



PRODUCTION NOTES

The Kids Are All Right

Directed By Lisa Cholodenko

Starring

Annette Bening, Julianne Moore, Mark Ruffalo, Mia Wasikowska and
Josh Hutcherson

Release date: September 2, 2010

Running time: 104 minutes

Rated: TBC

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SYNOPSIS

In this funny, vibrant, and richly drawn portrait of a modern family, Nic and Jules (Annette Bening and Julianne Moore) are two mothers who share a cozy suburban craftsman bungalow with their respective teenage children, Joni and Laser (Mia Wasikowska and Josh Hutcherson). As Joni prepares to leave for college, her younger brother presses her for a big favor. He wants Joni, now 18, to help him find their biological father. Against her better judgment, Joni honors her brother's request and manages to make contact with "bio-dad" Paul (Mark Ruffalo), an easy-going restaurateur. As Paul comes into the lives of this straight-shooting family, an unexpected new chapter begins for the group as family ties are defined, re-defined, and then *re-re*-defined.

The Kids Are All Right stars three-time Academy Award nominee Annette Bening and four-time Academy Award nominee Julianne Moore as the mothers; Mia Wasikowska (of this winter's *Alice in Wonderland*) and Josh Hutcherson (*Journey to the Center of the Earth*) as their children; and Mark Ruffalo (this winter's *Shutter Island*) as the father. The film was produced by Gary Gilbert, Jeffrey Levy-Hinte, Mandalay Vision's Celine Rattray, Jordan Horowitz, Daniela Taplin Lundberg, and UGC PH's Philippe Hellmann.

Lisa Cholodenko's previous features as director include *Laurel Canyon* and *High Art*, both of which she also wrote and both of which were also produced by Jeffrey Levy-Hinte. Lisa Cholodenko received her MFA from Columbia University (where Focus Features CEO James Schamus was one of her professors in the mid-1990s). Stuart Blumberg wrote the original screenplay for *Keeping the Faith*, which Edward Norton directed and starred in, among other feature scripts.

Lisa Cholodenko commented, "*The Kids Are All Right* is all about family. I'm very honored that the movie is being presented at the prestigious Berlin International Film Festival."

Combining comedic surprise with poignant emotional truth, *The Kids Are All Right* is infectiously funny and touching.

¹ABOUT THE CAST

JULIANNE MOORE (JULES)

Julianne Moore is currently earning rave reviews for her work in *A SINGLE MAN*, the feature film debut of fashion designer Tom Ford and starring Colin Firth, for which she was nominated for a Golden Globe Award and a Critics' Choice Award. She recently completed work on Atom Egoyan's *CHLOE*, which premiered at the 2009 Toronto Film Festival, in which she stars alongside Liam Neeson and Amanda Seyfried, as well as *SHELTER*, an independent psychological thriller, directed by Mans Marling and Bjorn Stein and also starring Jonathan Rhys Meyers.

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). She was the recipient of many critics' honors for her performance in Focus Features' *FAR FROM HEAVEN*, directed by Todd Haynes, including the National Board of Review, Los Angeles Film Critics and the 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: *BLINDNESS*, directed by Fernando Meirelles and starring THE KIDS ARE ALL RIGHT's Mark Ruffalo; *SAVAGE GRACE*, directed by Tom Kalin; Todd Haynes' *I'M NOT THERE*; Alfonso Cuarón's *CHILDREN OF MEN* with Clive Owen; *NEXT*, opposite Nicolas Cage; Joe Roth's *FREEDOMLAND* with Samuel L Jackson; Joe Ruben's *THE FORGOTTEN* with Dominic West; *LAWS OF ATTRACTION* co-starring Pierce Brosnan; *THE PRIZE WINNER OF DEFIANCE, OHIO*; Lasse Hallstrom's *THE SHIPPING NEWS* with Kevin Spacey, Cate Blanchett and Judi Dench; Bart Freundlich's *TRUST THE MAN, 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); *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.

ANNETTE BENING (NIC)

Annette Bening was most recently seen on the big screen in writer-director Diane English's remake of *THE WOMEN*, starring alongside Meg Ryan, Eva Mendes and Jada Pinkett-Smith. Prior to that, She starred in the 2006 film *RUNNING WITH SCISSORS* for which she was nominated for a Golden Globe Award. She will next be seen in *MOTHER AND CHILD* for writer/director Rodrigo Garcia. The film also stars Naomi Watts.

Annette was "Julia Lambert" in *BEING JULIA* for Sony Pictures Classics, the role that earned the actress her third Oscar nomination. For that performance, she was also named the National Board of Review's Best Actress, won the Golden Globe award for Best Actress in a Motion Picture - Musical/Comedy, and received a SAG nomination for Best Actress. She also starred in *MRS. HARRIS* with Ben Kingsley for HBO, earning an Emmy, SAG, and Golden Globe nomination.

An award-winning stage actress, Bening has spent much of her time in front of the movie camera. She starred in the critically acclaimed film *AMERICAN BEAUTY*, for which she received both an Academy Award nomination and a Golden Globe nomination for Best Actress - Drama. Her performance in the film earned her a Screen Actors Guild Award and the BAFTA (British Academy) Award. Her other film credits include Neil Jordan's *IN DREAMS*, and *THE SIEGE*, opposite Denzel Washington and Bruce Willis.

Bening was honored at the Boston, Palm Springs and Chicago Film Festivals with Lifetime Achievement Awards, as well as receiving the Donostia Prize at the San Sebastian International Film Festival. She won the Actress of the Year award at the Hollywood Film Festival, and received the Montecito Award at the Santa Barbara Film Festival.

She received her first Academy Award nomination and was named Best Supporting Actress by the National Board of Review for her role in *THE GRIFTERS*. She also received a Golden Globe nomination for Best Actress - Musical/Comedy for her starring role in Rob Reiner's *THE AMERICAN PRESIDENT*, opposite Michael Douglas. Bening also had supporting roles in Tim Burton's *MARS ATTACKS!* and in Sir Ian McKellen's film adaptation of Shakespeare's *RICHARD III*. Her other film credits include: *LOVE AFFAIR* with Warren Beatty; Barry Levinson's *BUGSY*, also opposite Beatty, for which she received a Golden Globe nomination for Best Actress - Drama; *REGARDING HENRY* with Harrison Ford and directed by Mike Nichols; *GUILTY BY SUSPICION*, opposite Robert DeNiro; Milos Forman's *VALMONT*, and *POSTCARDS FROM THE EDGE*. Bening made her feature film debut in the comedy *THE GREAT OUTDOORS*, with Dan Aykroyd and the late John Candy.

