

Ball in the House

A Chimera Films/Redeemable Features Production
in association with Cosgrove/Meurer Productions

98 minutes
currently unrated

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SYNOPSIS

At seventeen, most kids think the world is against them. Their families seem like aliens from another planet, and it feels like everything and everyone is conspiring to make life difficult. But just because you're paranoid doesn't mean they're not out to get you.

After six months of court-ordered rehab, seventeen-year-old JJ White (Jonathan Tucker) is sentenced to return home. Dr. Charlie (David Strathairn), JJ's affable therapist, delivers him back into the hands of his oddball blue-collar family—his unyielding stepfather, Bull (Dan Moran), his sweet but oblivious mother, Phyllis (Deirdre O'Connell), his seductive aunt, Dot (Jennifer Tilly), his befuddled uncle, Ernie (Larry Neumann, Jr.), and his younger brother, Benji (Nathan Kiley), and JJ quickly realizes how strange the world looks through starkly sober eyes.

Immediately confronted with the wreckage of his unsavory past, including heavy fines from his last DWI/car accident and a \$3500 drug tab to his "best friend" Bobby (Ethan Embry), JJ struggles to do anything and everything a sober kid can to pay back his debts. However, nothing seems to keep the wolves at bay, and he can't shake the feeling that these wolves are out for blood. JJ's anxiety only worsens when he learns that Bull (exasperated by the heavy toll of his stepson's binges and secretly persuaded by Dot and Ernie) signed a life insurance policy payable if JJ dies before his 18th birthday—just a month away.

Trapped in his shadowy house by a freak spring snowstorm and unsure whether the pressure he feels is a delusion, or the world really is conspiring against him, JJ desperately tries to remain straight amid the surreal chaos unfolding around him. Ultimately, faced with Bobby's sudden death, Dot's menacing attention, his girlfriend's heartless abandonment, Bull's apparent complicity and the overwhelming odds against staying clean, JJ must choose what he wants his reality to be.

In the offbeat style of her acclaimed feature debut, "Finding North," Tanya Wexler's **BALL IN THE HOUSE** offers an astute social satire that is at once visceral and expressionistic, humorous and tragic. Inspired by events in the life of screenwriter Matthew Swan and filmed on location in Chicago by leading German cinematographer Gero Steffen, it is, finally, a dysfunctional family noir.

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

“JJ’s struggle was so compelling. He was like Sisyphus, rolling this big boulder up a hill,” director Tanya Wexler says of what endeared her to the script for *BALL IN THE HOUSE*. Written by Matthew Swan, *BALL IN THE HOUSE* portrays seventeen year-old JJ White’s homecoming after a court-ordered stint in rehab. Waiting for him with closed arms is a creatively dysfunctional group of family and “friends,” many of whom want nothing more than to see JJ fail. Rather than greeting him with support, patience and compassion, JJ feels only bitterness, disappointment, and contempt from his family. *BALL IN THE HOUSE* examines how JJ struggles through the fateful month between his departure from rehab and the moment he becomes an adult.

Stephen Dyer, Wexler’s partner at Chimera films, was the first to read *BALL IN THE HOUSE*. Wexler and Dyer had been searching for a follow-up to the acclaimed festival hit *FINDING NORTH*, the pair’s first collaboration together. Their search ended when the “tattered, coffee-soaked” script landed on Dyer’s desk. “I read half of it and thought it was so clearly drawn,” Dyer recalls of his initial reaction to the material. “Once you started reading it, it engaged you. You couldn’t quite figure out where it was going to go. I called Tanya right away and said ‘I think we’ve got something here.’”

“It really crackled on the page. Most everything I have ever seen missed the mark for me tonally—little rang true about homes actually mired in this common situation,” Wexler says of films dealing with addiction and recovery. “When I first read Matt’s screenplay, I loved how simultaneously real and surreal it was. He so captured the awkward awful truth; the anger masked as love, the hope tainted with doubt, the promise of recovery clouded by the reality of the statistics.”

Much of *BALL IN THE HOUSE*’s surreal element comes courtesy of the film’s dark hook - the life insurance policy. Though intriguing to Wexler, the concept possessed a unique obstacle. “The challenge of the script was that the action of the main character is to *not* do something and to watch as the world conspires against him.”

Wexler and Dyer immediately began working with Swan to transform *BALL IN THE HOUSE* into a movie. The experience was resoundingly positive for the writer, who admits that Wexler and Dyer shared an understanding of JJ’s story. “We all had a very

similar vision of this thing,” he says of their collaboration. “This was supplanted so beautifully from my mind into Tanya’s.”

The three brought the project to producer Ira Deutchman, who was intrigued by the script’s wholly original take on addiction and recovery. “The absurdity of having a family that didn’t want this kid to become un-addicted was the kind of twist that made it interesting. His experience with his family seemed both universal and yet it was heightened to the point of absurdity. I think it appealed to my warped sense of humor.” Deutchman came aboard, and in the process of trying to get financing for the film, approached producers John Cosgrove and Terry Dunn Meurer, who gladly joined him in producing the film.

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The producers sent a copy of the script to David Strathairn, Wexler’s first choice for the role of Dr. Charlie, and crossed their fingers. “He called us out of the blue and said, ‘This is great, I want to meet with you.’” At the meeting, it was clear that he had similar ideas about the overall tone and scope of the piece. “It was funny. I think he was more concerned about us liking him,” Dyer recalls of their first meeting. Deutchman appreciated the actor’s affinity for the role as well as the prestige his commitment brought to BALL IN THE HOUSE. “The minute David committed, the credibility he brought to the project really helped everything fall into place,” he said. Wexler, Dyer and Deutchman were not Strathairn’s only admirers. “That was the thing that made the movie.” Dyer says. “Everyone wanted to work with David.”

