A Newcity/Chicago Film Project Production

A Jennifer Reeder Film

KNIVES AND SKIN

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SYNOPSIS:
KNIVES AND SKIN follows the investigation of a young girl’s disappearance in a stylized version of a rural Midwest town that hovers just above reality, led by an inexperienced local sheriff. Unusual coping techniques develop among the traumatized small-town residents with each new secret revealed. The ripple of fear and suspicion destroys some relationships and strengthens others. The backdrop of trauma colors quintessential rituals—classrooms, dances, courtship, football games—in which the teenagers experience an accelerated loss of innocence while their parents are forced to confront adulthood failures. This mystical teen noir presents coming of age as a lifelong process and examines the profound impact of grief.
DIRECTOR’S STATEMENT:
I tell stories about unruly women and the landscapes they transform. This is a story by a woman that proposes girlhood as a place of transcendence and transgression. I am committed to this voice and to producing unexpected narratives. I write scripts from actual experience and observation and my films are specific in mood and perspective. I am influenced by Ohio, where I grew up—all that sky and flatness. And even more so by the Midwestern people and their kind of everyday destructiveness and determination to cope. This awkward emotionality is evident in my films as scenes unfold like sticky flypaper and characters make one small mistake after another.

INTERVIEW WITH JENNIFER REEDER:
Jennifer Reeder interviewed by Ray Pride, film editor of Newcity, January 2019

Knives and Skin was on your mind for a long time.

It started in 2012 as a group of scenes, some visual ideas, maybe even as early as 2010. I wanted to make a series of short films about adults having a breakdown, at the worst, most wrong time. We're a culture of people breaking down, but somehow manage, for the most part, not to break down at inopportune times. So I had a series that I didn't know how to craft into a feature film, and I ended up making a bunch of short films including A Million Miles Away (2015), which went to Sundance. That experience helped me understand that people were at least interested in watching films about adults having breakdowns at the most wrong moment! Those short films about adults breaking down were also related to adult coming-of-age, or the idea that coming-of-age is a lifelong process, and that we evolve as adults. We certainly evolve as parents. And also, that in society, we don't put enough stock into what teenagers themselves know from both experience and observation.

So I made these short films, A Million Miles Away, Blood Below the Skin and Crystal Lake. Each with teenagers with agency, and adults in crisis. But they were tests, too, testing out scenes, testing out moments between characters to see if I could sustain these themes and ideas at feature length. The goal of so many people is to make a feature-length film, but that's not always mine. My goal is to tell a good story with good characters, and sometimes that's five minutes and sometimes it's fifteen, sometimes it's thirty. Right now? It's an hour and forty-five minutes! So it's been a long time coming. While writing I made other short films, and I directed my first feature, Signature Move, which I didn't write. So, I often had to stop and step back, and life things happened and became part of the process, too. So after all that, it was a year ago that I was finalizing what became the shooting script.

Compared to your dozens of earlier films, with each piece building on each other, short-by-short, festival-by-festival, you were more of a director-for-hire on Signature Move. In Knives and Skin, you’re capturing the voice established across all those shorts, but what lessons did you take from that first feature?
Signature Move gave me a real idea, over many, many days, of how to direct, how to be a better director, how to direct actors better, and especially, how to direct adults. Signature Move has no teenagers! I love working with teenagers, so that was a different moment. It's a comedy, but not a dark comedy. The wrestling scenes in Signature Move were awesome to direct, because they were choreographed action sequences. These large-scale action scenes gave me an idea of how to shoot the football game scene in Knives and Skin, which is not quite an action sequence, but still a larger spectacle.

And pacing yourself working over a longer schedule.

Yes, how to pace myself over a seventeen, eighteen, twenty-five-day shoot, yeah. It's not like I couldn't, like I was not able to handle, by any means, these 12-hour days, but I think you have to wake up every moment and reset, to think of it as a new day so that you come fresh to the set. What you have to keep in mind is what you've shot prior to that, plus all of what you still have to shoot. I don't mean this in terms of continuity, because there are lots of people on set keeping track of continuity, but making sure that at the end of the day, the emotional texture or temperature of the whole film is making sense. That's the job of the director.

It's different from saying, “Oh, we've got a weekend, we'll make a short.”

Oh, 100 percent, yes. And there are many more people involved behind the camera. It's very important to me to keep the set calm and fun. You want people to want to come back to work! They're getting paid, certainly, but it's also really important to me, because Chicago is a small town and word-of-mouth travels fast. If you're a director whose set is no fun, no one is going to come back. They might but they might not work as hard if they don't understand your set is a fun set.

So why grief?

Grief is the most complicated emotion. In both real life and in movies, it's one that has not been explored to the fullest. For instance, in too many films women, well, grieving people, and specifically grieving women, women in grief are shown just falling to their knees and sobbing uncontrollably. Or they just retreat from life altogether.

But in real life? I'm fascinated by stories of people in the immediate moments of grief. For instance, when a spouse dies, they're reluctant to call an emergency responder right away. Instead, they maybe sit or sleep with the dead body of their spouse for an extended period of time, maybe not days, which to me is neither disgusting nor morbid. It's very unexpected, but it's also maybe the most honest kind of response. I'm also fascinated with stories of parents who have lost children, particularly if they don't respond in the way that people imagine is “realistic” and then immediately become a suspect in that death.

Grief is just like desire. Grief is extremely personal, and grief is really eccentric. There are a lot of films that explore the complication of desire and the precision of desire. I don't know many films that are meant to entertain which also explore the precision and the complication of grief. I want to explore human connections and grief and trauma and coping.
How does this reflect your experience as the mother of three sons?

