
SONY PICTURES CLASSICS

A Stage 6 Presentation

The Bronze

Directed by
Bryan Buckley

Written by
Melissa Rauch & Winston Rauch

Official Selection
Sundance Film Festival 2015

100 Mins | Opens Everywhere March 18th 2016

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THE BRONZE

Cast

Hope Ann Gregory	Melissa Rauch
Stan	Gary Cole
Ben	Thomas Middleditch
Lance	Sebastian Stan
Janice	Cecily Strong
Maggie	Haley Lu Richardson
Young Hope	Ellery Sprayberry
Coach Pavleck	Christine E. Abraham
Ryan	Brian Binder
Matt	Barak Hardley
Doris	Dale Raoul

Crew

Director	Bryan Buckley
Screenplay by	Melissa Rauch & Winston Rauch
Producer	Stephanie Langhoff
Executive Producers	Jay Duplass Mark Duplass Bryan Buckley Melissa Rauch Winston Rauch M. Charles Cuddy
Associate Producer	Matt LeFebvre
Director of Photography	Scott Henriksen
Editor	Jay Nelson
Production Designer	David Skinner
Costume Designer	Michelle Martini
Casting Director	Jeanne McCarthy

SYNOPSIS

A decade ago, Hope Ann Gregory (Melissa Rauch) was America's sweetheart. Her inspired performance on a ruptured Achilles at the world's most prestigious gymnastics tournament clinched an unlikely bronze medal for the U.S. team and brought glory to her hometown of Amherst, Ohio. But in the years since that epic third place victory, Hope hasn't done a whole lot with her life. Still living in her dad Stan's (Gary Cole) basement, still sporting her daily uniform of a Team USA gym suit with teeny-bopper bangs, ponytail and scrunchie, she spends her days at the mall milking her minor celebrity for free food and favors.

Hope's routine is upended when she learns that she must coach Amherst's newest gymnastics prodigy Maggie (Haley Lu Richardson) in order to receive a sizeable financial inheritance. The hard-edged yet insecure Hope is faced with a serious dilemma: does she jeopardize her "hometown hero" status by devotedly training this rising star to achieve the dreams she never could? Or does she attempt to sabotage the impressionable Maggie to ensure that she remains the one and only star in Amherst?

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

By virtue of the film's very name "The Bronze" -- the writers of this already piqued my interest. I mean let's be serious, who truly celebrates coming in third? Heck, the Greeks didn't even include a bronze in their original Olympic games. It was a 20th century politically correct afterthought.

Which brings me to the second question: Who the hell would be insane enough to actually think a movie should celebrate such mediocrity? The screenwriters Winston and Melissa Rauch did. Stephanie Langhoff, the film's producer did. And so when I began to read "The Bronze" I expected something within the pages to be a somewhat demented and tad ironic explanation of this trio's obsession with America's worst medal.

Little did I know "demented" would be a serene and understated description of the character I would meet on page one. Her name was Hope Ann Gregory. This 27 year-old former Team USA Bronze winning gymnast was like no character I had ever seen. On the surface she was a cute little All-American blonde still clad in her red white & blue sweat suit from the 2004 games. She was caught in a time warp, still living at home in her father's basement in the tiny town of Amherst Ohio. A victim of her 15 minutes of fame. A single moment where she had fought through a torn achilles on the uneven bars to help America land a bronze medal. Now 11 years later she was slowly slipping from the American consciousness into obscurity. Her last stand of fame is the sleepy town she was born in. Coddled by her dysfunctional uber-enabling father. Hope was the ultimate forgotten star. A victim of the system like so many pro athletes who with one tear of an ACL find their life come unglued. Their whole identity, stripped.

In this sad notion, one might look upon Hope with sympathy. But then, well, she opened her mouth. My sudden exposure to her vicious tongue led me to think this character might someday force the MPAA to call an emergency closed door meeting to redefine what is considered acceptable language in our industry. Perhaps changing the R rating forever. An intriguing allure for a filmmaker. But not enough to make me want to do the movie.

But as I turned from one page to the next, this dark foul-mouth spoiled character began to expose her misunderstood beauty. Her honesty. And her struggle to love herself and those around her. When I reached the script's final page, I was beyond sold. And I joined The Bronze entourage.

** Please note: I am not from London, so genius is not a word I use often in describing people. If at all. So this is not hyperbole. She is actually a "genius" by a cynical Bostonian's terms.*

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

The legendary F. Scott Fitzgerald is often misquoted as saying “there are no second acts in American lives.” But in fact, in context, he meant the opposite. And stories like those of Hope Ann Gregory (played by Melissa Rauch) in “The Bronze” prove that even a defeated former hero can rise again.

Even if she’s a little bit of a mess on the way back up. Make that a big, nasty, selfish, foul-mouthed mess. That’s Hope when we meet her. About ten years ago, a teenaged Hope dazzled the world with her brave performance in the women’s gymnastics finals – landing her final routine brilliantly despite a ruptured Achilles – simultaneously ensuring her team a very unlikely bronze medal and ending her career. That moment of bravery and tragedy made her a national hero, though the endorsement deals soon fell to others in the spotlight, and Hope was relegated to the world of D-list celebrity.

