



FESTIVAL DE CANNES
OFFICIAL SELECTION
COMPETITION

BLINDNESS

A film by Fernando Meirelles

Based on the book 'Blindness' by José Saramago

Julianne Moore
Mark Ruffalo
Danny Glover
Gael Garcia Bernal
Alice Braga

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F O C U S
F E A T U R E S

I N T E R N A T I O N A L

BLINDNESS

Synopsis

From Nobel Prize winning author Jose Saramago and acclaimed director Fernando Meirelles (“The Constant Gardener,” “City of God”) comes the compelling story of humanity in the grip of an epidemic of mysterious blindness. It is an unflinching exploration of human nature, both bad and good--people's selfishness, opportunism, and indifference, but also their capacity for empathy, love and sheer perseverance.

It begins in a flash, as one man is instantaneously struck blind while driving home from work, his whole world suddenly turned to an eerie, milky haze. One by one, each person he encounters – his wife, his doctor, even the seemingly good samaritan who gives him a lift home – will in due course suffer the same unsettling fate. As the contagion spreads, and panic and paranoia set in across the city, the newly blind victims of the “White Sickness” are rounded up and quarantined within a crumbling, abandoned mental asylum, where all semblance of ordinary life begins to break down.

But inside the quarantined hospital, there is one secret eyewitness: one woman (four-time Academy Award® nominee Julianne Moore) who has not been affected but has pretended she is blind in order to stay beside her beloved husband (Mark Ruffalo). Armed with increasing courage and the will to survive, she will lead a makeshift family of seven people on a journey, through horror and love, depravity and beauty, warfare and wonder, to break out of the hospital and into the devastated city where they may be the only hope left.

Their journey shines a light on both the dangerous fragility of society and the exhilarating spirit of humanity. It is brought to life by Academy Award® nominated director Fernando Meirelles from a screenplay by Tony Award winner Don McKellar, based on the international bestseller by Jose Saramago, and an ensemble cast that includes: Julianne Moore (“Far From Heaven,” “The Hours”), Mark Ruffalo (“Zodiac,” “Reservation Road”), Danny Glover (“Dreamgirls,” “The Color Purple”), Gael García Bernal (“Babel,” “The Motorcycle Diaries,” “Y tu mamá también”), Alice Braga (“I Am Legend,” “City of God”), Yusuke Iseya (“Sukiyaki Western Django,” “Kakuto”), Yoshino Kimura (“Sukiyaki Western Django,” “Semishigure”), Don McKellar (“Monkey Warfare,” “Childstar”), and Maury Chaykin (“Where the Truth Lies,” “Being Julia”).

BLINDNESS is produced by Niv Fichman, Andrea Barata Ribeiro and Sonoko Sakai. The executive producers are Gail Egan, Simon Channing Williams, Tom Yoda, Akira Ishii and Victor Loewy. The co-producers are Bel Berlinck and Sari Friedland.

BLINDNESS

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

“I don't think we did go blind. I think we always were blind.

Blind but seeing. People who can see, but do not see.”

-- José Saramago, Blindness

In 1995, the acclaimed author José Saramago published the novel Blindness, an apocalyptic fable about a plague of blindness ravaging first one man, then a city, then the entire globe, with devastating fury and speed. Though the story was about a stunning loss of vision, the book opened the eyes of its readers to a new and revealing view of the world.

The book was celebrated by critics as a classic-in-the-making, a magnificent parable about our disaster-prone times and our metaphoric blindness to our sustaining connections to one another. It became an international bestseller, and also led, along with an accomplished body of equally thought-provoking literature, to Saramago garnering the 1998 Nobel Prize for Literature.

As the novel rapidly gained millions of fans around the world, many filmmakers were magnetically drawn to its intricately created world, one that had never been seen on screen before. After all, how does one make a compellingly visual film in which almost no one can see? It called for a grand vision and one filmmaker who had such a vision right from the start was Fernando Meirelles, who, at the time, was an up-and-coming Brazilian filmmaker with a passion for big, intense, all-enveloping cinema.

But at the time, Saramago rejected all his suitors, saying he was uninterested in a movie version of Blindness – and Meirelles went on to make another heartfelt movie, his groundbreaking, electrifying, yet lyrical tale of life among the young, fearless gangsters in Brazil's slums, “City of God.”

Meanwhile, multitalented Canadian screenwriter, actor and director Don McKellar was also trying to win the rights to Blindness. McKellar, whose films include the end-of-the-world drama “Last Night,” was grabbed by Saramago's themes as soon as he read the English translation of Blindness, and he knew they weren't going to let him go until he wrote his vision of the adaptation. He approached producer Niv Fichman of Rhombus Media – with whom he had collaborated on both “Last Night” and as a screenwriter on the Oscar®-winning “The Red Violin” -- with the idea of securing the rights. As soon as Fichman read the book, he was equally fervent about it but there remained that one major obstacle in their way: convincing Saramago.

“I always resisted (giving up rights to the Blindness),” Saramago told the New York Times Magazine in 2007, “because it's a violent book about social degradation . . . and I didn't want it to fall into the wrong hands.”

But Fichman and McKellar were not going to give up. All they wanted was a chance to meet with Saramago and present their case and, after months of persistent calling, convincing and cajoling, they finally received word that Saramago would meet with them . . . so long as they were willing to travel to his far-away residence in Lanzarote, one of the Canary Islands. Fichman's immediate response was, “Excellent. Yes. Where's Lanzarote?”

On the way to visit the octogenarian author, they developed their strategy. They would not discuss the book or their vision for the film, but rather try to impress upon Saramago the creative freedom their team, based in Canada, would bring to the picture. “I think Saramago was afraid that a studio would turn this into a zombie film and lose the fundamental underlying politic of the story,” says Fichman. “So we explained that control would remain in the hands of the filmmakers – and that

we wouldn't have to send our rushes to anyone. We explained that we would have the freedom to cast who we want, to shoot how and where we want, and do whatever we felt was right for the film."

The strategy paid off. "I think Saramago was impressed by our commitment," recalls McKellar, "I think he trusted that we had the integrity he was looking for and that we wouldn't compromise the film."

At last, Saramago agreed and McKellar began tackling one of the most exhilarating challenges of his career. "I knew that that the tone of Saramago's book would be very hard to achieve on film," explains McKellar, "None of the characters even have names or a history, which is very untraditional for a Hollywood story. The film, like the novel, directly addresses sight and point of view and asks you to see things from a different perspective. For me, as a screenwriter, I saw that as very liberating."

McKellar also understood that the film would have to diverge from the book in several key ways. Most importantly, he had to consider the idea that in a movie theatre, the audience was going to develop an unusually voyeuristic relationship with these characters who can be seen but can't see back. In the book, only the Doctor's Wife can see all the harrowing events that take place, but in the film, the audience would join her in bearing witness. The burden of sight would be shared between them, and that was a delicate situation that McKellar had to carefully navigate.

"Like the Doctor's Wife, the audience is watching people and that calls into question the humanity of observing and not acting, which becomes a major theme of the film," notes McKellar. "In some scenes, especially the rape scene, you are seeing things you don't necessarily want to see. You want the freedom to look away, to turn your head, but it's not being allowed. I wanted the audience to be sharing in the perspective of the Doctor's Wife as her field of responsibility widens."

The Doctor's Wife helped to lead McKellar deeper into the story. He continues: "I even asked Saramago why the Doctor's Wife took so long to take action in the hospital? Why didn't she act faster? Why, when she saw what was happening, didn't she grab her scissors and kill? He said she became aware of the responsibility that comes with seeing gradually, first to herself, then to her husband, then to her small family, then her ward, and finally to the world where she has to create a new civilization. It was a responsibility that she didn't know was in her. She becomes aware of it through actions and circumstances, and that is something I wanted to be strongly felt in the film."

Ultimately the power of the script entranced all who read it and also brought on board two additional producers: Andrea Barata Ribeiro of O2 Filmes, which had produced "City of God" and the recent sequel "City of Men" and Sonoko Sakai, founder of LA/Japan-based Bee Vine Pictures, who recently served as a producer on Francois Girard's adaptation of "Silk."

FLYING BLIND:

FERNANDO MEIRELLES TAKES THE HELM

Once Niv Fichman read Don McKellar's suspenseful, illuminating and, stunningly visual screenplay for BLINDNESS, he knew they would need a director with a matching sense of pace, scale and creativity, as well as an intense interest in the spectrum of human nature. This led them full circle back to Fernando Meirelles, who in the intervening years, had become an internationally acclaimed director. He had broken ground for an exciting new era of global cinema with "City of God," his intoxicating and inventive journey into Brazil's crime-ridden underground, which was filled with visual panache and action yet also scenes of unforgettable poignancy. The film was nominated for four Academy Awards®, including a nomination for Meirelles as Best Director. Meirelles then moved on to Hollywood to direct the heart-pounding screen adaptation of John Le Carré's Africa-set political thriller "The Constant Gardener," starring Ralph Fiennes and Rachel Weisz, which received another four Oscar® nominations.