I was thinking about grief long before I became a mom. I didn't make films about grief before I became a mom, but I was interested in grief before then. When I became a mom, at first I didn't think that any of the content of my films had changed at all. I don't think it's uncommon for mom artists or mom novelists or mom filmmakers to get questions that maybe the dads don't get, things like “How has motherhood changed your process?” or whatever.

So, at first I would say, “Oh, it hasn't, it hasn't changed at all.” But then I realized that maybe the first film, the first significant film that I made after becoming a mother, was about a missing child! I mean, that would be the most obvious connection for someone to make, that that would be my greatest fear, an unspeakable kind of fear. But I didn't put those things together; it was just a real instinct to make those films, to make this. *Knives and Skin* is about a missing child and a grieving mother. And there are lots of odd moms in the film. And it's also very much about the complications of motherhood and the very specific way the mothers in this film deal with their situation.

When did you add the teen chorus to *Knives and Skin*? The power of the young voices, a cappella, carries so much emotion. The pop songs are generationally inappropriate for these kids, even if they had had a big brother or a big sister who loved these songs. They're torn out of time. But their voices, in chorus, transform the once-brash pop songs into their own music, while also reflecting the youth of the music teacher. She's infusing them with the haunted melodies of her own sort-of-gothic teenage years, which now becomes a moving shared experience.

That's a totally accurate read. It also is part of my autobiography. The songs, or the groups, from my teenage years are included in *Knives and Skin*, and my shorts have included choral arranging of 1980s pop songs. In 2012, I did a film where characters sing an a cappella duet of Foreigner's “I've Been Waiting for a Girl Like You.” That's more rock than some of the progressive alt that's in this film. I made a short where a woman sings a very bad rendition, also a cappella, of “Sweet Child of Mine,” which in a lullaby form is a heartbreaking song. So many of the songs that I'm drawn to from that era, when you break them down lyrically, just have a lot of pathos. The songs also have a great, infectious beat, whether meant for fast dancing or slow dancing. But I'm drawn to the lyrics of a song that can carry the content of a scene, or the narrative thrust of a group of scenes. When I made *A Million Miles Away* in 2014, part of the experimentation was trying to see if I could get away with a choral rearrangement of a hard-hitting rock anthem. The title of *A Million Miles Away* is from a Plimsouls song featured in Martha Coolidge's *Valley Girl* which is one of my most favorite teen films of all time, so there was also that nod to that moment in that film.

Jenne Lennon, who has done all of the choral arranging for me the past several years, made a lamentation version of “You've Got Another Thing Comin’” by Judas Priest. In its original form, it's obviously, yeah, a total hard-hitting macho rock anthem. In this lamentation version? It's this self-esteem boosting, pathos-jammed, beautiful track. I liked the history of that band: the lead singer, who, perhaps when he wrote that song or was singing that song in leather with spikes also knew, “I am gay, I am HIV positive, you know I am the lead singer of this really macho band but I have these secrets and ‘You've Got Another Thing Comin’.” So it was both the song itself but this interesting provenance. That song plays out in its entirety. It's a three-and-a-half minute song in a twenty-seven-
minute short. What I found was that audiences were immediately emotionally affected by that scene, by this group of twenty-three actual teenage girls who had not a lot of film experience, but could all genuinely sing, who were not a choir prior to me casting them as singers. This was a transformative moment for me as a director, to say that this risk I took will pay off, it does exactly what I wanted it to do, which was have a genuine emotional effect on an audience. I tend to obsess over ideas until I feel instictually that they've been exhausted. Maybe not unlike other people, there are ideas that I will continue to poke at through many, many films. Even small lines of dialogue appear in multiple films or names of characters appear in multiple films! It's like a tic in my brain or an itch on the roof of my mouth. I just have to keep noodling away at that, poking away. I feel like I'm just getting started with musical elements in films, not that I want to build up to writing an opera or something that could be considered a full musical, but I certainly am not done with having people sing.

It's a shared experience that steps outside the constructed narrative.

Yes.

Are there influences on Knives and Skin simmering under the surface?

The comparison I heard most often, not just to Knives and Skin, even in the script phase, and even earlier in the shorts, is an easy comparison to David Lynch, and specifically Twin Peaks. I don't mind that comparison.

Something about trauma.

Yeah, absolutely. His films have a specific power and art direction and have very stylized dialogue. Characters often deliver an awkward line at the most awkward moment. This makes for beautiful, odd, memorable moments. David Lynch certainly also deals with surrealism. He was influenced by art.

I didn't go to film school, I went to art school. I was always making films, but alongside painters and sculptors and photographers. I totally understand that comparison and I think it's valid and embrace it because I appreciate him so much. But I would also say there's some Catherine Breillat as well as the double Todds, Todd Solondz and Todd Haynes. After I saw Safe when it came out in theaters, I feel like there is a little Carol White in every single female character that I have written and I have no shame admitting that. Knives and Skin has a scene that's a direct ode to Chantal Akerman's “Jeanne Dielman.” This is not the first time I've had a character make a meatloaf!

So, there are my film godparents. So far no one has made a connection that's inaccurate. I also loved the first Pitch Perfect, a great coming-of-age story that involves music and female friendship as survival strategy. It's like super-pop and sugary but I proudly own that DVD. So far there have not been any deeply offensive comparisons.

In Knives and Skin, a lot of dialogue bites and the actresses bite down hard, in the best possible way. These characters are definitely impatient, pissed-off women.
I love difficult women both in real life and in films. I even love cruelty as a character trait. One of the first films I remember seeing as a kid was Hitchcock's *Rebecca*, and being obsessed with Mrs. Danvers, who is so cruel to the second Mrs. de Winter! And this ever-present Rebecca who we never see, but we figure out eventually what happened to her. I liked this kind of love triangle between these three women, one of whom was so deeply cruel, one of whom is a ghost, basically, and the other one, the wide-eyed innocent. There has also been that kind of influence of trying to find out which of my characters is the cruel one, which one is the ghost, and which one is the one who, just simply, is deeply likable, maybe even to a fault. She's so likable that you hate her by the end! I love the way that you know certain female characters are just mean. Lynne Ramsay's *Morvern Callar* is a favorite. I brought that up as a Christmas movie on social media. Someone was asking, what are your favorite Christmas movies? *Morvern Callar*! I've shown her movie to my students and it's really polarizing, mostly to male students.

