

SCREEN MEDIA

Presents

A Serendipity Point Film

# CLARA



**In Theaters and On Demand May 3, 2019**

Starring: **Patrick J. Adams** (“Suits”), **Troian Bellisario** (“Pretty Little Liars”), **Ennis Esmer** (“Blindspot”), **Kristen Hager** (*Aliens vs. Predator: Requiem, Wanted*)

Written & Directed by: **Akash Sherman** (*The Rocket List*)

RT: 105 Minutes

\*2018 Toronto International Film Festival\*

\*Narrative Feature Jury Award – 2018 Austin Film Festival\*

\*2019 Canada Now\*

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## Director's Statement

Over three years ago, I set out to write a story about space - that large, shapeless forever that hangs above and around us. I always stare up a little too long on a clear night, thinking about which stars might have other worlds with life. That cosmic pondering always sparks the same, unbelievable thought for me... "we exist". Just the mere thought of it is pretty crazy, right? Pinch yourself, it's real. And then suddenly, just like that, my existence was shaken. I lost someone very close to me, without warning. Someone who if they hadn't existed - I wouldn't have either. I felt a gaping void that truly felt larger than outer space, and upon pinching myself, I knew it was very real.

The story I originally set out to write evolved into something much more. Although the wonder of the cosmos, my love for science, and the discovery of life elsewhere are still very much intact in the film, at its core this film is about love and loss. Death and life. Connection. Those to me are universal concepts that we aren't nearly done exploring. CLARA isn't about the search for life, it is about two lost people who find each other while searching for it.

- Akash Sherman

## **SYNOPSIS**

CLARA tells the story of Isaac Bruno (Patrick J. Adams), an astronomer consumed by the search for life beyond Earth. Convinced that the universe is a dark and lonely place, Isaac meets Clara (Troian Bellisario), an artist who shares his fascination for the wonders of space. Their unlikely collaboration leads to a deep connection, and a profound astronomical discovery.

## **The real-life NASA projects and tools that are featured in the film and how relevant they are in the real world**

One of CLARA's most notable features is the way filmmaker Akash Sherman has infused the story with relevant, newsworthy, and accurate depictions of astronomy and the real-life efforts currently being made to find evidence of life beyond our solar system. In the real world, we have entered a new era of planet hunting with NASA's recently launched mission the TESS telescope, and NASA's upcoming launch of the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST). It is theorized by experts that these two instruments will become the primary tools used in solving the ultimate mystery and answering one of humanity's most fundamental questions: Are we alone? Does life exist elsewhere in the universe?

Those who are familiar with the capabilities of TESS and JWST have posited that we will know the answer to these questions within the next decade.

The TESS telescope launched on April 18, 2018 as a survey mission to gather light data from hundreds of thousands of nearby stars, for the purpose of identifying systems which contain potentially habitable planets. The TESS is prominently featured throughout the film as the main characters, Isaac (Patrick J. Adams) and Clara (Troian Bellisario), utilize the data it provides to find habitable planet candidates.

The \$10 billion James Webb Space Telescope is set to launch in the Spring of 2021, and will become the most powerful instrument ever used in the search for interstellar life. The JWST will follow up on TESS's new planetary discoveries, and will use its high-powered instruments to examine fine details of these planets such as their atmospheres and temperature. The JWST will study potentially habitable planets for things like bio-signature gasses which could only be produced by the presence of life.

The film CLARA covers all of this, and more, making it stand apart as not so much a film about "science-fiction", but rather one about the inevitable "science-reality". When the JWST launches, it is entirely possible that real-life will imitate art in this case, and CLARA may be viewed, by some, as quite prophetic.

## The secret construct to making CLARA: Q&A with Writer/Director, Akash Sherman

Q: In your own words, what is the film, CLARA, about?

AS: The film is about connection. That's the one word I went off of in creating this story - the connection between people, ones we love, ones we lost. The connection between atoms, and how everything came to be. And our connection to what might be beyond us. CLARA is a very human story about two people and the search for life, and it's framed in a very cosmic way.

Q: Can you tell us how the idea of the script came to you?