“Everyone” included Jennifer Tilly, who plays the brilliantly conniving Aunt Dot. “Aunt Dot is a role that a lot of actresses were scared of,” Deutchman admits. “It was ‘too dark,’ and ‘too weird’ and ‘too mean.’ Jennifer was not only fearless in wanting to take it on, but also in the way she attacked the role.” Wexler feels she “attacked” with precision, determination and a touch of fun: “The minute she walked on the set, she was Aunt Dot. She’s a real spontaneous actor. She always nailed it in the first couple of takes. It’s instinctive with her.”

Tilly brought a keen understanding of the character with her to the set. “I did know Dot,” she says. “I knew her small town frustration, her sexual frustration and feeling not appreciated and her sense of entitlement.” Tilly also understood that Dot’s ‘dark’ and

'mean' elements were also very human. "I think that her "take no prisoners" attitude made her intriguing. The characters that are a little bent are the ones that are the most appealing for me, and Dot is more than a little bent."

"I think she's bitter because when she was younger she was kind of a hotsy-totsy," Tilly explains of Dot's desire to see JJ fall off the wagon. "All of a sudden she got older, and there's nothing worse than being an older hotsy-totsy in a small town. She's maybe just a little bit smarter than the rest of the family. She sees that her alternatives are dwindling and that she doesn't have as many chances. She sees JJ as her last chance."

Finding the Last Chance in question was not easy. Wexler, Dyer and Deutchman all knew that they needed a sensitive, reactive, strong actor to carry the film. "He had to be a fully rounded character that stands apart tonally from the rest of the cast," Deutchman says of JJ. "He's reacting to everything around him. He's not the active character in the story; he's the one things are being done to." With this in mind, there were casting calls on both coasts, as well as in Chicago.

"Jonathan's just plain likeable. The minute he's on screen, you care about him," Deutchman says of Tucker, an "unknown" at the time of his audition. The twenty-year old won raves for his performance in THE DEEP END upon its release shortly after BALL IN THE HOUSE wrapped. Dyer is extremely satisfied with the decision to cast Tucker: "He's amazingly human and sympathetic. A great mirror for the surreal portrayals from the rest of the characters. You really become invested in him."

"He was neither overly sentimental, nor brooding and thuggish," Wexler says of Tucker's performance. "I was also lucky to find a really talented actor the age of the character, rather than a 30 year old playing down to 17. This adds a subtle element that makes the whole thing feel authentic, as if all of this is really happening to this kid and this is the way he would see his life and family."

"He was so sweet," Tilly remembers of Tucker. "Tanya was really lucky to get him, and was really smart to cast him. All of the characters in the movie are balanced against this one character. You've got to root for the kid. I thought it would be dangerous to cast some Tiger Beat stud."

Wexler also felt that Ethan Embry was perfect for the part of Bobby when she had a general meeting with him a year before BALL IN THE HOUSE went into production. “I loved him. I just tucked him away in the back of my mind, and when the movie was going we called him directly. Don’t let anyone tell you general meetings don’t lead to work,” she jokes.

“They’re two amazing stage actors from New York,” Wexler says of Deirdre O’Connell and Dan Moran, who play Phyllis and Bull. O’Connell had the good fortune of being reunited with Tucker (again, portraying his mother) last fall in their guest spots on “The Practice.”

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Armed with a dream cast, Wexler set out to make what she jokingly refers to as “the ultimate tough love movie.” “I was so fortunate, because you never know who’s going to be insane,” she remembers of her trepidation prior to the shoot. She was relieved to find that she had hired a supremely professional and incredibly dedicated group of performers. Tucker is equally effusive in sharing his affection for the cast, describing the group as the most “respectful, giving, affable, kind performers” he could have hoped to work with.

Tilly attributes this affability to the cast’s background: “I loved working with all of them because they all had come from the theater, and actors that come from the theater understand about being a team player.”

“You can’t often afford a look,” Wexler laments of budgetary limits often imposed on independent productions. Thankfully for Wexler, the austere, cold look of BALL IN THE HOUSE came courtesy of sourced light. “It’s very stylized, and yet almost all of the light came through the windows.” The result is, Wexler feels, something “lush and rich and hidden.”

Wexler attributes much of the look of BALL IN THE HOUSE to Gero Steffen, a German Director of Photography she met at a film festival. “It very much felt like he was painting with light,” she says. “Gero and I wanted to create JJ’s world with shadows and sparing light that is split, fractured, and obscured. I encouraged Gero to really be dramatic and live on the edge in his lighting choices.”

“Gero was really a genius,” Tilly agrees, thankful for the practical freedoms the lighting offered the cast. “He and Tanya wanted to use only available light. That made it interesting in that there wasn’t a lot of setup time. The marks weren’t so specific. It gives you a lot of freedom to move around.”

Tilly appreciated Wexler’s understanding of character and tone, as well as the energy and dedication she brought to the set. “Tanya is great and really good with actors,” she says. “She’s whip-smart in that she knows what she wants in terms of camera and mood and all of the elements. She was really enthusiastic, and her enthusiasm was catching.”

The shoot was a bit of a homecoming for Wexler and Deutchman, both of whom lived in the Chicago area at one point in their lives. Nevertheless, the two New York residents had forgotten how cold the “windy city” can be in the winter months. “I can’t believe I ever lived there,” jokes Deutchman. “The cold was going through every layer of clothing I was wearing.”

“Being there got you into the character,” Tilly recalls of her time in Chicago. “The story is very bleak. To be surrounded by snow and industrial houses helped make you feel that small town desperation, that ‘gotta get out’ and ‘what kind of alternatives do we have’ feeling.”