**Morvern is cold from the first scenes.**

She's unrelenting. But I still love her. I still root for her when she's walking away at the end. I'm rooting for her. I couldn't wrap my head around the idea that she was a made-up character, she just seemed so believable and so real in her kind of cruelty. But again, it's grief. She's grieving and grief is eccentric. Other scenes are influential. I wouldn't say that I'm the biggest Paul Thomas Anderson fan, but I have always loved that scene in *Magnolia* where everybody sings together and there is a moment like that in *Knives and Skin*. That's a moment in that film that some people love and some people hate. I thought it was odd and risky and beautiful and poetic and dumb, even. Not because everybody can sing like Aimee Mann, but it's just this heartbreaking beautiful moment where we get to sit and stop and try to remember everybody in the ensemble cast, everybody's storyline, and understand that their hearts are all connected. I find that scene masterful. And I suppose like anybody else, at some point I was going to steal it for myself.

**The production design by Adiri Siriwatt, and cinematography by Chris Rejano are bold and brash, but your editing, again by Mike Olenick, has its own signature pacing.**

Yeah, the pacing. When I was 17, I went to work at a movie theater in Columbus, Ohio, where I grew up, the art-house. They just were hiring, I didn't even know that I wanted to be a filmmaker. So I replaced all the films that I thought that I liked with a whole 'nother catalogue of films based on what this theater showed. And there was never a moment where I didn't understand what I was looking at. I was drawn to these characters and to the pacing and to a sense of artfulness and a cinematography that I hadn't seen in many American films. I couldn't articulate that at the time, I was 17 and a ballet dancer, a very classical ballet dancer. “Swan Lake” or “The Nutcracker” or “Giselle,” ballets based on music, the story follows the music, the steps follow the music, the pacing follows the music. I think of the way that I work with my editor as more than just getting the scene established and onto the next scene, working a little more musically. This happened where we cut a couple of scenes together and then Nick Zinner, composing the score, would send us little test tracks that were just him messing around. He hadn't seen any scenes, he hadn't seen any footage. We would put the scene and the music together; we'll just slug it in there and see what happens. It was kind of incredible to watch and hear the edit change when the music changed. I'm not musical whatsoever but I like to think that my dance background has influenced how I direct and how I like
scenes to play out and how I edit. I see so many films by even very young European directors and that sense of lyricism is there and they're not being afraid to test the pace.

There’s so much character to each family’s domestic spaces.

Oh, that's there, for sure. I feel confident in my ability to write compelling dialogue. But I would much rather show an audience a character's space and let the audience begin to formulate who they think that person is based on that private space, their living space, and the things they choose to surround themselves with. The art direction, even when I was making a short for five dollars, art direction and the interior spaces were deeply important. What’s inside the frame, moving things out, moving certain things in, so that a poster behind the character, or books behind the character are the color of a pillow behind the character's head, and so on. All these details have meaning. With this one, it was no different. Our amazing production designer, Adi Siri watt, worked closely with me to make sure that the interiors were characters as well. Even the interiors of the cars are art-directed with precision.

The story moves briskly, with only a few gestures toward backstory. The familiar parts of the high school movie provide genre scaffolding, and you start with the highest stakes. The emotions are real and the characters hurt. The women are strong. Carolyn's injury comes when she explicitly denies consent.

I wanted to make a film where the story was about a missing girl, a gravely injured, missing girl. But at the end of the day, it's still a feminist portrayal, a take on the teen horror film that involves a missing girl whose body seems to reanimate, for lack of a better word, based on the grief of the entire town. Carolyn is both a zombie and a ghost, but I have never seen a zombie or a ghost portrayed this way.

There's a brutal disconnect. Carolyn is “the girl” but how everyone looked toward and beyond her threads through the story: everyone’s projecting onto her, mostly for the worst. Carolyn is pale, her glasses are pale, the pom-poms on her band hat are white, her jacket is paler than robin’s-egg blue, she arrives in white light. You give us a walking ghost from the get-go.

Even in casting, I wanted her to be small and pale, blonde, not unremarkable, but in a sense of what those things represent in American teen culture. A blonde, blue-eyed teenager in a marching-band uniform. That gives you a very specific idea of who that girl is, what her age is. Obviously, there are marching bands all over the country; it also feels deeply Midwestern to me. We knew going in, I wanted pale, softer colors, not bold ones. I wanted her to be like a doll. It felt real delicate when I was writing it and then shooting it and cutting it and then judging the balance of how much of Carolyn to put in, not injured, how much to put in after she is injured. We shot a lot of footage of her that in theory takes place before the film starts, but we use it not as a memory. It's a parallel harmony that's happening in the film. It felt important that, because we see Carolyn injured so quickly into the film, that at some point we realize that percentage-wise, there is more footage of her not injured than there is of her injured. That was a very specific determination.
I always knew in my brain what I wanted Carolyn Harper to look like, even that kind of generic name, Carolyn Harper, nothing against “Carolyn” or “Harper,” but that also just felt like “Laura Palmer,” there is something emblematic in her name as well.

The opening feels emblematically modern. The self-possession of Carolyn in that scene is quietly searing. There is so much agency and so much anger, she offers him every chance to back off, but she plays it as aggravated banter instead of the crankiness in the heat of the moment. She doesn't want to say it in a way that flirts, but in a way maybe she is flirting? Every single thing she says and the way it is performed is an elemental battle of wills. She announces her agency about sex plainly.

