

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Strand Releasing proudly releases on DVD on August 7, 2012

GIRLFRIEND

A film by Justin Lerner

"A RICH AND POWERFUL PIECE OF WORK" - *The Wrap*

scheduled to be released on DVD on **August 7th, 2012**

with a pre-book on **July 10th, 2012**.

Synopsis:

Winner of three Audience Awards, GIRLFRIEND is a moving, coming-of-age drama that explores the nature of love and human compassion. Evan, a young adult with Down Syndrome, lives with his mother in a poor, working-class town. When he unexpectedly inherits a large sum of money, he decides to use it to help out his friend and high school crush, Candy, a single mother deeply in-debt and facing eviction. The two form an unlikely relationship, and everything seems to be falling into place, until Candy's volatile ex-boyfriend, Russ interferes, resulting in an eruption of secrets and emotions. GIRLFRIEND subverts conventions, presenting a fresh take on love, struggle and family in contemporary society.

Directed by Justin Lerner. Starring Shannon Woodward (*Raising Hope* TV Series), Jackson Rathbone (*The Twilight Saga*), Amanda Plummer (*Pulp Fiction*).

AUDIENCE AWARD WINNER

Gotham Independent Film Awards

Woods Hole Film Festival

Mill Valley Film Festival

OFFICIAL SELECTION

Toronto International Film Festival

Quotes:

"OBSERVANT AND HEARTFELT" - *The Hollywood Reporter*

"TREMENDOUS HEART AND INTEGRITY... GENTLE, OPTIMISTIC AND JUST ABOUT RIGHT" - *Salon.com*

"SWEET, BEGUILING, AND AT TIMES WRENCHING" - *The Wrap*

"A DISCOVERY IN STYLE AND CONTENT" - *The Toronto Sun*

"A TENDER, OFTEN MOVING TALE" - *emanuellevy.com*

Country of Origin: USA / In English

Format: DVD

Stats: Color / Widescreen / Closed Captioned

Sound Format: 5.1 Surround

Running Time: 94 minutes

Genre: Drama

Product #: 3204-2

UPC: 7 12267 32042 4

Suggested Retail Price: \$27.99

Not Rated: This Film Contains Mature Subject Matter

Bonus Features: **Behind-the-Scenes: The Making of GIRLFRIEND • Behind-the-Scenes: The Scoring of GIRLFRIEND • BBC Interview with Writer/Director Justin Lerner • Original Theatrical Trailer • Other Strand Releasing Trailers**

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

By Justin Lerner

GENESIS OF THE STORY

The idea for *Girlfriend* came to me during the Winter of 2008. I was visiting my parents in Wayland, Massachusetts, the town where Evan Sneider and I attended high school together, and where we would eventually shoot the film. Evan had called me that day (even now, ten years after we've graduated, he regularly calls all of his high school friends to check in on them), which is why he was on my mind the long evening I came up with the entire story, on three pieces of scrap paper. I decided to build a work of fiction around Evan, but to write something that would cater towards showing the parts of Evan's personality that I found unique and engaging.

If I could build a film around Evan wherein he could simply be the person I have known for fifteen years – a compassionate, empathetic young man with Down Syndrome, possessing a surprising charm and disarming sense of humor – I knew that a story about his life would resonate with viewers. Moreover, I knew which kind of story would resonate the most – a story about something missing in Evan's life that he profoundly desires – a real, loving relationship.

In writing the actual script, my most important goal was to create a destitute, morally bankrupt world, full of characters that were deceitful, violent, dishonest, and selfish and, in turn, to drop into this world a character, Evan, who was the human personification of unconditional love and forgiveness. What would happen when unselfish and unadulterated love tried to exist in a world of deceit, anger, hate, and conflict? I wanted *Girlfriend* to be more than just a polemic, arguing for the benefits of human compassion. I hoped to use the film to question whether it is possible for someone like Evan – so full of hope and empathy – to co-exist in a climate of selfishness, hatred, and betrayal.

Although small details have altered since *Girlfriend* was first conceived, the actual story has not changed since that first night I scribbled it all down. One thing that did change from page to screen, though, is that Evan breathed into his character a deep, emotional life even greater than what I had anticipated he would. As a result of immersing himself in the reality of the role, and his stunning ability to make every situation that arose in the script completely real to him, Evan Sneider became my partner, as a true co-creator of Evan Gray.