His ability to invite audiences into new and perspective-changing worlds with his ambitious sense of style was a major deciding factor. “When I would dream about what would be perfect for *BLINDNESS*, I’d dream of the kinetic energy and naturalistic performances in ‘City of God,’ combined with the elegance and very subtle politics of ‘The Constant Gardener,’ so I knew that Meirelles was the right choice,” says Fichman. “We had started with a book from a Nobel Laureate, we had an adaptation from one of the great screenwriters of the world, and now with one of the most innovative directors, we had created a package that gave us incredible strength.”

“Five minutes of talking was all it took to convince Meirelles to take the helm of *BLINDNESS*,” recalls producer Andrea Barata Ribeiro, “Fernando could have made any type of film, but he and everyone who has worked closely with him knows of his concern with making the world a better place and this story was always important to him.”

Meirelles began with his eyes closed – literally. He spent hours with them tightly sealed, thinking about how the world would feel and sound, what it would really be like from the inside, if you suddenly lost your vision. For further inspiration, he read the book over and over, six or seven times, letting Saramago’s multilayered portrait of humanity under siege wash over him.

He understood the story could be interpreted in any number of ways – as a metaphor about the personal and political reactions to recent natural disasters; as an allegory about the perils of the future; as a commentary on choosing not to see what is happening around you; as a meditation on primal instincts; as a probe into the human conscience in all its desperate weaknesses and astonishing strengths – and he wanted the movie to be all these things and yet none of them explicitly.

“This story does not have one truth, and all the different interpretations make sense,” he says. “There are many moral dilemmas and I think the film goes even further in this direction than the book, where things are a bit more black and white. I have added a lot of grey. This is a story that must create a lot of questions, but give no answers. It raises issues about man’s evolution, makes us reflect critically, but points in no specific direction. As in the story, each one will have to discover their own road by themselves.”

But when it came to the film’s visual style, Meirelles eschewed the grey. He wanted to emphasize the unexpected kind of blindness specified by Saramago, not a lights-out darkness but an impermeable, radiant fog that obscures, but does not blot out, the world. “My first instinct was to take this dark story and make a very bright film, with an almost oppressive brightness,” he comments. Thus, even as all sight, civility and societal structure falls away for the characters, the film maintains a glaring luminosity that suggest a light on just the other side of the darkness.

Meirelles is renown for making visually arresting, high-energy films out of challenging subjects and in challenging places, but with *BLINDNESS* he faced perhaps the biggest challenge of them all: how do you shoot a story in which none of the characters, save one, has a point-of-view?

To address this, Meirelles took the risk of switching points-of-view throughout the film. He begins the film with a director’s omniscient vantage point, but then, inside the hospital-tuned-gulag he shifts to the interior POV of the Doctor’s Wife, because she is the only one can see. Once the audience has settled into that world, the POV changes again, this time to the Man with the Black Eye Patch who connects those being quarantined to stories from the outside world and to their own inner worlds. Finally, as the story moves back out into the war-torn city, the film’s POV becomes a fusion of the Man with the Black Eye Patch’s narrative with imagery seen through the eyes of the Doctor’s Wife.

The result is a kind of building multiplicity of voices and perspectives –one that echoes Saramago’s prose style and hints at a different way of seeing. To enhance this further, Meirelles divided the story into what he sees as three distinct stylistic sections. “The first act is when everybody is going blind, and that all moves very fast and is almost like an action film,” he observes. “I felt it was important for the audience to experience the oppression of not knowing what is going on at the beginning.”

Then, once again, everything changes. “For the second act when the doctor and his wife come to the asylum and experience the blindness,” he continues, “we used a lot of abstract images to convey the feeling of really being lost. This act also introduces the Man with the Black Eye Patch as the narrator and the Bartender who declares himself the King of Ward Three, and the story goes in a

different direction with one group fighting against the other group in a kind of gang warfare. Then, after the fire in the asylum, a new door opens, people leave and it becomes a new film again."

Though his vision was complex, once on the set Meirelles became known for his wide-open sensibilities, allowing for improvisation and creative accidents. Meirelles also added to the already global flavor of the production. "Fernando has a way of putting everybody at ease. There are no boundaries. On set we'd hear Portuguese, English, French, Spanish, and Japanese and yet we all spoke one language - the language of making a beautiful story," summarizes producer Sonoko Sakai.

THE DOCTOR AND HIS WIFE:
JULIANNE MOORE AND MARK RUFFALO

At the heart of *BLINDNESS* are the Doctor and the Doctor's Wife, two ordinary people plucked from their ordinary lives into a maelstrom of disorientation and confusion. The Doctor's Wife, the only person in the story who, through luck of the draw, is immune to the infection and can still see (despite pretending she is blind), becomes the audience's eyes in a sense and their conduit to everything that is happening to those whose vision is a blank. She guides the audience into the terrifying and threatening world of the abandoned sanitarium, where anyone can be killed at any time – whether by the frightened guards or the frantic inmates themselves. Surprising herself, with her back pressed to the wall, she becomes a true leader among her blinded fellow human beings, spurring them on to learn to live in the midst of their anguish and uncertainty.

To play the Doctor's Wife, the filmmakers recruited four-time Academy Award® nominee Julianne Moore, who is known for her subtly nuanced and deeply emotional performances in such films as "Far From Heaven," "The Hours," "The End of the Affair" and most recently Alfonso Cuarón's vision of a dystopian future, "Children of Men." Moore felt an instant link to the character, who she views not necessarily as a heroine but rather as someone driven, like all of us, to survive, a drive that takes her to dark places but also to a strength inside her she had not understood was there.

"The Doctor's Wife is just a normal human being and I think that's one of the great things about the novel. She is fallible, and a lot of what she does initially just skims the surface of what she really could be doing, keeping things clean, tying up wires. Her biggest concern in the beginning is simply her husband. But her ability to see ultimately both isolates her and makes her into a leader," comments Moore. "I think with this character, Saramago poses the idea of responsibility. He asks who are we and how responsible are we for one another, for the world we live in and for what we do in it? You have to consider how aware you are of the consequences of your actions, which really comes into play with the Doctor's Wife."

Moore had long been yearning to work with Meirelles when she received the script for *BLINDNESS*. "When I heard he was making this movie, I really wanted to do it. He's a brilliant director with an astonishing point of view," she says. "Then, after reading the script, I also felt that *BLINDNESS* was massive and important and a story we need right now."

The actress delivered a shock to the filmmakers when she arrived on set as a blonde. Meirelles had asked Moore to cut her hair for the film, but she took the transformation a step further, an idea that occurred to her while reading the screenplay. "I just had an instinct that it was right for the character," she explains. "Red hair makes you stand out because you are in the minority. I wanted the Wife to be a majority figure."

On the set, Meirelles was astounded by Moore's combination of skill and emotional tenderness. "Technically, she's like a machine; you say something and she responds immediately, she perfectly understands the story, the moment, the plot, and she knows precisely how close to be to the camera. At the same time, she is pure cinema. She has something, and I'm not even sure what you call it . . . Charisma? Expressiveness? Whatever it is, every day I was overwhelmed by her performance."

Contrasting with the Wife's upward swing of gaining courage is the tumbling descent of her husband, the Doctor. He begins the story as a strong, responsible community leader but, once blinded and interred in the hospital, he must grapple with a growing sense of powerlessness and despair that leads to subjugation. To play the Doctor, the filmmakers chose Mark Ruffalo, whose career took off

with his charmingly vulnerable role in the hit indie “You Can Count on Me” and has gone on to give memorable performances in a string of films that include “Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind,” “Collateral,” “All The King’s Men,” “Zodiac” and most recently, “Reservation Road” with Joaquin Phoenix. Ruffalo was a perfect match for this pillar of the community who plunges into a nightmare beyond his imagining.

As soon as he read the screenplay, Ruffalo could not resist wanting to explore the Doctor’s intense experience in the strange land of the newly blind. “What I found interesting is that the Doctor comes to find out that he is not who he thought he was and then, in one heartbreaking moment, he also finds out that his wife is not who he thought she was. The interesting truth of the matter is his wife is who he had *hoped* he would be under these circumstances. And he is the type of person he assumed his wife was. And that’s a very difficult moment for anybody, to have all their perceptions completely shattered,” he says. “But I think the Doctor finally comes to a peace about his inabilities and his downfall, and admits to an admiration for his wife’s strengths.”

Ruffalo had first met with Meirelles in Cannes in 2007 to discuss playing the Doctor, but then it looked like the production would overlap with the expected due date of Ruffalo’s third child. Despite how much he wanted the role, Ruffalo made it clear he needed to be with his wife for the birth. Meirelles however, was convinced that Ruffalo was right for the role, and as a result BLINDNESS’s wrap date was moved up to free Ruffalo in time – and fortunately, the baby cooperated.

