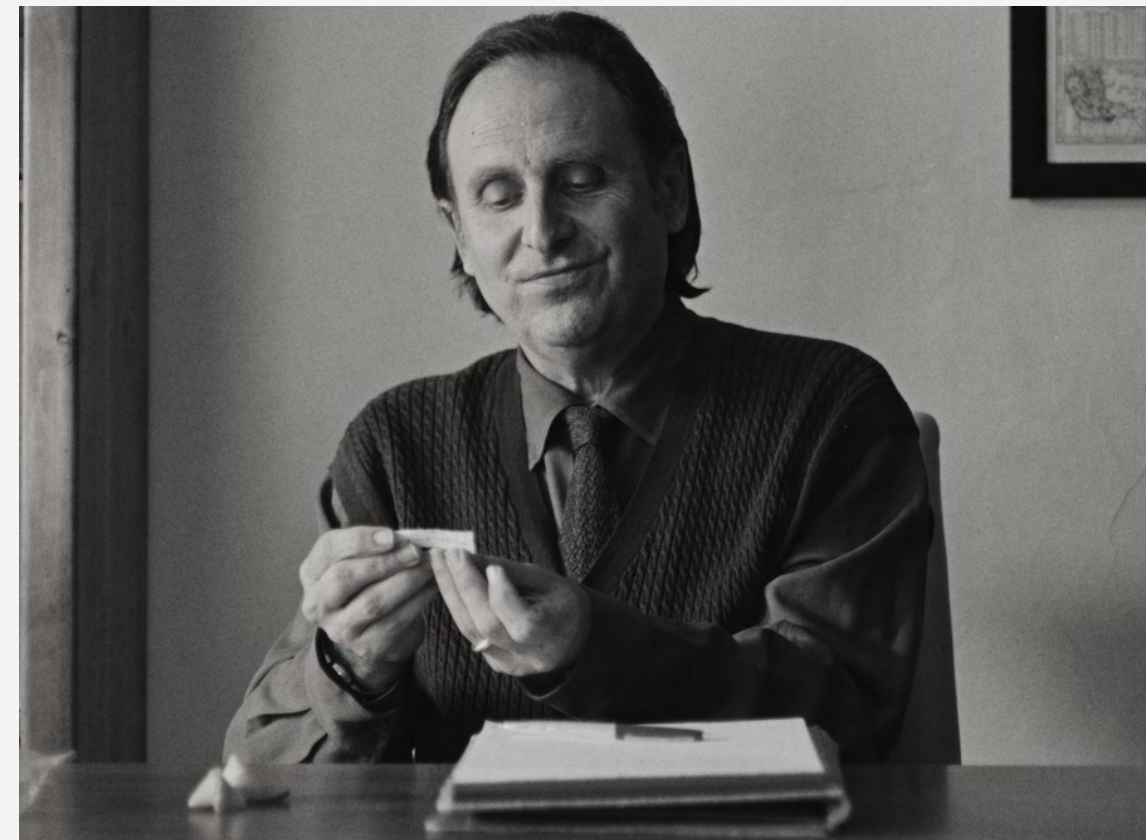
# CAST BIOGRAPHIES

## **Anaita Wali Zada - Donya**

Anaita Wali Zada was born the third of eight children in Afghanistan. By the age of 19, Anaita had become a well-known presenter and journalist on national television. Bold choices for women in the country have always taken exceptional courage and her liberalism and imaginative media work made her and her sister, Taban, a visible target of the Taliban. As Kabul fell in August 2021, Anaita and Taban were forced to flee, without knowing where they would land. Having settled in Washington, DC, their priority remains bringing their remaining family to safety. Anaita wants her life's work to honor the women of Afghanistan. To that end, she is studying English and preparing to pursue a university degree in acting and filmmaking.

## **Gregg Turkington - Dr. Anthony**

Gregg Turkington is an actor and comedian. His feature credits include Rick Alverson's ENTERTAINMENT, THE COMEDY, and Marvel's ANT-MAN. He also lent his voice to the beloved animated series GRAVITY FALLS and is well-known for his roles in the ON CINEMA universe including Adult Swim's DECKER.





## **Jeremy Allen White - Daniel**

Jeremy Allen White is an award-winning, dynamic actor known for his impressive, compelling performances that captivate both fans and critics alike.

Jeremy stars in the hit FX series *THE BEAR*, following ‘Carmy’, a young chef who comes home to Chicago to run his family sandwich show after a heartbreaking death in his family. Currently sitting at 100% on Rotten Tomatoes, the dramedy became an overnight smash success, garnering Jeremy a Golden Globe Award for “Best Performance by an Actor in a Television Series – Musical or Comedy”, a Critics’ Choice Award for “Best Actor in a Comedy Series” and a Screen Actors Guild award nomination for “Outstanding Performance by a Male Actor in a Comedy Series”. The show was nominated for a Critics’ Choice award for “Best Comedy Series” and was honored as an outstanding TV program by the American Film Institute. Given the massive success of the show, it was quickly renewed for a second season.

