



PRESENTS

MEDICINE FOR MELANCHOLY

A Film by BARRY JENKINS

FILM FESTIVALS

SOUTH BY SOUTHWEST 2008
SARASOTA FILM FESTIVAL 2008
INDEPENDENT FILM FESTIVAL OF BOSTON – 2008
SAN FRANCISCO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL 2008
PHILADELPHIA FILM FESTIVAL 2008
LOS ANGELES FILM FESTIVAL 2008

AWARDS

SPECIAL JURY AWARD FOR CINEMATOGRAPHY- SARASOTA FILM FESTIVAL 2008
AUDIENCE AWARD WINNER – SAN FRANCISCO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL 2008

87 MINUTES – COLOR– ENGLISH – NOT RATED

DISTRIBUTION CONTACT:

MARK BOXER
JUSTIN DIPIETRO
IFC FILMS SALES/DISTRIBUTION
maboxer@ifcfilms.com
jdipietro@ifcfilms.com

DISTRIBUTION CONTACT:

COURTNEY OTT
LAURA SOK
IFC FILMS PUBLICITY
ceott@ifcfilms.com
lasok@ifcfilms.com

TORONTO PUBLICISTS:

SUSAN NORGET/CHARLIE OLSKY
SUSAN NORGET FILM PROMOTION
SUTTON PLACE HOTEL
T:(416) 924-9221
Susan Norget: 917-833-3056 (cell)
Charlie Olsky: 917-545-7260 (cell)
Christine Richardson: 917-547-6876 (cell)
susan@norget.com
charlie@norget.com
christinrich@yahoo.com

www.ifcfilms.com

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SYNOPSIS

MEDICINE FOR MELANCHOLY is a love story about a one-night stand told through two African-American twenty-something's dealing with issues of class, identity, and the evolving conundrum of being a minority in a rapidly gentrifying San Francisco – a city with the smallest black population of any other major American City. When Micah (Wyatt Cenac) and Jo (Tracey Heggins) stumble into the brightness of a sunny San Francisco day after a hook-up, Jo' can't wait to escape the uncomfortable silence, but a shared cab ride and a lost wallet soon bring a well intentioned Micah to her front door. As caution turns to curiosity, the young couple sets off on a romantic ramble through eclectic neighborhoods and their own lives as they swap views on everything from the meaning of blackness to the letting go of heartbreak.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT BARRY JENKINS

I was living in the attic of James Laxton's parents' house, paying "rent" in the form of writing after a two-year stint in Los Angeles feigning the pursuit of a Hollywood career. It had been three years since I'd completed my last short at Florida State and, as someone who made ten bucks an hour opening boxes at five thirty in the AM, the loss of this relationship brought me face to face with reality: I had reached a dead end.

I'd been writing, had finished four features in the past eight months, in fact. A high-school football film, a "post-traumatic stress return from Iraq" drama, an SF-set parable focused pointedly on the soaring HIV/AIDS epidemic in the African-American community. Put simply: things beyond the scope of a filmmaker with no assets or connections to speak of.

And then something very ordinary happened: I opened my eyes and saw the images happening around me in San Francisco. The proximity. The very real notion that, if I had a camera and a few friends, we could unobtrusively capture the "stories" I walk through every day right here in this city. My friends Chris Wells and Amy Seimetz had done it. I did a little research and, holy shit, some guy named Joe Swanberg had done it over and over and over again.

I keep a list of story ideas in a word document begun sometime in 2002. Some of those ideas are no more than a line, others run five or six pages. In March of 2007, after the painful dissolution of my first interracial relationship, I opened that file with the goal of making something to address the reeling dizziness of my breakup while capturing the elusive atmosphere of modern-day San Francisco. Jotted down after seeing Clair Denis' VENDREDI SOIR, the idea lay dormant on my hard drive for four years. It reads like this:

The Morning After

Set in Chicago or New York. The story of a man and woman who wake up in bed together having no recollection of how they got there. From the appearance of things it's clear they've had sex. They do the most mundane things. This is a hotel room. Neither has a toothbrush. They stand side by side at the sink, both thumbing toothpaste across their gums. They dress. Outside on the corner, they both decide to have a cup of coffee at a nearby café. They sit together. While awaiting service they realize neither knows the other's name. They introduce. After the coffee, they both need a cab for the trip home. "Uptown" they each say to the other of where they live. They share a cab. The female is dropped off first. They shake hands. Part ways.

Now, from here, it could go either of a few different ways. Later that day they randomly cross paths again and decide to spend more time together. Or maybe the man discovers the woman's coat strewn across the backseat as he exits the cab... her wallet's inside. He must return it. And so we stay with them until they understand why they've been brought together. The longer they're together, the more curious of the other each becomes. This entire film could simply span from when they wake up together knowing nothing of each other until they fall asleep together again the next night, lovelorn and lost in conversation. Open for interpretation at that point.

MEDICINE FOR MELANCHOLY is a simple, straightforward film that illuminates the modern complexities of living as a declining minority in one of America's major cities. With mass media's representation of the African-American experience being limited to unprecedented degrees and gentrification displacing African-Americans from the cultural centers of American cities with unchecked speed, being African-American demands a struggle to assert and identify oneself on one's own terms in a manner on par with historically lesser represented minorities. In this meek story of a random encounter, the film explores the process of negotiating one's identity by illustrating how the effects of gentrification make it virtually impossible for minority urbanites to just "be." Jo' and Micah represent two sides of a conversation heretofore missing from cinema's representation of the black experience.