Summarizes Meirelles of Ruffalo: "Mark has this quality of raw honesty, not only in his characters, but personally. He brings great warmth to the Doctor and I think his performance is brilliant."

THE MAN WITH THE BLACK EYE PATCH: DANNY GLOVER

If the Doctor’s Wife becomes the eyes of BLINDNESS, the character known as the Man with the Black Eye Patch provides access to the story’s soul. An inveterate storyteller who also serves as the movie’s narrator, Fernando Meirelles always saw the Man with the Black Eye Patch as the on-screen manifestation of author José Saramago. "For me, it was like having the novelist as part of the cast," notes Meirelles.

A patient of the Doctor and a man who was already blind in one eye when the “White Sickness” struck, the Man with the Black Eye Patch is in a unique position to navigate the world of the blind, having been half-way there already. He comes to the fore when he brings news – or is it rumors? – of what happened in the outside world in the days after the first blind people were interred, spinning stories of overturned busses, planes crashing into one another and government dissolution. But as the film goes on, he becomes its inner voice, his observations, ultimately floating, disembodied above the proceedings..

The Man with the Black Eye Patch would require an actor of maturity, soulfulness and grace, which ultimately led to Danny Glover, the veteran star who has played an astonishingly broad diversity of roles from the comic action of the “Lethal Weapon” series opposite Mel Gibson to playing Nelson Mandela in the telefilm “Mandela”; from playing Paul Garner in Jonathan Demme’s screen adaptation of Toni Morrison’s “Beloved” and Albert in Steven Spielberg’s screen adaptation of “The Color Purple” to his recent turn in the hit musical “Dreamgirls.”

“The Man With The Black Eye Patch comes into this new world of blindness already half blind, so I think he understands where he is within his own truth, within himself. I did feel like this character was very much like Saramago because he is completely unapologetic --- he is who he is and he accepts who he is," explains Glover.

Most of all, Glover was taken in by the depths of BLINDNESS and all the swirling thoughts it provoked. "Our human aesthetic is based on our ability to see," he observes. “And I think Saramago is saying that when we take that away, the kind of relationships we form and the journey to forming those relationships must be transcendent and sustainable. How people come out of this experience is

the key, and I think it all relates to the idea that if we march into the 21st and 22nd centuries without a new ethos, we will be lost."

THE WOMAN WITH DARK GLASSES: ALICE BRAGA

One of the most mysterious characters in *BLINDNESS* is the Woman With Dark Glasses, played by Alice Braga, who first worked with Fernando Meirelles playing Angelica in "City of God" and who recently starred in another apocalyptic tale, "I Am Legend" opposite Will Smith. Meirelles always had her in mind for the role. "Alice is a very good actress and a very good friend, and I knew I wanted a Brazilian actor in *BLINDNESS*," he says. "At first, I had some concerns about having her act in English -- a language she learned only 3 to 4 years ago -- but I took the risk and it paid off. I think she has the kind of charisma that is something you are either born with or not."

Braga approached her character as someone who starts off quite secretive and enigmatic but becomes a richer and more open human being, especially as she grows closest to the orphaned Boy with the Squint, who needs her help to survive the dangers of the quarantined "camp." "The Woman With The Dark Glasses is mysterious," says Braga. "While she does sleep with men because it is easy money, I did not want to treat her purely as a prostitute. She starts out quite tough, but then she develops very strong maternal feelings."

Meirelles was impressed with how Braga pulled off the character's evolution. "When she first arrives at the hospital, covered by her glasses and her cascading hair, you don't really know who she is or understand her relationship with the Boy. She seems so cold, without warmth or affection. But then she begins to see with different eyes, from inside. Scene by scene, she becomes warmer, like a real human being. That's Alice's arc. Because of her blindness, the Woman with Dark Glasses learns to see."

THE THIEF AND THE KING OF WARD THREE: DON MCKELLAR AND GAEL GARCIA BERNAL

To play the man known as the Thief, who begins *BLINDNESS* as the Good Samaritan who gives the First Blind Man a ride home, the filmmakers turned to an unusual source: the film's screenwriter, Don McKellar, who also is an accomplished actor. "I didn't write the part of the Thief for myself," McKellar explains, "but I was always very interested in him. You first see the Thief as the good samaritan who gives the First Blind Man a ride home but later proves to take advantage of the situation when he steals his car. I like the trick that you think the Thief is the bad guy. He's a pathetic character you first believe is the villain of the piece and then you realize that, no he's not even close to that. There's something charming about his desperation because after a point, you meet the King of Ward Three and learn what real desperation is."

The King of Ward Three starts out known as the Bartender, his occupation in life before the "White Blindness" sets in. But inside the quarantined hospital, the Bartender appoints himself the royal dictator of Ward Three and then the rest of hospital, as he begins to control all of the meager resources provided by the government -- namely food -- by demanding jewelry, goods and ultimately women in trade.

The role went to one of today's most electrifying screen stars, Gael García Bernal, who came to the fore in Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu's breakout films "Y tu mamá también" and "Amores Perros" and garnered acclaim and awards for his performance as a young Che Guevara in Walter Salles' "The Motorcycle Diaries."

Bernal had long been a fan of the novel. "I always thought it was a transcendent story," he says. "It is about the inability of people to live together, about what happens when people don't really see each other. I like that it creates a situation that puts to the test all the social and moral structures we have been taught. The wards become chaotic and corrupt like the world. But in the end, it's a hopeful story because the only thing that can save us is ourselves."

Bernal knew he would be taking on an extremely demanding part, a portrait of power's corruptions yet one that had to maintain its own sense of humanity, that had to be at once comical, savage and true. "I think the King is just very practical, very pragmatic. He appears cold because he is not an idealist and he does not see hope, but he is a survivor, the same as all the others," observes Bernal. "To say the King is evil would be to go against the point of the story. He chooses practical solutions for the benefit of his ward. And what is so powerful about him is that his actions result in a very heated debate about morals."

THE FIRST BLIND MAN AND HIS WIFE:
YUSUKE ISEYA AND YOSHINO KIMURA

The first man to go blind in BLINDNESS, Patient Zero as it were, becomes the arrow that drives the story forward. The audience follows in suspense as he suddenly loses his vision while waiting at a red light, flails through the now hostile world and as he tries to come to grips with what is happening to him and why. Accepting a ride home from a stranger (later to become the Thief), he soon passes the strange infection to his angry, disconsolate wife and starts off a chain reaction that will quickly grow out of control.

The First Blind Man and his Wife are perhaps the characters who changed the most in Don McKellar's adaptation of Saramago's novel. For one thing, McKellar added in a note of marital discord that gives the opening scenes an even greater emotional tension, and becomes another theme unto itself – for the blindness breaks open an invisible rift between the couple, who find themselves uncertain at first of what connects them at all without sight.

Secondly, although the ethnicity of the characters doesn't enter into the novel, McKellar and Fernando Meirelles made the decision early on to cast two actors of Asian background to add to the film's mix of cultures, typical of any postmodern mega-city. But having made the decision, they then spent months searching for the right actors. Ultimately, they chose Japanese heartthrobs Yusuke Iseya and Yoshino Kimura, who both starred in the 2007 Japanese hit, "Sukiyaki Western: Django," a remake of Sergio Corbucci's 1966 Spaghetti Western, also starring Quentin Tarantino, from maverick director, Takashi Miike.

Both spoke just enough English to make the roles work and most importantly, they had an essential chemistry that allowed them to work beautifully together in silence. "Fernando made the brilliant realization that even though the parts were written in English, the couple could be speaking Japanese amongst themselves, so they didn't have to be fluent in English," says Sonoko Sakai. "This allowed us to look for great actors which we found with Iseya and Kimura."

BEING BLIND:
THE BLINDNESS WORKSHOPS

Once the cast of BLINDNESS was chosen, an enormous task lay at hand: to submerge them all in the experience of being suddenly, inexplicably and irrevocably blind. To do this, the filmmakers brought on board acting coaches turned "blindness coaches," Christian Duurvoort and Barbara Willis Sweete, who, after doing extensive interviews with blind people, developed their own creative system for teaching the sighted to physically maneuver as if they cannot see.

They began working with the actors in a series of intense "blindness workshops," that explored space, experimented with smell and sound, and simulated such physical tasks as finding food, setting a fire and assaulting someone while blind. Each actor began with a total immersion, spending hours blindfolded, simply to become accustomed to what it felt like to have no use of their eyes. Eventually, blindfolds were removed, graduating to moving with eyes shut and then performing with eyes open. Key actors also had the option of wearing lenses which effectively blinded them, something they'd often opt for during intense scenes which allowed them to focus on acting rather than on not seeing. "At first I asked for the lenses," explains Alice Braga, "because there were too

many things to think about: not looking and being in the moment, feeling the emotions, and speaking in a different language. But after twenty days of filming, I stopped using them because I had become so connected to feeling the part."