Because the film’s dark subject matter takes on an absurd quality when told through JJ’s eyes, Wexler was determined to have her actors find a balance between representing their characters with honesty, while knowing they were really playing JJ’s heightened reality of them: “It was most important to me that the actors still find authenticity within their characters, letting the writing do most of the comedic and surreal work in the scenes. So when JJ’s mother offers Dr. Charlie a bowl of cereal in place of the cake she planned, I wanted her to play it as if it was the most normal thing in the world to her, but at the same time as an ‘abnormal’ normality that is suffocating JJ. And when Dot hatches the plot, I wanted her to explain the darkly humorous, tawdry details of her life—this pathetic tale of scratching and clawing, as if it were really her truth.”

“Although the movie is shot from a newly sober, paranoid seventeen-year-old’s perspective, what I didn’t want was to strain for laughs, or to play to the camp,” she

continues. "In this way I think *Ball in the House* is a cousin to the *film noirs* of the '40s, where the heightened is rooted in truth, and the juxtaposition provides layers."

Despite its surreal plot and its decidedly chilling visual style, Wexler maintains that BALL IN THE HOUSE is a very simple story about abuse, family and hope. "The movie basically strips away the layers of denial, the half-lies and the half-truths about JJ, his family, his friends, his life, and his prospects," she says. "Once armed with that knowledge, unable to slip its grasp or squirm away, he has to face himself and the truth about recovery. What I love about the end is that while JJ does take a micro-step forward, there are no easy answers."

THE CRUELEST MIRAGE by Matthew Swan

When I was in the fourth grade, during the height of Nancy Reagan's "Just Say No" campaign/First-Lady-hobby, we watched a twenty-minute short film called, "A Day in the Death of Donny B." It was a grainy, effective piece of propaganda, which followed Donny B., a 19 year old heroin addict in Harlem, as he went through his day. He stole purses, cracked open parking meters, and by the end of the day, he had finally accumulated enough change to get his fix in some garbage-strewn alley. Interspersed throughout the film were interviews with Donny B.'s parents, an exhausted, beaten down couple, who didn't have the energy to give a damn about their oldest son any longer. After recounting all the failed rehabs, which they couldn't afford, and all the failed therapists, which they couldn't afford, the interviewer asked Donny B.'s parents what the next step is for their troubled, unreachable son. "Insurance. A lot of it. The bastard owes us. Now if only he'd kick before the next premium is due," said Mr. B. "Don't count on it. Donny was never reliable," said Mrs. B.

It was a cold piece of horrible business, particularly brutal to a mid-western fourth grader who thought his parents were the safest, surest thing in the world. I made a lot of promises in the fourth grade. I would never use drugs. I would never put my parents in that position. I would never be Donny B. It seemed like the easiest thing in the world.

Unfortunately, I grew up. And high school is a complicated place, and somewhere between the girls, and the zits, and the politics of popularity, I stopped saying "No." I was a lonely kid from nowhere, and drugs were an antidote. Each chemical came with its own social circle, from the dippy hippies and their Reefer Madness, to the Ravers, with their Ecstasy and skateboards. After a lifetime of looking, friends were suddenly easy. Good times were easy. Let's get wasted and worry about tomorrow tomorrow.

And then high school ended. We were all so damn busy having a good time, we forgot about the future. But now, the future was everywhere. It was part of every family dinner. It was in my parents' dreams for their son. It was in the lives of my college-bound friends, who had taken on the responsibility of growing up. And it was at its most suffocating, in the bottle-strewn garages where I gathered with my lost, drunken friends to talk about all those good times, and ask, "What time does the liquor store close?" We were eighteen years old and we had nothing on the schedule but to get drunk and die.

The easiest solution was to keep drinking. It kept the voices quiet. It kept the "good times" rolling, although no one was having any fun, no matter how loudly we insisted that "things don't get any better than this!" We talked louder and louder, cause we were terrified of any stretch of silence that could let our fear seep out. But eventually, there ain't enough beer, or coke, or dope, or anything, to keep reality in its box, until one day it explodes, and either sends you into adulthood, or into a telephone pole.

I chose to grow up. And was resoundingly hated for it. I think imagining that the whole world is conspiring against you is a common fantasy, particularly prevalent among self-absorbed, insecure teens with too much imagination. But as the Man said, "Just cause you're paranoid, don't mean they ain't after you."

BALL IN THE HOUSE is about that choice. JJ is forced to pull himself out of the drunken security he and his friends found poisoning themselves in the back of their parents' garages. When you're a kid, you're going to live forever. And then one day you're not. Losing that invulnerability is the loneliest feeling in the world. We sacrifice the immortality of youth for the terrible adult world of responsibility. We're alone in a world without any guarantees, and we feel our way through this new world of work, and commitments, and accountability, all the time praying that this is the path to happiness, that the light way up ahead isn't the cruelest mirage.