Bening's theater credits include the Anton Chekhov play *The Cherry Orchard* at Los Angeles' Mark Taper Forum in 2006, and Alan Bennett's *Talking Heads*, at the Tiffany Theater in Los Angeles. She also played the title role in Henrik Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* in March 1999 at Los Angeles' Geffen Playhouse. She was most recently on stage in *Medea* at UCLA, and will soon appear in *The Female of the Species*, also at the Geffen Playhouse.

Born in Topeka, Kansas and raised in San Diego, Bening was enrolled at a local college when she got a job as a dancer in a pre-show presented outside of San Diego's famed Old Globe Theater. This led to a walk-on in a Shakespearean production and two plays with the San Diego Repertory Theater.

Bening graduated from San Francisco State University and was accepted by the American Conservatory Theater in San Francisco, where she trained until she joined the acting company. She also appeared in both summer Shakespearean festivals and regional productions until her career took her to New York. There, Bening received both a Tony Award nomination and won the Clarence Derwent Award for most outstanding debut performance of the season for her role in *Coastal Disturbances*, originally at the Second Stage, then on Broadway.

MARK RUFFALO (PAUL)

Mark Ruffalo is one of Hollywood's most sought-after actors, easily moving between stage and screen and working with directors including Ang Lee, Martin Scorsese, Michael Mann, Spike Jonze, David Fincher, Fernando Meirelles and Michele Gondry.

Ruffalo's directorial debut, *SYMPATHY FOR DELICIOUS*, premiered at the Sundance Film Festival on January 23, 2010. The independent film stars Orlando Bloom, Laura Linney, Juliette Lewis and Ruffalo in a story about a Los Angeles DJ who finds that he has the power to heal. The film centers on two children who were conceived by artificial insemination that invite their birth father into their family life.

From January 13-17, 2010, Ruffalo reprised his Tony Award-nominated role in five performances of Clifford Odets' *Awake and Sing!* for L.A. Theatre Works, which will record each performance for broadcast on their nationally syndicated radio theater series. In the Lincoln Center Theater's 2006 revival of the Depression-era drama, Ruffalo, in his Broadway debut, played a World War I veteran who lost a leg during the war. The original cast included Ben Gazzara, Zoe Wanamaker and Lauren Ambrose.

Ruffalo will next be seen starring in Paramount Pictures' thriller *SHUTTER ISLAND* directed by Martin Scorsese. Ruffalo stars opposite Leonardo DiCaprio in the film which follows two cops (DiCaprio and Ruffalo) who are sent to Shutter Island to investigate a missing patient at a mental institution. *SHUTTER ISLAND* is scheduled for release on February 19, 2010. He will also appear in *DATE NIGHT*, which stars Tina Fey and Steve Carell and is set for release on April 9, 2010.

Ruffalo was last seen in 2009 in *THE BROTHERS BLOOM*, an international conman adventure directed by Rian Johnson (*BRICK*). The cast includes Adrien Brody, Rachel Weisz and Rinko Kikuchi. Ruffalo also made an appearance in the big-screen adaptation of *WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE*, directed by Spike Jonze. In 2008, Ruffalo starred in Miramax Films' *BLINDNESS*, directed by Fernando Meirelles (*CITY OF GOD*, *THE CONSTANT GARDENER*). The film is based on the book by Nobel Prize winner Jose Saramago, which follows a plague of blindness that affects everyone in an anonymous city. Ruffalo co-stars opposite Julianne Moore (*THE KIDS ARE ALL RIGHT*) and Danny Glover. *BLINDNESS* screened at the Cannes International Film Festival and the Toronto International Film Festival. In 2007, Ruffalo was seen in the Focus Features/Random House Films film *RESERVATION ROAD*, opposite Joaquin Phoenix, Jennifer Connelly,

and Mira Sorvino. The film screened at the 2007 Toronto International Film Festival. The same year Ruffalo appeared in the Phoenix Pictures film *ZODIAC* opposite Jake Gyllenhaal and Robert Downey Jr. Ruffalo portrayed the infamous Detective Dave Toschi, who devoted his career to tracking down the Zodiac killer. Phoenix Pictures 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. In addition to his Broadway stint in 2006, Ruffalo was seen *ALL THE KING'S MEN* with Sean Penn, Kate Winslet and Jude Law. The film premiered at the 2006 Toronto International Film Festival.

In 2005, Ruffalo starred as the romantic lead opposite Reese Witherspoon in Dreamworks' *JUST LIKE HEAVEN*. The previous year he appeared in the Michael Mann directed *COLLATERAL* opposite Tom Cruise. He was also seen in Warner Independents' *WE DON'T LIVE HERE ANYMORE* opposite Naomi Watts, Peter Krause and Laura Dern. Ruffalo served as an Executive Producer on the film which screened at the 2004 Sundance Film Festival. Also in 2004 Ruffalo starred the romantic comedy *13 GOING ON 30*, opposite Jennifer Garner. In March of 2004, he was seen in Charlie Kaufman's *ETERNAL SUNSHINE OF THE SPOTLESS MIND* opposite Jim Carrey and Kate Winslet, for Focus Features. 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.

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 won coveted Grand Jury Prize for best film in dramatic competition and the Waldo Salt Screenwriting Award at the 2000 Sundance Film Festival.

Ruffalo's other credits include *WHAT DOESN'T KILL YOU*, Brian Goodman's autobiographical crime drama, *THE LAST CASTLE*, opposite Robert Redford and James Gandolfini, *WINDTALKES*, opposite Nicolas Cage, *XX/XY*, *COMMITTED*, *RIDE WITH THE DEVIL*, directed by Ang Lee, *54*, *SAFE MEN*, *THE LAST BIG THING*, and *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. 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. 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.

Ruffalo resides in New York.

MIA WASIKOWSKA (JONI)

In a short amount of time, Mia Wasikowska has established herself as a rising star of the big screen. A trained ballerina turned actress, Wasikowska has been challenging herself as a performer since the age of 9.