Over time, the main cast as well as several hundred extras, who also had to be completely authentic in their blindness, began to adapt to working without sight. "It takes time to teach not only blindness but more importantly 'recent blindness,'" notes Duurvoort. "But with that time, you start to realize certain things. For the blind, space is what your body touches. Also, sighted people hear sounds that they do not pay attention to, but for the blind, all kinds of noises become very important."

So impressed by these workshops was Meirelles that not only did he participate, but he also urged everyone, including cinematographer César Charlone and other key department heads, to sign up, which would come to influence the very look and design of the film. "For me," Meirelles said, "the biggest revelation was sound - how you hear things, how sound changes for you, how it changes your perceptions of the world around you. So in this film you will hear much more. We use very clean sound, so the audience will pay attention to every little noise."

Everyone who participated had their own deeply personal experiences in the blindness workshops. "You come to a situation like this with some anxiety," says Danny Glover. "But Christian gave me a sensibility about trust and how your body feels things. I learned how you could quickly notice the energy in the room and even the temperature. That gave me a certain level of confidence which I felt I could take to the next level in front of the camera."

Mark Ruffalo found, to his exhilaration, that being blind gave him new creative options. "The most remarkable thing about being blind was the freedom I felt as an actor," he muses. "When I couldn't see, I wasn't worried about what my hands were doing or how I looked during the scene. It was like little kids say, 'I'm going to close my eyes and the world can't see me any more.' You learned to trust what the director was seeing more than your own eyes."

He continues: "Experiencing blindness also helped us to understand more about the story. In these workshops we were thrown out, blindfolded, onto a city street with 20 strangers, with only the sound of a bell to lead you. So what happens is that everyone starts holding onto each other and moving as a group. It immediately creates trust and community and I think that's part of what Saramago was writing about."

INTO BRIGHTNESS: THE PRODUCTION

From the beginning, Fernando Meirelles knew that creating BLINDNESS on screen would, ironically, require truly original imagery that could pull audiences deep into the shock and disorientation of the characters and hold them riveted to this world. To design a film that could do that, the director brought with him many of his trusted and talented artistic crew from "City of God," including: Oscar® nominated cinematographer César Charlone, who would use his experiences in the "blindness workshops" to help forge the film's visual simulations of the "White Blindness"; Academy Award® nominated editor Daniel Rezende, who worked closely with Meirelles to structure the film's shifting, sinuous points of view; and production designer Tulé Peak, who turned a prison into the hastily crafted internment camp that critics of Saramago's novel compared to Dante's Inferno, and transformed a once cosmopolitan city into a ravaged urban wasteland for BLINDNESS.

Adhering to Saramago's wish that the film, like the novel, be set in an unidentified city, which lends it a timeless universality, the production of BLINDNESS was shot in three different countries but no identifying signs were used. Most of the early exteriors were filmed in the large, vibrant city of Sao Paulo, Brazil, which also happens to be Meirelles' home town; the middle section of the film, set in the asylum-turned-quarantine-camp, was shot in a defunct prison in Guelph, Canada; and the film's climax, which unfolds against the shattered landscape of a completely disrupted metropolis, was shot in both Sao Paulo and Montevideo, Uruguay (a city suggested by cinematographer César Charlone who hails from Uruguay originally.)

A former architect, Meirelles is fascinated by structure but also by creative providence. He notes that his favorite moments in filmmaking are when a simple cut changes the meaning of a scene,

when a camera movement suddenly seems to take on a soul of its own, when the music hits just the right tone for a scene, when an actor connects with a powerful emotion – and he is thrilled that all of these things happened on BLINDNESS.

Throughout, he was guided most powerfully by the quotation in the frontispiece of José Saramago's novel (from the ancient Book of Exhortations): "*If you can see, look. If you can look, observe.*" After all, this story about blindness, Meirelles summarizes, "is really about learning to see."

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ABOUT THE CAST

JULIANNE MOORE (The Doctor's Wife), an actress of exceptional range, has delivered outstanding work in both box office hits and independent features. Her current films include the independent feature *Savage Grace*, which premiered at the 2007 Cannes Film Festival in the Director's Fortnight, about the Baekeland murders that took place in London in the 1970s, and *I'm Not There*, the Todd Haynes film in which seven characters embody a different aspect of the life and works of Bob Dylan. Moore's recent credits include the action-thriller *Next*, in which she starred opposite Nicolas Cage, *Children of Men*, directed by Alfonso Cuarón and starring Clive Owen, *Trust the Man*, written and directed by Bart Freundlich, starring David Duchovny, Billy Crudup and Maggie Gyllenhaal and *Freedomland*, opposite Samuel L. Jackson and directed by Joe Roth.

Moore is the ninth person in Academy history to receive two acting Oscar nominations in the same year for her performances in *Far From Heaven* (Best Actress nomination) and *The Hours* (Best Supporting Actress nomination). *Far From Heaven*, the critically acclaimed film from Focus Features directed by Todd Haynes, co-stars Dennis Quaid and Dennis Haysbert. She was the recipient of many critics' honors for her performance in this film including the National Board of Review, Los Angeles Film Critics and Broadcast Film Critics, among others. She won the Independent Spirit Award for Best Actress for her performance in the film and received Golden Globe and Screen Actors Guild Award nominations in the same category. *The Hours* (Paramount Pictures), directed by Stephen Daldry, is based on the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel of the same name by Michael Cunningham, and also stars Nicole Kidman and Meryl Streep. Among numerous honors for her performance in this film, and in addition to her Oscar nomination, she received a Screen Actors Guild Award nomination for Outstanding Supporting Actress.

Moore's additional film credits include: Joe Ruben's *The Forgotten*, with Dominic West; the romantic comedy, *Laws of Attraction*, co-starring Pierce Brosnan; Jane Anderson's *The Prizewinner of Defiance, Ohio*; Lasse Hallström's *The Shipping News*, with Kevin Spacey, Cate Blanchett and Judi Dench; Bart Freundlich's *World Traveler* and *The Myth of Fingerprints*; *Hannibal*, in which she starred as 'Clarice Starling' opposite Anthony Hopkins; *Evolution* with David Duchovny; Neil Jordan's *The End of the Affair* with Ralph Fiennes (Academy Award, Golden Globe and SAG Award nominations for Best Actress); Paul Thomas Anderson's *Boogie Nights* (Academy Award, Golden Globe and SAG Award nominations for Best Supporting Actress) and *Magnolia* (SAG Award nomination for Best Supporting Actress); Robert Altman's *Cookie's Fortune* with Glenn Close and Liv Tyler, and *Short Cuts* (Independent Spirit Award nomination for Best Supporting Female); Gus Van Sant's re-make of *Psycho* with Vince Vaughn; *An Ideal Husband* (Golden Globe nomination for Best Actress) with Rupert Everett; *The Map of the World* with Sigourney Weaver; Steven Spielberg's *The Lost World*; *The Big Lebowski*, starring Jeff Bridges and directed by the Coen Brothers; the Todd Haynes film *Safe* (Independent Spirit Award nomination for Best Female Lead); Louis Malle's *Vanya on 42ND Street*; James Ivory's *Surviving Picasso*; *The Hand That Rocks the Cradle*; *Benny & Joon*; *The Fugitive*; *Nine Months*; and *Assassins*.

Moore's additional honors include the Excellence in Media Award at the 2004 GLAAD Media Awards, the Actor Award at the 2002 Gotham Awards and the "Tribute to Independent Vision" at the 2001 Sundance Film Festival.

After earning her B.F.A. from Boston University for the Performing Arts, Moore starred in a number of off-Broadway productions, including Caryl Churchill's Serious Money and Ice Cream/Hot Fudge at the Public Theater. She appeared in Minneapolis in the Guthrie Theater's Hamlet , and participated in workshop productions of Strindberg's The Father with Al Pacino and Wendy Wasserstein's An American Daughter with Meryl Streep. Moore made her Broadway debut in 2006 in the Sam Mendes production of The Vertical Hour , an original play written by David Hare.

MARK RUFFALO (The Doctor) With an expansive list of diverse film credits, Mark Ruffalo is one of Hollywood's most sought after actors, easily moving between stage and screen with working with directors including Ang Lee, Michael Mann, David Fincher, Michael Gondry, Kenneth Lonnergan and Spike Jonze. Prior to *Blindness*, Ruffalo was in production on *The Brothers Bloom*, directed by Rian Johnson (*Brick*). The cast includes Adrien Brody, Rachel Weisz and Rinko Kikuchi. Ruffalo will portray the older brother in a conman team with Brody.

Ruffalo can also be seen in Focus Features' film *Reservation Road* opposite Joaquin Phoenix. The film is based on the best selling novel, which tells the story of two fathers on opposite sides of a hit-and-run car accident. *Reservation Road* was screened at the Toronto International Film Festival and had a platform release beginning October 19, 2007. Ruffalo recently wrapped *Where the Wild Things Are* directed by Spike Jonze and the Kenneth Lonnergan film *Margaret* with Anna Paquin and Matt Damon.

