

Industry Light Productions
and
Chosen Waters Productions
present

PORTRAIT OF A SERIAL MONOGAMIST

Written and Directed by Christina Zeidler and John Mitchell

Official Selection

Frameline 2015
Outfest 2015
Inside Out Festival 2015
BFI Flare 2015

82 mins, Canada, 2015
Language: English

Distribution

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CREDITS

CAST

Diane Flacks	Elsie Neufeld
Carolyn Taylor	Robyn
Vanessa Dunn	Lolli
Gavin Crawford	Morgan
Raoul Bhaneja	Jonathan
Karen Robinson	Karen
Robin Duke	Abby Neufeld
Sabrina Jalees	Sarah
Caroline Gillis	Grace
Shoshana Sperling	Rachel
Dawn Whitwell	Jackie

DIRECTED BY

Christina Zeidler and John Mitchell

WRITTEN BY

Christina Zeidler and John Mitchell

PRODUCERS

Mehernaz Lentin and Christina Zeidler

POST-PRODUCTION PRODUCER

Rick Hannigan, The Rolling Picture Company

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Celiana Cardenas, A.M.C.

EDITOR

Dev Singh

COMPOSER AND MUSIC SUPERVISION

Don Pyle

CASTING DIRECTOR

John Buchan and Jason Knight

SYNOPSIS

Smart, successful, and charming, Elsie is the perfect girlfriend; she also happens to be a serial monogamist, with a long history of broken hearts. When Elsie breaks up with her long-standing girlfriend to pursue another woman, she faces her mother's disapproval, conflicting advice from friends, and the nagging suspicion that she may have made a big mistake.

Set in the Parkdale neighbourhood of Toronto, *Portrait of a Serial Monogamist* invites audiences to peek behind the curtain to a world of smart, funny and relatable queer characters, dealing with the universal complications of modern relationships. Not another coming out story, this is a fresh coming-of-middle-age rom-com.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

In their first feature film, Zeidler and Mitchell create a smart and stylish film that presents an ensemble of funny, talented actors who do not fit the mould of stereotypical romantic comedy leads. The lush visual palette of the film maps a portrait of Toronto not in broad skylines but diligently through the personal landmarks of the characters, revealing a hidden or secret city. Integral to the film's process is the collaboration with queer punk icon Don Pyle, who created the musical score and also sourced the all-queer, female soundtrack, which drives the emotional energy of the film.

Q & A **with Co-Writers/Directors Christina Zeidler & John Mitchell**

What was the inspiration to make Portrait of a Serial Monogamist?

CZ: I play hockey in a women's league, and Johnny came to see one of my games. We were hanging out after, having a beer, and we started talking about the movies that we love, specifically romantic comedies, and how the protagonist is often an emotionally immature guy, who is kind of a jerk, but charming enough that you like him anyway.

JM: I think you'd just re-watched High Fidelity with John Cusack.

CZ: Yes, and I was saying how we always see a guy in that role and how refreshing it would be to see a woman in that role.

JM: I remember the light bulb instantly going off in my head, and saying that if you ever wanted to write that screenplay, I would love to work on it with you. I was drawn to the idea of doing something totally original. I thought it was a great starting point.

CZ: So, we made a pinky swear to write this story together, and see where it took us.

How do the two of you know each other?

CZ: From camp, back in the 80's. Johnny was the drama instructor, and I was the dance teacher.

JM: We bonded over bad choreography. I remember coming up with some ridiculous dance moves together, and thinking, well this person is as silly as I am, therefore we must become lifelong friends.

CZ: Not many people get to work with one of their best friends, so this experience has been pretty special.

The main character is not only a woman, but also a lesbian. Was that part of the initial idea?

JM: Again, that was Christina's suggestion, and I was completely for it, because it made the story even more unique, and I knew it was important to Christina.

CZ: I am a lesbian filmmaker and artist, but I'm also a consumer, it was something that I wanted to see. Often the representation we see on film is someone struggling with their sexuality, sometimes with tragic results. Not to denigrate those films, they are important stories, but that isn't this movie. Nobody dies, and it's not about coming out, it's a universal story about romance, comedy and relationships. We wanted to make a film that felt like an authentic representation of lesbian and queer lives, not hide the fact that it was queer, but at the same time not make a big deal out of that. For sure, that can be a "first world" bubble, but to present that reality for an audience, is still edgy.

JM: It is what is subtly subversive about this movie. It might not seem that way on the surface, because it doesn't appear to be an issue-driven story, but showing a world where being queer is the norm, that's new. Having said that, we also think this movie will have wide appeal, because it's for anyone who enjoys stylish, intelligent romantic comedies, the films we love.