I wanted to make her not the virgin, but sort of the pretty girl who is maybe a nerd, like a band nerd, who has agency over her sexuality. She has led this boy to the quarry to have sex on her terms, and because we tell girls how to deal with consent, but, still not boys, he doesn't know when to stop. He understands and respects her right up to the moment that she decides that she wants to go home and that she doesn't want to follow through. And he has that line that I don't mean to garner any kind of empathy or sympathy, where he says, “You promised, you know."

And she’s saying, yeah, I promised that five minutes ago and now I’m done.

Yes. She says, I changed my mind. And then he gets to call her a slut, and leaves her there. I didn't want to leave him as a one-dimensional douchebag. I mean, he's like a two-and-a-half-dimensional douchebag! He has a transformation throughout the film and he also later in the film has to deal with another person while not understanding borders and will and consent. That felt important, the transfer of will and consent and sex and grief, all of these complicated things within one scene. I wanted these beats of control to go back-and-forth, back-and-forth. That's how I write, and the characters in so many of the scenes in this film and in the shorts, it's a volley of control back-and-forth, subtle, but a volley of control, nonetheless.

THE MAKING OF KNIVES AND SKIN:
Although she might be a fresh name among the ranks of narrative feature film auteurs, Jennifer Reeder is not a newcomer to cinema, having built a well-established reputation as a creative artist with experimental work in the 1990s-early 2000s, marked by art gallery and museum exhibitions around the world, underground film festivals, reviews in leading art magazines like Artforum and inclusion in the prestigious Whitney Biennial in 2000. She’s part of a wave of narrative filmmakers migrating from the visual art world, like Steve McQueen, Miranda July and, most recently, Rashid Johnson of "Native Son," who is a friend of Jennifer's from their days together in the Chicago art world.

Reeder’s definitive turn toward narrative work commenced just about a decade ago, and she started exploring some of the characters and themes in "Knives and Skin" in her short films,
most notably "A Million Miles Away" (Sundance, 2015) and "Blood Below the Skin" (Berlinale, 2015). By 2015, she was actively developing the feature script for "Knives and Skin" (then called "As With Knives and Skin"), receiving a Creative Capital grant for the project and pitching it at IFP Independent Film Week in New York as part of the Emerging Storytellers section of the Project Forum. When she pitched the project later that year at Pitch at Industry Days, co-sponsored by the Chicago International Film Festival and IFP Chicago, her path would take a temporary detour.

Brian and Jan Hieggelke's Newcity/Chicago Film Project was also pitching at that event, with its first film, "Signature Move." That project had its screenplay, its lead actress, and its producers, but no director. The prep sessions gave the "Signature Move" team a chance to get to know Reeder, and vice versa. They decided to ask Reeder to direct, and to their happy surprise, she accepted. "Jan and I had met Jennifer through Newcity and its coverage of the art world, and saw her as someone who created auteur-like projects that seemed to adhere tightly to a specific personal vision, so I did not think she'd be interested in a project created by someone else. Jennifer later told us she was attracted by the prospect of working with a force like star-co-writer-and-fellow-producer Fawzia Mirza," Brian Hieggelke says. The experience working together and the success of "Signature Move," which world premiered at SXSW before enjoying a robust festival life and limited theatrical run before hitting the streamers, made the prospect of producers and director reteaming again appealing and before long, Jennifer, Brian and Jan were working on "Knives and Skin" with a goal of filming it in the summer of 2018.

While Brian took the lead on raising private equity to finance the film from Chicago business and cultural leaders, the team started work on casting the film. After flirting a bit with the idea of casting one or two famous actors, they decided to look to Chicago's robust community of actors at all experience levels, an approach more befitting the ensemble nature of the screenplay. If needed, they could turn to LA to fill in roles they could not find in Chicago. They did not need LA as the casting process, led by Chicago's premier casting agency, Paskal-Rudnicke Casting, turned up an exceptional and wildly talented cast, ranging from the four ensemble members from Chicago's legendary Steppenwolf Theatre Company, to the full troupe of teenagers playing the students of the fictional Big River High School, who were, in many cases, students or recent grads of Chicago's world-renowned acting programs at Northwestern and DePaul.

Assembling the crew was also something of an ensemble process, as the team brought back several key players from "Signature Move" as well as Jennifer's short films, including the film's Director of Photography, Editor, Wardrobe Designer and Production Sound Mixer, along with
many others throughout the crew. A big part of both features, "Knives and Skin" as well as "Signature Move," was the team’s commitment to assembling a cast and crew rich in diversity, with a substantial percentage of roles and jobs filled with women, people of color, and LGBTQ folks.

New to the team for this film were Production Designer Adrì Siriwatt and Gaffer David Louie Lukasik who were integral, along with DP Christopher Rejano, in collaborating with Reeder to create the distinctive look for the film that Reeder wanted, in what she describes as an environment "just hovering above reality."

One of the other signature elements of "Knives and Skin" is the use of music. Though not a "musical" in the traditional sense, hit songs from the eighties are sung throughout the film, at times by the girls’ choir. Songs like "Blue Monday," "Girls Just Wanna Have Fun," "Promises, Promises" and several others have been given new arrangements by Reeder’s longtime collaborator Jenne Lennon, which often turns a poppy upbeat tune into a lamentation, or a ballad of yearning. The team also worked with Groove Garden as music supervisors in tracking down rights before production, with an iterative process in which overpriced quotes led Reeder to find alternative choices in some cases, since all music needed to be licensed before production began. Nick Zinner, co-founder of seminal rock band Yeah Yeah Yeahs, contributed the score, composing more than 100 minutes of original music.