Wasikowska made her debut to US audiences as the tormented and suicidal teen "Sophie" in HBO's series *IN TREATMENT*. Produced by Mark Wahlberg and directed by Rodrigo Garcia, "In Treatment" focuses on the relationship between a therapist (Gabriel Byrne) and his patients. In recognition of her performance, Wasikowska was honored by the Los Angeles based organization Australians in Film (whose Host Committee includes Cate Blanchett, Naomi Watts, Nicole Kidman and Hugh Jackman, among others) with the Breakthrough Actress Award. The series was also nominated for a Golden Globe Award for Best Drama Series.

In December 2008, Wasikowska was seen in a supporting role in the film *DEFIANCE*. Based on a true story, three Jewish brothers (Daniel Craig, Liev Schreiber, and Jamie Bell) escape from Nazi-occupied Poland into the Belarusian forest where they encounter a village of Russian resistance fighters. Wasikowska plays "Chaya," a young villager who builds a relationship with one of the brothers. The war film, directed by Ed Zwick was distributed by Paramount Vantage. In October 2009, Wasikowska appeared in a supporting role in Fox Searchlight's film, *AMELIA* starring Hilary Swank and Richard Gere for director Mira Nair. Wasikowska portrayed "Elinor," a young fan of Earhart whose motivations for building a relationship with Earhart are questioned by her reliable friend "George" (Gere). During the same month, Wasikowska shared the screen with Hal Holbrook in the independent picture *THAT EVENING SUN* directed by Scott Teems. Wasikowska earned an Independent Spirit Award nomination for Best Supporting Actress for her role as a naïve Tennessee teenager.

On March 5, 2010, will star as the title character in Tim Burton's retelling of the Lewis Carrol novel, *ALICE IN WONDERLAND*. The Disney live and 3-D animated film was shot primarily in Los Angeles and London and co-stars Johnny Depp, Anne Hathaway, Michael Sheen and Alan Rickman.

Currently, Wasikowska is filming the Gus Van Sant directed film *RESTLESS* alongside Henry Hopper. Produced by Imagine Entertainment with Bryce Dallas Howard, Wasikowska is "Annabel," a terminally ill girl who falls in love with a death-obsessed teenage boy. The script was penned by first-time screenwriter Jason Lew. Columbia Pictures will release the film in 2010.

In March 2010, Wasikowska will portray "Jane Eyre" in the Focus Features and BBC Films screen adaptation of Charlotte Bronte's classic novel for director Cary Fukunaga (Focus' *SIN NOMBRE*). Shooting will take place in the U.K.

Wasikowska began her acting career in her home country of Australia, landing a recurring role on the popular medical drama *ALL SAINTS*. Upon securing her first major role in the independent film *SUBURBAN MAYHEM*, Wasikowska was recognized by the Australian Film Institute Awards for Best Young Actor. She followed up these projects with acclaimed performances in *LENS LOVE STORY*, *SKIN* (a short film,) *SEPTEMBER*, and in the Australian horror film *ROGUE* alongside Michael Vartan and Radha Mitchell.

Wasikowska resides in Canberra, Australia with her parents and two siblings.

JOSH HUTCHERSON (LASER)

With an impressive body of work, Josh Hutcherson's career continues to evolve with exciting and challenging projects.

Josh recently finished filming the highly anticipated MGM remake of the cult favorite *RED DAWN*. He will reprise the role of Robert Morris, the true fighter of the group, originally played by C. Thomas Howell.

Josh was recently seen starring in Universal Pictures adaptation of Darren Shan's successful book series, *CIRQUE DU FREAK: THE VAMPIRE'S ASSISTANT*, opposite John C. Reilly and Salma Hayek. The film, directed by Paul Weitz and produced by Lauren Shuler Donner, is a fantasy-adventure about teenage friends who unknowingly breaks a 200-year-old truce between two warring factions of vampires. Pulled into a fantastic life of misunderstood sideshow freaks and grotesque creatures of the night, the kids are given two paths immortal paths. One chooses good while the other chooses evil and tears their friendship apart.

Josh recently wrapped production on *CARMEL*, a film about a 16-year-old boy who wanders into Carmel, falls into the wrong crowd and becomes involved in art forgery. He is befriended by a retired local artist who traces her career back to the early days of Carmel artists, writers and other creative types, all with skeletons in their closets. The film also stars Lauren Bacall, Alfred Molina, Hayden Panettiere and Dina Eastwood.

Most recently Josh was seen starring in the first high definition 3-D live performance feature film ever, Walden Media and New Line Cinema's *JOURNEY TO THE CENTER OF THE EARTH 3-D*, starring opposite Brendan Fraser. Directed by Eric Brevig, the film follows a scientist (Fraser) and his troubled nephew (Hutcherson) on an expedition to Iceland where they stumble upon a mystery that leads them on a thrill-ride adventure to the center of the earth where they become face to face with never-before-seen worlds and creatures. The film has grossed over \$237,256,340.00 worldwide.

Josh's other starring roles include the Walden Media/Walt Disney Pictures feature *BRIDGE TO TERABITHIA*, which has garnered over \$135,000,000 in worldwide box office. Shot entirely in New Zealand, the film is based on Katherine Paterson's novel and directed by Gabor Csupo. The film tells the powerful story of a boy (Hutcherson) whose life is changed forever when he befriends the class outsider - who happens to be a girl (AnnaSophia Robb). Together they create the world of Terabithia, an imaginary kingdom filled with giants and trolls and all manner of magical beings.

Josh also starred in Unruly Films' *FRAGMENTS* which was released in summer 2009. Hutcherson played Jimmy, opposite Dakota Fanning. The film, which also starred Kate Beckinsale, Guy Pearce, Forest Whitaker, Jennifer Hudson and Jackie Earle Haley takes a look at the unique relationships formed after a group of strangers survive a random shooting in a Los Angeles Diner. *FRAGMENTS* was directed by Rowan Woods and is an adaptation of Roy Freirich's debut novel by the same name. It was produced by Robert Salerno (*21 GRAMS*).

Josh's film credits include the Fox/New Regency film *FIREHOUSE DOG*, Sony Pictures' Barry Sonnenfeld-directed *RV*, co-starring as Robin Williams' son, the critically acclaimed Fox/New Regency film *LITTLE MANHATTAN*, *KICKING AND SCREAMING* with Will Ferrell, voiced a lead character in last summer's Disney English-language release of Hayao Miyazaki's Oscar-nominated anime *HOWL'S MOVING CASTLE* and shared duties with Tom Hanks as the character of "Hero Boy" in Warner Brothers' hit *THE POLAR EXPRESS*, a groundbreaking film using motion performance capture for its characters and Sony Pictures' Jon Favreau-directed adventure film *ZATHURA*. Josh won a Young Artist Award for Leading Young Actor for his role in the film.