As first-time filmmakers, I imagine it's hard to get a feature made. How were you able to do it?

JM: From talking to other filmmakers, I think it's hard for anyone to get a feature made, but yes it was challenging, for sure.

CZ: We decided to launch an online crowd funding campaign, thinking we would raise the entire budget. Sites like Indiegogo, and Kickstarter are the new model for a lot of filmmakers, because they allow you to go directly to your audience, and ask them to support your film. It's a way for people to be a part of the process, and feel invested, figuratively and literally, in the project.

JM: We were looking at other campaigns, and came across a movie where they shot a trailer before they had the money to make the feature, so they could show people the look, and feel of the movie they were trying to make. That immediately appealed to us, and because we were first-time filmmakers we also felt it was important to show that we were serious, it gave us some credibility, and a chance to practice working together.

CZ: So, we shot a trailer, and used it as part of our campaign. People really liked it, and it did exactly what we hoped it would do, gave everyone a sense of the movie we were trying to make. In fact, through a friend, we were able to have the trailer included with the theatrical release of the Thom Fitzgerald movie "Cloudburst", starring Olympia Dukakis, and Brenda Fricker, so it played all across Canada.

JM: In the end we didn't raise as much as we set out to, but we did raise over thirty thousand dollars, which is a lot, and we were able to demonstrate that there is an audience out there, and it went a long way to helping us get the movie made.

CZ: It helped us when we went to private investors, which is how we ended up raising the rest of the budget.

Tell me about the casting. How did you go about that?

JM: We cast in two stages, the trailer first, so most of the main characters, and then everyone else once we knew the film was a go.

CZ: There are forty-seven characters in this movie.

JM: It is a bit ridiculous. We didn't want to make one of those low budget films with two characters in the same room for two hours. We wanted to make a low budget film that felt, and looked like a big movie, so we decided not to limit ourselves, but maybe we went a little overboard. In hindsight, two characters in a room sounds pretty good.

CZ: That's the next one, two people in a room, with a fifty million dollar budget.

Everyone is really good in the movie, but they aren't household names. Did you reach out to any stars, particularly for the lead role of Elsie?

CZ: We do have Robin Duke from Saturday Night Live, she is famous for her "Mr. T" impressions and "The Whiners", and the old SCTV show. "Crazy Crafts with Molly Earl" was a family favourite, so it was fun to work with her, and she's hilarious in the movie.

JM: We did talk about a couple of name actresses we thought would be good in the lead role.

CZ: But, we didn't want this to become the Hollywood version of lesbians. It was important to cast actors who looked like real people; again it was about the authenticity. I think everyone looks great in the movie, and totally authentic.

JM: There's also incredible talent in Toronto; people who deserve to be household names. Diane Flacks, who plays Elsie, has been doing amazing work for years, both as a performer, and a writer in theatre, television, and radio. I also knew some of the actors from my years in comedy, and theatre, so I reached out to them and fortunately they were interested. The rest we cast with the help of a casting director friend. I think we have a dream cast, and can't wait for audiences to discover that.

CZ: A lot of the actresses said how great it was to be involved in something with so many interesting roles for women. Shoshana Sperling, who plays one of Elsie's friends, is a comic genius, but she actually stopped auditioning because she wasn't getting offered parts, which is crazy, because she is insanely talented.

It's unusual to have two directors. How did that work?

CZ: It was very collaborative. My background is in experimental filmmaking, and John comes from the theatre, so he has a lot of experience working with actors, and I have a lot of experience making short films. We were lucky to have some pros on our side: our Producer Mehernaz Lentin, an experienced DP, Celiana Cardenas and our Composer Don Pyle (a queer icon, who wrote the theme song for Queer As Folk) who all contributed to raising the quality of the film overall.

JM: Christina is a very visual filmmaker, and has a wonderful sense of style. Our skills complimented each other, and it was fun making this together. We sometimes refer to our movie as a coming of middle age story, and the two of us had each wanted to make a feature for a very long time, but for whatever reason neither of us had, so in many ways this movie is our own coming of middle age story.

Toronto is almost another character in the movie. Why was that important?

JM: One of our influences was Woody Allen, particularly Manhattan, and we were interested in the idea of making Toronto a character. Toronto isn't New York, of course, and we didn't want to disguise that, turn the city into something it isn't. Nor were we interested in doing a travelogue of familiar landmarks. We wanted to show Toronto the way we see it, give audiences an insider's view; the secret city, as we call it.