AS: The idea for the film came to me while I was bored in an art history lecture. I just wanted to create something then and there. So, I left the lecture, went for a walk, listened to music, and started thinking about space - because, hey, sometimes I like to think about space. What else is out there? Thinking that big got me thinking small, about us - people. I went to my dorm, wrote for 7 hours straight, and came out with a rough concept for a film rooted by love, loss, life, death, space and discovery.

Q: Why did you want to tell this story?

AS: I initially wanted to tell this story purely because of my unshakeable fascination with space and our scientific pursuit for life beyond Earth. However, as I was writing the script I lost someone very close to me - my grandfather who was a huge presence in my life. I was so wrapped up in the idea of life being somewhere else, I decided to also focus on how precious life is here. My journey with loss has deepened the story in such a personal way that I have dedicated the film to my grandfather's memory.

Q: What was your knowledge on astronomy prior to starting to work on this film? To what extent, personally, did you do research to verify the authenticity?

AS: My knowledge of astronomy at the beginning of this project was embarrassingly basic. I've always loved space, but it's been more of an unshakeable fascination for me rather than a field of study. My first priority was the story. After we had the story, it was about specificity. So, we hit the books! I began a large phase of research with co-story writer, James Ewasiuk, and became more familiar with the field of astronomy and where the world is at right now with the search for habitable planets. We were excited by the upcoming TESS and James Webb Space Telescopes. Total game-changers. We took the accuracy as far as we personally could, and once I finished the first draft, we had several science advisors help take it further. We weren't actually too far off overall, but the experts really helped make everything more specific, and even plausible.

Q: Let's discuss the script development. How long did it take to complete; what was the process?

AS: After Serendipity Point Films picked up the story, it took me about two months to complete the first draft during development. I'm a night owl, so many long nights writing and re-writing, pacing in my underwear, and listening to music. One of the most crucial parts of my process is bouncing ideas off of close creative friends, it helps conquer any creative blocks. After sharing it with our producer, Ari Lantos, we felt we were heading in a really good direction - we were even ready to go to cast and distributors with it. It was all happening so fast at that point, you can imagine how excited I was! And later the script

would evolve so much more after including Patrick J. Adams and Troian Bellisario in the creative conversations.

Q: Did you have any creative inspirations when writing CLARA?

AS: I had quite a few creative inspirations at the time of writing CLARA. Movies like Interstellar got me thinking about space again - it encouraged me to look up! And then there's films like The Imitation Game and Good Will Hunting about exceptional, broken individuals with very human struggles, and the potential to make breakthroughs. Watching films like those and listening to their soundtracks gave me a cocktail of inspiration comprised of scientific discovery and a deeper exploration into being human.

Q: Were you ever concerned some of the scientific dialogue would be too challenging for general audiences to follow?

AS: There is quite a bit of scientific dialog in the film, but it was never a concern of mine that it would be too challenging for audiences to follow. What's most important is that the audience trusts that the character's voice is real - if they're an expert they should talk like experts. Audiences can still follow complex topics based on how characters react and their body language. We all speak body language. I am confident viewers will grasp a surface level knowledge of the topics discussed in the film.

Q: Tell us how you met producer, Ari Lantos; and the process of getting the script greenlit to go to camera?

AS: I met Ari, our producer, in 2013 at the Banff World Media Festival. I was there as a finalist in a nationwide film competition, the Cinecoup Film Accelerator, pitching in front of a big room of producers, Ari being one of them. His father, Robert Lantos, was on the judge's panel. We reconnected two years later once I moved to Toronto, and I met with Ari to discuss a new project (CLARA). We were immediately on the same wavelength and wanted to make the same kinds of movies. Been brothers ever since.

Q: Lead cast, Patrick J. Adams and Troian Bellisario seem to have been a natural fit to play 'Isaac' and 'Clara'. Can you tell us how casting came about on this film?

AS: Patrick J. Adams was actually the very first person we approached for the role of Isaac Bruno. Patrick connected with the story instantly, and was already coming to us with ideas of how we could go deeper into his character. Patrick has such a love for character. I knew from very early on we were going to make a great team.