Josh's television credits include the TNT telepic WILDER DAYS, with Peter Falk, the Animal Planet feature MIRACLE DOGS, and guest appearances on NBC's ER. A Kentucky native, Josh currently resides in Los Angeles.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

LISA CHOLODENKO Director

It was while working as an assistant editor on John Singleton's Oscar-nominated *Boyz N the Hood* and the Golden Globe nominee *Used People* (1992) that Lisa Cholodenko truly discovered film. Working on these projects sparked a seamless and natural transition into what is now an unyielding film career.

Shortly after working as an editor on a number of features, Lisa decided that at 28 she was ready to attend film school. Thus, she soon found herself at Columbia University School of the Arts where she received her M.F.A. in screenwriting and directing. Under the auspices, of her mentor, Milos Forman, Lisa wrote and directed a number of applauded short films, including *Souvenir* (1994), which screened at more than 25 International film festivals and had its premiere at the 1994 London Film Festival, and *Dinner Party* (1997), which has aired on UK, French, and Swiss Television and was a winner of the British Film Institute's Channel 4 TX prize.

In 1998, Lisa embarked on her directorial feature film debut, *High Art*, starring Ally Sheedy and Radha Mitchell. The film is a probing journey into a dark meditation on love, loss and the dilemmas we face in our daily lives. In *High Art*, Lisa examines the idea of ambition and the obscurity between personal drive and the bargaining of one's morals for success. The film received numerous awards including the National Society of Film Critics award for Ally Sheedy's performance, Sundance Film Festival's Waldo Salt Screening award, and Deauville Film Festival's Jury Special Prize.

In order to keep energy up during her editing sessions for *High Art*, Lisa would listen to a great deal of music. One morning, her editor, Amy Duddleston, brought in the Joni Mitchell record "Ladies of Canyon." Lisa immediately became inspired. Joni Mitchell would be the catalyst to Lisa's second feature, *Laurel Canyon* (2002), which transports audiences to the heart of the Hollywood Hills, home to many musicians, actors and other bohemian types. The film centers on a young straight-laced couple lured into an epicurean Rock n Roll lifestyle. *Laurel Canyon* enjoyed premieres at the 2002 Cannes Director's Fortnight, 2002 Toronto International Film Festival and the 2003 Gijón International Film Festival. Moreover, it won the Director's View Film Festival's Dorothy Arzner Prize in 2003 and was nominated for two Independent Spirit Award in 2004.

Following *Laurel Canyon*, Lisa continued to carefully select projects that countered the conventional and which concentrated on the idiosyncratic beauty of the human spirit. In 2004, she directed *Cavedweller*, which won the 2004 Seattle International Film Festival's New American Cinema Award and the 2004 Karlovy Vary International Film Festival's Award of Ecumenical Jury. Additionally, Lisa directed for several television programs such as *Homicide: Life on the Street* (1999), *Six Feet Under* (2001), *Push Nevada* (2002) and *The L Word* (2005).

GARY GILBERT (PRODUCER)

Gary Gilbert is the founder and President of Gilbert Films, a Los Angeles-based production company dedicated to producing and financing independent and studio films. Zach Braff's GARDEN STATE, the first feature to be produced and financed by Gilbert, premiered at the 2004 Sundance Film Festival. Fox Searchlight and Miramax jointly acquired the film for worldwide distribution, marking the first time in Sundance history that two studios partnered to acquire a film. In addition to the film's critical acclaim, Gilbert along with Braff received an Independent Spirit Award in 2004 for Best First Feature.

In association with Lakeshore Entertainment, Gilbert produced and financed HENRY POOLE IS HERE, directed by Mark Pellington and starring Luke Wilson. The film was released domestically by Overture Films in August 2008. Gilbert also produced and co-financed MARGARET, written and directed by Kenneth Lonergan (YOU CAN COUNT ON ME) starring Anna Paquin, Matt Damon, Mark Ruffalo, Matthew Broderick, J. Smith Cameron, Jean Reno, Kieran Culkin and Allison Janney. Fox Searchlight co-financed the film, which

was produced in association with the late Sydney Pollack and Scott Rudin. Searchlight will release MARGARET worldwide in 2010.

Gilbert also produced MEET MONICA VELOUR, the feature directorial debut from award-winning commercial director Keith Bearden, starring Kim Cattrall, Brian Dennehy, and Keith David. A native Detroit, Gilbert was honored to produce one of the first films in Michigan to utilize the State's aggressive tax incentive and growing film infrastructure. MEET MONICA VELOUR was shot entirely in Michigan and is slated for a 2010 release.

Gilbert's upcoming projects include RIGHT ANGLE, written and to be directed by award-winning filmmaker Michael Burke; and FROM PRADA TO NADA, to be directed by Fina Torres and produced in association with OddLot Entertainment.

JEFFREY LEVY-HINTE (PRODUCER)

President of Antidote Films in New York, Jeffrey Levy-Hinte recently completed the documentaries SOUL POWER (his directorial debut) and THE DUNGEON MASTERS, both of which premiered at the 2008 Toronto International Film Festival. SOUL POWER also had its European premiere at the 2009 Berlin International Film Festival, and was winner of the 2009 Los Angeles Film Festival Audience Award. SOUL POWER is currently being distributed domestically by Sony Pictures Classics and internationally through Celluloid Dreams.

Additionally, Levy-Hinte has produced over a dozen acclaimed films, including ROMAN POLANSKI: WANTED AND DESIRED, the widely lauded documentary feature by director Marina Zenovich, which enjoyed premieres at the 2008 Sundance Film Festival and 2008 Cannes Film Festival. It has been broadcast on HBO and distributed by ThinkFilm, with an international release by The Weinstein Company.

Prior to that, he produced THE LAST WINTER, an eco-horror thriller co-written and directed by Larry Fessenden. Nominated for best ensemble cast at the 2007 Gotham Awards, the film premiered at the 2006 Toronto International Film Festival and was released by IFC Films in September 2007. Also in 2007, Levy-Hinte produced the documentary BOMB IT, a comprehensive investigation of graffiti, covering street art from all around the world.