He wrapped production on two buzzed about films including Sean Durkin’s *THE IRON CLAW*, opposite Zac Efron and Harris Dickinson. Based on a true story, the A24 film will follow the rise and fall of world-famous wrestling siblings, the Von Erichs, their family dynasty and their notorious impact on the sport. Additionally, Jeremy will star alongside Jessie Buckley and Riz Ahmed in Apple’s *FINGERNAILS*, directed by Christos Nikou. The sci-fi love story, set in a world where a test can measure whether couples are truly in love, follows “Anna” (Buckley) and her certified lover “Ryan” (White) as she begins to work in an institute to help couples succeed.

Previously, he is beloved for playing “Lip Gallagher” on the mega-hit *SHAMELESS* for 11 seasons. In 2020, he starred in Dave Franco’s hit *THE RENTAL*, opposite Alison Brie, Dan Stevens and Sheila Vand. In 2018, White appeared in Amazon Prime’s *HOMEcomings* opposite Bobby Cannavale and Julia Roberts. His film credits include Antonio Campos’s *AFTERSCHOOL*, *THE TIME BEING* opposite Frank Langella, and *YOU CAN’T WIN* opposite Michael Pitt. Additionally, he can be seen as the male lead of the independent feature *AFTER EVERYTHING* opposite Maika Monroe and Gerardo Naranjo’s English debut *VIENA AND THE FANTOMES*, a film about life on the road with an 80s punk band, where he stars opposite Dakota Fanning.







# CREW

## **Writers**

Carolina Cavalli & Babak Jalali

## **Director**

Babak Jalali

## **Producers**

Marjaneh Moghimi, p.g.a.

Sudnya Shroff, p.g.a.

Rachael Fung, p.g.a.

George Rush

Chris Martin

Laura Wagner

## **Executive Producers**

Lata Krishnan

Neda Nobari

Nikhil Jakatdar

Akash Nigam

## **Associate Producers**

Peter McClellan

Valerie Bush

## **Director of Photography**

Laura Valladao

## **First Assistant Director**

Elaine Gibson

## **Production Designer**

Rob Riutta

## **Costume Designer**

Caroline Sebastian

## **Head of Hair and Make Up**

Holly Ruth

## **Production Sound Mixer**

Nixon Sanchez

## **Editor**

Babak Jalali

## **Sound Design**

Stefano Grosso

## **Original Music and Composition by:**

Mahmood Schricker

# CREW BIOGRAPHIES

## **Carolina Cavalli - Co-Writer**

Carolina Cavalli is a writer-director from Milan working in the Italian and English language. Carolina won Premio Solinas Experimenta Serie prize for her original comedy-drama series MI HANNO SPUTATO NEL MILKSHAKE. Her debut feature as writer-director, AMANDA, was selected for the the 79th Venice Film Festival and premiered internationally at TIFF 2022. It is currently on theatrical release. Her first novel “Metropolitania” was published in November 2022

## **Marjaneh Moghimi - Late Producer**

Marjaneh Moghimi was the founder-director of Butimar Productions, a Bay Area nonprofit organization dedicated to producing world-class documentary and narrative feature films by filmmakers from the Middle East and those who form part of the Middle Eastern diaspora. Moghimi produced numerous award-winning films with acclaimed international directors such as Bahman Giarostami’s KANMANCHEH, INFIDELS, and PILGRIMAGE (which was nominated for best documentary at 2014 Tribeca Film Festival); Michael Apted’s POWER OF THE GAME; Justine Shapiro’s OUR SUMMER IN TEHRAN, for ITVS; and Mitra Farahani’s BEHJAT SADR and FIFI HOWLS FROM HAPPINESS (which premiered at Berlin and Telluride Film Festivals in 2013 and was picked up for theatrical distribution by Music Box films, also available on Netflix and Fandor). Her last narrative feature RADIO DREAMS, directed by Babak Jalali, won the Hivos Tiger Award for Best Film at the 2016 Rotterdam International Film Festival and was picked up for theatrical distribution by Matson Films. The film screened at more than 25 cities in North America and is now available on Amazon.

## **Sudnya Shroff - Producer**

Sudnya Shroff is an Indian American artist who has made San Francisco Bay Area her home since 1996. She has pursued her passion for storytelling through visual art, murals, installations, the written word, and now FREMONT, her first feature film. As a champion of the world’s displaced sisterhood, Sudnya has made it her life’s mission to tell stories - arrestingly beautiful and awe inspiring stories - the kind that have the power to move and change our subconscious narratives of fear around those who don’t look and sound like us. Towards that end, she has built a community that trusts her and has joined forces in this endeavor to effect a powerful and much needed social awakening.