DOWN SYNDROME

I did no actual research on Down Syndrome for this film. *Girlfriend* is not a film about Down Syndrome. Down Syndrome just happens to be a prominent, visible challenge for Evan. All people have challenges, albeit some are subtler and less physically recognizable. The film is about Evan as an individual facing the seemingly impossible goal of attaining the kind of love that he wants (and deserves) from Candy.

During shooting if ever I was concerned about getting some behavior or situation factually accurate in the context of an individual with Down Syndrome, I would defer to Evan, and his mother. Instead of making Evan try and fit himself into a character, I'd revise the script to fit Evan's personal experience and his own level of capacity of functioning. I did not try to reflect the average characteristics of individuals with Down Syndrome, because the film is not meant to teach you anything about the disability. My commitment was to Evan's reality.

I was not interested, therefore, in creating a work of fiction about Down Syndrome. In making *Girlfriend*, what remained infinitely more interesting (and challenging) to me was to put an actor with a disability into a role that did not require one in order for the narrative to work. This act empowers him more than any didactic film or tutorial about Down Syndrome could ever do. By never mentioning or fixating on his disability, the film becomes more universal, says more about the human condition, where all of us have the burden of our personal limitations to get what we want out of life. Putting Evan in the lead role had no motivations other than artistic ones. Quite simply, I cast him because I find him compelling to watch. It was a mere casting decision, similar to the choice a painter might make when, say, he has painted a forest and decides to make the leaves on a tree orange rather than yellow, or red, or brown.

Much of my work has been influenced by directors who use non-professional actors. In American filmmaking, there's David Gordon Green, Alexander Payne, and Steven Soderbergh, to name a few, who all are masters at eliciting performances (or, often,

non-performances) out of real people that are unique, unstilted, and memorable. These directors have also inspired me to enjoy mixing seasoned actors with non-actors, and it is in their combination that, when it's done right, it creates a pulsating, unpredictable energy to a scene.

I love to work with non-professionals in addition to working with professionals, because every so often I stumble upon a subject like Evan, whose very existence, whose face and speech and eyes and smile, are effortlessly captivating while they perform the most mundane of tasks. This is a rare occurrence for me, but there are some foreign directors who have been very influential in my pursuit of these types of actors – Carlos Reygadas, Bruno Dumont, and Lucrecia Martel. They do this masterfully, and they capture people at their most natural.

At the very same time that Evan tells the camera (and us) something in a scene, he's also hiding three or four other things. It is this mystery that leads us not only to want to keep watching him, but also, it allows the film to live longer in our minds.

If not overused, I think long takes can be powerful in order to allow an actor give us something authentic. Real time passes. I tried, in many key scenes of *Girlfriend*, to allow you to watch Evan's behavior over long, unbroken stretches of time, so as to build a relationship between him and the camera that was both investigative and voyeuristic.

I also found it very important to leave a lot of key moments either partially obscured or completely off-screen, so that the viewer has to do a little work to stay engaged, and to always wonder what is hiding just beyond the edges of the frame. Michael Haneke's use of off-screen sound and action has deeply impacted my storytelling tastes. His use of elliptical cuts, as well, take us more economically through a narrative, but the gaps in between each of his cuts tend to leave just the right amount of mystery to keep us playing with the film in our heads, long after the credits have rolled.

GOALS

My main goal in making *Girlfriend* was to have Evan be one part of a much bigger story, something open ended, possessing an element of mystery, a reason to wonder about the human capacity for compassion, commitment, and love. With an actor like Evan, whose heart is so big, whose imagination is so vivid, and who – in every moment in the film – was able to make me believe he was really experiencing what was happening to his character, I felt my only duty, when I saw Evan's talent for portraying the reality of the character, was to try and keep him in that emotional headspace for as long as I could... and he did it quite beautifully.

ABOUT JUSTIN LERNER

Justin Lerner is the son of two developmental psychologists, one Catholic and one Jewish, who compromised by sending him to Quaker school in Pennsylvania until the age of eleven. He went to Cornell University, where he graduated cum laude for his honors thesis on the films and philosophy of Russian filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky.

In 2007 he received his MFA in Directing at UCLA's Graduate Film School, where his thesis film *THE REPLACEMENT CHILD*, screened at TELLURIDE FILM FESTIVAL, SUNDANCE FILM FESTIVAL, LOS ANGELES FILM FESTIVAL, and won two Student Emmy awards for one for Best Drama and the other for Best Director.