Locations offered their own challenge to the project since the film is set in a fictional "rural Midwestern small town" but was to be largely shot in and around Chicago. Houses for the main characters were sourced in perimeter neighborhoods of Chicago, like Morgan Park and Jefferson Park along with the close-by suburb of Melrose Park, where the aesthetic resembled classic American homes of varying economic vitality rather than the high-rises and brownstones most would associate with Chicago. The nearby town of Lemont—a river city abutted by oil refineries and a wide range of homes from lower-to upper-middle class—offered the perfect proxy for the fictional Big River, especially since, within minutes of its still-vibrant old-fashioned downtown, it has a beautiful quarry-turned-public park that would be the setting for a substantial part of the film. Lemont High School, with its beautiful football field atop the hills aligning the river, would provide the perfect place to set Big River High School—but it was not available, except for the football stadium, during filming due to a major summer construction project. So the filmmakers searched the city and its neighboring suburbs for the perfect school, before settling on Taft High School on the Northwest Side of Chicago. In an unexpected bit of serendipity, it turns out that Taft was the basis for Rydell High School in the original musical.
"Grease," written by Chicagoans Jim Jacobs and Warren Casey and later adapted into the film starring John Travolta and Olivia Newton-John (with Rydell relocated out of Chicago, natch). Though this was the first movie ever made at Taft, it seemed like a good omen for a teen film!

Principal photography was set to begin July 9, 2019. But about two weeks prior to that date, UPM Quinn Richardson was in a car accident and discovered that he needed emergency brain surgery to remove a tumor. In a sign of his passion for the project and his fortitude, he missed a fair bit of pre-production but was ready for principal photography on day one. And then, during the final week of pre-production, the producers got a call from First Assistant Director Josh Schilling with the news that he was undergoing an emergency appendectomy. He, too, would miss pre-production but otherwise start on time. It was not long before the crew was riffing about "the real knives of Knives and Skin." After all, two unlikely incidents had occurred. But, as the saying goes, "bad luck comes in threes," and so, on her first day on the set, actor Raven Whitley finished her scenes and started feeling sick. An ambulance rushed her to a nearby hospital, where she too underwent emergency surgery.

Fortunately, the rest of production went quite smoothly. Sure, there was the unanticipated constant drone of airplanes overhead at several locations, thanks to sites on the Northwest Side of Chicago lying directly in the flight path of one of the world's busiest airports, O'Hare. Sure, there was the scam suffered via a phantom RV rental through Outdoorsy.com the day the production went into a weeklong string of overnight shoots in the quarry, where the conditions were about as bad as a Chicago summer gets—that is hot muggy nights, replete with howling coyotes and mosquitoes treating cast and crew like craft services for insects. Most of the cast and crew wrapped on August 9, after 24 days of principal photography. Two weeks later, a skeleton crew shot an actual high school football game for background, as well as a day of pickups, and the production officially wrapped on August 25.

Reeder's long association with Wexner Center for the Arts at Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio, has nurtured an editing relationship with Mike Olenick, who she met at the Wexner. "Knives and Skin" editing started during production, but after it wrapped, it moved into high gear, with Reeder making regular trips to Columbus to push toward picture lock. The balance of post-production was set to take place in Chicago, but the film was invited to a work-in-process screening at the American Film Festival in Wroclaw, Poland, where it won the most valuable prize, a substantial in-kind post-production package. Soon Reeder and Rejano were en route to Warsaw, to do color work at ColorOffOn and VFX at Orka. Back in Chicago, sound design and mix were done by Another Country and then finishing took place at Flavor/Cutters.
"Knives and Skin" will have its world premiere at the Berlinale in the Generation 14plus section on Saturday, February 9.

THE CHICAGO SCHOOL OF FILMMAKING
Chicago is in the very early stages of a major transformation as a center of movie and television creation. Thanks to the generous Illinois tax credit of 30 percent, along with the development of the Cinespace Studios in the old Ryerson Steel plant, which has become the second-largest studio in number of sound stages in the United States after Universal Pictures, the city is enjoying an unprecedented level of Hollywood-based productions like the various Dick Wolf series ("Chicago Fire," PD, Med). This serves to expand the scope of an experienced production crew workforce.

This, along with the city's long underused assets—its beauty and scope for settings, its robust film schools—including the nation's largest—and its substantial foundation of creative assets, its writers, artists and especially, its theater and comedy actors and crew members, create the conditions for substantial opportunity to develop a film culture to rival (and complement) Chicago's world-renowned theater and comedy scenes.

Newcity is helping lead the way, both as a magazine that covers the industry in greater depth than anyone else (see, for example, its Film 50 edition which serves as a who's who to the local industry https://newcityfilm.com/2018/09/27/film-50-2018-chicagos-screen-gems/) and as a full-service production company that can develop projects, raise financing, execute production and post-production and even navigate distribution as needed.

CAST BIOGRAPHIES:

THE ADULTS

Tim Hopper (Dan Kitzmiller) Tim's film roles include “School of Rock,” “Last of the Mohicans” and “Vanilla Sky.” A Steppenwolf Ensemble member, he also performed as Vanya in “Uncle Vanya” in the Goodman Theatre’s recent production. His extensive television work includes “Empire,” “The Exorcist,” “Chicago Med,” “Chicago Fire,” “Grave Secrets,” “Oz” and "Law & Order: SVU."
Audrey Francis (Lynn Kitzmiller) Audrey is a Steppenwolf Theatre ensemble member who is also an accomplished director for the stage. Her film appearances include “Signature Move” and “Dig Two Graves,” and has been in “Chicago Med,” “Chicago Fire,” “ER” and “Written Off.”