CZ: Architecturally, a lot Toronto looks the same. Our cinematographer mentioned that what is so unique about Toronto is that the class differences are less apparent than in other cities, and what makes the city interesting are the people. We set the movie in Parkdale, because it's a kind of a microcosm of the city, with people from many cultures, and socio-economic backgrounds living in one neighbourhood.

JM: Toronto is also undergoing a tremendous transformation at the moment; there are more cranes in the sky than any other North American city. It feels like the city is changing for the sake of change, and we thought that was a nice metaphor for Elsie, moving forward without really knowing where she is going.

Music plays an important role in the film. Can you tell us about your approach?

JM Music is important to both of us, as it is to our lead character Elsie, she works for a cultural magazine. We are both musicians and have performed a lot in our city over the years. We wanted to bring a flavor of the Toronto music scene to the film.

CZ We were incredibly lucky to work with queer punk music icon Don Pyle. Don has been in many seminal queer bands and is also somewhat of a queer punk historian. He recently published a book called “Trouble in the Camera Club” a collection of his photos from the 70ies and 80ies chronicling the Punk scene in Toronto.

JM We wanted to find a sound for our city and something that focused on queer and women’s voices.

CZ Don was able to reach out to some incredible artists, music that will be new to most audiences. He also created such an icon soundtrack.

JM There is a bit of a tradition in Romantic Comedies of having kick ass soundtracks.

CZ Yeah, Don nailed it.

What are your hopes for the movie?

JM: That people will find it entertaining, and intelligent, laugh a bit, get caught up in the romance of the story.

CZ: I hope we are able to reach our core audience, and that they embrace the movie. If we can do that, than this will have been a success, and I think the movie can expand from there, because I do believe it has the potential for wide appeal.

ABOUT THE CAST

Diane Flacks (Elsie Neufeld)

Diane Flacks is a Canadian comedic actress, screenwriter and playwright. She has co-written and starred in numerous television series, including Working The Engles, The Broad Side, P.R., Behind the Scenes and Listen Missy. She has also written for The Kids in the Hall, and acted in Walter Ego and Moose TV. Her plays have included Sibs (co written with Richard Greenblatt), Smudge (with Alex Bulmer) Gravity Calling and The Waiting Room.

She has also written and performed four one-woman stage shows: Myth Me, By a Thread, Random Acts and Bear With Me. Bear With Me was based on the book of the same name published by MacMillan Stewart in 2005, about pregnancy and new motherhood through a humorous lens. In 2007, Flacks became a featured columnist with the Toronto Star, and is a regular contributor for the CBC Radio show Definitely Not the Opera.

Carolyn Taylor (Robin Woodyard)

Carolyn Taylor is a Second City alumnus. Winner of five Canadian Comedy Awards, one Canadian Screenwriters Award and nominated for two Geminis, Carolyn has written for This Hour Has 22 Minutes and The Hour with George Stroumboulopoulos. Her acting credits include Queer as Folk, Wildcard, Sue Thomas FBI and the feature film, 19 Months. Carolyn is part of the musical art collective MINTZ and makes hundreds of tiny wax sculptures that she calls “psychic byproducts” of conversation.

Vanessa Dunn (Lolli)

Vanessa Dunn is an actor and writer from Toronto. She has appeared on stage for Hart House Theatre, AGYU, Harbourfront Centre (HATCH Festival) and Summerworks Festival. Her television and film credits include ALPHAS (NBC) and Scott Pilgrim vs. the World. Vanessa is the lead singer of feminist art rock band, Vag Halen.

Sabrina Jalees (Sarah)

Sabrina Jalees is a comedian, actor, keynote speaker and writer based in Brooklyn. As a stand up she's toured North America, England, South Africa and played the prestigious Just For Laughs Festival several times. Currently, she's a recurring guest on Comedy Central's The Nightly Show With Larry Wilmore, the host of the 300k+ listened to weekly serial My Sexy Podcast and developing the next iteration of her webseries. She's appeared on Last Comic Standing, Flashpoint, MTV'S Failosophy, VH1's Best Week Ever. She's the Gemini and International Emmy nominated host of YTV's In Real Life. Born and raised in Canada, Sabrina's early years in comedy were capsuled during her decade long run as a staple of Much Music's pop culture tear-down show Video On Trial. Her TED talk on the importance of honesty and embracing diversity was featured on several sites including Upworthy.