Selected as one of *Variety's* "Producers to Watch" in 2003, he has produced many other critically successful and award-winning films, including Julian Goldberger's THE HAWK IS DYING, Gregg Araki's MYSTERIOUS SKIN, Catherine Hardwicke's THIRTEEN, and Lisa Cholodenko's HIGH ART and LAUREL CANYON. He edited the 1996 Academy Award-winning documentary WHEN WE WERE KINGS, has served as a juror for the Independent Spirit Awards, and is the Chairman of the Board of the Independent Filmmaker Project (IFP).

CELINE RATTRAY (PRODUCER)

Celine Rattray is President of Mandalay Vision, the newly launched independent development, production and financing arm of the Mandalay Entertainment Group. Focusing primarily on innovative storytelling, Mandalay Vision's slate includes *The Kids are All Right*, the Sundance darling directed by Lisa Cholodenko and starring Julianne Moore, Annette Bening and Mark Ruffalo, purchased by Focus Features following a two day bidding war which resulted in the biggest sale of the festival; *The Whistleblower*, a drama directed by Larysa Kondracki and starring Rachel Weisz, Vanessa Redgrave and David Strathairn; *Vanishing on 7th Street*, an apocalyptic thriller directed by Brad Anderson, starring Hayden Christenson, Thandie Newton and John Leguizamo and financed by Herrick Entertainment.

Prior to Mandalay, Celine Rattray formed and ran Plum Pictures from September 2003 to December 2009, with her partners Galt Niederhoffer and Daniela Taplin. The prolific company made 20 independent films including ten Sundance Film Festival selections, one Toronto selection and one Berlin selection. The company also developed multiple studio films including projects at Fox, Paramount, Universal, Sony and Newline. Plum films have won the Sundance audience award and screenwriting prize, the Gotham award and been nominated for 2 Golden Globes and 2 Spirit Awards. Plum was profiled in Forbes, NY Times, Fast Company, Crains and listed in Hollywood Reporter's Indie Power List

Rattray exec produced Toronto entry *New York, I Love You*, a project comprised of compiled films by a roster of directors that includes Mira Nair, Josh Marston, Hughes Brothers, Brett Rattner, Yvan Attal, Fatih Akin, Jiang Wen, Shunji Iwai, Andrey Zvyagintsev, Shekhar Kapur. The cast includes Kevin Bacon, Natalie Portman, Scarlett Johansson, Chris Cooper, Robin Wright, Ethan Hawke, James Caan, Anton Yelchin, Orlando Bloom, Christina Ricci, Shia Labeouf, Hayden Christenson, Rachel Bilson. Vivendi released in October 2009. Also released in October was Tribeca Festival selection *Trucker*, starring Michelle Monaghan. *Afterlife* with Liam Neeson, Christina Ricci, Justin Long, was the closing night film of AFI Film Fest, sold to Overture / Anchor Bay and is slated for release in the spring.

Rattray produced 2009 Sundance entry *The Winning Season* with Sam Rockwell and Emma Roberts. It was one of the biggest sales of the festival, selling to Lionsgate and set to be released in 2010. 2008 Sundance entries were *Diminished Capacity*, starring Matthew Broderick, Alan Alda, Virginia Madsen; and *Birds of America*, starring Matthew Perry, Ben Foster, Ginnifer Goodwin and Hilary Swank. *Diminished Capacity* sold to IFC and Paramount and *Birds of America* sold to First Look.

In 2007, Plum had three films at Sundance: *Grace is Gone*, directed by James C. Strouse and starring John Cusack; *Dedication*, directed by Justin Theroux and starring Billy Crudup and Mandy Moore; and *Great World of Sound* directed by Craig Zobel. The Weinstein Company bought *Grace is Gone* and *Dedication* following heated bidding wars, and *Grace is Gone* went on to win the coveted audience award and the Waldo Salt screenwriting award at Sundance as well as the critics award at Deauville. It also was nominated for 2 Golden Globes for best score and best song by Clint Eastwood. *Great World of Sound*, which sold to Magnolia, won a Gotham Award for Breakthrough Director and was nominated for 2 Spirit Awards.

Plum's other credits include *The Ground Truth: After The Killing Ends* (2006), which was released by Focus Features, as well as *Lonesome Jim* (2005), directed by Steve Buscemi, starring Casey Affleck and Liv Tyler, released by IFC Films.

JORDAN HOROWITZ (PRODUCER)

Jordan Horowitz is the Vice President of Production and Development at Gilbert Films. In addition to THE KIDS ARE ALL RIGHT, Mr. Horowitz produced MEET MONICA VELOUR, the first film from award-winning commercial director Keith Bearden, starring Kim Cattrall, Brian Dennehy, and Keith David, to be released in 2010. Gilbert Films has also produced and financed Zach Braff's GARDEN STATE, released by Fox Searchlight in 2005, HENRY POOLE IS HERE, directed by Marc Pellington, starring Luke Wilson, and released by Overture in August 2008, and Ken Lonergan's long-awaited MARGARET, to be released by Searchlight in 2010.

Mr. Horowitz's upcoming projects include BRICKHEAD, written by Bill Gullo and to be directed by Matthew Bonifacio (LBS.), which will be produced in collaboration with the Detroit based non-profit New Detroit; and RIGHT ANGLE, written and to be directed by award-winning filmmaker Michael Burke.

Before Gilbert Films, Mr. Horowitz served as the Artistic Director of The Delicious Theater Group. With Delicious, he produced a number of plays for the New York City Stage, including the award-winning adaptation of Mark Twain's THE CELEBRATED JUMPING FROG OF CALAVERAS COUNTY.

Mr. Horowitz attended Northwestern University and currently resides in Culver City, CA.