Today, while America has mostly forgotten her, Hope still basks in that glory in her home town of Amherst, Ohio – though “basking” is a polite word for it. She milks her fifteen minutes of fame for all it is worth, getting everything from free grub at the mall food court to all the swag, drugs and attention she needs from the fans and marginal hangers-on who still remember her as a shining star. She’s long been out of money, still living with her too-nice-of-a-guy dad, postal carrier Stan (Gary Cole), who can’t seem to set his daughter on the right path. Now in her late 20s, Hope seems to be resigned to living for the next high, the next bad meal, and the next chance to relive her past glory by watching an old VHS tape of her medal-winning performance

Anyone who knows Melissa Rauch from her several seasons starring as the highly intelligent and ambitiously feisty Bernadette from the top-rated CBS sitcom “The Big Bang Theory” will be surprised and delighted to watch her play a character of a much different disposition, and one of her own creation at that. “The Bronze” represents the film screenwriting debut of Melissa and her husband, Winston Rauch. “Most of our favorite movies feature anti-heroes,” explains Melissa, citing performances from films like Jack Nicholson’s work in ‘As Good as It Gets’ “To us, the best comedies come out of characters that don’t pander to an audience by striving for likeability as their primary concern. What’s more interesting are the facades we put up over our vulnerabilities, because everyone has their flaws, everyone is struggling with something. Some people just hide it better than others.” Our movie starts with this life-changing, triumphant moment where Hope defies all odds to win a medal, securing her moment in sport’s history. Unfortunately, she also gets stuck in that moment. Her unwillingness to reset and engage with a new phase in her life creates a grotesquely miserable person. She’s in pursuit of every hedonistic pleasure that could help her experience the highs of a moment deep in her past, but it’s a fool’s errand. She’s become her own false idol, worshipping a former version of herself. Hope’s new

triumph in the end is allowing herself to move on, which ideally the audience will root for, particularly given that they've now witnessed all the unnecessary pain she's caused herself."

"We knew this was going to be a dark comedy, but what was most important to us was to tell an honest, character driven story. We feel the tone of the film reflects the full spectrum of emotions you experience in life, from dark, privately held inner pain, to the heights of adrenaline that come from stepping out of your comfort zone to chase a dream," says Winston Rauch. "The film is also a statement on how Americans treat celebrity – you're hot one minute, then phased out the second the heat dies down. We explore the extremes of once garnering unanimous adulation and respect everywhere you go, to eventually feeling gradual indifference from the public – and how all that could affect a young girl's psyche."

Rauch admits that part of the inspiration from the film had to do with her own experience as a professional actress. The Rauchs were writing partners long before they were romantically involved – in fact, Melissa first came to prominence with a one-person show called "The Miss Education of Jenna Bush" which she co-wrote with Winston for the New York Fringe Festival in 2005 before they were married. The success of the play got Melissa some smaller roles on television, which did not go unnoticed by the residents of her home town in Central New Jersey, where her parents still lived. "I'd go back home for the holidays and people at the mall would recognize me. and I'd get a free pretzel at the food court and think 'wow, I've made it.' Then the next year, after the show was cancelled, I'd come back – no free pretzel." Winston Rauch adds that the whole idea of winning "only" a bronze medal brings additional color to Hope's situation as a fading star: "It's a universal symbol of mediocrity," he says playfully.

Crafting the character of Hope was partially a matter of practically- at just under five feet, the only sport that made sense for a character played by Melissa Rauch was gymnastics ("I was not going to be on a medal-winning basketball team," she confesses with a deadpan expression.) But it also meant finding the right combination of talent and location to set Hope in a world that would at first would enable her grotesquely bad habits and lack of direction, and then believably challenge her to get her act together.

Director Bryan Buckley, who has earned top industry accolades for his commercial work and an Oscar nomination for his short film "Asad" in 2013, was eager to take on "The Bronze" as his first feature assignment not only because of the film's outrageous sense of humor, but also because of its provocative inquiry into the darker aspects of Hope's character, reflected in her gluttonous appetites and penchant for profane put-downs that would be worthy of Don Rickles. "As a sports fan, I've always found it fascinating how we as a culture put athletes on pedestals. Then they get knocked off and what happens? For athletes, there's no coming back – an actor who flops can always find work again, but for most athletes that fleeting moment of greatness is gone. To have a character like this, and introduce her from that darkest side, but then peel back those layers and fall in love with her – there's nothing better than that."

While Hope's heroics were scripted, the Rauch's are quick to name the film's producer, Stephanie Langhoff, as the real life hero of the project. "She met with two people who never had any of their movies produced, never starred in a movie," remembers Winston. "We kept praying she'd get back to us." "Then we got a call," adds Melissa, finishing his sentence. "And it was the best voicemail of our lives! I saved it and then e-mailed it to Winston so we would have it forever!"

As a producer with Jay and Mark Duplass' Duplass Brothers Productions, Langhoff had an instinct that the project might be a good fit. "Melissa and Winston were fans of the kinds of movies we produce," she says. "And we like to embrace people who are writers and actors and directors, people who want to be involved in the film in many different ways. I knew Melissa was going to star and I read the script and fell in love with it instantly. I can't remember the last time I laughed that hard at a script, and you get the tone in the first three minutes. It was incredibly funny and well-written, but also had a lot of heart, which is what we do at Duplass Brothers Productions."