Kate Arrington (Renee Darlington) Kate is a Steppenwolf Theatre ensemble member whose Broadway appearances include Craig Wright’s “Grace,” with Paul Rudd, Ed Asner and Michael Shannon and Richard Greenberg’s “Our Mother’s Brief Affair” with Linda Lavin. Her television appearances include “The Good Wife” and “Billions.” Kate’s film work includes “Hello I Must Be Going” and Martin Scorsese’s forthcoming “The Irishman.”

James Vincent Meredith (Doug Darlington) James is a Steppenwolf Theatre ensemble member whose television appearances include “Boss,” “Empire,” “Chicago Justice,” “The T,” “The Exorcist” and “Chicago Med” and “Betrayal.” His film roles include Stephen Cone’s “Princess Cyd.”

Marilyn Dodds Frank (Gramma Miriam Kitzmiller) Marilyn’s extensive experience includes work at Steppenwolf, Lookingglass Theatre and the Goodman, as well as in Tina Landau’s “Superior Donuts” on Broadway. She also appeared in the Chicago-set “Flatliners.”

Tony Fitzpatrick (Principal Markum) Artist, writer and actor Tony Fitzpatrick was a longtime collaborator with filmmaker Jonathan Demme, who directed Tony in roles in “Married to the Mob” and “Philadelphia.” Tony also has roles in “U. S. Marshals,” John McNaughton’s “Mad Dog and Glory” and “Normal Life” as well as Spike Lee’s “Chi-raq.” Tony plays a recurring character in the series “Patriot.” He also received a Jeff award for a principal role in “Mass Murder” at the Prop Theatre.

Marika Engelhardt (Lisa Harper) Marika’s television roles include “Chicago Fire,” “Patriot,” “Empire” and “Chicago Med.” Her theater work includes roles at A Red Orchid Theatre, Victory Gardens and the Goodman.

Alex Moss (Aaron Westrich) Alex’s television work includes “Chicago Med.” He has also appeared in shows at Annoyance Theater and iO Theater.

THE TEENAGERS

Raven Whitley (Carolyn Harper) A recurring character on CBS/Warner Bros. upcoming “Red Line,” Raven also performed the role Catherine in Goodman Theatre’s lauded production of Arthur Miller’s “A View From The Bridge,” directed by Ivo Van Hove.

Ty Olwin (Andy Kitzmiller)
Ty played Kristen Stewart’s love interest in Olivier Assayas’ “Personal Shopper,” distributed by IFC Films. His television experience includes recurring roles on “APB” and “Patriot.” He has also been in productions at Steppenwolf and the Goodman.

Robert Cunningham (Jesse Darlington)
Robert, a Northwestern graduate, made his film debut in Brian Taylor’s outrageous comedy “Mom & Dad.”

Jalen Gilbert (Jason Kendrick)
Jalen has been seen in “The Exorcist.”

Grace Smith (Joanna Kitzmiller)
Grace has extensive theater credits including most recently, Lookingglass Theater and American Blues Theater.

Ireon Roach (Charlotte Kurtich)
Ireon has a range of theater credits at the Goodman, Steppenwolf and Raven Theatre, with film and TV credits including “Chicago PD” and Stephen Cone’s latest feature, “Princess Cyd.”

Haley Bolithon (Afra Siddiqui)
Haley’s theater experience includes work at the Goodman and A Red Orchid Theatre.

Kayla Carter (Laurel Darlington)
Kayla has been seen on stage with Writers Theater and Shakespeare Project of Chicago.

Emma Ladji (Colleen)
Emma has been seen on stage with Shakespeare Project of Chicago and Writers Theater.

Aurora Real de Asua (April Martinez)
Aurora has been seen on stage with Goodman Theatre and Chicago Shakespeare Theater.

CREW BIOGRAPHIES:

Director
Jennifer Reeder constructs personal fiction films about relationships, trauma and coping. Her award-winning narratives are innovative and borrow from a range of forms including after-school specials, amateur music videos and magical realism. These films have shown consistently around the world, including the Sundance Film Festival, The
Berlin Film Festival, The Rotterdam Film Festival, The London Film Festival, SXSW, The Venice Biennale and The Whitney Biennial. Her awards include several that have qualified her films for Oscar nomination. She won a Creative Capital Grant in Moving Image in 2015, short-film funding from Rooftop/Adrienne Shelly Foundation in 2016 and short-film funding from the Hamburg Film Fund in 2016. She is a USA Artist nominee for 2008, 2015, 2016, and 2017. She is currently a Herb Alpert Film Award nominee. She is a native of Columbus, Ohio USA.

Jennifer Reeder - Selected Filmography

Seven Songs About Thunder, 20 minutes, 2010
And I Will Rise If Only To Hold You Down, 23 minutes, 2012
A Million Miles Away, 28 minutes, 2014
Blood Below the Skin, 30 Minutes, 2015
Crystal Lake, 18 minutes, 2016
All Small Bodies, 20 minutes, 2017
Signature Move, 85 minutes, 2017
I Dream You Dream of Me, 10 minutes, 2018
Knives and Skin, 107 minutes, 2019

Select Articles by Jennifer Reeder

Open Up the Gates: Women Want to Direct Action Movies
http://www.talkhouse.com/open-gates-women-direct-action-movies/

A Set of One's Own: Female Filmmakers on Takeaways from the Post-Weinstein Moment

Select Interviews with Jennifer Reeder

These Girls Know Secret Things: An Interview with Jennifer Reeder | The Nickelodeon
http://nickelodeon.org/jennifer_reeder/

Meet Jennifer Reeder: the world needs her feminist short films right now
http://www.theskinner.co.uk/film/interviews/jennifer-reeder-feminist-short-films-what-the-world-needs-right-now
**Producers**
Brian and Jan Hieggelke are the founders of Newcity, the preeminent cultural publishing company in Chicago (and São Paulo, Brazil), which they launched in 1986. In 2014, they launched a sister film production and boutique distribution company, Chicago Film Project, to pursue opportunities that have three characteristics: superior quality, commercial viability and some kind of Chicago DNA. Their first film, "Signature Move" (2017), world premiered at SXSW before playing more than 150 festivals worldwide and racking up numerous awards, including the prestigious Grand Jury Prize for Best US Narrative Feature at Outfest. After a limited theatrical run in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago and several other markets—in which it was the #1 film opening weekend in the US on a per-theater basis—the film launched on SVOD and TVOD platforms and is currently holding a 100 percent rating on Rotten Tomatoes.