I developed the further drafts of the script with him on board over the next few months as we were trying to cast Clara, but then we ran into scheduling conflicts with Patrick and eventually lost him from the project. I knew in my heart Patrick was the only person I wanted to make this film with, so I convinced Ari to push the film to Spring. Patrick was back on board, and I met Troian through him.

Troian gave me some of the best script notes I've ever received. She's a born storyteller herself. After getting to know her better, there were certain qualities that I saw in her that were distinctly Clara - intelligence, warmth, edge - and then it hit me. She's Clara! I offered her the role and she was ready for

the challenge. I was very fortunate to find such a special collaboration with these two actors. I love them to bits. For both Troian and Patrick, what I really needed to do as a writer/director was give them space to play - things only got better once these two were in the mix.



Clara (played by Troian Bellisario) and Isaac (played by Patrick J. Adams) in a scene from CLARA. Photo credit Sabrina Lantos.

Q: Before shooting, did you map everything out with cinematographer, Nick Haight? What was that process like for you?

AS: I met our cinematographer, Nick Haight, through Patrick who highly recommended him. They shot a short together called We Are Here and the cinematography was fantastic - so I knew Nick had a great eye to begin with. Nick and I were instantly on the same page, same vibe. He's very easy going and ambitious, a great creative wingman. We had a very aggressive 19-day production schedule and his balance of efficiency and quality was just what we needed.

Q: What was your biggest obstacle getting this film made?

The biggest obstacle was doing the ambitious premise and reveals in the film justice on such a tiny budget. My solution to this was to look at what excites me most about scientific discovery - the implications! My aim is to get viewers excited about the idea and implications of discovery, and then reveal just the right amount of information for a payoff, but letting imaginations run wild. This allowed me to show and tell less, which is a strength. Viewers can form their own opinion, rather than us spelling it out for them.

Q: You made a sci-fi/drama without an inflated budget, forgoing big CGI effects and green screens; while managing to tackle big, astronomical ideas. This is a huge accomplishment for a young director. Can you give us some insights to how you accomplished this?

AS: We had a huge task ahead of us to make a sci-fi film without the budget many sci-fi films have. To give you an idea of how small it is, we had 1.5% of the budget Contact had. Yet, we managed to make a film that feels bigger than its budget, both thematically and visually. I had two tricks up

my sleeve: focus on story and character, and do your own VFX. Many big budget films favour spectacle over story/character which results in desensitization to fancy bombarding visuals, and limited emotional resonance. I embraced our budgetary limitations and used spectacle sparingly to frame an intimate story in a big way. I'm a self-taught VFX artist (I was a nerd in high school), so I did the majority of the VFX from home which saved us costs, and resulted in some very stunning cosmic imagery. The secret sauce to making this film: keep it human, save spectacle for the right moments.

I used this same approach in my first shoe-string budget feature *The Rocket List*. On a budget of 7k, the film was about a group of friends who go on a road trip to cross off their bucket lists before the world ends. Instead of focusing on the Armageddon, city-wide panic, military must prevent disaster, I focused on four friends in a van who get away from all that to live their lives before the end. You still get the effect of an "end of the world" movie, but now it's something more human and relatable. It was about friendship.

Q: Let's talk about your age. How did it feel being in the director's seat on film like this at such a young age?

I was 20 years old when I first pitched the story of Clara, and finally had the opportunity to direct it shortly after turning 22. The topic of my age was unavoidable, and I was up against some of doubt and apprehension from others. Luckily, I had a producer that believed in me - Ari Lantos had my back from day one. I knew if I was going to pull this off, I couldn't be scared - I have a story to tell, and that's what I'll do. As long as my heart is in this, I'm qualified. The fear went away. I actually wasn't nervous during the first few days of production, only excited. It all went smoothly and there were no disasters! I'm very proud of what our team was able to achieve, and grateful that they trusted me as their director. There's still a lot for me to learn, but I'm ready to learn it.

Q: Let's discuss Patrick J. Adams' performance as Isaac

AS: I love Patrick's performance in this film. He brings an incredibly intensity to Isaac, with a burrowed vulnerability. Isaac is broken when we meet him, and Patrick really sells it - he was so committed to understanding every detail and quirk that could inform his performance. I always trusted him to bring the words on the page to life. Whenever we thought an idea wasn't working in the scene, Patrick was the first to have a solution. He has a very sharp mind, he's truly an intelligent actor. We developed a strong friendship and bond and trust before we starting filming CLARA, so on set, we trusted each other.