THE CAST

JJJonathan Tucker
Aunt Dot..... Jennifer Tilly
Dr. Charlie.....David Strathairn
Bull.....Dan Moran
PhyllisDeirdre O'Connell
Bobby.....Ethan Embry
Uncle ErnieLarry Neumann, Jr.
Lizzie.....Aleksa Palladino
Benji..... Nathan Kiley
Officer Waters..... Gregory Sandquist
Recruiting Officer.....Eddie Bo Smith, Jr.
Anchorwoman Cindi Amy Zimmerman
Anchorman Bob..... Larry Nash
AA Woman.....Jonah Lisa Marsh
AA ManStephen Rose
Bartender Roderick Peoples
Father O'Malley Rob Riley
Delivery Boy..... Frank Caridi
Nasty Woman Beata Pilch
Sally Struthers Herself

THE FILMMAKERS

Director Tanya Wexler
Screenwriter..... Matthew Swan
Producers Ira Deutchman
Stephen Dyer
John Cosgrove
Terry Dunn Meurer
Executive Producers..... Melissa Chesman
Greg Johnson
Peter Newman
Director of Photography..... Gero Steffen
Production Designer Diane Hughes
Editor Meg Reticker
Original Music..... Robbie Kondor
Theme..... Kevin Salem & Brian Kelly
Music Supervisor Susan Jacobs
Costume Design Emmy Taylor
Associate Producer Jo Levi
Casting: Susan Shopmaker
Mickey Paskal
Rachel Tenner
Unit Production Manager..... Christina Varotsis
1st Assistant Director..... Bruce Terris
2nd Assistant Director..... Marie Frick
Production Coordinator..... Jennifer Byrne
Production Accountant Desirée Killian-Varni
Assistant Production Coordinator..... Timothy Scott Longwell
Script Supervisor Linda Leifer
Set Decorator..... Martha Ring
Lead Woman Judy Kropsch
Property Master Marc Miller
Set Dressers Kelly D. Lewis
Andy Mason
Additonal Set Dresser..... John Thoeming
Scenic Artists Michelle Caplan
Ann Davis
Carpenter..... Ryan Flesher
Focus Puller..... David Dean Wightman

CAST BIOS

Jonathan Tucker (JJ):

If not for his seasoned resume, actor Jonathan Tucker, 19, would surely be tuckered out after what has been a whirlwind year. He first plunged into Fox Searchlight's critically lauded "The Deep End" opposite Tilda Swinton. Tucker portrays Swinton's sensitive teenage son in the thriller about a devout mother who instinctively reacts to cover-up a death in an attempt to avoid her son's implications. Directed by Scott McGehee and David Siegel, "The Deep End" and the performances embodied within have been described by critics as "mesmerizing," "enlightening," and "invigorating."

Also enlightening was Tucker's previous effort, Sofia Coppola's "The Virgin Suicides." Produced by Francis Ford Coppola's American Zoetrope Films, Tucker portrayed Kirsten Dunst's voyeur teen neighbor and attempted savior.

Though a Boston native, Tucker has had the opportunity to travel the world over, including a couple of years in Paris as a young boy, thanks to his renown art historian/professor/curator father, Paul Hayes Tucker, and marketing analysis mother, Maggie Moss-Tucker. By third grade, he was starring in the Boston Ballet's production of "The Nutcracker." He recently graduated from Ojai's Thacher School and plans to attend Columbia University.

Tucker's additional credits include the young Billy Crudup in Barry Levinson's acclaimed "Sleepers" and the comedy "Two if by Sea" with Sandra Bullock.

Jennifer Tilly (Aunt Dot):

Jennifer Tilly received both an Academy Award nomination, and an American Comedy Award nomination for her role as Olive in Woody Allen's "Bullets over Broadway." Her performance in "Liar, Liar" as Jim Carrey's gold digging client earned her another American Comedy Award nomination, as well as a Blockbuster Award nomination as Favorite Supporting Actress.

Tilly was recently seen starring opposite Kirsten Dunst, Cary Elwes, Eddie Izzard and Joanna Lumley in "The Cat's Meow," the story of the unsolved killing aboard William Randolph Hearst's yacht in November 1924. Tilly plays gossip columnist Louella Parsons. "The Cat's Meow" was directed by Peter Bogdanovich.

Tilly starred in the boxoffice smash "Monster's Inc.," the latest animated film by Pixar. She starred opposite Billy Crystal, John Goodman and Steve Buscemi.

This fall, Tilly completed a run on Broadway in "The Women," Clare Booth Luce's tale of gossipy well-to-do Manhattan women. Tilly starred opposite Cynthia Nixon, Kristen Johnston and Rue McClanahan.

Tilly was seen on television in a remake of Orson Wells' "The Magnificent Ambersons," directed by Alphonso Arau ("Like Water For Chocolate") for A&E Networks. Tilly plays Aunt Fanny in a cast that includes Madeleine Stowe, Jonathan Rhys-Meyers, James Cromwell and Dina Merrill.

Tilly was last seen in "Dancing at the Blue Iguana," an improvisational film about a strip club, directed by Michael Radford (IL Postino). Tilly's other film credits include "Bound"

(Saturn Award nominee-Best Actress, GLAAD Award recipient), "The Muse," "Relax, It's Just Sex," "Stuart Little," "The Getaway," "Made in America," "Bride of Chucky" (Saturn Award nominee-Best Actress), "Shadow of the Wolf," "Let it Ride," "The Crew," and "The Fabulous Baker Boys."

On Television, she starred in the miniseries *Bella Mafia*, with Vanessa Redgrave, and the fox series "Key West." She also starred in "Sister Mary Explains it All" with Diane Keaton, directed by Marshall Brickman, for Showtime. She received a CableAce Award nomination (Best Actress in a Comedy) for her recurring role as Garry's girlfriend, Angelica on "The Garry Shandling Show." For her role in the Showtime movie "Heads," she received a Gemini Award nomination for Best Actress.

Tilly has extensive stage credits, including "Tartuffe" and "Boy's Life" at the LATC, and "Baby with the Bathwater" and "The Woolgatherer" at the LA Public Theatre. She received a Dramalogue Award for her work in "Vanities," and for her performance in "One Shoe Off" at the Joseph Papp Theatre, she won a Theatre World Award for Outstanding Newcomer.

Tilly recently completed "Fast Sofa" with Crispin Glover and Natasha Lyonne.

David Strathairn (Dr. Charlie):

A seasoned actor on and off Broadway, on the big screen and on television, David Strathairn attended Williams College before launching a successful acting career.

