

Press Notes



www.9livesofmara.com

Press Contact: Spirited PR / Polly Show pollypr@gmail.com Cell: 213 500 5936 Fax: 323 460 6033

Distribution Contact: Big Bang Films / Jina Panebianco
jinapanebianco@gmail.com Cell: 310 663 4879 Fax: 310 626 9450

Full Synopsis

What lies in the darkness where the lines of madness and malevolence intersect?

Twelve-year-old Robin is in turmoil following the death of his mother. As his distant father throws himself into work, Robin must prematurely become the man of the house, a parentified child caring for his younger sister.

This is when *she* appears, an amorous intruder threatening to invade his home and bewitch his dad.

This darkly sexual and mysterious woman appears hell-bent on becoming the children's stepmother—something young Robin refuses to accept. Just the smell of her perfume is enough to turn the fragile boy's stomach. Who is this creature? What is she? His answers lie in the darker shade of the supernatural.

After devouring the ancient tome on the history of witchcraft, the *MALLEUS MALEFICARUM*, Robin begins to notice his stepmother Maria's strange habits are in terrifying alignment with those of a witch. His fear for both himself and his family overwhelms him as he becomes dangerously obsessed with destroying this pernicious threat.

Encouraging him all the way is his best friend Larry, a foul-mouthed Iago to Robin's Othello. Larry's always on hand with a scary comic book or urban legend to further goad Robin in his murderous beliefs. But there is far more to both Larry and Maria than meets the eye. Thus begins Robin's inextricable path toward insanity and murder.

In the end, we must decide if Robin's troubled mind fabricated a monster, or is there something far more sinister afoot just beyond our thin veil of reality....

Indian director Balaji K. Kumar's first feature, *9 LIVES OF MARA*, comfortably stands in a genre all its own—one best described as Fairytale Noir. Using innovative visual techniques amid haunting characters, Kumar keeps us thinking long after the lights come up with this slick and haunting Oedipal tale with Lovecraftian elements.



Short Synopsis

Twelve-year-old Robin is in turmoil following the death of his mother. This is when *she* appears, an amorous intruder threatening to invade his home and bewitch his dad. This darkly sexual and mysterious woman appears hell-bent on becoming the children's stepmother— something young Robin refuses to accept.

Encouraging him all the way is his best friend Larry, a foul-mouthed Iago to Robin's Othello. Larry's always on hand with a scary comic book or urban legend to further goad Robin in his murderous beliefs. But there is far more to both Larry and the intruder than meets the eye. Thus begins Robin's inextricable path toward insanity and murder.

Using innovative visual techniques, director Balaji K. Kumar keeps us guessing with this slick and haunting Oedipal tale, *9 LIVES OF MARA*, which speaks to our darkest fears of madness and malevolence.



Super Short Synopsis

Twelve-year-old Robin is in turmoil following the death of his mother when his father brings home another woman. Convinced this dark, mysterious woman is a witch, Robin and his best friend Larry hatch a plan to get rid of her. But there is far more to both Larry and Maria than meets the eye.

Production History

9 LIVES OF MARA came into being through the sheer force of will exerted by its primary filmmakers. Director Balaji K. Kumar and producer Jina Panebianco, energized by their recent win for “Best Trailer, No Movie” at the Golden Trailer Awards, were determined to see a worthwhile project hit the big screen.

Screenwriter Eric Massey and Balaji donned their collective thinking caps and the story of a modern-day witch and an insane 12-year-old boy quickly formed. The script was completed within 3 ½ weeks—fast by anyone’s standards. Based on its strengths, money followed just as quickly, and the entire production was fully funded within three months.

But a funded production is nothing without a cast, and the film needed a strong one to breathe life into the complex dialogue and planned visual subtleties.

As Balaji and Jina began sending the script out for casting, one thing was certain: Getting the right fit for the role of the Documentarian was paramount. Everyone was in agreement. There was no one else to play this role but Patrick Bauchau. Originally from Belgium, Patrick began his career in the French New Wave Cinema and has gone on to star in over 100 productions, including *THE FIVE OBSTRUCTIONS*, *SECRETARY*, *PANIC ROOM*, and *RAY*.

