



Presents

# FROZEN RIVER



Written and Directed by Courtney Hunt

(97 mins, USA, 2008)

Distribution



1028 Queen Street West  
Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M6J 1H6  
Tel: 416-516-9775 Fax: 416-516-0651  
E-mail: [info@mongrelmedia.com](mailto:info@mongrelmedia.com)  
[www.mongrelmedia.com](http://www.mongrelmedia.com)

Publicity

Bonne Smith  
Star PR  
Tel: 416-488-4436  
Fax: 416-488-8438  
E-mail: [starpr@sympatico.ca](mailto:starpr@sympatico.ca)

High res stills may be downloaded from <http://www.mongrelmedia.com/press.html>

## SYNOPSIS

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FROZEN RIVER is the story about Ray Eddy, an upstate New York trailer mom, who smuggles illegal immigrants from Canada into the United States over a Mohawk Indian Reservation. Normally a timid and reserved woman, Ray begins smuggling illegal immigrants as the only way to keep her family together after her husband takes off with the family's down-payment for their new doublewide dream home. In order to make the money in time, Ray teams up with a Mohawk smuggler, Lila Littlewolf, and the two begin making runs across the frozen St. Lawrence River carrying illegal Chinese and Pakistani immigrants in the trunk of Ray's Dodge Spirit. At the onset, Ray and Lila's partnership seems doomed to failure as Lila normally doesn't "work with whites," but Lila's eagerness to get her baby son back from her mother-in-law who has "stolen" him, lead Lila and Ray into an uneasy partnership.

At first the money is good and the ice holds. With help from Jimmy, the Mohawk dealer, they make several runs and soon the money for Ray's doublewide is within her grasp. As quickly as things began to go well, the entire scheme is threatened as the home life of each woman threatens to wreck their plan. T.J., Ray's 15-year-old son, struggles to take care of the house and hold things together for his younger brother Ricky, while mom is "at work." And Bernie, Lila's friend, tries to find her a straight job on the Reservation so that she can get out of smuggling and reclaim her baby son. However, Lila, who lives in a camper, feels she has no realistic way to support him without smuggling and rejects Bernie's efforts. Finally, with the money she needs almost set aside, Ray and Lila embark on a final run across the river which, if they survive, will set things right. But when the run goes bad, the Quebec police chase the women onto the ice and, with the New York State troopers on the other side of the river, the two women have to make a desperate escape. Trapped on the Reservation, the fate of Lila and Ray is left in the hands of the Tribal Council. With few options left, Ray and Lila's partnership is tested; they must face the consequences of their actions to survive.

## **DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT**

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I wrote this film after learning about women smugglers at the border of New York State and Canada who drive their cars across the frozen St. Lawrence River to make money to support their kids. The risk involved compelled me to write a story, not only about smuggling at the northern border, but also about what life circumstances would lead someone to take such chances. What I discovered was that a mother's instinct to protect her children is more powerful than any cultural, political or economic boundary line. Melissa Leo (Ray) and Misty Upham (Lila) embodied the unheralded struggle of single mothers of all ethnicities who are living on the edge.

## **ABOUT THE PRODUCTION**

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Shot on the Sony Vericam in 24 days, in sub-zero weather in Plattsburgh, New York with a bare-bones budget, the production of Frozen River depended on many things going right. Weather was a constant factor and the crew braved fierce cold and night shoots to get the footage and make our days. The actors, many of whom were first timers, showed commitment on the level of professionals and the professionals, especially Melissa Leo, led them with generosity of spirit and great skill. The other enormous factor was the participation of the people of Plattsburgh, New York, who supported us in a thousand ways and ultimately gave Frozen River a home.

## **CAST BIOS**

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### **MELISSA LEO (Ray)**

As a working actor for more than 20 years Melissa Leo is most widely known for her genius portrayal of Detective Kay Howard on **HOMICIDE: LIFE ON THE STREETS**. Leo studied Drama at Mount View Theatre School in London, England and later at the SUNY Purchase Acting Program. Among her memorable works: **THE YOUNG RIDERS**, **THE "L" WORD**, **21 GRAMS**, **THREE BURIALS OF MELQUIADES ESTRADA** and **HOLLYWOOD DREAMS**.

Leo credits also include: **IMMACULATE CONCEPTION** shot in Pakistan, **LULLABY** shot in South Africa, **RIGHTEOUS KILL** starring Robert DeNiro and Al Pacino, and **GRETA** starring Ellen Burstyn and Hillary Duff. She also appeared in the same role in the short, **FROZEN RIVER** that premiered at the New York Film Festival in 2004.