Strathairn has appeared in numerous John Sayles' features, a classmate from Williams College, including his and Sayles' directorial debut "The Return of the Secaucus Seven." Other Sayles' features in which Strathairn starred include "Limbo," "Matewan," "Brother From Another Planet," "Eight Men Out," "City of Hope" and "Passion Fish."

Continuing to work with Hollywood's top directors, Strathairn's film credits include Scott Eliot's "A Map of the World," Mark Steven Johnson's "Simon Birch," Mike Nichols' "Silkwood," Stephen Gyllenhaal's "Losing Isaiah," Sydney Pollack's "The Firm," Tim Robbins' "Bob Roberts," Penny Marshall's "A League of Their Own," Taylor Hackford's "Dolores Claiborne" and Curtis Hansen's "L.A. Confidential."

Also working with Hollywood's hottest talent, he has starred opposite Meryl Streep in "The River Wild," with Richard Dreyfuss in "Lost in Yonkers," with Jessica Lange in "Losing Isaiah", with Ray Liotta and Jamie Lee Curtis in "Dominick and Eugene," with Sean Penn and Christopher Walken in "At Close Range," with Debra Winger in "A Dangerous Woman" and with Ashley Judd and Oliver Platt in "Simon Birch."

Strathairn's extensive stage work includes a lead performance in Vaclav Havel's "Temptation" at the Joseph Papp Public Theater, as well as "Einstein & the Polar Bear" and "The Three Sisters" on Broadway.

Television credits include the HBO features "In The Gloaming" and "The James Brady Story," "The American Clock" for TNT, "Lathe of Heaven" for A & E, directed by Philip Haas, and the CBS miniseries "Day One." Strathairn was also a regular on the David Milch series "Big Apple".

Ethan Embry (Bobby):

A talented comedic and dramatic actor, Ethan Embry has been building a successful career since the age of 10, when he made his feature debut opposite Ed O'Neill in the John Hughes comedy "Dutch" and in the Emmy winning mini series "Drug Wars: The Camarena Story." Embry returned to the small screen last year in the Fox drama "Freakylinks" (a.k.a. "Fearsum"), from the creators of "The Blair Witch Project." He will be seen next in the independent film "They," which opens this Fall.

Embry is well known for his turns as the secret admirer in the Columbia/TriStar's teen comedy "Can't Hardly Wait" opposite Jennifer Love Hewitt, as the naïve young bassist in Tom Hank's "That Thing You Do," and as the youngest crew member in Ridley Scott's "White Squall." Additional feature credits include the cult hit "Empire Records," "Vegas Vacation," "Disturbing Behavior" and "Dancer, Texas." Embry currently lives in Los Angeles.

Dan Moran (Bull):

Dan Moran was born on the banks of the mighty Mississippi, in a small carthen shack. The son of a catfisherman, Moran joined the circus, where he worked as a roustabout for five years. Then he met Shakespeare.

Moran began his acting career with a three-year stint in the New Shakespeare Company of San Francisco, a touring group that traveled the U.S., averaging 60,000 miles a year by car. In 1997 Moran moved to New York to attend NYU School of the Arts, where he was voted Most Likely to Go Bald before graduating in 1980.

A founding member of the New York Stage & Film theater company, now in its 17th year of operation, Moran originated roles in "Sideman," "Escape from Happiness," "Savage in Limbo," "Dark Rapture" and many others. He spent several seasons with Shakespeare & Co. in Lenox, MA, where he starred in "As You Like It," "A Midsummer Night's Dream" and "Macbeth." Additional theater credits include "A Streetcar Named Desire," "A Month in the Country," "Edward II," "Pericles" and "Happy Days." Moran will appear next on Broadway in Arthur Miller's "The Man Who Had All the Luck."

Moran has appeared in a wide range of features, including "Happiness," "Hamlet," "Maximum Risk," "Better Living" and "Mob Queen," as well as five Woody Allen films, including "Mighty Aphrodite," "Sweet and Lowdown," "Curse of the Jade Scorpion" and "Deconstructing Harry." On television he has been seen in "Law & Order," "Third Watch," "Homicide," "One Life to Live" and "Loving." Moran has been happily married for 20 years, and has raised two beautiful beings, Ella and Miles, his jazz babies.

Deirdre O'Connell (Phyllis):

A veteran of stage, screen and television, Deirdre O'Connell has appeared in more than 15 movies and 30 theatrical productions. Her wide-ranging film credits include Wayne Wang's "Smoke," Brad Silberling's "City of Angels," Peter Weir's "Fearless," Ed Zwick's "Leaving Normal," Phil Joanou's "State of Grace," Barry Levinson's "Tin Men," Pat O'Connor's "Stars and Bars" and John Mellencamp's "Falling From Grace." O'Connell received an Independent Spirit Award nomination for her supporting performance in Robin Armstrong's "Pastime." She will be seen next opposite Kevin Costner in Tom Shadyac's "Dragonfly."

O'Connell's extensive stage work includes Beth Henley's "Revelers," Sam Shepard's "A Lie of the Mind" and "Fool for Love," "Agnes of God," "The Tempest," "As You Like It," "The Seagull," "The Geography of Luck" and "The Front Page." She received the Dramalogue and Los Angeles Critics Awards for her performance in "Stars in the Morning Sky," and a Dramalogue Award for her performance in "Etta Jenks."

On television, O'Connell has co-starred in such movies as "Murder in a Small Town" for A&E, "A Journey into Genius" for PBS' American Playhouse, "Best Intentions" for Lifetime, "Seduction of Innocence" for CBS and "Trial by Fire" for ABC. In addition, she has appeared in "Law & Order," "Chicago Hope," "Second Noah," "Sirens" and HBO's "From the Earth to the Moon."