"Stephanie's so incredibly invested and passionate. Her brilliant, spot-on creative input added so many rich and invaluable dynamics to our movie on so many levels. In addition to that, it's an understatement to say that she faced obstacle after obstacle in the process of putting this all together - but she never once waived. She never gave up on ensuring we'd have every possible chance to succeed with this project. She lived in Ohio for over a month working around the clock," continues Melissa, "Trying to get the movie going before there were any guarantees that it would all come together. We remain in awe of Stephanie's extraordinary skills and instincts through every phase of the process, and will forever be indebted to her for her belief in 'The Bronze' and her determination and tenacity in turning this dream into a reality."

Ultimately, all credit production designer David Skinner for finding the real-life town of Amherst, Ohio, population about 12,000, just 40 miles west of Cleveland. "At first we thought we wouldn't be able to shoot in Ohio, where Melissa and Winston had set the script," says Langhoff. "It's not always thought of as a state that is a good business fit for filmmaking, but it turns out there are good tax credits in Ohio, and the film commission has been great to work with." The look of the town and the access to local color and talent made the choice an easy one for Langhoff and Bryan Buckley, who wanted Hope's town to feel as authentic as possible.

Director Buckley cites finding the town of Amherst as one of the most important elements in realizing his vision for the film. "Those mid-America, small towns are little ecosystems unto themselves. I grew up in New England and knew a lot of small towns like this as a kid, but I honestly didn't know if they existed anymore. Amherst was just perfect - they had never had a movie shoot there, so the locals had all of the enthusiasm and excitement that comes as a movie. Their Main Street is full of businesses and not one of them is a franchise. It's a special place,

and I know we wanted to show the real people of that town and make sure we stayed true to showing this world as accurately as they could.”

“Between finding Amherst, and then finding a gym at a Czech community center just outside of Cleveland that happens to be decorated in red, white and blue, it feels like the stars really aligned,” says Langhoff.

“Amherst could not have been more welcoming,” says Melissa Rauch. “We both had a great affection for the town by the time we left.” “The movie wasn’t going to work if the small town wasn’t believable,” says Winston. “You had to believe that it was small enough so that Hope could have the same fame years after her accomplishment.”

The production team found the people of Amherst to be not only accommodating, but eager, many of them appearing as extras and in smaller roles, and treating the visiting crew like family. Far from making fun of the small town or its residents, the townsfolk of “The Bronze” who surround Hope genuinely want what is best for her: it’s a place she should be happy, but isn’t - and the real Amherst just happens to be that kind of place with those kind of people. “Amherst looks like the backlot of a movie studio,” says Winston, enthusing about how the film so precisely matched their vision. Melissa explains: “In the first few pages of the script, there’s a setting description, ‘it’s the type of town where people wave at you when you go by the gas station.’ Well, when we pulled into town the first day, we drove by a gas station and the mechanics all looked up and waved!” “At one point, we wrote the name ‘Pavleck’ into the script as the coach’s name and of the gym where Maggie trains,” says Winston. “We just pulled the name out of the air, but in Amherst, there is a mural with the name ‘Pavleck’ on it.”

The production team also found that Hope’s story was strangely echoed by real-life events, giving them some perspective on the underlying meaning in Hope’s story: “It was an interesting time to be in Ohio,” says Winston. “We were filming when LeBron James announced his return to Cleveland. There were disc-jockeys on the radio literally crying tears of joy over the return of this extraordinarily famous and unforgettable athlete who had chosen to return to his beloved state of Ohio while we were making the story of an Ohio athlete who was mourning the process of being forgotten.”

Another crucial element to the film are the characters who ultimately get Hope out of her dark funk, beginning with her father, Stan, a well-meaning postman who is just starting to sense that his little girl may have taken a wrong turn. Veteran actor Gary Cole was the ideal choice to play Stan, having worked with Rauch several years ago and offering a wide range of both comedic and dramatic skills that the part demands. “We learned so much about Stan through Gary,” says Winston Rauch. “We had somehow convinced ourselves that Stan was the ‘normal’ character in the Gregory household, but when Gary played the part we realized how much he was an

enabler, how much he had coddled Hope. He made their relationship much more rich and complicated than we realized.”

“It probably would have been better if Hope had won nothing at all,” says Gary Cole about the story. “When you win a bronze, no one remembers you except for the people in the small town you are from. Stan devoted a lot of time and energy to her career when she was a young gymnast – maybe he lives through her a little bit, the way some stage parents do. But now he’s getting to a place where he’s fed up with her, but too nice to confront her.” Being the father of a 21 year-old daughter (“I wouldn’t say she’s like Hope,” he clarifies) gives Cole some much needed perspective on the nuances of Stan’s character. “Like anything in life, dads with daughters have to pick their battles, and sometimes it’s difficult to let go, because you can’t control things the way you thought you could before. He’s afraid of confronting Hope and stirring up her wrath, but the consequences of not confronting her become too much.”