CREDITS

CAST

Jules
Nic
Joni
Laser
Paul
Jai
Clay
Sasha
Tanya
Luis
Brooke
Stella
Joel
Waify Girl
Pregnant Woman
Clay's Dad
Woman In Diner
Bartender

JULIANNE MOORE
ANNETTE BENING
MIA WASIKOWSKA
JOSH HUTCHERSON
MARK RUFFALO
KUNAL SHARMA
EDDIE HASSELL
ZOSIA MAMET
YAYA DACOSTA
JOAQUIN GARRIDO
REBECCA LAWRENCE
LISA EISNER
ERIC EISNER
SASHA SPIELBERG
AMY GRABOW
JAMES MACDONALD
PAMELA SHAW
MARGO VICTOR

CREW

Director
Writers

Produced By
Produced By
Produced By

Produced By
Executive Producers

Executive Producers

Co-Producers

Co-Producers

Director Of Photography
Production Design
Costume Designer
Editor
Casting

Music Supervisor
Original Music
Unit Production Manager
1st Assistant Director
2nd Assistant Director

LISA CHOLODENKO
LISA CHOLODENKO
STUART BLUMBERG
GARY GILBERT
JEFFREY LEVY-HINTE
CELINE RATTRAY
JORDAN HOROWITZ
DANIELA TAPLIN LUNDBERG
PHILIPPE HELLMANN
STEVEN SAXTON
RON STEIN
CHRISTY CASHMAN
ANNE O'SHEA
RIVA MARKER
ANDREW SAWYER
NEIL KATZ
J. TODD HARRIS
BERGEN SWANSON
LAURA ROSENTHAL
CHARLES E. BUSH, JR.
JOEL NEWTON
TODD LABAROWSKI
IGOR JADUE-LILLO
JULIE BERGHOFF
MARY CLAIRE HANNAN
JEFFREY M. WERNER
LAURA ROSENTHAL
LOS ANGELES CASTING BY LIZ DEAN, C.S.A.
LIZA RICHARDSON
CRAIG WEDREN & NATHAN LARSON
BERGEN SWANSON
JESSE NYE
JASMINE MARIE ALHAMBRA

PRODUCTION CREW

Stunt Coordinator
Stunts

Stunt Safety/Rigger
Production Supervisor
Set Decorator
Script Supervisor
Production Coordinator
"A" 1st Assistant Camera / "B" Camera Operator
"A" 2nd Assistant Camera
"B" 1st Assistant Camera
"B" 2nd Assistant Camera
Loader
Costume Supervisor
Set Costumer
Costumer
Additional Costumers

Head Ager/Dyer
Co-Makeup Department Heads

Makeup Artist
Hair Department Head
Key Hairstylists

Hairstylist
Gaffer
Best Boy Electric
Electricians

Rigging Gaffer
Rigging Electricians

Balloon Technician
Key Grip
Best Boy Grip
Dolly Grip
Grips

Rigging Key Grip
Rigging Best Boy Grip
Rigging Grips

Sound Mixer
Boom Operator
Utility Sound
Special Effects Technician
Propmaster
Assistant Propmaster
Assistant Props

MARK NORBY
SEAN GRAHAM
CASSIDY HICE
WILLIAM SPENCER
DARRELL CRAIG DAVIS
TRACEY LONDON
DAVID COOK
REBECCA ROBERTSON-SZWAJA
MARK ASARO
MARK FIGUEROA
GASTON RICHMOND
LEONCIO PROVOSTE
ALEX SCOTT
AARON TICHENOR
JACQUELINE ARONSON
LISA MARIE HARRIS
KATHRYN L. BUCHER
RIKI SABUSAWA
SIERRA BAY ROBINSON
SHARON FAUVEL
ELAINE OFFERS
VALLI O'REILLY
RONNIE SPECTER
CYDNEY CORNELL
CARL BAILEY
DANIEL CURET
JASON ORION GREEN
DAYTON NIETERT
JESSE RUSHTON
CHRISTOPHER BERNAL
DAVID BOUZA
RICK CRONN
ERIK A. ERICHSEN
JOHN JOLEAUD
JASON P. SALINAS
MIGUEL SANCHEZ
BILL GREENBERG
CARSON E. MAYNE
DOUG I. SOTO
NEIL YOUNG
GREG KARAMOV
DEMETRIE COOLEY
SETH GREENWALD
TIGRAN AGHASARYAN
EDWARD V. BAUMAN
RICKY DIAZ
OSCAR GARCIA
JORDAN GARRETSON
JEFFREY B GREGG
VADIM FRUMIN LANDAU
JULIAN S. LOPEZ
JOSE A. SANTIAGO
ADAM SHEEDY
FRED TROESKEN
TED S. KENNEDY
MICHAEL DIGIOVANNI
ALEX GAGE
MICHAEL E. PACHECO
CHRIS B. ROUNTREE
JOSE ANTONIO GARCIA
JONATHAN LEE-GER FUH
ERIC A. BAUTISTA
NEIL SMITH
JEFFREY M. O'BRIEN
KAREN HOLLEY
GREG HOLLEY

Food Stylist
Leadman
On Set Dresser
Set Dressers

Greensperson
Assistant Production Coordinator
Production Accountant
1st Assistant Accountant
Payroll Accountants

Art Director
Art Department Coordinator
Stand By Painter
Painter
Location Manager
Key Assistant Location Manager
Assistant Location Managers

Location Scout
EPK
Still Photographer
2nd 2nd Assistant Director
Set Production Assistants

Additional Set
Production Assistants

Office Production Assistants

Casting Associates

Cast / Producer's Assistant
Assistant to Ms. Moore
Assistant to Mr. Ruffalo
Assistant to Ms. Cholodenko
Assistant to Mr. Gilbert
Assistant to Mr. Levy-Hinte
Executive in Charge of Production Plum Pictures
Development Executive Plum Picture
Extras Casting Director
Video Playback Coordinator
Video Technician
Transportation Coordinator
Transportation Captains