Caroline Gillis (Grace)

Caroline has been an actress in Toronto for over twenty years. She originally hails from Cape Breton and has worked extensively with her fellow Cape Bretoner and friend, Daniel MacIvor. She has originated roles in many of his plays including See Bob Run back in 1987. She has worked in theatres across Canada from the Belfry in Victoria to Neptune in Halifax, as well as stints at the Blyth Festival and the Stratford Festival. Most recently she was a member of the English Theatre Company at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa. Her television work has included: SLINGS AND ARROWS and THIS IS WONDERLAND. Her film credits include: MONKEY WARFARE and HIGHWAY 61.

Shoshana Sperling (Rachel)

Comic genius Shoshana Sperling is a Toronto writer and performer who has given us character-rich plays, television and live comedic monologues. Queer audiences will remember her hilarious performance in Cassandra Nicolaou's Interviews with my Next Girlfriend. Shoshana performs with her partner musician Maury LaFoy in Monkey Bunch named "The Rolling Stones for the pre-school set" by Toronto Life.

Dawn Whitwell (Jackie)

Rated one of America's Funniest Lesbians by Curve magazine, Dawn is taking her "subversive, slacker-next-door wit" on the road last summer for a second time as part of the legendary Edinburgh Festival Fringe. Recently Whitwell was featured at Boston's Women In Comedy Festival and has also appeared at Gotham and Comic Strip Live in New York. Dawn is most proud to have founded Comedy Girl, an all-girl standup outfit in Toronto.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

Christina Zeidler (Writer/Director)

Christina Zeidler is a cross-discipline artist whose practice is informed by creative collaboration. She has over thirty short film and video titles in distribution, which have shown internationally at festivals and appeared on television and the web. "Portrait of a Serial Monogamist" is her first feature film. Her visual art and design work have shown in group and solo shows including features at IIDEX, bulthaup showroom, Textile Museum of Canada, multiple universities across Canada (including a feature show at OCAD for Nuit Blanche), and at MADE and Katherine Mulherin Art Projects in Toronto. Zeidler is one half of the euro-electronica-pop-diva sensation "ina unt ina" and part of the high concept art band "Mintz".

As a curator and entrepreneur she is interested in building trust with cultural communities and communities of artists by creating space for people to engage in creative risk taking. She is the "chief alchemist" of The Gladstone Hotel in Toronto, Canada. Wearing the dual hats of developer and entrepreneur, Zeidler set out in 2003 to renovate and revitalize the building using a community based approach. Her approach to management is distinctly feminist as The Gladstone Hotel upholds a strong anti-oppression framework through its operations. She is the creator of the "Artist Designed Room Project" using local artist/designers to implement individually designed hotel rooms, even creating a room herself entitled "snapshot". With 37 unique artist designed hotel rooms, a multi-use second floor, a restaurant and two bars, The Gladstone Hotel is more than just a hotel, it is a hub for the arts which fosters the local community while providing instant access to the arts scene for those traveling to Toronto. In her spare time Christina engages in as much community activism as possible.

John Mitchell (Writer/Director)

John Mitchell is a writer and award-winning director who started his career as one half of the cult 90's musical comedy duo, Brock & John. Mitchell spent two years at the famed Second City in Toronto. He has written and directed several musical comedies and was one of the creators and early writers of, The Drowsy Chaperone (originating the role of "The Groom"), which went on to win 5 Tony Awards on Broadway. He is currently in post-production for his documentary, Waiting For Ishtar, a love letter to Elaine May's much-maligned comedy starring Dustin Hoffman and Warren Beatty.

Mehernaz Lentin (Producer)

As an independent producer, Mehernaz Lentin has worked with some of Canada's leading filmmakers bringing award-winning, innovative dramas and documentary films to theatrical and television markets in Canada and around-the-world. Projects include: feature film, HEAVEN ON EARTH, which was selected as Canada's Top Ten by TIFF 2008, by Oscar nominee Deepa Mehta; feature-length documentaries include INVISIBLE CITY by Oscar nominee, Hubert Davis, winner of the Hot Doc's 2009 Best Canadian Feature Award, which she also co-wrote; TOXIC TRESPASS by Barri Cohen, winner of the 2008 Writer's Guild of Canada Best Documentary Award; one-hour documentary 24 HOUR CAB-RIDE for the CBC's The Lens, which she co-wrote and co-directed; short dramatic films A SHORT FILM ABOUT FALLING a

collaboration between Peter Lynch and internationally renown artist Max Dean and TRAVELLING MEDICINE SHOW by Amnon Buchbinder.