“The relationship with Stan was so important because even though this is a very heightened world, the characters needed to be grounded in reality,” says Melissa Rauch. “I was so happy that we began production by shooting all of the scenes in the house, because that’s the core of who Hope is. She is darkest with her father – you’re always the ugliest with the people that you love most. That really helped set the tone for shooting, because I knew where Hope was coming from: this is where all the dick jokes and lashing out at other people and outrageous behavior is enabled. And Gary is such a gifted actor because everything comes from such a real place.”

Through a combination of somewhat unlikely events – including the unexpected death of her former coach – Hope finds herself coaching Amherst’s next gymnastics hopeful, an impossibly bright-eyed high schooler named Maggie, who has long idolized Hope. Hope isn’t exactly in this for noble reasons: a letter from her coach says that Hope will inherit some money if she coaches Maggie through upcoming events towards the world championships. But the letter doesn’t say anything about Maggie succeeding or becoming a better gymnast, so Hope decides to put Maggie on a terrible diet, encourages her to flirt with boys, and pick up on as many bad behaviors as she can, hoping that Maggie will bow out sooner rather than later.

When she first auditioned for the part, actress Haley Lu Richardson (who has many years training as a dancer) was not confident that she would get the role. “It’s pretty safe to say it was the worst audition of my life,” she remembers. Leaving too late and hitting rush-hour traffic, the exhausted actor arrived 45 minutes late, knowing that she would be expected to perform one of Maggie’s long monologues. “I was so flustered, I literally had to stop and start again about eight times. I called my agent afterwards and said ‘if they call you and tell you to drop me, don’t listen to them!’” Instead, a few days later, Richardson got the call that she was to play Maggie: “I squealed,” she says.

“When we saw Haley we knew we had found our Maggie,” says Melissa Rauch. “She’s only nineteen, but she has such maturity, and she’s so thoughtful with her acting choices and always prepared. There is a certain Hope-Maggie element to our relationship – particularly the feeling that she was my little buddy at the end. She’s just terrific.”

“Melissa and Winston are literally the nicest people,” enthuses Richardson. “This is their dream baby project and I can tell how proud and excited they are – that’s when good things come, when people are excited about it.” She’s also thrilled by the challenge of playing a character who plays a key part in both Hope’s story as well as supporting the film’s darker comedic elements. “Maggie is socially young – she’s sixteen, but dresses and acts like she’s thirteen, so she’s super sweet but easily influenced,” explains Richardson as to how the determined and focused Maggie too quickly picks up on Hope’s negative behaviors.

“I’ve been so lucky in that the few things I have done professionally have been so different from each other,” explains Richardson who, like all actors, is wary of being typecast in only being able to play one type of character in one medium or genre. “This was something I didn’t expect to play, another world to live in...the vibe of this movie is so quirky and ridiculous and inappropriate, and that vibe really drew me in.”

Another key component is Hope’s unlikely relationship with the manager of Maggie’s gym – an affable guy named Ben who has always had a crush on Hope, but whose social skills are limited because of an uncontrollable facial twitch. “Ben is a real sweetie-pie,” says actor Thomas Middleditch of his character. “He’s just returned back to his home town and he’s met his high school tormentor and secret crush – their worlds are colliding and his love must blossom.”

Middleditch developed Ben’s occasional physical tics by imitating an acquaintance whom he calls “a hard blinker” – and worked from the eyes on out. “The twitch is always there,” he explains. “What is harder to do is when our director Bryan Buckley says ‘let’s try one with less twitch or no twitch.’ I have a hard time stopping – once you get in the habit of doing it here and there, it’s harder to turn off than to keep it going.”

Like his co-stars, Middleditch was instantly thrilled to be involved in a film with such a unique comedic tone: “When I read the script, I thought it was incredible, and I knew I would love to do Ben, because I’m not as good looking as Sebastian Stan,” he jokes. “Ben is this happy sycophant who has been a lot of fun to play.”

The better-looking (“eye of the beholder,” warns Middleditch) Sebastian Stan indeed plays the part of another man from Hope’s past – Lance, the former men’s gymnastics star, and very briefly Hope’s boyfriend, who is now women’s national team coach Lance Tucker. “Melissa and Winston gave me some suggestions as to the characters’ history, but they also allowed me to go off and do what I wanted to do, and that was a part of the fun,” remembers Stan, who has seen

his comedic chops challenged amidst a cast that always seemed to be finding new things about their characters. “They are all so talented in being able to improvise on the spot – every take they seem to have something new up their sleeve. To be in an environment like that where people are so willing to build with each other, that kind of freedom you don’t find very often.”

Having not only the instinct to improvise and develop new material on the spot – but also the resources and focus to make sure it is done so productively – was the responsibility of the film’s director, Bryan Buckley. Though not a name known to most mainstream film audiences, industry insiders know Buckley as one of the most innovative and successful directors of television commercials in the last decade. No less than the New York Times called Buckley “the King of the Super Bowl,” noting that he has created dozens of high-profile “big game” ads and helmed some of television’s most creative and beloved ad campaigns.