### **Selected Filmography**

2008 Santa Mesa  
2008 Lullaby  
2007 Frozen River  
2007 Mr. Woodcock  
2007 Racing Daylight  
2006 Falling Objects  
2006 The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada  
2005 Patch  
2005 Hide and Seek  
2003 21 Grams  
2000 Fear of Fiction  
1997 Under the Bridge  
1992 Immaculate Conception  
1988 A Time of Destiny  
1985 Streetwalkin'  
1985 Always

### **MISTY UPHAM (Lila)**

Misty Upham, born in Kallispell, Montana, grew up in south Seattle, the fourth of five children. She began her career at the age of thirteen when she joined a community theater group, Red Eagle Soaring. What began as a summer workshop soon turned into a full-time job. By the age of fourteen she was writing and directing short skits and performing on tours throughout the northwest. In the next four years she would be accepted to several Seattle theater companies, all while attending high school. Her first break came in 2001 when she landed the role of Mrs. Blue Cloud in Chris Eyre's sophomore project **SKINS**, where she portrayed a victim of domestic abuse on the Pine Ridge reservation. Upham additional credits include: Eyre's **EDGE OF AMERICA**, Rick Stevenson's **EXPIRATION DATE**, ABC's **DREAMKEEPER** and also starred in her same role as Lila across Melissa Leo in the short, **FROZEN RIVER**.

### **CHARLIE MCDERMOTT (TJ)**

Charlie McDermott feature credits include M. Night Shyamalan's **THE VILLAGE**, David Wain's **THE TEN**, and Jay Craven's **DISAPPEARANCES**. McDermott is slated to begin work on his next project the **UNTITLED TEEN ROAD MOVIE** in early 2008 and he has been cast as the lead in the feature film **FOR THE LOVE OF JADE** scheduled for filming later in the year.

**MARK BOONE JUNIOR (Jacques Bruneau)**

Mark Boone Junior is best known for his roles in two films by Christopher Nolan, MEMENTO and BATMAN BEGINS and his work in Buscemi's TREE'S LOUNGE, LONESOME JIM and ANIMAL FACTORY. He has had a prolific career, appearing in over 70 films: David Fincher's SE7EN and THE GAME, John Singleton's ROSEWOOD and 2 FAST 2 FURIOUS, Raimi's THE QUICK AND THE DEAD, Carpenter's VAMPIRES, Malick's THE THIN RED LINE, GET CARTER, THE GENERAL'S DAUGHTER, and DIE HARD 2.

## **FILMMAKER BIOS**

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### **COURTNEY HUNT (Writer/Director)**

Courtney Hunt holds an MFA from Columbia University's Film Division. Her thesis film, *ALTHEA FAUGHT*, a short about the American Civil War, which she wrote and directed, was purchased by PBS in 1996 and aired on American Playhouse. It screened in film festivals including the Tribeca First Look Series, Edinburgh International Film Festival, Montreal Festival des Film du Monde, and the Los Angeles Independent Film Festival. The film also won Columbia's first Prize in Directing from New Line Cinema. Hunt's second short film, *FROZEN RIVER*, premiered in the New York Film Festival in September, 2004 and went on to screen at numerous other festivals, including Los Angeles, Nashville, Williamstown, and the American Indian Film Festival.

Hunt holds a law degree from Northeastern University and a B.A. from Sarah Lawrence College. She was born in Memphis, Tennessee.

### **HEATHER RAE (Producer)**

Heather Rae has produced both narrative and documentary feature films. Her credits include: *TRUDELL*, about Native activist John Trudell, *Independent Lens' WATER FLOWING TOGETHER*, about master ballet dancer Jock Soto, *SAWTOOTH*, starring Adam Beach, Gary Farmer and Udo Kier, and *BACKROADS*, directed by Shirley Cheechoo. For six years, Rae ran the Native Program at the Sundance Institute and was a programmer for the Sundance Film Festival. Rae is Cherokee Indian and a mother of three.

### **CHIP HOURIHAN (Producer/Line Producer)**

Chip Hourihan is an independent film producer whose projects include *MIND THE GAP*, and Hourihan's own dramatic feature *GLISSANDO*. Hourihan has also produced television programs, series, segments and promo packages for networks that have included NBC, CBS, Fox, TNT, TNN, MTV, ESPN, Showtime, Nickelodeon, Al Jazeera and TF1. Hourihan is a graduate of Yale University.

### **CHARLES S. COHEN (Executive Producer)**

Charles S. Cohen, a real estate owner and developer, heads a multi-faceted real estate development company that develops, owns and manages office and showroom space in Los Angeles, Manhattan, Florida and Houston, including the Pacific Design Center (Los Angeles). He is also a principal of the Cohen Media Group, a film and media development consortium, and has served as a board member for the Hamptons Film Festival. He is a graduate of Tufts University and Brooklyn Law School.