In addition to "Knives and Skin," Chicago Film Project produced writer-director Hugh Schulze's "Dreaming Grand Avenue" in 2018, which is currently in post-production.

**Director of Photography**
Christopher Rejano was born and raised in the shadows of Detroit. He began an early fascination with filmmaking watching early MTV, skateboard videos and American independent cinema. Spending much of his youth with a video camcorder or still camera in his hand eventually led to relocating to Chicago to attend Columbia College. It was here where he mentored under legendary cinematographer Laszlo Kovacs, ASC on the MGM film "Return to Me."

Where Chicago was once known as a commercial town, a recent explosion of television and streaming network productions has allowed Rejano to have the opportunity to work as a Second Unit DP and camera operator on many of these Chicago-based shows. He has shot commercials for clients such as McDonalds, Aldi, Purina, K Mart and Toyota. Rejano’s approach to aesthetic is one driven by the necessity of proper storytelling and not by the pitfalls of following the latest trends. Often cited for a hearty midwestern work ethic and his ability to bring artistry to the screen has resulted in his work being featured at the Sundance Film Festival, SXSW Film Festival, Berlinale, and Tribeca Film Festival. He has also won back-to-back awards for Best Cinematography at the Midwest International Film Festival for his work on the films: "Crystal Lake" and "Signature Move." Rejano is a member of International Cinematographers Guild Local 600.

**Editor**
Mike Olenick has been editing films for Jennifer Reeder since 2003. Among the films he has cut for her include: "Seven Songs About Thunder" (2010), "A Million Miles Away" (2015), "Blood Below the Skin" (2015), "Crystal Lake" (2015), "All Small Bodies" (2018),
and Knives and Skin (2019). He was also a consultant editor on her feature "Signature Move" (2017). In 2015 he moderated a conversation with Jennifer at the Wexner Center for the Arts, where they discussed the process of editing "Blood Below the Skin."

Mike has worked as an editor on films for Guy Maddin (including "Keyhole," "The Forbidden Room" and "Seances"), Lucy Raven ("China Town"), Michael Robinson ("Circle in the Sand"), Kelly Reichardt ("Travis"), and Sadie Benning ("Play Pause"). He's edited films that have screened at the Berlinale, MoMA, Sundance Film Festival, Rotterdam International Film Festival, Fantastic Fest, Fantasia International Film Festival, Slamdance Film Festival, and streamed on MUBI. Projects he has worked on are in the permanent collections of MoMA, The Met and the Tate.

In addition to editing, Mike makes his own films focused on photography, forbidden desire, reproduction, transformation, and memories. His work has won awards at the Slamdance Film Festival (Best Experimental Short), Chicago Underground Film Festival (Best Looking Film), Ann Arbor Film Festival, and Big Muddy Film Festival (Best Experimental Feature). In 2016 he was awarded a fellowship at the inaugural Shudder Labs, where he developed the script for his horror thriller "There Goes the Neighborhood."

Composer

Nick Zinner plays guitar in the three-time Grammy-nominated rock band Yeah Yeah Yeahs, the hardcore band Head Wound City, and the atmospheric project 13 million year old ghost. He has collaborated and/or performed with Bright Eyes, Santigold, The Haxan Cloak, TV On The Radio, Arcade Fire, Damon Albarn, Stop the Virgins, Africa Express, Amen Dunes, Scarlett Johansson, Amadou and Mariam, and more. He has recently produced LPs for Songhoy Blues (Mali), Deap Vally (LA), and Fufanu (Iceland). Nick wrote “41 Strings,” an orchestral piece with more than 45 musicians that was performed in New York in 2011, in 2012 at the Sydney Opera House with the Sydney Youth Orchestra, in London at the Royal Festival Hall in 2014, and is now featured as the theme song for HBO’s series VICE. He has composed and performed for film soundtracks, notably "Mad Max: Fury Road." the Spike Jonze short “I’m Here,” the documentary “They Will Have To Kill Us First,” and “Where The Wild Things Are,” where he co-wrote the title song “All is Love” which was nominated for a Grammy Award and a Golden Globe for Best Original Song for a Motion Picture. He has published four books of his photography, most recently “131 Different Things” (Akashic). His photos have appeared in The New York Times, Vice, Rolling Stone and more, and have been exhibited all over the world including solo shows in Tokyo, Berlin, New York, London, Los Angeles, and Mexico City. Before joining Yeah Yeah Yeahs, he studied photography at Bard College, and now lives mostly in between Los Angeles and New York City.
Fun fact: Rolling Stone picked the Yeah Yeah Yeahs song "Maps" as #6 on their 2018 list of the "100 Greatest Songs of the Century — So Far"

**Wardrobe Designer**
Kate Grube is a costume designer best known for her work in "Give me Liberty" (2019), "Princess Cyd" (2017) and "Signature Move" (2017.) She is an Alumnus of the Columbia College Theatre Program. Her work aims to find the hidden details in everyday life, unpacking the mystery behind the way people see themselves, and how others see them.