Transportation Co-Captain
Picture Vehicle Captain
Drivers

CRAIG GLENN
APRIL FALZONE
JAMES A. COSTELLO
JOSH ELLIOTT
LEONARDO COLEMAN
COLMAN COSTELLO
CHRISTOPHER W.J. DINAN
MORGAN GILLIO
STEVE KELLEY JR.
MARTIN CARRASCO LEON
GREG MANKE
JOHN STONE
CHRISTINE EYER
COURTNEY LABREE
ROBERT CABLE
MARGARET MARTINEZ
ILANA MCALLISTER
DAN HEMPHILL
JAMES PEARSE CONNELLY
CINDY PETERS
KATIA KAPLUN
LISA MATSUURA WALKER
NED SHAPIRO
CHARLES FAGIN
SHAWN HUESTON
JEFF KORSON
MARIE PAULE GOISLARD
MARK SHOCKLEY
SUZANNE TENNER
EMILY HOGAN
JACKSON ROWE
LESLIE MERLIN
TYLER BEEM
SAM K. NAINOA III
MEGAN SCHMIDT
ROBERT MORRIS
WILLIAM BATSEL
CAROLINE FIFE
MEREDITH ANNE GREENBERG
ALEX O'FLINN
HENRIK PELLIER
DIANA VAN LEEUWEN
NICOLAS ZAPATA
LILI ROMERO
DONALD CHAMBERS
MARIBETH FOX
ERIC SOULIERE, C.S.A.
TIFFANY LO
CAROLINE T. APPLGARTH
WEDNESDAY STANDLEY
NATHANIEL STUTZ
SHAUNA BOGETZ
PAUL T. LIST
NIC MARSHALL
JENNY HALPER
CHRIS BUSTARD
LUCAS SOLOMON
VERNON EVANS
GENO HART
ADAM PINKSTAFF
HARDY OPHULS
JOHN PELLEGRINO
MARTIN OSBOURNE
LUKE H. ATKINE
TONY BARATTINI
MICHAEL R. BELT
JODY BINGENHEIMER
ANGEL DE SANTI
AUDREY FITZGERALD

Head Chef
Chef / Driver
Cooks

Craft Service
Set Medics

Studio Teachers

Stand-In for Ms. Moore
Stand-In for Ms. Bening & Ms. Wasikowska
Stand-In for Mr. Ruffalo
Interns

WAYNE FLOWERS
CRHIS HAYNES
KIRK HUSTON
CARLOS M. SERRANO
STEVE WEIBLE
DAVE WILSON
JAMIE KEMP
SANTOS P. RODRIGUEZ
BRIAN NAILING
ANDRES M. HERNANDEZ
GARY WOLDMAN
DANIEL SHINE
TONY PENIDO
HEATHER FIELDING
JACK STERN
CELIA HEMKEN
TONI KALLEN
GABE DELL
ALEXANDRA DUNN
LENNON FICALORA
BIANCA POLETTI
RACHEL ROSALES

POST PRODUCTION

Post Production Supervisor
First Assistant Editor
Audio Post Services provided by
Sound Design and Supervision

Re-recording Mixers

Sound Editor
Foley Recordist
Foley Artist

Music Editor
Technical Score Advisor
Music Editor
Post Services provided by
Digital Film Colorist
Digital Intermediate Producer
Digital Intermediate Editor
Digital Color Assistants
Imaging Technicians
Digital Restoration

Data Technicians

Imaging R&D
Engineering
Technicolor Executive
Technicolor Key Account Manager
Technicolor Customer Service Representative
Manager Sound Services - Video Film Audio Forensics
Titles designed by
Digital Visual Effects
Lead Visual Effects Composer
Visual Effects Compositors

+SCALE Executive Producer
Financial and Distribution Advisory Services
Production Insurance provided by

JAMES DEBBS
BOB DRWILA
SOUND FOR FILM
ELMO WEBER
FRANK GAETA
ELMO WEBER
FRANK GAETA
PATRICK GIURAUDI
JOE LEMOLA
DARRIN MANN
CATHERINE HARPER
CHRIS MORIANNA
JENNY BARAK
MATT NOVACK
JENNY BARAK
TECHNICOLOR DIGITAL INTERMEDIATES
JASON FABBRO
ESTHER LEE
MARK SAHAGUN
DAN WILLIAMS
FLOYD BURKS
BRAD SUTTON
WILSON TANG
DON HENRY
TIM HEUGELE
JOSHUA PINES
MARK HUBBARD
DIANE UPSON
DAN WESSELMAN
DON COWAN
MICAH LITTLETON
ANDY GOLDMAN
+SCALE
TODD SINES
CHARLOTTA FORSSMAN
SUNG KYU KOO
MARCUS LANSDALL
CINETIC MEDIA
KATHY ENGLAND AT TAYLOR & TAYLOR, LTD.

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Footage from "Locked Up Abroad: Uganda" provided courtesy of National Geographic Channel

SPECIAL THANKS

Partizan Entertainment

Kevin Huvane

Tony Lipp

Evelyn O'Neill

Stephen Halls

Gaby Morgerman

Robert Stein

Stephanie Ritz

Carter Cohn

Bart Walker

John Sloss

Pamela Pickering

Mrs. Jamie Kapel, Ira Resnick, Milton Radutzky and Richard Radutzky

Emilio Mauro

Carter Reedy

Michael Hausman

Scott Ferguson

April Janow

Joshua Zeman

Irwin Rappaport

Jennifer Hoopes

Catherine Shao

David Paul Wichert

Rori Bergman

Robert Ziembicki

Caryn Marcus

Juan Guzman / Los Angeles City Parks

The staff of Penmar Park and Recreation Center

Frank Harris and the gardeners at Ocean View Community Gardens

The prop houses of Los Angeles

ANTIDOTE INTERNATIONAL FILMS

Vice President - Takeo Hori

Project Supervisor - James Debbs

Office Manager - Kathy Ruiz

UGC PH

Producer - Philippe Hellmann

Producer - Camille Moreau

Cast & Crew Payroll services provided by CAST & CREW PRODUCTION SERVICES

Extras Payroll services provided by CENTRAL CASTING

Catering provided by FOR STARS CATERING INC.

Electric Equipment provided by PASKAL

Filmed with CLAIRMONT Cameras

Camera support provided by J.L. FISHER, INC.

Color by TECHNICOLOR

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For Wendy and Calder

Indiewire.com

“Kids” More Than All Right: Cholodenko Shines At Sundance by Peter Knegt (January 26, 2010)

Introducing the world premiere of Lisa Cholodenko's "The Kids are All Right," Sundance's John Cooper joked that if anything bad were to happen during the screening, "there would go the independent film industry." His reference came from the fact that reps from essentially every distributor were in attendance, anticipating the last minute entry to the fest and one of its hottest acquisition titles. Cholodenko admitted she had raced to get it finished in time, but there was absolutely no evidence of hastiness on screen. The audience laughed, even cheered (at a soon-to-be-classic scene in which "Kids" co-stars Annette Bening and Mark Ruffalo sing a duet of Joni Mitchell) en route to a rapturous round of post-screening applause.