Isaac (played by Patrick J. Adams in a scene from CLARA. Photo credit Sabrina Lantos

Q: Let's discuss Troian Bellisario's performance as Clara

AS: Clara is a very unique character because she's grounded in never having her feet on the ground. Troian Bellisario approached the role fearlessly. We faced a challenge with Clara because she can easily be unfairly judged as "the free spirit" on the surface, but truthfully, she's secretly fighting a darkness inside of her, much like Isaac - she's just better at hiding it. Troian is exceptional at tapping into that inner struggle in such a visual way that her character barely talks about it - we see her experience it. Troian also brought such a passion to the details of Clara, a character who has been all over the world. Troian developed a backstory for every item, every piece of clothing she has. It was amazing to see this character become real, piece by piece, through Troian. On top of all that, her real-life charm and intoxicating presence was a seamless transference, which ultimately made this character more special than I could have ever imagined.



Clara (played by Troian Bellisario) in a scene from CLARA. Photo credit Sabrina Lantos

Q: Is there a key message in this film you hope the audiences take away?

AS: The key message I want audiences to take away from the film is to think about where we are, and how special it is that we're here. Think about what you're connected to here - places, things, people - and appreciate that connectivity.

## CAST BIOS

### **PATRICK J. ADAMS | Isaac Bruno**

A “master artist” according to Variety and “tour-de-force” according to Backstage, Patrick J. Adams has starred as a fraudulent lawyer, a superhero, a veteran, a pro tennis player, and dozens of other memorable characters on stage and screen. For seven seasons Adams has charmed audiences worldwide, as Mike Ross in USA’s hit drama, SUITS, a role which garnered him a Screen Actors Guild Award nomination in the category of Outstanding Performance by a Male Actor in a Drama Series.

Patrick will next be seen in Pulse Films’ comedic digital series PILLOW TALK, executive produced by Sharon Horgan (Catastrophe’s) and distributed by Vice. Also this year, Patrick stars in the indie feature comedy, ROOM FOR RENT alongside comedic luminaries Brett Gelman, Mark Little, Stephanie Weir & Mark McKinney.

In 2016, Patrick again starred opposite Bellisario in the Old Globe Theatre’s world premiere production of Anna Ziegler’s THE LAST MATCH, earning critical praise for his performance as Tim, an incredibly talented but deeply flawed pro tennis player. Also that year, he stepped off the Waverider as ‘Hourman’ in The CW/Berlanti/DC action series, LEGENDS OF TOMORROW.

With Zoe Saldana & Jason Isaacs, Adams starred in the 2014 television miniseries ROSEMARY’S BABY, directed by Agnieszka Holland.

Additional television credits include Michael Mann and David Milch’s acclaimed series LUCK, opposite Dustin Hoffman and Michael Gambon, season two of the hit series, ORPHAN BLACK opposite Tatiana Maslany; as well as, LOST, FRIDAY NIGHT LIGHTS, PRETTY LITTLE LIARS, N.C.I.S, LIE TO ME, and FLASH FORWARD.

Adams co-starred in films including the hit comedy OLD SCHOOL, directed by Todd Phillips and 2009 Berlin Film Festival competitor, RAGE directed by internationally renowned filmmaker Sally Potter, in which he appeared alongside Judi Dench, Jude Law, Dianne Wiest and Steve Buscemi. His indie feature work includes, THE WATERHOLE, 2009 Slamdance entry WEATHER GIRL, 6 MONTH RULE, directed by Blayne Weaver and CAR DOGS opposite Academy Award winning actress Octavia Spencer.