Casting the lead children presented more of a challenge. They had to be smart and edgy, but still kids underneath it all. A conscious decision was made early on to avoid the precocious “miniature adults” effect. Bret Loehr (*IDENTITY/E.R.*), Troy Gentile (*GOOD LUCK CHUCK/NACHO LIBRE/TENACIOUS D IN THE PICK OF DESTINY*) and Aspen Payge (*COLD CASE/WITHOUT A TRACE*) were a grand slam home run for the film, each giving rich performances that belied their young years.

The same effect was true for the role of Older Robin. Chad Donella (*HATE CRIME/FINAL DESTINATION*) gave the director and producer chills as they listened to his voiceovers one hot afternoon in the production parking lot. Next came the pivotal role of Maria or “the Mara.” Balaji had a very specific idea in mind for who this character should be. And when Pollyanna McIntosh (*HEADSPACE/ SEX AND DEATH 101*) walked through the casting door, there was never a question—she was the Mara. Her consummate performance and style sold everyone immediately.

Production began with shooting Patrick’s scenes. The director and producer had previously met with him several times. After speaking with Balaji about the role, Patrick was convinced it was something he could not pass up. To help stretch the film’s budget, while retaining the right aesthetics, Patrick’s portion of the film was shot on Super 16mm. This intentionally imbued the film with a rough and gritty appearance, much like that of a real documentary. (The rest of the movie was shot on Panavision 35mm.)

After two days of smooth shooting with Patrick, the real work began. Shooting on a low budget is tough. But shooting a complex, atmospheric story in 18 days with a cast that mixes animals and children breaks every rule in the low-budget filmmaking handbook. That was the Herculean task that lay before the debuting director, however.

To accomplish this, every facet of the movie—from storyboards to craft service—had to be analyzed and planned out meticulously. Reflecting this work ethic, Kumar met with cinematographer, Joseph Rubinstein, for almost a month as they detailed every shot, every lens, and every lighting choice.

To stretch the budget even further, a digital SLR camera was employed to fill the gap. Its photos, along with a proprietary algorithm, were used in Final Cut to give the appearance that the stills were in motion. Nearly 10% of the film was shot this way, proving to be both frugal and cinematically effective.

The tight shooting schedule mandated that smart choices had to be made on the fly. This granted little margin for error, with only two – three takes at best—an impossible standard to achieve unless working with true professionals. Time restrictions placed on working with children were even crueler. Some shots included one child speaking and reacting with another who wasn't even on-set at the time.

In the end, the film was completed—on-time and under budget. It was the result of several determined first-time filmmakers entering, conquering, and—in the end—relishing their baptism by fire. 9 LIVES OF MARA stands as a testament to their raw determination and careful planning, resulting in a film for all to enjoy.



Filmmaker Biographies

Balaji K. Kumar (Director/Co-Writer/Producer)

Balaji K. Kumar is an artist, photographer, visual designer, director, writer, and producer. Born and raised in India, Kumar worked as an assistant creative director for Chandrodaya Art Films, the company responsible for producing OKA OORI KATHA, which won "Grand Jury" prizes in festivals all over the world, including the London Film Festival, Berlin Film Festival, Yugoslavian Film Festival, and Melbourne Film Festival.

Before enrolling at UCLA to study advanced cinematography, Balaji attended an engineering college, affiliated to the International University of Missouri. There he learned drafting techniques and architectural rendering/model making.

Combining his skills as an artist, photographer and draftsman, Balaji began to work as a storyboard consultant for advertising firms including, Ogilvy Benson and Mather, J Walter Thompson, and Saatchi and Saatchi.

Having acquired a good working knowledge in all facets of filmmaking, Balaji continued to work as a storyboard artist and visual designer, conceptualizing and visualizing sequences for motion pictures and television shows in the United States and Europe. Some of the films he has worked on include the features TERMINATOR 2, PLAYING WITH ANGER, and ENDANGERED.

Armed with this collective knowledge, Balaji prepared to fulfill his life long dream of directing films. He shot a 35mm promo trailer for his original screenplay TWELVE TWISTED TRICKS, which won the fourth annual Golden Trailer Awards as "Best Trailer, No Movie."

9 LIVES OF MARA is his feature directorial debut.



Eric Massey (Co-Writer)

Eric Massey is a versatile author of screenplays, commercials, and books with a career spanning over a decade.

Eric has written several contracted screenplays. He also provided consultation and script revisions for HAUNTED FOREST, an ecological horror film directed by renowned artist Mauro Borrelli and picked up by Lionsgate.