Larry Neumann, Jr. (Uncle Ernie):

A veteran theater actor, Larry Neumann, Jr. just finished performing with his wife in the two-person show "Disciple." During the 2001 season at the Court Theatre, Neumann played Feste in "Twelfth Night," Radish in Trevor Griffith's "Piano" and Jowett in Tom Stoppard's "Invention of Love," and also appeared as Mr. Vanislaw in Christopher Durang's "Betty's Summer Vacation" at Roadworks. Last season, he appeared in "Ghetto" and "1776," both 2000 Jeff Award winners for production.

A member of the Famous Door Theatre company, Neumann received the 1996 Jeff Award for Actor in a Revue and the 1997 After Dark Award for his portrayal of the Dali Lahma in "Hitting for the Cycle." He also appeared in "The Living," the 1997 Jeff Award winner for production. Neumann's additional Chicago theater credits include "The Angels of Lemnos," for which he received a Best Supporting Actor nomination from the Chicago Dramatists, as well as "Othello," "Marat/Sade" and "Disappeared."

Among Neumann's film and television credits are "Stir of Echoes," "Just Visiting," "Walker, Texas Ranger," "The Untouchables," "America's Most Wanted" and "Roommates."

Aleksa Palladino (Lizzie):

After a break-out performance as Lo in director Lisa Krueger's indie hit "Manny & Lo," Aleksa Palladino went on to appear in a variety of films including: "A Cool, Dry Place," "Wrestling with Alligators," Woody Allen's "Celebrity," "The Adventures of Sebastian Cole," "Second Skin," "Red Dirt," "Cherry," and "Lonesome." She will next be seen in Todd Solondz's "Storytelling."

Nathan Kiley (Benji):

A native of Schaumburg, Illinois, 12-year old sixth grader Nathan Kiley travels back and forth between Los Angeles and Chicago to pursue his acting career. He has appeared in numerous television shows, including playing a young Jerry Seinfeld in a take-off called "The Whinfelds." In 1999, Kiley played the lead in the HBO film "One Small Hero." In addition to acting, he is in the gifted program at school and enjoys Karate and basketball.

FILMMAKER BIOS

Tanya Wexler, Director:

Tanya Wexler received her B.A. from Yale University and her M.F.A. from Columbia University, Graduate Film Division. At Columbia she directed the short films "The Dance" and "Cool Shoes." "The Dance" played at The Telluride Film Festival, The Seattle Film Festival, and The First Look Series (sponsored by Kodak), among others. Her debut feature, "Finding North," premiered to sold out audiences at the 1998 Palm Springs International Film Festival, then played at The South-by-Southwest Film Festival, The New York Lesbian and Gay Film Festival, The San Francisco International Lesbian and Gay Film Festival, and Outfest, The Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, among others. It was released theatrically by Cowboy Pictures.

Matthew Swan, Screenwriter:

Matthew Swan received his B.A. in literature and drama from Bennington College in Vermont. He went on to be accepted to the Playwrights Program at Juilliard where he studied under Christopher Durang and Marsha Norman. While at Juilliard, he caught the attention of Laura Ziskin, who recently signed him to an overall deal at Twentieth Century Fox for spec scripts, rewrites and television. A native of Boston, Matt now lives in Brooklyn. "Ball in the House" is his first produced screenplay. In addition, "Mr. Smith," which Swan adapted for the screen from his play, is scheduled for release in 2002, with Forrest Murray and Ian McCrudden producing. Swan is currently writing a book adaptation for Fine Line Features and Wendy Finerman Productions.

Gero Steffen, Director of Photography:

Gero Steffen was born in East Germany. He won the Best Cinematography prize at the 2001 German Film Awards (the "Lolas") for his work on "Frau2 sucht HappyEnd" ("Female 2 Seeks Happy End"). Steffen has established himself as one of Germany's leading cinematographers with such films as "The Green Desert" and "Knocking on Heaven's Door," which was the highest grossing German film of 1997. "Ball in the House" is his first American film.

Meg Reticker, Editor:

Meg Reticker has edited a number of feature films over the past ten years which have gone on to play at major film festivals. She has worked in both television and film and has edited narrative and documentary. The diversity of her work includes such films as "Heavy," directed by James Mangold, and this year's "Wet, Hot, American Summer," directed by David Wain. Other films include "The Big One," directed by Michael Moore, "Arresting Gena," directed by Hannah Weyer, and "Fish and the Bathtub," directed by Joan Micklin Silver.

Robbie Kondor, Composer:

Robbie Kondor grew up playing rock and roll, and later, jazz and classical music on the piano, culminating in a degree from the Manhattan School of Music. While still at school, he began playing keyboards on recording sessions and soon became one of the most sought after keyboard players in New York.

His credits as player and arranger include records with Eric Clapton, Whitney Houston, Aretha Franklin, Carly Simon, Manhattan Transfer, the Bee Gees, Anita Baker, Billy Joel, Bette Midler, Meatloaf, Dionne Warwick, Vanessa Williams, Mariah Carey, Linda Ronstadt, James Galway, Roberta Flack, Barbara Streisand, Smashing Pumpkins, and others.

He is frequently seen on television augmenting the Letterman band, accompanying a singer on the network morning shows, and in the house band for specials including the Grammys, Comic Relief, Pavarotti and Friends, Performance at the White House, John Lennon Tribute, and many others.

Kondor has had a bird's eye view of film scoring, playing on sessions for Elmer Bernstein, Michael Small, Dave Grusin, Marvin Hamlisch, Patrick Doyle, Georges Delerue, Ira Newborn, Ralph Burns, and Benny Golson.