“He is a visual and narrative genius,” says Melissa Rauch. “He created this world that is so unique, it is very much “Hope’s world” in Amherst. But then when we get to the competition in Toronto, and we’re leaving the ghost town malls and main street for a global stage, which has scale and grandeur far more thundering, vibrant and alive than her small town. Bryan had such a clear vision for this and executed against it like he does everything, with elegant precision and expertise that completely blows your mind.” Melissa continues, “Bryan’s a true Actor’s Director. He’s such a calming presence, and the guidance, trust and respect he gives to his actors on-set – from the leads down to the day-players, really brought out the best in everyone’s performances. It doesn’t hurt that he’s also an incredibly warm and positive person. Having someone as intelligent, collaborative, abundantly creative and talented as Bryan at the helm of the ship was such a gift and truly took this project to the next level.”

“He’s basically won every single award in the ad industry,” says Winston Rauch. “He’s someone who has been entrusted with billion dollar brands. But he’s also someone who read an article about the ongoing situation with pirates off the coast of Somalia and then wrote and directed a short film about it – that got nominated for an Oscar! He somehow did that with a cast that, for the most part, couldn’t speak a word of English. It’s a testament to his endless talents as a director, as well as the humanity of his heart, which inform his brilliant and inventive choices that are evident in each frame of ‘The Bronze.’” There are so many remarkable layers to his life and his work. Watching Bryan, who is a true artist at the top of his game, was an education in excellence.”

“He moves so quickly,” says Haley Lu Richardson of her director. “I’m used to taking some time to process a note, and sometimes I’m a little slow. But Bryan will just yell things out from the side to keep you focused and there is so much improvising and reacting in the moment. It’s been a great challenge – and in the best way – because I’ve never worked with someone who moves as quickly as he does.”

“I knew Bryan was a perfect match because there is such a wide scope to this movie,” explains producer Stephanie Langhoff. “We have scenes at this world-class gymnastics competition, and that required a director who was comfortable with that high-pressure environment and all that had to happen in it – but he is also great with comedy and the nuances of it, he is a heartfelt filmmaker, and I love the way he can tell stories visually. I knew he would do an amazing job and yet he still blew my expectations out of the water. There are so many layers to the movie that were very thoughtfully crafted by Bryan to make it something incredibly unique and special.”

Buckley is happy to deflect much of the credit to the Rauchs. “They are disgustingly charming and delightful,” he says. “They say that character comes out when people are under pressure, and I never saw anything but sweetness in all situations and how they work with each other.” Buckley admits that before he met the couple, he was nervous about how he might mesh creatively. “I remember thinking because she was the writer and the star, I hope Melissa is willing to let me contribute – because this could go many different ways. But as soon as we began the process, she completely trusted me. Both of them were so committed, and having them as writers meant we could rework on the fly or adjust when we saw problem coming.”

As for Melissa Rauch as an actress, Buckley is even more enthusiastic. “She could get in and out of character so easily – the accent, throwing herself into that phony smile – and it didn’t take much for her to dial it back just enough so that you still like her.” The production schedule meant that the scenes were shot out of chronological order, and Buckley remarks at how prepared Rauch was for each scene, knowing exactly where Hope was along her journey. “We worked at such a breakneck speed, it was such a pleasure to work and not worry about where she was in her process.”

For their part, writers Melissa and Winston Rauch were barely able to process exactly what their bad-girl-goes-good story had turned into, even after the film completed its modest twenty-two day production schedule. “We are so used to doing everything on our projects ourselves,” Melissa explains. “We were actually bringing props from home and buying things in the airport that we thought would be in Hope’s house,” she says with an embarrassed smile. “We arrived in Ohio and walked into a middle school where the production had taken over thirty classrooms,” continues Winston. “There was an entire room already devoted to props. That alone was a dream come true.”

And while the entire cast enthuses about finding brilliant improvisational moments while filming, the writers explain that such freedom was only possible because of the time they had put into the script. “The rhythm is very important to us,” says Melissa. “If something doesn’t sound right, if the musicality of the comedy is off, Winston and I will work on it until it does sound right. We wanted to be sure that we captured what was on the page first. If we had time after that, we could go off a little bit and see what else we might get – and we’re so blessed to have

actors who knew their characters so well that they could build on it. We discovered some great moments, that were very special.”

It’s likely that audiences will remember some of the film’s more outrageous moments – if you’ve ever wanted to know what it’s like when two world-class gymnasts have sex, then one extended sequence in “The Bronze” will likely show you more than you ever dared imagine. But for the cast and crew, it wasn’t just the racier and more shocking bits that tell the story of Hope, and that was clear from the immense effort and passion put into the project by the Rauches. “You could not ask for kinder, gentler, smarter, or funnier people,” says producer Stephanie Langhoff. “It surprises me that they wrote such a twisted script, because they are the most not-dark-and-twisted people. I fell in love with them as quickly as I fell in love with the script and it has been such a joy to watch Melissa play Hope so impeccably. I think Melissa’s own goodness comes through in Hope and that helps you to fall in love with her.”

Winston Rauch explains that working with Melissa to create a new vehicle for her to star in has been one of the pleasures of the project on a more personal level, and both of them confess that the experience of bringing “The Bronze” to life has been utterly surreal and dreamlike. But they also know that the film will deliver much more than the crazy, outrageous laughs. “It’s funny to think that it happens in a film with so much profanity and sexual references and whatever else,” says Winston. “But we’ve all made a concerted effort to ensure that it won’t be lost that there is an element of redemption for all of that in Hope. And if that redemption doesn’t exist, what’s the point of telling this story?”