In 2006, Ruffalo appeared in the Phoenix Pictures film *Zodiac* opposite Jake Gyllenhaal and Robert Downey Jr. Based on a true story, the film follows the men who tracked down the Zodiac serial killer who terrorized San Francisco for 25 years. Ruffalo plays the San Francisco homicide inspector in charge of the case. Phoenix Pictures has announced that they have purchased the rights to *The Brass Wall* as a starring vehicle for Ruffalo. He will play an undercover cop who infiltrates the Lucchesi crime family in New York to solve the murder of a city firefighter.

Last year Ruffalo made his Broadway debut in the Lincoln Center Theater's revival of Clifford Odets' Awake and Sing! Ruffalo received a Tony Award nomination for his performance in the category "Best Featured Actor in a Play." In the Depression-era drama, directed by Bartlett Sher (The Light in the Piazza), Ruffalo played a World War I veteran who lost a leg during the war. The cast included Ben Gazzara, Zoe Wanamaker and Lauren Ambrose.

In 2006 Ruffalo appeared in Columbia Pictures' *All the King's Men* with Sean Penn, Kate Winslet and Jude Law. The film premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival. In 2005, Ruffalo starred as the romantic lead opposite Reese Witherspoon in Dreamworks' *Just Like Heaven*. Prior to this role, he was seen in Dreamworks' *Collateral*, released in 2004, opposite Tom Cruise and Jamie Foxx. In *Collateral*, Ruffalo played the LAPD officer in pursuit of Tom Cruise's hitman character. He also appeared in Warner Independents' *We Don't Live Here Anymore*. The film received critical acclaim at the 2004 Sundance Film Festival. Ruffalo starred opposite Naomi Watts, Peter Krause and Laura Dern and also served as an executive producer on this drama that examines the consequences of infidelity that befall two marriages. In 2003, Ruffalo was seen opposite Meg Ryan in Jane Campion's film *In The Cut*. That same year, he appeared in the independent film *My Life Without Me*, written and directed by Isabel Coixet and also starring Sarah Polley and Scott Speedman. In 2004, Ruffalo was seen in Columbia/Tristar's romantic comedy *13 Going on 30*, in which he co-starred opposite Jennifer Garner. In March of 2004, he was seen in Focus Features' film *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*,

opposite Jim Carrey, Kirsten Dunst, Kate Winslet, Elijah Wood and Tom Wilkinson and written by Charlie Kaufman.

Ruffalo earned critical recognition in 2000 for his role in Kenneth Lonergan's *You Can Count on Me*, opposite Laura Linney and Matthew Broderick. For his performance, he won the *Best Actor Award* at the 2000 Montreal Film Festival and the

New Generation Award from the Los Angeles Film Critics Association. The Martin Scorsese-produced film received recognition from critics nationwide and was especially well-received at the 2000 Sundance Film Festival, winning two of the festival's top prizes: the coveted *Grand Jury Prize* for best film in dramatic competition and the *Waldo Salt Screenwriting Award*.

In the following two years, Ruffalo landed roles in the action films *The Last Castle*, opposite Robert Redford and James Gandolfini, and *Windtalkers*, opposite Nicolas Cage and Christian Slater. He also starred in the first picture from Nylon Films, *XX/XY*, written and directed by Austin Chick. Additional film credits include Miramax's *Committed*, co-starring Heather Graham, which was also showcased at the 2000 Sundance Film Festival; *Ride With the Devil*, directed by Ang Lee and co-starring Tobey Maguire and Skeet Ulrich; Miramax's *54* with Mike Meyers; *Safe Men*, with Sam Rockwell and Steve Zahn; *The Last Big Thing*, directed by Dan Zupovich; Joan Micklin Silver's *Fish in the Bathtub*, with Jerry Stiller and Dan Bootzin's *Life/Drawing*.

Ruffalo's acting roots lie in the theater, where he first gained attention starring in the off-Broadway production of *This is Our Youth*; written and directed by Kenneth Lonergan, for which he won a *Lucille Award for Best Actor*. *Variety* said of his performance, "Mark Ruffalo is a genuine discovery...it's a terrific performance; funny and heartbreaking at once." Ruffalo has won several awards for other performances, including a *Dramalogue Award* and the *Theater World Award*. In 2000, Ruffalo was seen in the Off-Broadway production *The Moment When*, a play by Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award winner James Lapine. Ruffalo was part of an impressive ensemble cast that included Illeana Douglas, Kieran Culking and Arija Bareikis.

Having trained with Joanne Linville at the distinguished Stella Adler Conservatory, Ruffalo made his theater debut in *Avenue A* at The Cast Theater. Ruffalo continued his relationship with The Cast Theater, performing in several of Justin Tanner's award-winning plays, including *Still Life With Vacuum Salesman* and *Tent Show*. A writer, director and producer as well, Ruffalo co-wrote the screenplay for the independent film *The Destiny of Marty Fine*, which was the first runner-up in the 1995 Slamdance Film Festival in Park City, Utah. Additionally, he has directed several plays and one-acts. In 2000, he directed Timothy McNeil's original play *Margaret* at the Hudson Backstage Theatre in Los Angeles.

ALICE BRAGA (The Woman With Dark Glasses) Brazilian born actress Alice Braga has been receiving critical acclaim and international recognition ever since her stirring performance in *City of God* helped catapult the film to multiple Golden Globe and Oscar® nominations. Appearing in nearly a dozen films in just five years, Braga, already fixture of Brazilian cinema, has captured Hollywood's attention with a host of promising projects on the horizon.

Scheduled for a December 14 release, Braga will star opposite Will Smith in *I Am Legend*, the story of the last survivor of a man-made plague that has mutated humans into vampires. Based on the novel by Richard Matheson, this Warner Bros. release is directed by Francis Lawrence with a screenplay adapted by Akiva Goldsman and Mark Protosevich. In Wayne Kramer's upcoming film, *Crossing Over*, Braga joins an ensemble cast including Sean Penn and Harrison Ford in a film about the lives of immigrants living in Los Angeles and their efforts to achieve US citizenship. Braga is set to star in Universal's *Repossession Mambo* opposite Jude Law and Forest Whitaker. Written by Eric Garcia,

adapted from his own novel, this Sci-Fi film follows a man as he struggles to pay off his heart transplant before it is repossessed. This film is slated for a 2009.

Braga recently wrapped production on David Mamet's *Redbelt*, chronicling the life of a Jiu-jitsu master, played by Chiwetel Ejiofor, who must enter the ring to redeem his honor after being conned by movie stars and promoters. Tim Allen and Emily Mortimer also star in this film set for a 2008 release by Sony Pictures Classics. Braga's past credits include: her portrayal of a carefree art student opposite Diego Luna, in *Sólo Dios Sabe (God Only Knows)* which premiered at the Sundance Film Festival; *A Journey to the End of the Night*, an independent film set against the backdrop of the Brazilian sex trade industry with Mos Def and Brendan Fraser; the riveting drama about the dangers of a love triangle, *Cidade Baixa (Lower City)*, and the offbeat comedy *O Cheiro do Ralo (Drained)*.

Fluent in Portuguese, Spanish and English, Braga is the daughter of actress Ana Maria Braga.

YUSUKE ISEYA (The First Blind Man) Born in Tokyo, Yusuke Iseya started his career as a model while he studied at Tokyo Geijutsu Daigaku (Tokyo National University of Fine Arts & Music). He continued his studies at New York University where he studied film. He made his acting debut in *Wandâfuru raifu (Afterlife)*, followed by *Kinpatsu no sougen* (for which he won the 2001 Japanese Professional Movie Award), *Distance*, *Gaichu (Harmful Insect)*, and *Yomigaeri*. In 2003, he made his directorial debut with the film, *Kakuto* (which earned a nomination for the Tiger Award) and then returned to acting. His credits include: *Dead End Run*, directed by Sogo Ishii and in 2005, *The Passenger*, directed by Francois Rotger. Most recently, Iseya worked with the renowned director Takashi Miike in *Sukiyaki Western Django* and has recently completed work on *Closed Note*, directed by Isao Yukisada.