Since turning his attention to composing, Kondor has written for Nova (PBS), After School Special (ABC), The Equalizer, All My Children, several national television commercials, and six feature films including "Happiness," "The Suburbans," and "Series Seven." He has won two Emmy awards for his work in television, a Clio and an ADDY for his work in commercials, and a NARAS Most Valuable Player award for his contributions as a studio musician.

Kevin Salem & Brian Kelly, Theme Music:

Kevin Salem and Brian Kelly began writing music for films recently and have composed music for "13 Moons" (Alex Rockwell, dir.), "The Big Bend" (Tod Williams, dir.) and "Love in the Time of Money" (Peter Mattei, dir). Mr. Kelly's resume includes music for "Basquiat" and "Grind" and one solo LP, "Each Day Blues." He is currently trying to raise his ATP ranking from an abysmal 345,679. Mr. Salem has three solo LP's, including the soon-to-be-released "Ecstatic." He has produced and played guitar for a list of artists including: Chocolate Genius, Emmylou Harris, Madder Rose, Giant Sand, Aster Aweke, Freedy Johnston & Yo La Tengo. He hopes someday to braid his hair.

Diane Hughes, Production Designer:

Diane Hughes credits her mother with piquing her early interest in the design arts by dragging her through innumerable model homes. There, Hughes learned a lot about bad decorating and floor plans, and spent long hours laying them out with clothespins in the backyard, and furnishing them from the Sears Catalog. Today she labels her approach to Production Design "Visual Storytelling" - using form, color, and texture to communicate rather than words. After 10 year of learning her craft in the trenches of LA indie and TV Movie Production, Hughes now chooses to live in her home town of Chicago, where BALL IN THE HOUSE was filmed.

Ira Deutchman, Producer:

Ira Deutchman has been making, marketing and distributing films for 27 years, having worked on more than 130 films, including some of the most successful independent films of all time. He was one of the founders of Cinecom and later created Fine Line Features—two companies that were created from scratch and, in their respective times, helped define the independent film business.

Currently Deutchman is President and CEO of Emerging Pictures, a New York-based digital film production and exhibition company. Deutchman is also a partner in Redeemable Features, an independent production company that he founded to develop and produce a wide range of theatrical and television programming.

Among the over 60 films he acquired and released at Fine Line were Jane Campion's "An Angel at My Table," Gus van Sant's "My Own Private Idaho," Jim Jarmusch's "Night on Earth," Robert Altman's "The Player" and "Short Cuts," Roman Polanski's "Bitter Moon" and "Death and the Maiden," Alan Rudolph's "Mrs. Parker and the Vicious Circle," Mike Leigh's "Naked," and the award-winning "Hoop Dreams," the highest grossing non-music documentary in history.

Prior to Fine Line, as President of The Deutchman Company, he provided marketing consulting services for such films as Steven Soderbergh's "sex, lies, and videotape" for Miramax, Charles Burnett's "To Sleep With Anger" for The Samuel Goldwyn Company and Whit Stillman's "Metropolitan" for New Line Cinema.

Previously, Deutchman was one of the founding partners and President of Marketing and Distribution for Cinecom Entertainment Group, the film distribution company known for such diverse releases as Merchant/Ivory's "A Room with a View," Jonathan Demme's "Stop Making Sense," Gregory Nava's "El Norte" and John Sayles' "The Brother From Another Planet."

While at United Artists Classics, Films Incorporated and Cinema 5 Ltd., highlights included Lina Wertmuller's "Seven Beauties" and "Swept Away," Barbara Koppel's "Harlan County, USA," Jean-Jacques Beineix's "Diva," and Francois Truffaut's "The Last Metro." While still in college, he organized and marketed the midwest premiere of John Cassavetes' "A Woman Under the Influence."

Deutchman is an Associate Professor in the Graduate Film Division at Columbia University, and serves on the advisory boards of the Sundance Film Festival and the Los Angeles Independent Film Festival. His screen credits include Associate Producer of John Sayles' "Matewan," Executive Producer of Jonathan Demme's "Swimming to Cambodia," Gary Sinise's "Miles From Home," Paul Bartel's "Scenes from the Class Struggle in Beverly Hills," Matty Rich's "Straight Out of Brooklyn," Stephen Gyllenhaal's "Waterland," Maggie Greenwald's "The Ballad of Little Jo," Alan Rudolph's "Mrs. Parker & the Vicious Circle," Paul Auster's "Lulu On the Bridge" and Wayne Wang's digital feature "Center of the World." Deutchman was the Producer of Tony Vitale's "Kiss Me, Guido," Sarah Kernochan's "All I Wanna Do," Mark Christopher's "54," Adam Davidson's "Way Past Cool" and Bob Gale's upcoming "Interstate 60." He was also Consulting Producer on the CBS sitcom "Some of My Best Friends."

Deutchman is a graduate of Northwestern University, with a major in film.

Stephen Dyer, Producer:

Educated in Europe and Japan, Stephen Dyer is a founding partner of New York-based Chimera Films, and has produced the feature films "Ball in the House," "Late Bloomers" and "Finding North." "Late Bloomers" premiered in competition at the 1996 Sundance Film Festival, played more than 50 festivals worldwide, and sold to Strand Releasing and Alliance Independents. Dyer has done budgeting work and production consulting for Danjaq, Agenda Films/Crossroads Pictures, Little Films, and Owen Films, among others. Recently he produced a national commercial for The Coalition for Organ Donation, and

the short film "Etude," by the director of "Late Bloomers." He is currently attached to produce "Never Come Morning," a feature script adapted from the acclaimed novel by Nelson Algren, and "Eva and Me," for Little Films.