Adams maintains strong ties to Southern California theatre. He produced and starred in writer Bill Cain’s (“House of Cards”) acclaimed production of 9 CIRCLES, at the Bootleg Theatre in Los Angeles for which he was awarded a Backstage Garland Award for Best Performance in a Play and nominated for a 2012 Los Angeles Drama Critics Circle award for Lead Performance. He is a member of the Ojai Playwrights Conference, starring in new works by established and developing playwrights. Cain’s “Equivocation” was developed at Ojai and Adams subsequently starred in the celebrated Geffen Playhouse production, which was honored with the 2010 Best Production at the LA Ovation Awards. He made his professional stage debut in the landmark, West Coast premiere of Edward

Albee's THE GOAT OR WHO IS SYLVIA at The Mark Taper Forum, which also took home Best Play at the Ovation Awards. Adams also produced and directed a hit revival of MARAT/SADE for which he accepted Best Production at the L.A. Weekly Theatre Awards.

Originally from Toronto, Adams is a graduate of the University of Southern California.

### **TROIAN BELLISARIO | Clara**

Troian Bellisario is a burgeoning actress, writer and producer best known for her starring role on the acclaimed Freeform smash hit PRETTY LITTLE LIARS. In addition to starring in the show, Troian has taken on the role of director this season. After graduating from Warner Brothers' director's program last June she went on to direct her first episode, which will air on May 23rd, 2017.

After completing her run in THE LAST MATCH at The Old Globe Theater in San Diego, Troian also wrote, produced and stars in the leading role in the independent feature FEED, which is set to premiere on July 18th and marks her first produced, full-length film. She will star in the film opposite Tom Felton and Ben Winchell.

She can also be seen in the indie film, MARTYRS directed by the Goetz Brothers, SISTER CITIES, which premiered on Lifetime, and CONSENT.

Troian also wrote, produced and starred in the short film EXILES, as well as starred in the title role of "Lauren" for one of the WIGS web series focused on sexual assault in the military. On stage, she appeared in "Equivocation" at the Geffen Playhouse in Los Angeles. With The Casitas Group, a theatre company of which she is a founding member, Troian appeared in an exclusive engagement of Martin McDonagh's "The Pillowman," as well as a Sam Shepard double feature: "Fool for Love" and "True West." During her time as a B.F.A at the USC School of Theatre, Troian performed in productions of "The Crucible," "All's Well that Ends Well," "Red Light Winter," "The Complete Female Stage Beauty" and "Cloud 9."

### **ENNIS ESMER | Charlie**

Turkish-born, Toronto-raised Ennis Esmer came to Canada from Ankara, Turkey at the age of three. He trained at Second City while attending the fine arts high school Earl Haig. Esmer made it through three years of theatre training at York University before getting kicked out. He spent much of the 00s working on standup, sketch (with Mustered & Relished) and joke music (as frontman of Calcu-Lator & The Oral Presentation) at various clubs in Toronto.

Ennis Esmer portrays the titular country club's resident tennis professional 'Nash' on the Amazon comedy series Red Oaks opposite Craig Roberts, Paul Reiser, Richard Kind, and Jennifer Grey. The show will shoot its 3rd and final season during the summer of 2017. Esmer also currently has recurring roles on DirecTV's You Me Her, a comedy about polyamory in Portland, Syfy/Space's Dark Matter, Global/Ion's

detective comedy *Private Eyes* with Jason Priestley, and most notably NBC's hit series *Blindspot* as billionaire criminal mastermind & voluptuary 'Rich Dotcom'. Esmer was also part of the ensemble of Toronto actors featured in political thriller *Miss Sloane*, directed by John Madden, and starring Jessica Chastain, Gugu Mbatha-Raw, and Mark Strong.

Before all that, Esmer played the role of 'Oz Bey' on *The Listener*, which ran for five seasons all over Planet Earth. His work on the show earned him an ACTRA Award nomination and multiple Canadian Comedy Award nominations. Esmer co-starred on *The LA Complex*, which aired on the CW in the United States. He has recurred and guest starred on numerous series including FXX's *Man Seeking Woman*, Syfy's *Lost Girl*, USA's *Covert Affairs*, CBC's *Republic Of Doyle*, CW's *Nikita*, TNT's *The Transporter*, among others. Esmer also served as a co-host of the Canadian edition of the game show *Wipeout*, with national treasure Jonathan Torrens.