YOSHINO KIMURA (The First Blind Man's Wife) Yoshino Kimura was born on April 10, 1976 in the United Kingdom and lived in London and New York until returning to Japan to continue her education. In 1996, she made her debut as an actress in the NHK drama *Genki wo ageru (I'll Cheer You Up)* where she played the leading part. In 1997, she played the role of the heroine's daughter in the movie *Shitsurakuen (Paradise Lost)* and won the Rookie of the Year Award of the Japan Academy Prize. This marked her jump to stardom. In July 2000, she made her stage debut, playing the lead role in the premiere of *Horobikaketa jinrui, sono ai no honshitsu to wa (Perishing Humankind, What is the Essence of its Love?)*, which was directed by Amon Miyamoto. In 2003, she was cast in a musical for the first time in *Me & My Girl*. In New York, she took acting and dance lessons. In March 2005, she starred in the stage drama, *Maboroshi ni kokoro mo sozoro kuruoshi no warera Masakado (The Saga of Shogun Masakado Taira)* directed by Yukio Ninagawa, playing the role of the wife of Masakado Taira, Kikyo, which earned accolades. In August 2005, she played the role of the wife of Mozart, Constanze, in the musical *Mozart!* Ten years from her debut, her performance in *Semi shigure (2006)* won her the Best Actress Award of the Japanese Academy Awards. In 2007, she starred in the Hollywood film, *Dream Cruise (SHOWTIME)*, her first English-speaking part. Her new film *Sukiyaki Western Django* (all-English) was released in 2007. She has appeared in more than fifty TV dramas, movies and stage dramas, as well as commercials. Besides being active as an actress, Yoshino debuted as a singer in 1998 with the song "Iruka no natsu" (Summer of a Dolphin) and has released five singles and three albums to date.

In 2004, she was appointed Goodwill Ambassador for the Visit Japan Campaign by the Minister of Land, Infrastructure and Transport. She also took on the role of Goodwill Ambassador for the Japan-Korea Visit Year 2005 with her Korean counterpart, Ms. Cho Ji Woo, a South Korean actress. In 2006, she served as Tourism Goodwill Ambassador for the 2006 Japan-Australia Year of Exchange. She has gained an excellent reputation for her English speaking ability with the aim of being an actress in the international arena.

MAURY CHAYKIN (The Accountant) is one of the most versatile and prolific character actors in the film world. Known within the business as an actor's actor, Chaykin has appeared in over 140 films. *Dances with Wolves* introduced his enormous talents to a huge audience in a riveting cameo as a suicidal army major. Other feature films in which Chaykin starred include *My Cousin Vinny*, *Entrapment*, *Twins*, *Wargames*, *Owning Mahoney*, *Mystery Alaska*, *Cold Comfort*, *Unstrung Heroes*, *Whale Music* (for which he won the Genie Award for best actor in a leading role), *Being Julia*, and *The Sweet Hereafter*. Chaykin has made five films with the Canadian director Atom Egoyan and has worked with Diane Keaton on six projects over the years. Chaykin has also worked extensively in television appearing on "Boston Legal," "CSI," "Stargate" and starring for three years in the title role as the brilliant agoraphobic detective "Nero Wolfe" on the A&E series. More recently, he won a Gemini award for his performance in Ken Finkelman's extraordinary series "At The Hotel" and has been entertaining large audiences with his hilarious portrayal of Harvey Weingard on the popular HBO series "Entourage."

DANNY GLOVER (The Man with the Black Eye Patch) Actor, producer and humanitarian Danny Glover has been a commanding presence on screen, stage and television for more than 25 years. As an actor, his film credits range from the blockbuster *Lethal Weapon* franchise to smaller independent features, some of which Glover also produced. Most recently, he co-starred in the critically acclaimed feature *Dreamgirls* directed by Bill Condon and in *Poor Boy's Game* for director Clement Virgo. He appeared in the hit feature *Shooter* for director Antoine Fuqua and will next be seen in *Be Kind, Rewind* for director Michel Gondry. He has also been cast in a recurring role on the award-winning television drama series *Brothers and Sisters*.

Glover has also gained respect for his wide-reaching community activism and philanthropic efforts, with a particular emphasis on advocacy for economic justice, and access to health care and education programs in the United States and Africa. For these efforts, Glover received a 2006 DGA Honor. Internationally, Glover has served as a Goodwill Ambassador for the United Nations Development Program from 1998-2004, focusing on issues of poverty, disease, and economic development in Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean, and currently serves as UNICEF Ambassador.

In 2004, Glover co-founded Louverture Films (www.louverturefilms.com) dedicated to the development and production of films of historical relevance, social purpose, commercial value and artistic integrity. The New York based company has a slate of progressive features and documentaries including the recently released *Bamako*, which premiered to superb reviews at the Cannes International Film Festival.

A native of San Francisco Glover trained at the Black Actors' Workshop of the American Conservatory Theater. It was his Broadway debut in Fugard's *Master Harold...and the Boys*, which brought him to national recognition and led director Robert Benton to cast Glover in his first leading role in 1984's Oscar[®]-nominated Best Picture *Places in the Heart*. The following year, Glover starred in two more Best Picture nominees: Peter Weir's *Witness* and Steven Spielberg's *The Color Purple*. In 1987, Glover partnered with Mel Gibson in the first *Lethal Weapon* film and went on to star in three hugely successful *Lethal Weapon* sequels. Glover has also invested his talents in more personal projects, including the award-winning *To Sleep With Anger*, which he executive produced and for which he won an Independent Spirit Award for Best Actor; *Bopha!*; *Manderlay*; *Missing in America*; and the film version of Athol Fugard's play *Boesman and Lena*. On the small screen, Glover won an Image Award and a Cable ACE Award and earned an Emmy nomination for his performance in the title role of the HBO movie "Mandela". He has also received Emmy nominations for his work in the acclaimed miniseries "Lonesome Dove" and the telefilm "Freedom Song." As a director, he earned a Daytime Emmy nomination for Showtime's "Just a Dream."

GAEL GARCIA BERNAL (Bartender/King of Ward Three) An actor nearly all his life, Gael García Bernal began performing in stage productions with his parents in Mexico, and later studied at the Central School for Speech and Drama in London.

Bernal appeared in several plays and short films before his major feature film debut in Alejandro Gonzalez's *Amores Perros*, which was nominated for the Best Foreign Film Oscar in 2000. He gained more attention for Alfonso Cuarón's *Y Tu Mamá También*, where he starred opposite his close friend, Diego Luna.

He subsequently starred in the title role of Carlos Carrera's Academy Award-nominated *El Crimen del padre Amaro* (The Crime of Father Amaro). Later Bernal was cast to play the revolutionary leader Che Guevara in Walter Salles's *The Motorcycle Diaries*. Gael Garcia Bernal also starred in Pedro Almodóvar's *La mala educación* (Bad Education). He then worked on James Marsh's independent feature *The King* and in Michel Gondry's *The Science of Sleep*. He also starred in Alejandro Gonzalez Iñárritu *Babel*, Hector Babenco's *El Pasado* and *Rudo y Cursi*.

Bernal founded the film production company Canana with Diego Luna and Pablo Cruz in 2005. Since then, they've produced *JC Chavez*, *Deficit*, *Cochochi* and presently in production, *Voy a explotar*. Together they also run the Ambulante documentary film festival, that travels around several cities in Mexico.

García Bernal made his directorial debut with *Deficit*, a low-budget feature film shot in Mexico.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

FERNANDO MEIRELLES (Director) An Academy Award nominee for *City of God*, Fernando Meirelles graduated with a degree in architecture. While attending university in Brazil, he made his first experimental productions using U-Matic equipment and a crew composed of friends. The resulting films won several prizes at the country's earliest independent video festivals.

The same group of friends went on to found the innovative studio, Olhar Eletrônico (Electronic Glance), bringing new life to Brazilian TV in the 1980s. For a decade, the group produced programmes for a variety of TV stations. In 1989-1990, Meirelles created and directed the popular children's series "Rá-Tim-Bum," for Brazilian public television. The 190 episodes of "Rá-Tim-Bum" received the Gold Medal from the New York Film and TV Festival in addition to numerous other awards.

From television, Meirelles went on to direct commercials and promotional videos. His independent studio, O2 Filmes, became the largest in Brazil and over a period of ten years, received the most prestigious national and international prizes, including five Cannes Lions, several Clios, and nine Professional of the Year awards. In 1997, Meirelles directed his first feature film, *O Menino Maluquinho* (Wacky, Wacky Boy) with Fabrizia Pinto.

Meirelles participated in the television project "Brava Gente Brasileira" (2000) directing the episode "Palace II" (Golden Gate) as a 'rehearsal' for *City of God*. *Palace II* was re-edited as a short and received the Best Short Film prize in the Panorama Section of the 2002 Berlin Film Festival among several other international awards. In 2000, Meirelles made his second feature film *Domesticas* (Maids) with director Nando Olival which was selected for competition at the Rotterdam International Film Festival. In 2002, he finished his third film, a feature-length adaptation of Paulo Lins' novel *Cidade de Deus* (City of God). The film was co-produced by Walter Salles' Video Filmes (*Central Station*). *City of God* won more than 52 awards around the world and received four 2004 Academy

Award nominations including: Best Director (Fernando Meirelles); Best Cinematography (Cesar Charlone); Best Editing (Daniel Rezende) and Best Adapted Screenplay (Braulio Mantovani).