Additionally, Eric collaborated with Italian director Fabio Segatori on a gritty horror screenplay titled FLESH AND BLOOD. His four completed book manuscripts range from genre fiction (fantasy, romance, dark suspense) to humorous narrative nonfiction.

Aside from narrative writing, Eric has a background in marketing. As the senior copywriter at a major financial company, he has written collateral that helped the company successfully acquire over one billion dollars in online deposits within a two-month period.

Currently, Eric is writing a dark psychological thriller. He lives in Northern California with his wife and baby daughter.

Jina Panebianco (Producer)

Jina is a film graduate of NYU with an extensive business background of management experience in corporate banking. Following NYU, Jina enrolled in an intensive TV/film production program at Center for the Media Arts in New York.

After graduating from the 10-month program, she worked for Comedy Central in NYC, first in the Affiliate Sales and Event Marketing division, then for Creative Services as a segment producer responsible for programming spots for the network.

She has also freelanced as a Project Manager, producing events for major corporations all over the world such as News Corporation, News Limited in Australia, TV Guide, Showtime Networks, MTV, FOX and CBS.

Jina is now focusing solely on producing quality independent feature films. She produced the trailer for the original screenplay TWELVE TWISTED TRICKS, which won the Golden Trailer Award in the category "Best Trailer No Movie."

As well as producing 9 LIVES OF MARA she broadened her horizons producing the Bollywood feature JAI CHIRANJIVAA!, which was distributed worldwide.

Cast Biographies

Chad Donella (Robin - Older)

Chad originally hails from Toronto, Canada. There, he attended the York Arts Drama Program, a prominent and highly respected theatre school in Canada, where he starred in such productions as OEDIPUS REX, MEASURE FOR MEASURE, WAITING FOR GODOT, THE DOLL'S HOUSE and THE COLLECTED WORKS OF BILLY THE KID.

He was subsequently cast in various other plays, appearing on some of Toronto's finest stages including: WILD ABANDON at the Tarragon Theatre, 2 TO TANGO and COWBOY MOUTH at Theatre Center East, and THE JULIET CHRONICLES at the Factory Theatre.

The entertainment community took notice of Chad's amazing versatility and uncanny ability to capture a character's depth, casting him in the controversial and award-winning Canadian teen series, STRAIGHT UP. He continued to work extensively in the Canadian television industry, rapidly making his way to Los Angeles where he soon established himself as an actor to watch.

He started landing leading roles in the box office hits DISTURBING BEHAVIOR (MGM) and FINAL DESTINATION (New Line), which garnered numerous fans and many dedicated websites.

Lionsgate, long a fan of Chad's work, then cast him as their lead in the romantic comedy GIRL FEVER. After seeing his work in that film, they offered him a role in SHATTERED GLASS. Other recent film credits include DAKOTA and HATE CRIME, which garnered him Best Supporting Actor at the Breckenridge Film Festival in Colorado.

But it was the role of Jacob in the highly rated and critically acclaimed mini-series TAKEN (DreamWorks Television / Sci-Fi Channel) that brought Chad to an entirely new and devoted fan base. The series was a ratings success and drew eminent praise for Chad's work.

His numerous and recent television credits include guest star and recurring roles on prominent shows such as GHOST WHISPERER, MONK, WITHOUT A TRACE, N.C.I.S., COLD CASE, the Emmy award winning series E.R., DRAGNET, THE PRACTICE, and SMALLVILLE.

Bret Loehr (Robin - Younger)

At the young age of 14, Bret Loehr has already established an impressive list of credits to his name. Bret, who starred opposite John Cusack in the Columbia Pictures feature IDENTITY, most recently appeared with Sean Patrick Flannery in the fantasy VERITAS, PRINCE OF TRUTH as well as the

Chuck Norris television movie WALKER, TEXAS RANGER: TRIAL BY FIRE.

In addition to his film roles, Bret also starred in the Fox series CRACKING UP as the youngest son to eccentric parents played by Molly Shannon and Christopher McDonald. Bret's further television credits include recurring roles on EVERWOOD, AMERICAN DREAMS, ALLY MCBEAL, and GENERAL HOSPITAL, along with guest starring roles on E.R. and WITHOUT A TRACE, among others.

Bret is currently filming the feature TRUE ADOLESCENTS in Seattle, WA.