His independent film work includes *How To Plan An Orgy In A Small Town*, directed by Jeremy LaLonde, which won numerous awards at the Canadian Filmmakers' Festival. Other credits include *Dirty Singles*, directed by Alex Pugsley, *Sex After Kids*, also directed by Jeremy LaLonde, and the breakout hit *Young People Fucking*, marking his first time working with *Blindspot* creator Martin Gero, who directed. The film premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival, where it was named one of the top ten Canadian films of 2007, and Ennis earned a Canadian Comedy Award nomination. He also starred and executive produced the feature *Big News From Grand Rock*, directed & written by Daniel Perlmutter, proving that he can occasionally do a Canadian indie movie that isn't entirely about sex.

Esmer is involved with numerous charities including Youth Without Shelter, a shelter providing support for homeless youth in the GTA, for which he has hosted and otherwise been involved in numerous fundraising events. He has also worked with Live Below The Line, a charity that raises funds to combat extreme poverty by challenging participants to subsist on a food budget of \$1.75 per day for five days. He also plays dodgeball on Sundays where he's considered "decent", and is usually busy freaking out about the Blue Jays or Raptors, depending on the time of year.

## **KRISTEN HAGER | Rebecca**

Originally from Red Lake, Ontario, Canada, Kristen Hager has made quite a name for herself in American and Canadian film and television. Kristen first garnered attention with her supporting roles in the Universal Studios feature film *WANTED*, opposite Angelina Jolie and James McAvoy, and opposite Cate Blanchett and Richard Gere in director Todd Haynes' award winning Bob Dylan biopic, *I'M NOT THERE*. She then starred in the Strause Brothers' Fox feature film *ALIEN VS. PREDATOR: REQUIEM*.

Hager's starring role as the title character in Charles Manson themed thriller *MANSON, MY NAME IS EVIL* received rave reviews after premiering at the 2009 Toronto International Film Festival. Recently, she was seen in the romantic comedy *THE RIGHT KIND OF WRONG*, opposite Ryan Kwanten and Catherine O'Hara and directed by Jeremiah Chechick. The film

premiered at the 2013 Toronto International Film Festival. In 2013 she wrapped starring roles in both the independent films IN EMBRYO opposite Ross McCall, written and directed by Ulrich Thomsen, and the independent thriller TRIGGER. Hager can also be seen in Anton Corbijn's LIFE, opposite Robert Pattinson and Dane DeHaan.

Hager starred on Syfy's hit show "Being Human," where she played the series regular role of "Nora" throughout the show's four-season duration. Other notable television credits include recurring roles on the CBS Series "CSI: Miami," the CW series "Runaway", the CBC series "Wild Roses," Syfy's series "The Expanse," and the Showtime series "Masters of Sex." In 2015, Kristen was cast as the lead role in David Zabel's pilot, "The Adversaries," as well as the lead in Michelle Ashford's TNT pilot, "The Cocaine Project." She was last seen in FOX's "Gotham" as well as the Reelz mini series "After Camelot," playing a troubled Joan Kennedy opposite Matthew Perry and Katie Holmes. She can next be seen in "Condor" for AT&T Audience Network. The 10- episode straight-to-series drama inspired by Paramount's Sydney Pollack 1975 political thriller [Three Days of the Condor](#) is produced by MGM Television and Skydance Television and was developed in association with Paramount TV.

She graduated from York University with an Honours B.F.A. from the Acting Conservatory. She resides in Los Angeles.

## **RH THOMSON | Dr. Rickman**

Acclaimed Canadian stage and screen actor RH Thomson, was awarded in 2015 the very prestigious Governor General's Performing Arts Award for Lifetime Artistic Achievement, and last year, was the recipient of the *2014 ACTRA Toronto Award of Excellence*.

He was made a *Member of the Order of Canada* in 2010 and was awarded an *Honorary Doctorate* from the University of Toronto, Trinity College.

Thomson has earned many accolades throughout his distinguished career, including Gemini Awards for *Glory Enough For All* and *Lotus Eaters*, and a Genie for Will Sly in *If You Could See What I Hear*. In addition to his wins, he has also received nominations for 7 other Gemini Awards, a Juno Award and a Jessie Award.