Lentin co-produced THE REPUBLIC OF LOVE (2002 Canada/U.K co-production) a feature adaptation of Pulitzer prize-winning novelist Carol Shield's novel by the same name. The film was co-written by Esta Spalding and Deepa Mehta and directed by Deepa Mehta. Lentin Line-Produced BOLLYWOOD/HOLLYWOOD (2001), also written and directed by Deepa Mehta, the film went on to become one of Canada's highest grossing box-office hits. Lentin's first feature as producer was the award-winning feature SKIN DEEP (1995) by Midi Onodera, which was co-produced with the National Film Board of Canada. She has produced over half a dozen dramatic and performing arts based films, including ALPHA GIRLS, a 75-minute inter-active multi-platform project by Midi Onodera.

Celiana Cardenas (Director of Photography)

Born in México City, Celiana graduated from El Centro de Capacitación Cinematográfica (CCC) in México City, attaining her Bachelor Degree as Director of Photography. After traveling for 3 years with the T.V. series Sweating Bullets (México, Israel, South Africa) she lived in Los Angeles, California until 2001. She studied at the University of California (UCLA), taking a Master Degree in the "Painting with Light" program. She has worked with such artists from the New Mexican Cinema as Emmanuel Lubesky A.M.C., A.S.C., Rodrigo Prieto A.M.C., A.S.C., Guillermo Granillo A.M.C., A.E.C. Henner Hoffman A.M.C. Xavier Pérez Grobet A.M.C., and A.S.C. among others.

In 2010 Celiana moved to Toronto. Since then, she has shot 3 Canadian Features Films, DOP third season of a Web Series, while continuing her career in Latin America. In 2012, she attended TIFF to compete for best Canadian Feature film with "Picture Day".

Don Pyle (Composer and Music Supervision)

Don Pyle is a Toronto musician, producer and artist. He's released thirteen albums and dozens of singles with the various groups he has been a member of, including Black Heel Marks, The Filthy Gaze of Europe, Shadowy Men on a Shadowy Planet, Phono-Comb, Greek Buck, and Fifth Column.

As producer and/or engineer, his credits include releases by The Sadies, Andre Williams, John Doe, Tied To The Branches, Soupcans, Toronto Homicide Squad, synth-punks Cellphone, and forthcoming LPs by SF band Flesh World, and Hamilton's TV Freaks.

Collaboratively or solo, film scores include six for Wrik Mead, two feature films and a number of shorts for John Greyson, Derek von Essen - and with Shadowy Men, the TV series Kids in the Hall. He created sound designs for Caroline Azar and GB Jones's installation The Bruised Garden, Simone Jones's Projektor and Kevin Hegge's feature documentary She Said Boom: The Story of Fifth Column, which he also mixed. He has just completed the score for Christina Zeidler and John Mitchell's feature Portrait of a Serial Monogamist, for which he also acted as Music Supervisor.

His book *Trouble In The Camera Club*, published by ECW Press in 2011, documents his photographs and experiences of the birth of punk in Toronto from 1976 - 1980. His photos have appeared in numerous publications, including the covers of Liz Worth's oral history of Toronto punk, *Treat Me Like Dirt* (ECW Press), and Geoff Pevere's meditation on *Teenage Head, Gods of The Hammer* (Coach House).

Dev Singh (Editor)

Dev Singh went Queen's University earning a BSc. in Biochemistry. After working and spending a year abroad, including 8 months in India and Nepal, he attended the Ryerson Film Studies program in Toronto, Canada. Along the way to becoming an editor he worked as an assistant editor and VFX editorial liaison and coordinator on movies such as *Resident Evil - Apocalypse*, *Four Brothers*, *The Ice Harvest*, *The Greatest Game Ever Played* and *Assault on Precinct 13*. Singh attended the prestigious Canadian Film Centre's Editor's Program in 2009-2010. He edited *PICTURE DAY* (TIFF '12, d. Kate Melville), winner of the 2012 BORSOS Prize for Best Canadian Film and winner of the 2013 Audience Award at River Run International Film Festival and for which I was nominated for a Canadian Cinema Editor's Best Editing in a Feature Film. In 2012, Singh was named one of *PLAYBACK* magazine's 10 to Watch. He has also edited two interactive transmedia projects for *The Secret Location*, Endgame Interactive, Winner of a 2012 International Digital Emmy and nominated for a Gemini '11 Best Cross Platform Program - Fiction and Stanfield's "Guy at Home", which was nominated for a SXSW '11 Audience Award. Recently Dev edited *BACKCOUNTRY* which premiered at the 2014 Toronto International Film Festival, and had its European Premiere at the 2014 Stiges Film Festival.