“Hope is the cinematic, living proof that people can get past wherever they got hung up in their lives. We all get stuck in some darkness at some point. The circumstances are different for everyone, so often beyond our control, and just as often partnered with our own, very human and imperfect judgment. Could be a bad turn you took, or a sadness you can’t let go of. Or a past you’re competing with that’s taking you out of all of the possibilities that the present moment holds. Hope Gregory got so badly derailed as a human being but somehow, she was able to reconnect with her passion,” he concludes. “And if there’s hope for Hope, there’s hope for everyone.”

ABOUT THE CAST

MELISSA RAUCH (Hope Ann Gregory / Co-Writer / Executive Producer)

Melissa Rauch is best known for her role of Bernadette on "The Big Bang Theory." Her television career spans such shows as "True Blood," "The Office," "Kath & Kim," "Dirty Sexy Money," and "Best Week Ever." Among her feature film credits are roles in "I Love You Man," "Delirious," and "Are You Here." Rauch garnered critical acclaim for her award-winning portrayal of the former President's daughter in her one-woman stage show, *The Miss Education of Jenna Bush*, which enjoyed runs in New York City and Los Angeles, and was an official selection of the HBO U.S. Comedy Arts Festival in Aspen. Rauch also co-wrote, directed and starred in the short film, "The Condom Killer," a *film noir* comedic satire and official selection of the 13th Annual Hollywood Film Festival and The Friar's Club Comedy Film Festival. Rauch received her BFA in acting from Marymount Manhattan College. She currently resides in Los Angeles with her husband and writing partner, Winston Rauch.

GARY COLE (Stan)

Gary Cole can currently be seen on HBO's Emmy winning comedy "Veep" opposite Julia Louis-Dreyfus, and he has received an Emmy nomination for his work. He recently completed work in the Blumhouse feature "The Town that Dreaded Sundown" and appeared in the New Line feature "Tammy" opposite Melissa McCarthy, Susan Sarandon, and Allison Janney.

Best known for his film roles in classic cult comedies such as "Office Space," "Pineapple Express," "Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby," and "Dodgeball: A True Underdog Story," Cole is a veteran of both the screen and the stage. As an ensemble member of Steppenwolf Theater Company, Cole's theater credits include "August: Osage County," "Collected Works of Billy the Kid," "Speed the Plow," "American Buffalo," "Flyovers," and "Balm in Gilead." Additional film credits include: "American Pastime," "The Ring 2," "Win a Date With Tad Hamilton!," "I Spy," "One Hour Photo," "A Simple Plan," "The Brady Bunch Movie" and Clint Eastwood's "In the Line of Fire." Television credits include: "Midnight Caller," "The West Wing," "Arrested Development," "Desperate Housewives," "Chuck," "The Cleaner," "Entourage," "The Good Wife," "True Blood," "Suits," and "Hart of Dixie."

THOMAS MIDDLEDITCH (Ben)

Thomas Middleditch can currently be seen as Richard Hendrix, the central character in Mike Judge's Emmy nominated series on HBO, "Silicon Valley." In addition to "The Bronze," Middleditch will be seen in the upcoming "The Final Girls," directed by Todd Strauss-Schulson. He will also soon be heard as one of the lead voices in the DreamWorks animated feature, "Captain Underpants," along with Ed Helms, Nick Kroll, and Kevin Hart to be directed by Rob Letterman.

Middleditch has been featured on "The Office," playing the role of Dwight Schrute's brother, and

also played Fuzzy in the Paramount Pictures feature, "Fun Size." Other film work includes Martin Scorsese's "The Wolf of Wall Street," "The Campaign," "The Brass Teapot," "The Kings of Summer," "The Other Guys," "Being Flynn," and "Splinterheads." He is a regular performer at UCB, a member of The Improvised Shakespeare Company, and creates and performs comedy shorts with College Humor.

Like many funny people before him, Middleditch came to the U.S. from Canada (British Columbia) but first he made a stop in Chicago and toured with The Second City before moving to New York City. He currently lives in Los Angeles with his two dogs, Meatloaf and Potter.

SEBASTIAN STAN (Lance)

On the heels of wrapping "The Bronze," Sebastian Stan has been cast in two major films helmed by iconic directors. Stan will play NASA scientist Dr. Chris Beck in Ridley Scott's "The Martian" co-starring Matt Damon and Jessica Chastain, based on the pioneering e-book by Andy Weir. Stan was also cast as Joshua, the estranged son to Meryl Streep's rocker mom in Jonathan Demme's "Ricki and the Flash." Written by Diablo Cody, the film also co-stars Kevin Kline and Rick Springfield. Stan will then reprise his role as Bucky Barnes/The Winter Soldier in his third appearance in the Captain America franchise in "Captain America: Civil War."

Other film credits include Darren Aronofsky's "Black Swan," Demme's "Rachel Getting Married," and "Hot Tub Time Machine" with John Cusack. On television, Stan is well-known for his recurring role as Carter Baizen on the hit series "Gossip Girl." He also starred opposite Sigourney Weaver in USA Network's "Political Animals" and in the NBC drama "Kings" alongside Ian McShane. Stan appeared in the first season of ABC's hit series "Once Upon a Time" as fan-favorite, "The Mad Hatter".