The film details a tempestuous summer in the lives of Nic and Jules (Annette Bening and Julianne Moore), a couple anticipating their daughter Joni's move to college. Joni (played by Mia Wasikowska, who between this and "Alice in Wonderland" should likely become 2010's major breakthrough actress) has just turned 18, and her younger brother Laser (Josh Hutcherson) wants her to make use of her newfound status as a legal adult to seek out the sperm donor to which both of them were born from. Enter Paul (Mark Ruffalo), who immediately hits it off with his newfound biological children and in turn begins to send the family into quite the emotional tailspin.

The performances are across the board fantastic, and it would not be a surprise if a year from now Bening, Moore and Ruffalo all find themselves in contention for Oscar nominations. Though it's actually Cholodenko's and co-writer Stuart Blumberg's script that is "Kids"'s strongest asset. Its power lies in how consistently funny and deceptively lighthearted it feels. But in the end, the affecting nature of the film creeps up on you. The film's passionate final scenes leave you with the immediate realization that there is much more at play here than simply a sharp romantic comedy.

Set in California, Nic and Jules occasionally reference each other as married, but beyond that the film refrains from being overtly political. Their relationship is presented as any other, and their children are delightfully unfazed by their parents' sexuality. And it's through this subtlety that Cholodenko actually gives us an incredibly profound entry into the canon of gay-themed film. Such authentic examinations of a same-sex family don't come around too often, and "The Kids Are All Right" has mainstream accessibility to boot. It's this accessibility that should allow for the film to have no trouble finding a distributor. Whispers of a major deal came immediately after the credits rolled, and could very well go down today. But wherever "Kids" ends up, audiences should prepare for something truly special: One of the most endearing and genuine cinematic portraits of a contemporary American family, and one that just so happens to be reared by a same-sex couple.

Salon.com

By Andrew O'Hehir

PARK CITY, Utah -- I can't pretend to read the minds of people who passionately oppose letting gay people marry each other. If they assume that such marriages pose some anarchic challenge to the social order, I would point them towards writer-director Lisa Cholodenko's generous and hilarious comedy "The Kids Are All Right," which premiered here on Monday before a theater packed with bicoastal movie-biz luminaries. As Sundance Film Festival director John Cooper joked before the screening began, a terrorist could have taken out "what is left of the independent film business" in one shot.

All those people showed up because of Cholodenko's reputation as one of American cinema's best-kept secrets. Her earlier films, "Laurel Canyon" and "High Art," revealed her as an unusual combination of writerly intelligence and cinematic craft, but for whatever set of weird business reasons she has struggled to bring this scenes-from-a-lesbian-marriage comedy to completion, which took seven years from start to finish. Given the red-hot politics of the gay marriage issue, her timing is arguably perfect, and at any rate the movie is worth the wait. Cholodenko gets memorable performances from Annette Bening and Julianne Moore as the flawed, self-involved but profoundly human partners in a long-running relationship that's hitting one of those slippery, middle-age danger zones.

Nic (Bening) is a doctor, intensely driven and controlling, who's sliding into that polite, socially acceptable, four-glasses-of-red-wine version of alcoholism. Jules (Moore) has a succession of failed careers and businesses behind her, and now Nic's bankrolling another one, an eco-conscious landscape design business. They've slightly and subtly drifted apart -- they just don't put on that secret DVD of gay male porn that much anymore! They probably don't need a direct challenge to their family stability -- and to Jules' sexuality -- but here it comes, in the person of roguish, motorcycle-riding Paul (Mark Ruffalo), who just happens to be the biological father of Nic and Jules' teenage kids.

Their eldest, Joni (Mia Wasikowska) -- yes, of course she's named after that Joni -- has just turned 18 and made a call to the sperm bank that yielded half her genetic code. Her younger brother Laser (Josh Hutcherson) is actually the one who wants to meet Paul, but it's the ultra-bright, inquisitive Joni who forms a connection with him, and ends up hanging out at his organic mini-farm and restaurant, meeting his ultra-cool African-American business partner (and occasional lover) and so on. Nic and Jules furiously resist the intruder at first -- "We're not doing a time-share on our kids during Joni's last summer at home," Nic spits -- but despite their efforts Paul becomes a tentative, adjunct member of the family.

Once Jules agrees to take on Paul's weedy, overgrown backyard as her first landscape gig -- thrusting the two of them together for long days of Los Angeles summer sunshine -- the comic logic of the situation begins to move in an obvious direction. Beneath the easygoing surface Paul feels rootless and is drawn to Jules both physically and emotionally. She's flattered, and frankly horny, and as she says, "I keep seeing the expressions of my kids in your face." But there's nothing forced or false about what develops between Paul and Jules, and Cholodenko's definitely not interested in that story line about a hot lesbian who goes straight after a healthy dose of rogering.

I'd describe Cholodenko as an old-fashioned dramatist (in the best possible sense) whose heart and imagination are big enough for all these people. Each of the five principal characters takes a turn at the center of the story; each of them makes ferocious mistakes and must struggle to overcome them. It would be easy for her to cast Paul as the story's comic villain, the blithe, privileged, good-looking straight white guy who

screws up the happy lesbian household. But Cholodenko draws out one of Ruffalo's best performances, capturing Paul as a sweet, sad Peter Pan figure whose principal sin is a sudden longing for what he can't have.

Nic and Jules were doing a fine job of screwing up their happy lesbian household before Paul's arrival, of course, but "The Kids Are All Right" ranks with the most compelling portraits of an American marriage, regardless of sexuality, in film history. Even more remarkably, it's an overwhelmingly affirmative warts-and-all portrait, not a Bergman-style descent into the pit of marital darkness. Watching two of our finest actresses playing unglamorous, flawed and complicated women is a rare privilege, and in virtually every moment and every breath of "The Kids Are All Right" we feel that Nic and Jules have created something that, damaged as it is, must be saved.

From dinner-table repartee over thank-you cards Joni hasn't yet written ("If it were up to you, our kids wouldn't even write thank-you cards," Nic says to Jules, "they'd just send out good vibes") to a tense, too-much-information conversation with Laser about their taste for "gay man-porn," Nic and Jules are facing age-old questions of parenting in a subtly altered context. If "The Kids Are All Right" may be an effective weapon in the cultural wars, that's not because it's offering some radical new vision of marriage and family. It's because it's so real, so sexy, so sad, so honest and so truly, heartbreakingly funny.