GIRLFRIEND is Justin's feature film directorial debut, and it made its World Premiere at the 2010 Toronto International Film Festival, then going on to win top honors at Woods Hole Film Festival, White Sands Film Festival, and Mill Valley Film Festival. Most recently, *GIRLFRIEND* was awarded with the 2011 Gotham Independent Film Audience Award.

Justin is now preparing his second feature film, *THE AUTOMATIC HATE*, which is being produced by Academy Award nominee Alix Madigan (*WINTER'S BONE*). His family resides in Wayland, Massachusetts, where he went to high school with *GIRLFRIEND* lead actor Evan Sneider. Justin currently lives in Los Angeles.

CAST BIOGRAPHIES

EVAN SNEIDER (EVAN) was born in Boston and raised in Wayland, MA, where *GIRLFRIEND* was shot. He currently resides near Cape Cod.

His main goal is to become a working actor.

Evan's interest in acting began when he was very young, sparked by a role in Delia Ephron's *How to Eat like a Child* during a summer theater program.

Determined, with his interest in acting growing, Evan performed in elementary and middle school plays as well as continuing to perform in summer theatre.

Beyond the traditional subjects in high school, Evan elected to take theatre, drama and creative writing classes. It is here that Evan and director Justin Lerner first met.

In addition to his friendship with Justin, Evan has been lifelong friends with actors Daniel Turnbull and Darren McDonald, who have small roles in *GIRLFRIEND*.

After post-graduation studies, Evan, who is a huge Stephen Sondheim fan, began auditioning for numerous community theater productions and has performed in more than twenty, including turns in Sondheim's *Into the Woods* at F.U.D.G.E. Theatre Company in Arlington, MA and in Sondheim's *Assassins* with the Lexington Players. His first film work was in Lerner's thesis film "The Replacement Child." *GIRLFRIEND* is his feature film debut.

AMANDA PLUMMER (CELESTE) has appeared in a wide variety of films, including

THE FISHER KING by Terry Gilliam (for which she was honored with a BAFTA award for her work as Lydia); PULP FICTION, by Quentin Tarantino (for which she earned an American Comedy Award nomination for her performance as 'Honey Bunny'); BUTTERFLY KISS by Michael Winterbottom; MY LIFE WITHOUT ME by Isabel Coixet; PAX by Eduardo Guedes; DANIEL by Sidney Lumet; and KEN PARK by Larry Clark.

Her highly acclaimed work on Broadway includes *Agnes of God* with Geraldine Page; *A Taste of Honey* with Valerie French; *Pygmalion* with Peter O'Toole; and *The Glass Menagerie* with Jessica Tandy. Her work has garnered her a Tony Award and two nominations, as well as the Outer Critics Circle Award and the Drama Desk Award.

She has also been honored with three Emmy Awards, one Emmy nomination, a Saturn Award, a CableAce Award and Golden Globe nomination. She is also the recipient of the Anti-Defamation League Award.

SHANNON WOODWARD (CANDY) has already worked with some of the industry's most fascinating actors. She played Tommy Lee Jones' daughter in Columbia Pictures' action-comedy MAN OF THE HOUSE; worked with Elisha Cuthbert, Camilla Belle and Edie Falco in the thriller THE QUIET, released by Sony Pictures Classics; and with Jake Weber and Chase Crawford in the Freestyle horror release THE HAUNTING OF MOLLY HARTLEY.

Her TV credits are vast and deep. She appeared opposite Minnie Driver and Eddie Izzard in twenty episodes of the F/X comedy series "The Riches," on two episodes of "ER" in 2009 and appeared in guest spots on such dramatic series as "Criminal Minds," "Law & Order: SVU," "Cold Case," "Without a Trace" and "Boston Public."

JACKSON RATHBONE (RUSS/CO-PRODUCER) is perhaps best known for playing Jasper Hale in the runaway hit TWILIGHT saga and for his lead role as Sokka in M. Night Shyamalan's THE LAST AIRBENDER.

Rathbone was born in Singapore and, because of his father's job, has lived all over the world, including Indonesia, London, Connecticut, California, Norway, and Texas, where the family finally settled and where Rathbone joined the local community theater and was accepted into The Pickwick Players, a youth program.

Rathbone moved to northwest Michigan to attend the prestigious Interlochen Arts Academy as a high school theater major, where he flourished in Shakespearean plays. The summer between his junior and senior year, he performed in the Southwest Shakespeare Festival as Ferdinand in "The Tempest."