### **DONALD A. HARWOOD (Executive Producer)**

Donald A. Harwood is a partner in the law firm, Itkowitz & Harwood, in New York, specializing in complex civil litigation, commercial transactions, and entertainment law. He is a graduate of St. Lawrence University and the Northeastern University Law School.

### **MOLLY CONNERS (Co-Producer)**

Besides *FROZEN RIVER*, Molly Connors recently produced *ASYLUM SEEKERS*, a feature film directed by Rania Ajami. She is currently developing Ajami's next feature project which will be shot on location in Libya.

**REED MORANO (Director of Photography)**

Reed Morano is a graduate of the Tisch School of the Arts, New York University. With ten years of experience as a director of photography, her credits include OFF THE GRID: LIFE ON THE MESA, an award-winning documentary currently in release and nominated for a 2007 Gotham Award. Morano's work has aired on Fox Sports, A & E, E! Entertainment, TLC, NBC, CBS, and UPN, and has been showcased at film festivals around the world.

**INBAL WEINBERG (Production Designer)**

Inbal Weinberg, who has worked with Hal Hartley and Todd Solondz, has an extensive list of credits, including HALF NELSON, STEPHANIE DALEY, SORDID THINGS, and THE GIRL FROM MONDAY.

**KATE WILLIAMS (Editor)**

Kate Williams is an accomplished editor whose credits includes three of Steve Buscemi's directorial works: INTERVIEW, ANIMAL FACTORY, and TREES LOUNGE. Williams also edited the acclaimed GODDESS OF 1967, THE MYTH OF FINGERPRINTS, with Julianne Moore, Hope Davis and Blythe Danner, and THIS SO-CALLED DISASTER, a documentary about Sam Shepard directing his play 'The Late Henry Moss.' Williams also edited the HBO mini-series, EMPIRE FALLS, for which she received an Emmy nomination.

**PETER GOLUB (Composer)**

Peter Golub is a noted composer of numerous works for film, theatre, ballet and concert hall. Most recently, he composed music for THE GREAT DEBATERS, directed by Denzel Washington, DEMONOLOGY, and THE JOY OF GOING SOMEWHERE DEFINITE at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles. Golub also composed music for the film ENGLISH ONLY (produced by Universal), AMERICAN GUN, THE LARAMIE PROJECT, LOST (the American Film Institute's Directing Women' Workshop), and the British TV film, THE CAT BROUGHT IT IN. He served as dance music arranger on THE ADDAMS FAMILY, and conducted and orchestrated the films POISON and SWOON. Golub is the Director of the Sundance Composers Lab.

## **CAST LIST**

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|                   |                    |
|-------------------|--------------------|
| MELISSA LEO       | Ray                |
| MISTY UPHAM       | Lila               |
| CHARLIE MCDERMOTT | T.J.               |
| MARK BOONE JUNIOR | Jacque Bruno       |
| MICHAEL O'KEEFE   | Trooper Finnerty   |
| JAY KLAITZ        | Guy Versailles     |
| BERNIE LITTLEWOLF | John Canoe         |
| DYLAN CARUSONA    | Jimmy              |
| MICHAEL SKY       | Billy Three Rivers |

## **CREW LIST**

|                    |                           |
|--------------------|---------------------------|
| COURTNEY HUNT      | Writer/Director           |
| HEATHER RAE        | Producer                  |
| CHIP HOURIHAN      | Producer/Line Producer    |
| CHARLES S. COHEN   | Executive Producer        |
| DONALD A. HARWOOD  | Executive Producer        |
| JAY B. ITKOWITZ    | Co-Executive Producer     |
| MOLLY CONNERS      | Co-Producer               |
| ALFONSO TRINIDAD   | Associate Producer        |
| REED MORANO        | Director of Photography   |
| INBAL WEINBERG     | Production Designer       |
| KATE WILLIAMS      | Editor                    |
| PETER GOLUB        | Composer                  |
| SHAHAD ISMAILY     | Composer                  |
| KERI LATIMER       | Additional Music          |
| TRACEY DEER        | Additional Casting        |
| ANNE MARIE DENTICI | Unit Production Manager   |
| SHAMIKA PRYCE      | Production Coordinator    |
| LAURA MEHLHAFF     | Assistant Producer        |
| BRIAN RZEPKA       | Art Director              |
| ABBY O'SULLIVAN    | Costume Designer          |
| CRYSTAL SHADE      | Key Makeup/Hair           |
| MARTINA MELENDEZ   | Wardrobe Supervisor       |
| CRAIG SHILOWICH    | Location Manger           |
| ANDREW CESANA      | Script Supervisor         |
| KEVIN PAZMINO      | First Assistant Director  |
| VADIM EPSTEIN      | Second Assistant Director |
| WARIS SUPANPONG    | First Assistant Camera    |
| MICAH BLOOMBERG    | Sound                     |
| KEVIN ADAMS        | Boom Operator             |