In 2007, Stan made his Broadway debut opposite Liev Schreiber in Eric Bogosian's "Talk Radio." During the Roundabout Theater Company's 2013 season, Stan returned to Broadway stage in "Picnic" directed by Sam Gold. Stan currently resides in New York.

CECILY STRONG (Janice)

In 2014, Cecily Strong returned to "Saturday Night Live" for her third season. Strong earned rave reviews for her "Weekend Update" character "The Girl You Wish You Hadn't Started a Conversation with at a Party," which *Rolling Stone* hailed as an "instant classic." Her recurring character of a ditzy porn star-turned-aspiring-pitchwoman that she plays alongside Vanessa Bayer has already become an audience favorite. Strong has also co-hosted "Weekend Update" alongside both Seth Meyers and Colin Jost.

In Chicago, Strong improvised regularly at iO and served as an understudy for the Second City Main Stage and E.T.C. shows. She performed as a member of the Second City national touring company and has also appeared at the Chicago SketchFest, Chicago Just for Laughs, the New

York Sketch Fest and the Edinburgh Fringe Festival.

Strong can be seen in upcoming films "Staten Island Summer," and also voices several characters in "The Awesomes," the Hulu original series created by Seth Meyers. Strong was raised in Oak Park, Illinois, and has a BFA in theater from the California Institute of the Arts.

HALEY LU RICHARDSON (Maggie)

Haley Lu Richardson has always been one for passion and dreams, but when she moved to Los Angeles at 16 she quickly realized that the only "trick" to success is hard work. Her first test of hard work was dancing on the Microsoft X-box Kinect float in the 2012 Rose Bowl Parade. She was quick to land her first lead roles in TV movies "Christmas Twister" and "Escape from Polygamy." Next she transformed into bleached-blond Tess for a season of "Pretty Little Liars" spinoff "Ravenswood." With the blonde do, Haley Lu also appeared on MTV's "Awkward" as "queen of the sophomore sluts," and a similar role in TBS's up coming series "Your Family or Mine." In 2014, Richardson travelled to national and international film festivals for her two movies "The Well" and "The Young Kieslowski."

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

BRYAN BUCKLEY (Director / Executive Producer)

Oscar Nominated Director Bryan Buckley has been dubbed the "King of the Super Bowl" by the New York Times. Directing over 50 commercials for the big game since 2000. Many pieces of Buckley's work have been inducted into the Museum Of Modern Art's permanent collection and he is an esteemed recipient of the DGA award, Emmy's and over 50 Cannes Lions. A 2010 Adweek Readers Poll named Buckley the Commercial Director of the decade and he was also chosen as one of the 50 best Creative Minds in the last 25 years by Creativity Magazine.

Buckley's directing career started in 1994 when he directed the Emmy Award winning "This is SportsCenter" Campaign. In 1997, Buckley co-founded Hungryman along with "This is SportsCenter" creator, Hank Perlman. By 2004, the company won the Cannes Festival's Palme D'or as the top commercial production company in the world and has finished in the top ten for more than ten consecutive years, the first production company to do so.

Buckley wrote and directed the short film "Asad." The film was shot in Africa with an all Somali, refugee cast and screened at over 50 film festivals worldwide, taking top honors at the TriBeCa Film Festival, Austin Film Festival, Florida Film Festival and Michael Moore's Traverse City Film Festival, to name a few. In 2013, Buckley was nominated for an Academy Award for "Asad."

WINSTON RAUCH (Co-writer / Executive Producer)

Winston first collaborated with his writing partner and wife, Melissa Rauch, to create "The Miss Education of Jenna Bush" which won "Outstanding Solo Show" and "The Audience Favorite Award" in the New York International Fringe Festival. The show enjoyed extended runs at the HBO U.S. Comedy Arts Festival in Aspen, as well as The Coronet Theater in Los Angeles. Rauch was also the co-writer and executive producer of The Condom Killer, a film-noir comedic short, an official selection of the 13th Annual Hollywood Film Festival and The Friar's Club Comedy Film Festival. Rauch has a number of projects currently in development for film and television and currently resides in Los Angeles.

STEPHANIE LANGHOFF (Producer)

Stephanie Langhoff is producing partners with the filmmaking team of Jay and Mark Duplass. Together they have worked on the brothers' films "Jeff, Who Lives at Home," and "The Do-Deca-Pentathlon," as well as Craig Johnson's "The Skeleton Twins" and Colin Trevorrow's "Safety Not Guaranteed." The team's first television series, "Togetherness," was written and directed by the brothers and recently premiered on HBO. Before joining Duplass Brothers

Productions, Langhoff was an executive at Revolution Studios in New York where she started as an assistant. Prior to her career in film, Langhoff worked as an investment banker after graduating from the University of Virginia.