Upon graduation from Interlochen, Jackson moved to LA and signed with Patch

Mackenzie at Cutler Management, who sent him to study film acting with Jeremiah Comey. In short order, he landed a recurring role on "Disney 411," interviewing Disney Channel stars, and signed with Paradigm talent agency. He would go on to land substantial roles in TV, including the Hallmark telefilm "Close to Home," the series the series "The O.C." and "The War at Home," and in independent films HURT and SENIOR SKIP (with Larry Miller) and BIG STAN (opposite Rob Schneider). Jackson next landed a series regular role in the ABC Family series "Beautiful People."

After having completed the role of Jasper Hale in the runaway hit TWILIGHT: NEW MOON, along with the lead in the Clive Barker thriller, DREAD, he appeared in lead, guest-starring roles in the TV series "The Cleaner" and "Criminal Minds," where he was able to show his broad range by playing a character with multiple personalities. He then shot the recently-released TWILIGHT: ECLIPSE.

Jackson has also teamed up with his manager, Patch Mackenzie, to start their production company, PatchMo Entertainment, the first completed project for which is GIRLFRIEND.

In his off-time from acting, Jackson reads voraciously and writes music. He contributed music to the score of GIRLFRIEND. Jackson is a Renaissance Man, adept at most sports including horse riding. He sings and plays most musical instruments. He has been performing at The Gardenia in Hollywood and also with his band, 100 Monkeys, to standing room only houses in clubs nationwide and Canada such as The Roxy, The Mint and The Viper Room in Los Angeles. He and his band 100 Monkeys, also do regular benefit concerts in Michigan to raise money for Adrenal Cancer research.

CREW BIOGRAPHIES

JARED ANDERSON (PRODUCER/KENNY) is also an actor for film and television and a member of the popular band 100 Monkeys. In addition to playing "Kenny" in GIRLFRIEND, Jerad and his band mates composed the film's score.

KRISTINA ANDERSON (PRODUCER) has written several feature films in development at Wayne/Lauren. Kristina's writing has been shortlisted for the prestigious Nicholl's Fellowship awarded by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

SHAUN O'BANION (PRODUCER) grew up around the industry, the child of two professional singers/actors, he watched his father appear eight times as a soloist on *The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson*, and appear in numerous film and television shows.

Drawn to the business from an early age, he got his first film industry job as a set PA after sneaking onto the Universal lot at age 17. From there, he has gone on to work for (and with) some of the industry's most well-known and well respected talent. In 2009, his first feature film as producer (DAKOTA SKYE) picked up a handful of Festival awards and

was distributed by E1 Entertainment. He is currently developing several projects.

QUYEN TRAN (CINEMATOGRAPHER) received her fine art and photography training at the University of Virginia and the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C. before receiving an MFA in Cinematography from UCLA's Graduate Film School. At UCLA, Quyen won Best Cinematography three years in a row, photographing numerous short films which have screened at festivals including Sundance, Telluride, Tribeca Film Festival and Los Angeles Film Festival, among others.

GIRLFRIEND is Lerner's third collaboration with Quyen, who also shot his early short films "Maggie's Not Here" and "Echostop" in Los Angeles.

Quyen has photographed films on location in South Africa, Thailand, Japan, China and Vietnam. She is bilingual in Vietnamese and English, and has studied German and Italian, and is passionate about all things food: cooking it, photographing it, and eating it.

2010 has been an explosive year for Quyen. In addition to her continued collaboration with Lerner in post-production on GIRLFRIEND, Quyen has shot TROUBLEMAKER for writer-director Geeta Malik and saw the fiction feature she shot, THE PEOPLE I'VE SLEPT WITH, released in theatres in New York, LA and San Francisco. She is currently at work on two separate documentaries, one directed by Grace Lee, the other by Susan Morgan Cooper.

SETH CHATFIELD (PRODUCTION DESIGNER/JEREMY) is an actor, artist, performer and designer. He makes his debut as a production designer with GIRLFRIEND. Seth worked previously as a set designer on some short films and as an independent professional in the field of graphic design. He also appears in GIRLFRIEND as Evan's Uncle Jeremy, his big-screen debut in a substantial role. Based in New England, he is also a musician active in the Boston music scene.