Since 2002, following on from the success of *City of God*, O2 Filmes together with Globo Television has produced five episodes per year of the television series, "City of Men" (Cidade dos Homens). Meirelles produces all episodes and has directed several of them. Fernando Meirelles is currently involved in his next feature film project, *Intolerance* in addition to producing films from first-time Brazilian directors.

In 2004 Meirelles directed the feature film *The Constant Gardener*, based on the John Le Carré novel.

DON McKELLAR (Screenwriter/The Good Samaritan/The Thief) To connoisseurs of Canadian cinema, Don McKellar is best known for his collaborations with Bruce McDonald. McKellar wrote *Roadkill* and *Highway 61*, co-wrote *Dance Me Outside*, and appeared in *Roadkill* and *Highway 61*. He also co-wrote (with Francois Girard) the Genie-winning *Thirty-two Short Films About Glenn Gould*, *The Red Violin* and wrote, directed and starred in his latest feature, *Childstar*. McKellar is a prodigious writer for the stage (he won the 2006 Tony Award for *The Drowsy Chaperone*, Best Book of a Musical) and television ("Twitch City"). His role in Atom Egoyan's *Exotica* won him a Best Supporting Genie and his directorial debut, *Last Night*, earned him the Prix de la Jeunesse at Cannes. He has also appeared in Atom Egoyan's *Where The Truth Lies*, Olivier Assayas' *Clean*, the critically acclaimed series "Slings & Arrows," John N. Smith's "The Tommy Douglas Story," Gary Burns' *Waydowntown*, and David Cronenberg's *eXistenZ*, as well as Peter Wellington's *Joe's So Mean To Josephine* and Patricia Rozema's *When Night Is Falling*.

NIV FICHMAN (Producer) is a founding partner of Rhombus Media, renowned as one of the world's most respected producers of high quality feature films, television series and films on the performing arts. Fichman has produced most of Rhombus' output, which now stands at around two hundred films over the past thirty years. He is responsible for several highly renowned feature films, the most recent being the Canadian World War I epic *Passchendaele*, written, directed and starring Paul Gross. Fichman has previously produced such directors as Francois Girard, Olivier Assayas, Guy Maddin, Don McKellar, Peter Mettler, David Wellington, Peter Wellington, Kevin McMahon, Marc Evans, as well as his partners at Rhombus, Larry Weinstein and Barbara Willis Sweete. Some of Fichman's other recent productions include an adaptation of the best selling novel *Silk* by Italian author Alessandro Baricco with *The Red Violin* director Francois Girard, and featuring Michael Pitt and Keira Knightley, Marc Evan's *Snow Cake* starring Alan Rickman, Sigourney Weaver and Carrie-Anne Moss, as well as Don McKellar's *Childstar*, and Olivier Assayas' *Clean*, with Maggie Cheung, Nick Nolte and Beatrice Dalle, for which Cheung won the best actress Palme at the 2004 Cannes Film Festival. Fichman also produced the Academy Award-winning *The Red Violin*, *Saddest Music in the World*, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, *Thirty-Two Short Films About Glenn Gould*, *Last Night*, and *September Songs*. For television he produced "Slings & Arrows," an 18-part multi-award winning mini-series broadcast on the Sundance Channel in the US and various stations around the world, and "Yo-Yo Ma: Inspired By Bach," a six part series which was a notable international success on television and DVD. Over the past thirty years Rhombus productions have received literally hundreds of awards including an Academy Award, several International Emmys, Primetime Emmys, numerous Geminis, Genies, and a number of Golden Pragues and Golden Roses. Side from his producing responsibilities, Niv Fichman has directed a number of Rhombus productions including "Crossing Bridges," "Struggle for Hope," "Marcelo Alvarez: In Search of Gardez" and "World Drums."

Away from Rhombus, Fichman recently ended an eight-year stint on the Board of the Toronto International Film Festival. He has also received a Doctor of Letters degree (honoris causa) from York University in June, 1998. Most recently, Niv Fichman was named the Canadian Producer of the Year for 2007 by the CFTPA.

ANDREA BARATA RIBEIRO (Producer) was elected by Variety as one of the 50 most influential women in the entertainment industry worldwide. She is a partner of O2 Filmes and one of the creators of its Television and Film branch. She produced the feature films *Maid*s (2001), by Fernando Meirelles and Nando Olival; *City of God* (2002), by Fernando Meirelles; *Not by Chance* (2007), by Philippe Barcinski; *City of Men* (2007), by Paulo Morelli; *The Pope's Toilet* (2007), by César Charlone and Enrique Fernández, as well as the TV series “City of Men” (2002/2003/2004/2005), for Globo and “Sons of Carnival” (2006), for HBO Latin America. She also was the producer of the Emmy nominated “Antonia” (2007), a TV series for Globo.

SONOKO SAKAI (Producer) has bridged several cultures in a film career which has well utilized her international background. Born in New York, Sakai was raised in Japan, the United States and Mexico.

Sakai is founder of Bee Vine Pictures, a motion picture production company that was created in Los Angeles and Japan to develop and produce quality films.

She produced *Silk* starring Kiera Knightley, Michael Pitt, and Koji Yakusho and directed by Francois Girard. Prior to producing, Sakai began her film career as a production assistant for Konigsberg Productions. She then found her way into the international sales and marketing of films, landing a job as a sales agent at Shapiro Entertainment. Three years later, Sakai turned her selling experience into buying films and started Gaga America, a subsidiary of Gaga Communications, a Japanese film distributor. In 1990, Sakai left Gaga to head the U.S. office of Nippon Herald Films. During her 20 years as a film buyer, Sakai acquired such box office hits as *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, *Whale Rider*, *The Motorcycle Diaries*, *Winged Migration*, *Elizabeth*, *Billy Elliott*, *Traffic*, *Heat*, *Gangs of New York*, *Hilary and Jackie*, *Like Water for Chocolate*, *Passion of Christ*, *True Lies*. She also associate produced *That Night* for Warner Bros. Most recently, Sakai served as an acquisition consultant for Herald-Kadokawa Pictures.

Sakai serves on the executive board of Film Independent (IFP) in Los Angeles, the sponsor of the Independent Spirit Awards. Besides movies, she also has a passion for food. Sakai wrote a Japanese cookbook titled *The Poetical Pursuit of Food* (Random House/Potter). Her articles have appeared in such U.S. publications as the Los Angeles Times, Los Angeles Herald-Examiner, and *Saveur Magazine*. Sakai is a graduate of UC Davis. She was pursuing a doctorate in Education at UCLA when she decided to change her course in life and work in films.

BEL BERLINCK (Co-Producer) Together with Fernando Meirelles, Andrea Barata Ribeiro and Paulo Morelli, has implemented and developed the movie and TV department at O2 Filmes, of which is a partner. Has produced the full-length films *City of Men* (2007), *The Pope's Toilet* (2007), *Not by Chance* (2007), *Antônia* (2007) and *Up Against Them All* (2004), and the TV series “City of Men” and “Antônia,” both broadcast on TV Globo, and “Sons of Carnival,” on HBO – all finalists to the Emmy International. Worked as executive producer in the full-length films *Viva Voz* (2003), *City of God* (2002) and *Maid*s (2001).

SARI FRIEDLAND (CO-PRODUCER) has been an integral part of several of Canada's most successful television series during the past three decades, including the original "Degrassi Series" (90 half-hours), "Liberty Street" (26 half-hours) and "Riverdale" (42 one-hours). Friedland then went on to produce the multiple Gemini award-winning "Slings & Arrows" (18 one-hours) for Rhombus Media which airs on Showcase, The Movie Network and Movie Central in Canada and the Sundance Channel in the US. Friedland just completed producing phase one of the performing arts reality series "Triple Sensation" for the CBC. Red Green's *Duct Tape Forever* was Friedland's producing foray into feature films. For Rhombus Media, she produced the feature film *Clean*, written and directed by French filmmaker Olivier Assayas, starring Maggie Cheung & Nick Nolte. *Clean* premiered at the 2004 Cannes Film Festival earning Maggie Cheung the award for Best Actress.

Over the last twenty years Friedland has volunteered a great deal of her time to the Canadian Film and Television Producers Association (CFTPA) representing the interests of independent producers and currently sits on the CFTPA's Board of Directors and is the Chair of the Industrial Relations Committee. She has actively participated in the successful negotiation of the last four DGC, ACTRA and WGC agreements. In recognition of her volunteer work, Friedland – somewhat prematurely – received the Kodak/CFTPA 2006 Lifetime Achievement Award.

GAIL EGAN (Executive Producer) is a qualified barrister and practised commercial law at Lincoln's Inn before joining Price Waterhouse Corporate Finance. She then worked for the International Media Group Carlton Communications.