Known for playing the bumbling Jasper Dale on *The Road To Avonlea* series opposite Sarah Polley, Thomson was also seen as Tom Hardwick in the CBC mini-series, *The Englishman's Boy* directed by John N. Smith, and can be seen in *Athanasia*, a film shot with Panos Karkanevatos, and in Atom Egoyan's highly-esteemed feature, *Chloe* opposite Julianne Moore.

His many stage roles have won him countrywide acclaim as well as a *Dora Mavor Moore Award*, a *Toronto Drama Bench Award*, and the prestigious *Gascon-Thomas Award, Artist of Distinction* from the National Theatre School in 1997. In 2010 he received the *Barbara Hamilton Memorial Award* "for excellence as well as for serving as an arts advocate and ambassador".

In between his busy schedule, Thomson has developed work of his own for television, winning a Gemini for Best News and Current Affairs in 2003 for *The Lost Boys* based on his great-uncles' experiences in World War I. He co-produced the 2008 installation *Vigile 1914-1918 Vigil*, individually naming the 68,000 Canadians killed in WWI. His most recent passion-project, *The World Remembers-Le Monde se Souvient*, is a five-year international centenary project individually naming the millions killed in WWI.

Recently, Mr. Thomson directed *The Crucible* at Theatre Calgary and filmed guest star roles in the Showcase series *King*, the CBC series' *Republic of Doyle* and *Cracked* and starred opposite Toni Collette and Michael Sheen in Dennis Lee's feature film *Jesus Henry Christ*.

In 2016, Thomson was nominated for a Dora Award, for his amazing portrayal of 'Edouard', a brilliant professor, slipping into dementia, in *You Will Remember Me*. He is currently shooting the second season of the latest adaptation of *Anne of Green Gables*; Anne, playing the indelible 'Matthew Cuthbert' in the CBC/Netflix series.

## **CREW BIOS**

### **AKASH SHERMAN | Director/Writer**

Akash Sherman is a Toronto-based writer and director with a strong background in visual effects. At just 22 years of age, Akash was named one of Playback Magazine's *5 Filmmakers 2 Watch in 2017*, with two award-winning short films under his belt and an array of commercial and VR content. Akash grew up making films in his hometown of Edmonton, Alberta, and made his festival debut at age 16 with his heartfelt short film *FOR THEM, FOR YOU* which won the "Best Narrative" and "Best of Fest" awards at the 2011 Future of Cinema Film Festival in Michigan. After his second short film *A TEACHING GAME* took home a Jury Award at the 2012 Edmonton International Film Festival, Akash became a Top 5 finalist in the nationwide 2013 Cinecoup Film Accelerator competition with his revolution epic, *UPRISING*. In 2014, Akash collaborated with the City of Edmonton on his first documentary *THROUGH MY EYES* which resulted in a local call to action to eliminate youth homelessness. By 2015 Akash had begun developing *CLARA* with producer Ari Lantos at the tender age of just 20, while concurrently working full-time as a VFX artist and VR editor to make ends-meet. With the casting of Patrick J. Adams (*Suits*) and Troian Bellisario (*Pretty Little Liars*), *CLARA* was green-lit for production in 2017; marking the beginning of a new chapter in Akash's career as a filmmaker by becoming his first project to attract distribution and a guaranteed theatrical release in 2018.

### **ARI LANTOS | Producer**

In his 10-year career as a Producer with Toronto-based Serendipity Point Films Ari's producing credits have spanned across a wide range of genres in both film and television. His most notable credits include the multiple Canadian Screen Award-winning films *Remember*, directed by Atom Egoyan and starring Academy Award winners Christopher Plummer and Martin Landau; and *Barney's Version* starring two-time Academy Award winner Dustin Hoffman and Paul Giamatti who won the Golden Globe Award for best male actor for his portrayal of the titular character. His additional film credits include the romantic comedy *The Right Kind of Wrong*; the genre-bending horror musical *Stage Fright*; and the comedic thriller *Real Time*, starring Jay Baruchel and Randy Quaid. In June of 2017 Ari departed Serendipity Point Films to launch his new production company Story Hawk Pictures, through which he continues to develop and produce both film and television. *CLARA* marks the 8th feature film that Ari has produced, and the first on which he is credited as the sole producer.