HARRISON LEES (PRODUCTION DESIGNER/HARRISON) began his film career after graduating with a B.A. in Ancient History in 2006. Deciding to explore the medium out of his love for the films of Stanley Kubrick, he landed his first position as Art Director for Justin Lerner's award winning short film "The Replacement Child." Since then, he has designed numerous short films and features, as well as having held a wide variety of other crew positions.

After observing firsthand the creative outlet of acting, Harrison decided to try his own hand at it, bringing together his artistic sensibilities with his knowledge of history and fascination with film. Having experimented with stage plays, Harrison was pulled from the crew and given a featured extra role in the film AFTERSCHOOL, which premiered at the Cannes Film Festival in 2008. This spurred him on to get his first starring role as Henry in the short "White Elephants" and soon after he landed the supporting role of Harrison in GIRLFRIEND.

Harrison's ambitions in film extend to all aspects of the movie-making process. While continuing to dabble in design and develop his acting career, he is gearing up to direct his first short film in San Antonio, TX.

JUNE SUEPUNPUCK (COSTUME DESIGNER) is also a freelance illustrator. She graduated from the University of Virginia with a B.A. in Psychology and a minor in Studio Art. She received further training at The University of California, Los Angeles, where she earned a Master's degree in Costume Design for Theater, Film, and Television. June has designed costumes featured in both theatrical and film productions nationwide. Her work spans contemporary films like *GIRLFRIEND* to period and fantasy works. June's latest period piece, "The Nuclear Family," a 1950's-inspired commercial spec about the importance of nuclear disarmament, won the grand prize for the Swackhamer Disarmament video contest. June's costumes also premiered at the United Nations during the 2010 NPT Review Conference.

JEFF CASTELLUCCIO (EDITOR) is an experienced editor in short-form television promos, feature-length documentaries and independent films.

Jeff began his entertainment career working as an intern for *Late Night with Conan O'Brien* and TriBeCa Films in New York City. At TriBeCa, Jeff's work ethic caught the eye of Robert De Niro who selected Jeff to become one of his personal assistants. Inspired by De Niro, Jeff eventually moved to Los Angeles where he spent the next four years working in production on over 30 films and television shows including *24*, *CSI*, *American Dreams*, *SHOPGIRL*, *AMERICAN PIE: BAND CAMP* and Martin Scorsese's *THE AVIATOR*.

During this time Jeff taught himself to edit on Final Cut Pro. When the first piece he edited for his Marine friends in Iraq caught the eye of a production executive, Jeff was offered a job on the spot to cut the behind-the-scenes content for Sony Pictures' *UNDERWORLD: EVOLUTION*. Jeff then joined 23D Films, where for several years he edited promos for multiple Disney features and TV projects.

Jeff moved into documentary filmmaking when he co-edited *Red Bull's "X-Fighters"*, which led to a nomination for *Best Off-Road Theatrical Film* at the 2009 *Xtremey Awards*. Jeff went on to edit a number of award-winning extreme sports titles.

Based on the success and quality of his short-form and documentary work, Jeff was asked to edit the independent feature *DAKOTA SKYE*, which won seven indie film awards. Since then he has edited several feature films including *MONSTER MUTT*, the first studio feature film by the Academy Award-winning special effects company Drac Studios.

CAST

EVAN SNEIDER	Evan
SHANNON WOODWARD	Candy
JACKSON RATHBONE	Russ
AMANDA PLUMMER	Celeste
NATE KRAWSHUK	Simon
JERAD ANDERSON	Kenny
SETH CHATFIELD	Jeremy
CAROLE HELMAN	Janis
HARRISON LEES	Harrison
DARREN MACDONALD	Darren
DANIEL J. TURNBULL	Andy
JOSEPH TURNBULL	Willie Jones

CREW

Written & Directed by	JUSTIN LERNER
Producers	JERAD ANDERSON, KRISTINA LAUREN ANDERSON, SHAUN O'BANION
Co-Producer	SARAH STEINBERG HELLER, PATCH MACKENZIE, JACKSON RATHBONE
Executive Producer	JASON OLIVIER
Associate Producer	D. SCOTT KIRKLEY
Director of Photography	QUYEN TRAN

Editor
Costume Designer
Production Designer
Original Score by
Sound Designer
Casting Director

JEFF CASTELLUCCIO
JUNE SUEPUNPUCK
SETH CHATFIELD, HARRISON LEES
100 MONKEYS
DANIEL PERLIN
BRAD GILMORE

If you'd like more information about this film please call Samantha Klinger at 310.836.7500 or email samantha@strandreleasing.com.