In 2000 she formed the independent production company Potboiler Productions with Simon Channing Williams. Together they have produced seven feature films including a classic adaptation of *Nicholas Nickleby* directed by Douglas McGrath, the rock epic *Brothers of the Head* directed by Keith Fulton & Lou Pepe, and the Oscar winning *The Constant Gardener* directed by Fernando Meirelles. Gail is currently executive producing Mike Leigh's *Happy-Go-Lucky*, Fernando Meirelles' *Blindness* and Alessandro Baricco's *Lecture 21*, as well as *Distant Thunder*, a wildlife feature directed by Mark Deeble & Victoria Stone which will film in Africa in 2008. Potboiler has acquired the rights to the latest John le Carré novel *The Mission Song* and is currently developing the screenplay.

SIMON CHANNING WILLIAMS (Executive Producer) Simon Channing Williams' career started at the BBC where he worked with amongst others; Stephen Frears, James MacTaggart, Mike Newell, Michael Apted and Mike Leigh.

As a result of working with Mike Leigh they jointly formed Thin Man Films in 1988, producing many critically acclaimed films such as the Palme D'Or winning *Secrets & Lies* and Oscar nominated *Topsy-Turvy* and *Vera Drake* which also won the Golden Lion at Venice.

Outside his relationship with Mike Leigh and Thin Man Films, Simon Channing Williams produced a number of other films, including *Puccini* for director Tony Palmer, *When the Whales Came* directed by Clive Rees and *Jack and Sarah*, directed by Tim Sullivan, which was an enormous hit at the UK box-office, as well as Nick Love's debut feature *Goodbye Charlie Bright*.

In 2000 he formed the independent production company Potboiler Productions with Gail Egan. Together they have produced seven feature films including a classic adaptation of *Nicholas Nickleby* directed by Douglas McGrath, the rock epic *Brothers of the Head* directed by Keith Fulton and Lou Pepe, and the Oscar-winning *The Constant Gardener* directed by Fernando Meirelles.

Simon and Mike Leigh have just completed their 11th film together, entitled *Happy-Go-Lucky*. It will be released worldwide in 2008. Potboiler has also acquired the rights to the latest John le Carre novel, *The Mission Song*.

As a result of filming *The Constant Gardener*, Simon was instrumental in setting up *The Constant Gardener Trust* which is building a secondary school in the desert town of Loiyangalani some 600 km north of Nairobi. The school will be completed by the end of 2009. The Trust is also building showers and lavatories in the Nairobi slum of Kibera as well as installing 10,000 litre water towers.

He was given the honour of being made an elder of Loiyangalani and last December he was awarded the *Order of the Grand Warrior* by President Kibaki in recognition of both his work with *The Constant Gardener* film and *The Constant Gardener Trust*.

CESAR CHARLONE (Director of Cinematography) was born in Uruguay. In 1970 he moved to Brazil, leaving behind a veterinarian course. He lived in São Paulo, where he studied filmmaking and started working with advertisement. In 1975, he went to Europe, where he stayed for three and a half years working in different countries. He went through several jobs, including director of photography in Sweden. Back in Brazil, Cesar made some documentaries about workers movement, including one that featured Lula, who would one day become Brazil's president.

Cesar worked as a director of photography in several feature films, including *O Homem da Capa Preta* (1984); *Feliz Ano Velho* (1986) and *Como Nascem os Anjos* (1995). In 1994, he directed and supervised 22 cameramen in *Two Billion Hearts*, the official FIFA World Cup film. He also filmed the documentary *Pierre Verger*. He spent three and a half years in Cuba, where he thought cinematography and helped to create the famous Cuba International Film School. In 2003, he was cameraman in Tony Scott's *Man On Fire* and director of photography in *Sucker Free City*, directed by Spike Lee.

Once working at O2 Filmes, he joined Fernando Meirelles in several projects, including the short "Golden Gate" and the features *City of God*, for which he won a Golden Frog (Cameraimage – Poland) and was nominated for an Academy Award for best cinematography; and *The Constant Gardener* (2005), which got him a Satellite Award and a BAFTA nomination. Cesar also found time to direct episodes of the Brazilian TV series "City of Men". Ever since 1975, Cesar has been directing TV commercials on every chance he gets, adding to over 700 advertising films up to now. In 2007 he released *El Baño del Papa*, his feature film directorial debut.

TULE PEAKE (Production Designer) Art director and stage designer born in São Paulo in 1957, with experience in publicity and TV, began his career in cinema with *Os Matadores* (1997), by Beto Brant. He also worked as art director for the comedies *Alô?!* (1998), by Mara Mourão, and *Por Trás do Pano* (1999), by Luiz Villaça. He worked with Fernando Meirelles in the the films *Menino Maluquinho II – A Aventura*, co-directed by Fabrizia Alves Pinto, *Maid*s (2001), co-directed by Nando Olival, and *City of God* (2002). Graduated in architecture from the Brás Cubas College in São Paulo and began working with publicity in the 70's. He has worked as set designer and art director for over one thousand commercials and been active in various channels on TV. Worked as art director for the films *Redentor* (2003), by Cláudio Torres, *Acquaria* (2004) by Flavia Moraes, *Casa de Areia* (2005), by Andrucha Waddington, for which he won the ABC Award in his category, and *O Maior Amor do*

Mundo (2006), by Carlos Diegues. In 2007 he worked as art director in the film *Tropa de Elite*, by José Padilha.

RENEE APRIL (Costume Designer) most recently designed costumes for Roland Emmerich's *10,000 B.C.*, Shawn Levy's *Night at the Museum*, Marcus Nispel's fantasy epic about Vikings and American Indians, *Pathfinder*, and for Darren Aranofsky's time-traveling story *The Fountain*. She previously worked with director Roland Emmerich on the Fox blockbuster *The Day After Tomorrow*, starring Dennis Quaid and Jake Gyllenhaal. She also designed the costumes for the award winning drama *Confessions Of A Dangerous Mind*, starring George Clooney, Sam Rockwell and Drew Barrymore; and in a lighter vein April worked with director Bill Paxton on the sports drama *The Greatest Game Ever Played*. April earlier collaborated with director Alan Rudolph on the acclaimed period dramas *The Moderns* and *Mrs. Parker And The Vicious Circle*, starring Jennifer Jason Leigh and Matthew Broderick. Her other film credits include, *Children Of A Lesser God*, starring William Hurt and Marlee Matlin; *Agnes Of God*, directed by Norman Jewison and starring Jane Fonda and Meg Tilly; *Black Robe*, directed by Bruce Beresford and the critically acclaimed independent from Working Title Films *Map Of The Human Heart*. April is a native of Montreal whose Canadian film credits include the critically acclaimed *The Red Violin*, starring Samuel Jackson and Greta Scacchi; and *Grey Owl*, starring Pierce Brosnan, which garnered April the Genie Award (Canadian Oscar) for Achievement In Costume Design. April also received a Genie for her work on *The Bay Boy*, starring Liv Ullman and Kiefer Sutherland, and was nominated for a Genie on Pen Densham's *The Kiss*, starring Joanna Pacula.

DANIEL REZENDE (Editor) was born in São Paulo, Brazil and began editing commercials and video clips in 1997. His first feature film was *City of God* (*Cidade de Deus*), directed by Fernando Meirelles followed by another Brazilian feature, *Storytellers* (*Narradores de Javé*), directed by Elliane Caffé. His first film outside Brazil was *The Motorcycle Diaries*, directed by Walter Salles, a Spanish language adaptation of an Ernesto "Che" Guevara book. *Dark Water* was his first English language film, again directed by Salles. Additional credits include three Brazilian features, *The Year My Parents Went on Vacation*, directed by Cao Hamburger, *City of Men* directed by Paulo Morelli and *Elite Squad* directed by Jose Padilha. Rezende also edited two episodes of a HBO series called "Filhos do Carnaval."

BLINDNESS

Doctor's Wife	JULIANNE MOORE
Doctor	MARK RUFFALO
Woman With Dark Glasses	ALICE BRAGA
First Blind Man	YUSUKE ISEYA
First Blind Man's Wife	YOSHINO KIMURA
Thief	DON MCKELLAR
Accountant	MAURY CHAYKIN
Boy	MITCHELL NYE
Man With Black Eye Patch	DANNY GLOVER
Bartender/King of Ward Three	GAEL GARCÍA BERNAL

Directed by FERNANDO MEIRELLES

Based on the novel by JOSÉ SARAMAGO

Screenplay by DON MCKELLAR

Produced by NIV FICHMAN / ANDREA BARATA RIBEIRO / SONOKO SAKAI

Co-Producers BEL BERLINCK / SARI FRIEDLAND

Executive Producers GAIL EGAN / SIMON CHANNING WILLIAMS

TOM YODA / AKIRA ISHII / VICTOR LOEWY

Cinematography CÉSAR CHARLONE, ABC

Production Designer TULÉ PEAKE

Costume Designer RENÉE APRIL

Editor DANIEL REZENDE

Original Score by MARCO ANTÔNIO GUIMARÃES / UAKTI