### **NICK HAIGHT | Cinematographer**

Nick Haight is a cinematographer based in Toronto, Canada. He graduated from the image arts program at Ryerson University in 2013 and has since worked on a large number of short films, commercials, television series and music videos.

### **MATT LYON | Editor**

Matt Lyon began making movies at the age of eight with some plasticine and a super-8 camera. He's been hooked ever since.



After completing the film production program at Concordia University, he worked as an assistant editor on the Disney produced animated feature, *The Wild*, going on to cut several half hour animated series for some of Canada's largest animation studios.

In 2008, Matt edited his first feature, *You Might As Well Live* with producer Ari Lantos and long time collaborator Simon Ennis. The film was named the "Dos Equis Most Interesting Film" at the 2009 Slamdance film festival. He teamed up with Ennis again in 2011 for the feature length documentary, *Lunarcy!*. Premiering at the 2012 Toronto International Film Festival, it went on to become a fan favourite at IDFA and SXSW.

After completing a residency at the Canadian Film Centre Editors Lab, Matt cut *Bang Bang Baby* for visionary director Jeffrey St. Jules. It was awarded best Canadian debut film at TIFF 2014, and took home the Claude Jutra Award for best debut feature at the Canadian Screen Awards. Afterwards, he cut two seasons of *The Leaf: Blueprint*, a behind-the-scenes documentary series following the iconic Toronto Maple Leafs hockey franchise. *Clara* marks Matt's first collaboration with director Akash Sherman.

### **CHRIS CRANE | Production Designer**

Born and raised in Toronto, Ontario, Chris Crane first pursued a career in photography, then switched to window display. From there he made the jump Set Decoration and eventually into Production Design. As well as Production Designing season one and two of *Blood & Water*, he has Production Designed the feature film *Operation Avalanche* (Sundance 2016), *The Other Half* (SXSW 2016), *The Rainbow Kid* (TIFF 2015) and *I'll Follow You Down* (Fantasia 2013). He continues to live and work in Toronto.

### **JONATHAN KAWCHUCK | Composer**

Jonathan Kawchuk is an award-winning composer from Alberta. He has scored the feature films, *Memento Mori* (National Film Board of Canada), for which he was nominated for a 2017 Alberta Film and Television Award in the category of Best Original Musical Score (Non-fiction Over 30 Minutes), and *Clara* (Serendipity Point Films), as well as the Norwegian documentary web series, *Fra Ungdommen*, and a video feature for *Vogue Italia*. Kawchuk has experience writing internationally for multiple short films, theatre projects, and sound installations. As a technician, he worked on albums for Nico Muhly and Ben Frost, and as an assistant sound tech for the Philip Glass Ensemble on *Music in 12 Parts*, in London. He holds a composition residency at the Canadian Film Centre.

Kawchuk also is signed to Paper Bag Records as a recording artist. For his debut album, he lived and recorded in natural environments across Europe, North America and Asia. Kawchuk studied at multiple institutions and completed his Bachelor of Music, Honours, First Class, at the Liverpool Institute of Performing Arts. In addition to his formal education, he has held a recording internship in Iceland, learned gamelan in Indonesia, and studied wildlife field recording in England under Chris Watson (*Frozen Planet*, *Nova*)

## **CREDITS**

Written & Directed by  
Akash Sherman Produced  
by  
Ari Lantos

Executive Producers

Anant Singh  
Mark Musselman

Produced with the Participation of

Telefilm Canada Produced with the  
Participation of Ontario Media Development  
Corporation

Co-Executive Producer

Brian Cox

Story by

Akash Sherman and James Ewasiuk

Starring Patrick J.  
Adams Starring  
Troian Bellisario

Ennis Esmer Kristen  
Hager R.H. Thomson  
Jennifer Dale

Line Producer

Lori Fischburg

Director of Photography

Nick Haight

Production Designer

Chris Crane

Editor

Matt Lyon

Music by

Jonathan Kawchuk

Costume Designer

Kendra Terpenning

Casting by

Larissa Mair