MARK and JAY DUPLASS (Executive Producers)

After a series of micro-budget Sundance shorts in 2003 and 2004, brothers JAY AND MARK DUPLASS - who write, direct, produce and act - premiered their first feature “The Puffy Chair” at Sundance in 2005. “The Puffy Chair” was nominated for two Independent Spirit Awards, won the Emerging Vision Award at the SXSW Film Festival, and was jointly distributed by Roadside Attractions and Netflix.

The brothers’ second feature “Baghead” played at the 2008 Sundance and Tribeca film festivals, and was distributed by Sony Pictures Classics in July of the same year. In 2010, Fox Searchlight released their Jonah Hill and John C. Reilly dramedy “Cyrus” to the highest per screen average of any film that year. “Cyrus,” which garnered rave reviews, was followed by the acclaimed 2012 Paramount Vantage release of “Jeff, Who Lives at Home,” which starred Jason Segel, Ed Helms, and Susan Sarandon, and premiered at the Toronto Film Festival. Also in 2012, Mark and Jay re-teamed with Fox Searchlight on the release of the comedy “The Do-Deca-Pentathlon.”

Most recently, the Duplass Brothers produced, wrote and directed the HBO series “Togetherness,” which premiered to critical acclaim in January 2015.

Jay and Mark have also produced several acclaimed and award-winning films through their Duplass Brothers Productions banner. Among the highlights are Colin Trevorrow’s award-winning “Safety Not Guaranteed” (Sundance 2012), Charlie McDowell’s “The One I Love” (Sundance 2014), Craig Johnson’s “The Skeleton Twins” (Sundance 2014), Ross Katz’ “Adult Beginners” (Toronto 2014), and the upcoming films CREEP (SXSW 2014).

Mark and Jay are also known for their work in front of the camera as actors. Mark has appeared in a number of award-winning studio and independent films and the FX comedy show “The League.” Both brothers can be seen in regular recurring roles on Fox’s “The Mindy Project.” Jay is also a regular in the Golden Globe-winning Amazon original series “Transparent.”

SCOTT HENRIKSEN (Director of Photography)

Obsessed with cameras and images from a young age, Scott Henriksen was raised in Southern California and spent his formative years watching 70’s TV and photographing skateboard culture and action sports. Graduating in ‘92 from Art Center College of Design’s photography dept. led to work as Director of Photography shooting groundbreaking music videos for Weezer “Buddy

Holly" and Wax "California" for director Spike Jonze, Metallica and Depeche Mode videos for Anton Corbijn and Sugar Ray and Smashmouth for McG plus many others. Music videos led into a wide and varied commercial career and a long tenure with Bryan Buckley shooting influential and innovative commercials including many super bowl spots like monster.com "When I Grow Up" in 1998. This collaboration continues into narrative work like Asad, which was nominated for an Oscar and The Bronze, premiering in competition at the Sundance Film Festival. Mr. Henriksen lives in Hollywood CA.

JAY NELSON (Editor)

Jay Nelson is an award-winning editor and director from Los Angeles known for his work on many international commercials, films and videos. Jay is also the Executive Producer, Writer and Editor for the documentary "Wild In The Streets," and editor of the film "Holy Wars." Originally from Ohio, Nelson moved to Los Angeles and began his career as a writer and director for the C.A.G. theater company, which soon blossomed into creative work on music videos, television and film. He moved to Hawi, Hawaii with his family in 2007 and continues to work around the world in film and TV, while also devoting his resources to causes such as Partnership for Drug Free America and Heal the Bay. A founding editor at Cut + Run editorial in LA, he divides his time between offices in New York, Los Angeles, and Austin.

DAVID SKINNER (Production Designer)

David Skinner is a Los Angeles-based commercial production designer. His work can be seen in numerous advertisements currently on air in addition to Super Bowl spots in years past. He began his career in New York, starting as a carpenter and working his way up to production designer solely through on-the-job training. With no formal education background in design, a sense of reality is prevalent in David's work.

David's first narrative work can be seen in the Academy Award-nominated short film "Asad" (2013). With a beautiful touch, he sensitively created a war-torn Somalia in a small South African tourist town, bringing director Bryan Buckley's story to a human place in an inhuman world.

MICHELLE MARTINI (Costume Designer)

Michelle Martini is a costume designer for both films and commercials. She is now based in Los Angeles, after beginning her career in design and film in New York City.

After graduating from Rhode Island School of Design with a degree in Film Animation, Michelle moved to New York City to work alongside Oscar nominated costume designer April Ferry. She designed her first independent film "Nobody Know's Anything" at the age of 23 working with comedians like Ben Stiller, Janeane Garofalo, Margaret Cho and Mike Meyers. After years of

working in features she made a foray into the world of advertising and began an epic journey of non-stop Super Bowl spots with commercial director Bryan Buckley.

Michelle is accomplished in creating costumes from idea and concept; taking them into the construction process and all the way to the camera's eye. She has worked directly with many reputable directors in the film and commercial industry including Spike Lee, Barry Sonnenfeld, Bryan Buckley, Todd Field, Tim Robbins, Jonathan Demme, Ted Demme and more.

After a decade of living on both coasts Michelle finally calls Los Angeles home. She lives in Venice with her 5 year old son, Milo.

In 2012 Michelle was nominated for a Costume Designers Guild Award for a Target campaign in which she designed and constructed the costumes. The campaign was directed by Wayne McClammy.