**Rachael Fung - Producer**

Rachael Fung is an independent Producer and filmmaking fellow of The Gotham (formerly IFP) and SFFILM who was named one of Variety's 10 Producers to Watch in 2023. The founder of New York and Sydney-based Extra A Productions, she produced Nia DaCosta's debut feature, LITTLE WOODS starring Tessa Thompson and Lily James which premiered at Tribeca 2018, was released theatrically in the US by NEON and is currently streaming on HBOMax. Other producing credits include THE GIANT (TIFF 2019, San Sebastian 2019) and shorts KIMCHI (SXSW 2018), THE LONELY WHALE (2016) and THE GOD PHONE (Audience Award winner at Little Rock Film Festival 2012). Rachael was previously Associate Producer for Baz Luhrmann and Catherine Martin's company, Bazmark Inq, working on projects including THE GREAT GATSBY and THE GET DOWN.

**George Rush - Producer**

George M. Rush is a producer and attorney specializing in the entertainment industry with an emphasis on the independent film community. Clients include producers, directors, screenwriters and investors in development, production and distribution phases. George represented Barry Jenkins' MEDICINE FOR MELANCHOLY, David Robert Mitchell's MYTH OF THE AMERICAN SLEEPOVER, and Joe Talbot's THE LAST BLACK MAN IN SAN FRANCISCO, as well as other independent films including MENASHE, LOVESONG, ALWAYS SHINE and I BELIEVE IN UNICORNS. As a producer, George collaborated with Boots Riley on SORRY TO BOTHER YOU, Michael Tully on PING PONG SUMMER and DON'T LEAVE HOME and John Maringouin on GHOST BOX COWBOY. He has also Executive Produced Dean Fleischer-Camp's MARCEL THE SHELL WITH SHOES ON and Frank Berry's AISHA.

**Chris Martin - Producer**

Chris Martin is a producer, line producer, writer and story-editor with over twelve years experience in film, television, and commercials. A producer of five theatrical and documentary projects, and an Independent Spirit John Cassavetes Award nominee, his credits include SORRY TO BOTHER YOU, 55 STEPS, LA MISSION, PUSHING DEAD, TEST, THE HEARBREAK KID, MISTRESS OF SPICES, CBS' ALIVE, ESPN's BONDS ON BONDS, Sundance Channel's BIG IDEAS FOR A SMALL PLANET, and Discovery Channel's I (ALMOST) GOT AWAY WITH IT. A participant in the 2017 Cannes Marché du Film Producers Network he is twice finalist to the Sundance Institute Producer's Lab.

**Laura Wagner - Producer**

LAURA WAGNER is an award-winning producer whose films have premiered at film festivals including Sundance, Tribeca, SXSW, Rotterdam, Melbourne and many more, and have enjoyed success worldwide in theatrical markets, on television and on digital streaming platforms. Her feature documentaries include THE SCALE OF HOPE and ARTIFISHAL, and her narrative fiction films include IT FELT LIKE LOVE (Sundance 2013), TRACKTOWN (Sundance Creative Producing Lab 2014), EASY LIVING; and MY FIRST KISS AND THE PEOPLE INVOLVED. She is a Sundance Creative Producing Fellow, an SFFILM Rainin Foundation Fellow, a Film Independent fellow, and an alum of the Rotterdam Producing Lab, the Cannes Producers Network Fellowship, the Trans Atlantic Partners program, and Berlinale Talents.

**Laura Valladao - Cinematographer**

Laura Valladao is a Cinematographer based in Brooklyn, New York. She brings a focused curiosity to each project, collaborating to craft an honest and unique visual language for every film. She shot the feature film, PREMATURE, directed by Rashaad Ernesto Green, which premiered in the NEXT program at Sundance 2019 as well as the short film MY NEPHEW EMMETT, directed by Kevin Wilson Jr., which won the Student Academy Award® in 2017 and went on to be nominated for an Oscar. Laura's documentary credits include DEAR MAMA: THE SAGA OF TUPAC AND AFENI SHAKUR, directed by Allen Hughes and her commercial work has received awards from the AICP. Her work on the Danish TV series LIMBOLAND, directed by Rikke Schjødt, helped season one to win TV Prisen for Best Television Series, Short Form. When she isn't shooting, you can find Laura backcountry camping in Death Valley or surfing at Rockaway Beach.



# ABOUT MUSIC BOX FILMS

Music Box Films is the prestigious North American distributor of acclaimed international, independent, and documentary feature films. Recent releases include Eric Gravel's César nominated thrilling social drama *Full Time*, starring Laure Calamy; Rebecca Zlotowski's New York Times Critic's Pick adult drama *Other People's Children* starring Virginie Efira; and *The Unknown Country*, Morrisa Maltz's SXSW Road Trip Drama starring Lily Gladstone. Since its formation in 2007, Music Box Films has distributed award-winning films and art-house favorites that include Academy Award winner *Ida*, *Meru* (from Oscar-winning filmmakers Jimmy Chin and E. Chai Vaserhelyi), Christian Petzold's *Transit*, the popular Swedish comedy *A Man Called Ove*, and the original *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*. Music Box Films is independently owned and operated by the Southport Music Box Corporation, which also owns and operates the Music Box Theatre, Chicago's premier venue for independent and foreign films. For more information, visit [www.musicboxfilms.com](http://www.musicboxfilms.com).

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