Troy Gentile (Larry)

Troy Gentile has established himself as the go-to child actor for comedy. He has twice played Jack Black's younger self in NACHO LIBRE and in TENACIOUS D: THE PICK OF DESTINY, as well as starring roles in BAD NEWS BEARS and DRILLBIT TAYLOR.

His other credits include GOOD LUCK CHUCK, PINEAPPLE EXPRESS And I COULD NEVER BE YOUR WOMAN. On television, Troy was series regular on CBS' FUGLY and has guest starred on BUS LIFE and THE SUITE LIFE, both for Disney.

Pollyanna McIntosh (Maria/The Mara)

Pollyanna grew up in Portugal, Colombia, South America, and Edinburgh, Scotland. She began acting on the stage in many Edinburgh Festival productions, and then left home at sixteen for a career in London and abroad as a model.

Pollyanna became involved in film at this time playing cameo roles in Irvine Welsh's THE ACID HOUSE and Luc Besson's THE FIFTH ELEMENT, along with starring in London's vibrant underground cinema scene. She also took to the stage once again in Shakespeare's PERICLES, Strindberg's THE DREAM PLAY and Wilde's THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST.

After graduating with honors in Drama and Theatre Studies with Psychology from London's Roehampton Institute, she produced, directed, and acted in a highly successful run of Jane Martin's VITAL SIGNS at The Man in The Moon Theatre in Chelsea.

She moved to Los Angeles four years ago where she produced and directed theatre with the Blank Theatre Company and the Young Playwrights Festival. She then performed in DIAL M FOR MURDER and THE PURSUIT OF PLEASURE at the Coast Playhouse.

Pollyanna's memorable film roles include Stacy in HEADSPACE (Winner of two awards at NYC Horror Film Fest and one at the World Horror Convention 2006), and Thumper Wint in the upcoming Winona Ryder and Simon Baker starrer SEX AND DEATH 101 (Best Director, Seattle Film Fest) by HEATHERS scribe Daniel Waters. She plays kick ass Russian rock goddess Varela in the upcoming Nancy Montuori Stein directed ALL AGES NIGHT. In BATS: HUMAN HARVEST she plays the lead opposite David Chokachi and Tomas Arana. The film was a Sci Fi Channel original, released on DVD by Sony Home Entertainment.

Her next project is LAND OF THE LOST with Will Ferrell for Universal Pictures.

In addition to acting, Pollyanna is writing her first screenplay and is co-producing the feature film JUNK.

Patrick Bauchau (Documentarian)

Patrick Bauchau was born in Brussels, Belgium, and raised in Belgium, Switzerland, and England, U.K. He attended Oxford University on an academic scholarship and studied Modern Languages (he speaks French, English, Spanish, Italian, German and a bit of Russian and Flemish). Patrick began his career in the French New Wave cinema. His work spans the 1960s through the present, though he took a break from acting during the 1970s. Patrick is best known these days for his role as Sydney in the series THE PRETENDER. He also appeared in KINDRED: THE EMBRACED, and a spate of other films and television appearances both in the United States and Europe including BOY CULTURE, RAY, SECRETARY, PANIC ROOM, THE CELL, THE DEAD ZONE, C.S.I., 24, and ALIAS.

Patrick's interests include gardening, carpentry, collecting oriental art, and yoga.



Cast and Crew List

Big Bang Film Company Presents
In Association with Mara Investments LLC

A Balaji K. Kumar picture

9 LIVES OF MARA

Chad Donella Bret Loehr Troy Gentile Pollyanna McIntosh and
Patrick Bauchau

Chad Donella Robin Junior (Older) Bret Loehr Robin Junior
(Younger) Troy Gentile Larry Pollyanna McIntosh Maria/The Mara
Patrick Bauchau Documentarian Spencer Garrett Dr. Bevington
Aspen Payge Mary Randy Crowder Robin Senior

Music by: Ganesh B. Kumar Editor: Juli Vizza Line Producer:
Tosca Musk Executive Producers: Russell Van Stroud, Shankar
Iyer, Vandana Sheth Director of Photography: Joseph Rubinstein
Casting by: Lindsay Chag Production Designer: Mark Longo
Produced by: Jina Panebianco, Efren Muro, Balaji Kumar Written
by: Eric Massey and Balaji K. Kumar Directed by: Balaji Kumar

www.9livesofmara.com