Artistically, the film is an affirmation of so many things. When I say that, I speak not to the quality or merit of the film itself nor our abilities as craftsmen and women, but to the notion that if ever we desire to do something, fuck it: all we have to do is take that first step and do it. I'd completely given up on the prospect of ever making another film, and then Justin Barber threw himself behind me and willed this thing into action. We weren't many, but damn if we weren't able. Cast and crew included, there were never more than eight of us physically making this film; most times there were six. I worked for eight months as a director's assistant on a film whose crew hovered near a hundred people. Never in the course of production did our eight-person team feel less significant.

With the love, support, and participation of my friends, I was able to articulate the confusion robbing me of sleep. And that...was nothing short of a miracle.

-Barry

CAST BIOGRAPHIES

Wyatt Cenac (Micah) hails from Dallas and has been performing stand up, improv and sketch comedy at the Upright Citizens Brigade Theatre in Los Angeles since its inception in 2005. He currently resides in New York where he recently joined "The Daily Show" as their newest correspondent and writer. Before that, he spent three seasons as a writer and contributed voice-over work for FOX's "King of the Hill" and also co-starred with Kanye West in a pilot for HBO.

Tracey Heggins (Jo) is a talented young ingénue has her first leading film role in the critically acclaimed feature "MEDICINE FOR MELANCHOLY." She can also be seen in the upcoming independent film "SACRED TERROR" and just finished another lead in the short film "CHAINS" starring Andre Royo from "THE WIRE." Some of her recent television credits include CBS'S "SWINGTOWN" and the ABC FAMILY hit "LINCOLN HEIGHTS."

CREW BIOGRAPHIES

Barry Jenkins (Writer/Director) is a filmmaker born and raised in the inner-city of Miami. After completing a bachelor's degree in film and creative writing, he relocated to Los Angeles where he worked as a director's assistant and development associate for Harpo Films. Barry currently resides in San Francisco, working for the rent check by day and writing, writing and writing by night. He is the writer-director of the short films MY JOSEPHINE and LITTLE BROWN BOY. MEDICINE FOR MELANCHOLY is his first feature film.

Justin Barber (Producer/Punching Bag) is an independent producer/couch-surfer living off of left-over craft service snacks somewhere in California. He financed MEDICINE FOR MELANCHOLY, his first feature, through an impressively high tolerance for other people's futons and the ever-appreciated help of his family and friends. He is the director of two short films, THE HEART OF A SMALL BOY and LEAVING BAGHDAD, which received poor screening slots at insignificant film festivals across the nation.

James Laxton (Cinematographer) believes that people are inherently good. He would like to see himself as a good collaborator and has a talent for taking a lot of pictures at the same time. In 20 years he would like to find himself continuing to take pictures of characters wanting to go places that we've never seen before.

Nat Sanders (Editor/Sound Designer) likes to take images and sound and put them next to each other. Sometimes certain images and sound work better next to particular images and sound than others do, so Nat does his best to always find the superior choices. For the most part, he is a slave to the idea that motion picture editing should produce a seamless result, and therefore often kills himself for hours at a time meticulously manipulating trivial things such as an actor's hand movement from one shot to another, and other banalities that nobody besides himself would likely ever notice. Friends and collaborators often laugh at, and are occasionally frustrated by, this obsession of his. But he can't help it.

Cherie Saulter (Co-Producer) wears many hats, sometimes all at once. Cherie Saulter works weekends and never takes vacations. Cherie Saulter is a healthy vegan who regularly showers and takes her vitamins. Cherie Saulter doesn't judge. Cherie Saulter gives hugs upon request. Cherie Saulter has won awards. Cherie Saulter will stay up all night if she has to. Cherie Saulter will do the best she can.

Strike Anywhere grew out of Florida State University's School of Motion Picture, Television, Sound and Recording Arts. We transplanted to California, dispersed through Los Angeles, regrouped in San Francisco and began honoring the independent spirit with an absence of compromise purchased with hunger. But not, you know, ambition... Like, we're really actually hungry.

MEDICINE FOR MELANCHOLY is our first feature, and premiered at South by Southwest in 2008. The film's ever-growing festival slate already includes the prestigious San Francisco International Film Festival, The Philadelphia Film Festival, Sarasota Film Festival, Los Angeles Film Festival and Toronto International Film Festival.

CITY ON A HILL, directed by Amy Seimetz, is our second feature and is currently in postproduction.

CAST

Micah..... Wyatt Cenac
Jo..... Tracey Heggins

CREW

Director/Writer..... Barry Jenkins
Producer..... Justin Barber
Co-Producer..... Cherie Saulter
Director of Photography.....James Laxton
Editor/Sound Designer.....Nat Sanders
Music Supervisor/Associate Producer..... Greg O'Bryant
Camera Assistant..... Alejandro Cruz
Production Sound.....Nikolas Zasimczuk
Re-Recording Mixer.....Will Storkson