John Cosgrove, Producer:

John Cosgrove has produced and directed a body of work (over three hundred hours of primetime network television) that has brought him to the top of his field with the highest honors, critical acclaim and rating successes. Cosgrove makes his debut as a feature producer with BALL IN THE HOUSE.

As co-creator and executive producer of six-time Emmy nominee "Unsolved Mysteries," Cosgrove has presided over one of television's longest-running series with his partner, Terry Dunn Meurer. During its 11 seasons, "Unsolved Mysteries" has helped solve 281 cases, leading to the arrest of 150 wanted fugitives and re-uniting over 100 families with lost loved ones.

Cosgrove has also executive produced 14 movies-for-television, including "Yesterday's Children" (CBS), starring Jane Seymour and Hume Cronyn; "The Happy Face Murders" (Showtime), starring Ann-Margret, Marg Helgenberger and Henry Thomas; "Guilty Until Proven Innocent" (NBC), starring Martin Sheen and Brendan Fraser; and "The Inheritance" (CBS), an adaptation of Louise May Alcott's first novel. In addition, Cosgrove directed two NBC movies for television, "Victim of Love" and "The Sleepwalker Killer," starring Hilary Swank.

The documentary "Five American Guns" (HBO), which Cosgrove directed, presented an unsettling view of violence in America and won first-place honors at the San Francisco, New York and Montreal Film Festivals, and was instrumental in the creation of the HBO series "American Undercover." "Angel Death," starring Paul Newman and Joanne Woodward, was the first television program to investigate the harrowing effects of PCP. It won two Emmies and Gold Medals at the New York Film Festival and Milan Film Festival.

Directed and executive produced by Cosgrove, "Missing: Have You Seen This Person?" was an Emmy nominated series of three one-hour specials for NBC that led to the recovery of 25 missing children.

Cosgrove began his career as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Kingston, Jamaica, where he wrote and produced a twice-weekly television series for the Jamaican Adult Literacy Program and produced a recruiting-training film for the U.S. Peace Corps.

Among his professional associations, Cosgrove is a member of the Caucus of Producers, Writers and Directors and is on its Steering Committee. He is also a member of the DGA, WGA, Producer's Guild of America and Academy of Television Arts and Sciences.

Cosgrove also serves on the board of the Board of Directors of the Los Angeles YMCA and the Private Industry Council of Los Angeles. He is chairman of the Communication and Fine Arts Council of Loyola Marymount University and serves on the Board of Trustees of Loyola Marymount. He is also on the Board of Directors of The Lowe Institute of Claremont McKenna College.

Cosgrove has two daughters, Jennifer and Sarah, and lives in Pasadena, California with his wife, Mary, and his three stepchildren.

Terry Dunn Meurer, Producer:

An award-winning and acclaimed filmmaker, Terry Dunn Meurer is co-creator and executive producer of the six-time Emmy nominated series, "Unsolved Mysteries," along with partner John Cosgrove.

"Unsolved Mysteries" is one of television's most imitated series. The first and most successful show of its kind, "Unsolved Mysteries" has gained not only critical notice, but also a loyal following drawn to the show's exciting mix of stories ranging from high-profile fugitive cases to unexplained phenomenon, lost loves, missing persons and unclaimed fortunes. A hallmark of the program is the 800 number linking viewers directly to the "Unsolved Mysteries" phone center. Viewers' tips are directly responsible for the apprehension of 40 percent of fugitives and 60 percent of the lost loves profiled on the show.

In addition Cosgrove/Meurer Productions, Inc. has a development slate of a half-dozen TV movies for CBS, NBC, FOX, Showtime and USA. Their telefilm, "Happy Face Murders" (Ann-Margret, Marg Helgenberger, Henry Thomas) was Showtime's highest rated movie in the past 14 months and received critical recognition in the national press. Other Cosgrove/Meurer Movies of the Week include "Yesterday's Children" (CBS), Louisa May Alcott's "The Inheritance," "The Sleepwalker Killing" (NBC), "Voice from the Grave" (NBC), "Escape from Terror" (NBC), "Victim of Love" (NBC), "The Morrison Murders" for USA Networks, "Betrayal of Trust," starring Judith Light and Judd Hirsch (NBC), "Nurses on the Line" starring Lindsay Wagner and Robert Loggia (CBS), "Complex of Fear" starring Hart Bochner (CBS), "Between Love and Hate" starring Susan Lucci (ABC) and "Guilty Until Proven Innocent" starring Martin Sheen (NBC).

Before founding Cosgrove/Meurer Productions in 1987, Meurer and Cosgrove shared a successful six-year collaboration producing a wide variety of documentary and reality-based programming. Among their collective credits are the Emmy nominated special, "Missing: Have You Seen This Person?" and the HBO documentary "Five American Guns," an unsettling view of violence in America as seen through the eyes of five average Americans involved in shooting incidents. The acclaimed special won first place honors at the San Francisco, New York and Montreal Film Festivals.

In 1984, Meurer produced "Missing Persons: Four True Stories" for HBO. In a scene that would be repeated often on "Unsolved Mysteries", this special generated a dramatic family reunion after a missing father saw the cablecast and contacted police.

Among her other credits, Meurer also produced "Murder or Mercy," which examined euthanasia and was awarded top honors at the Houston International Film Festival. It also won a Golden Eagle and a Blue Ribbon at the American Film Festival.

A California native, Meurer is a graduate of Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. Among her professional associations, Meurer is a member of the Caucus for Writers, Producers and Directors, The Academy of Television Arts and Sciences and Women in Film.

Meurer is the mother of three children, Daniel, Casey and Kevin, and divides her time between her company's Burbank office, her nearby home, and her commitment to parent activities at her children's schools.