**CREDITS:**
**Written and Directed by**
Jennifer Reeder

**Produced by**
Brian Hieggelke
Jan Hieggelke

**Executive Producers**
Tremaine Atkinson
Christopher Keogh
Tony Olson

**Director of Photography**
Christopher Rejano

**Editor**
Mike Olenick

**Production Designer**
Adri Siriwatt

**Wardrobe Designer**
Kate Grube

**Original Score by**
Nick Zinner

**Sound Recording by**
Jason Culver
The Harpers
Marika Engelhardt
Raven Whitley

The Kitzmillers
Audrey Francis
Tim Hopper
Ty Olwin
Grace Smith
Marilyn Dodds Frank

The Darlington
Kate Arrington
James Vincent Meredith
Kayla Carter
Robert T. Cunningham

Ireon Roach
Emma Ladji
Jalen Gilbert

Tony Fitzpatrick
Alex Moss
Haley Bolithon
Aurora Real De Asua

Casting by Jennifer S. Rudnicke CSA & Mickie Paskal CSA

Music Supervision by Groove Garden, Annie Pearlman & Melissa Chapman

Choir Arranger/Conductor Jenne Lennon

Associate Producers
Jason Fura
Bette Cerf Hill
Tracy L. Miller
Nabeela Rasheed

Contributing Producers
Bart A. Lazar
Thomas R. Leavens

CAST
in order of appearance
Lisa Harper MARIKA ENGELHARDT
Carolyn Harper RAVEN WHITLEY
Andy Kitzmiller TY OLWIN
Charlotte Kurtich IREON ROACH
Afra Siddiqui HALEY BOLITHON
April Martinez AURORA REAL DE ASUA
Joanna Kitzmiller GRACE SMITH
Gramma Miriam Kitzmiller MARILYN DODDS FRANK
Dan Kitzmiller TIM HOPPER
Lynn Kitzmiller AUDREY FRANCIS
Doug Darlington JAMES VINCENT MEREDITH
Renee Darlington KATE ARRINGTON
Laurel Darlington KAYLA CARTER
Jesse Darlington ROBERT T. CUNNINGHAM
Aaron Westrich ALEX MOSS
Cauleen Gilliard EMMA LADJI
Jason Kendrick JALEN GILBERT
Head Cheerleader CAMERON JOAN WISE
Mousy Freshman CLAIRE VAN DER LINDEN
Choir Member AYANNA BRIA BAKARI
Choir Member GRACE ETZKORN
Choir Member MARIA MONTERO
Principal Markum TONY FITZPATRICK
Jock CHARLIE FOX
Jock JESSE GRANATO
Tiger Shirt Voice GENEVIEVE VENJOHNSON
Football Game Announcer PATRICK MULVEY
Stunts Stunt Coordinator CHRISTIAN LITKE
Charlotte Stunt Double KIEA D. HOUSTON
Carolyn Stunt Double DANIELLE STAHL

CREW
Unit Production Manager QUINN NICHOLSON
1st Assistant Director JOSHUA SCHILLING
Script Supervisor TERRENCE THOMPSON
1st Assistant Camera NINA PILAR PORTILLO
2nd Assistant Camera ASHLEY BATTLE
DIT DARREN J. SANDERS JR.
Steadicam Operator SEBASTIEN AUDINELLE
Additional Camera IAN MCAVOY • JANA MCLAINE • IGOR ANDONI•
CEDENO GARCIA • ANDREA KINNERK • JOSEPH
LIM • ELLA LUBIESKIN • JOSHUA M. SMITH • MATT BORDMAN

Gaffer DAVID LOUIE LUKASIK
Key Grip/Gaffer BEAR ALDRICH
Best Boy Grip TJ CLOUNIE
Best Boy Electric SETH OBERLE
Grip and Electric ALHARETH AJJAJ
JAXI ALEGRIA
MIKE CHO
PATRICK HYATT
JAKE JOINER
Additional G & E SPENCER HAGERMAN • ALEX HALSTEAD • ALEX HELME • JOHN JADKOWSKI • NOAH KELLY • MELISSA REVELS • KYLE RUCKERT • PATRICK SAGE • POUYA SHAHBAZI • CAITLYN SPIRITUS • RYAN WINNICKI • Q WORTHY • HEX YANG

Set Decorator MARIE ULLRICH
Prop Master KERRI LYN WALSH
On-Set Dresser LINDA WYATT
Set Dressers C.K.CASMIER
RACHEL COLE
Art Department Coordinator TY’KIRA SMALLS
Scenic Artist ANTHONY J. FERRETTI

Costume Supervisor HALLEY SHARP
Set Costumer CASSIDY KEAN
Shopper JULIA LAUREN STERN
Stitcher/Shopper JERICA HUCKE

Hair and Makeup Department Head KAT SASS
Key Hair and Makeup LIBBY KNAPP
Hair and Makeup TAYLOR DARCY
Additional HMU TIFFANY ANDERSON • SARAH SHARP • JULIA LAUREN STERN • LUCKY STIFF • ASHLEY ZIMEL

Boom Operator REID MILLER
Additional Boom ADAM SANTIAGO

Contributing Music Producer ROLAND LABANA
Marching Band Drum Line Music BEN DRANSFIELD
Charlotte’s Sonnet RAYMOND SALVATORE HARMON

Key Set PA ANDREA RIVERA
Key Office PA METRA LAVON GILLIARD
PAs ALEXIS FRANCISZKOWICZ
MYLES KEOGH
HALEY MULCRONE
Additional PAs MARIA FRANCESCA DOWNS • LENA ELMELIGY • PARIS HIPPS • TALIA KOYLASS • ROGER LOU • MONIQUE MITRANI • JULIA MONDSCHEAN • SHEIKH TAHA MUNIR • TYLER MYLES • AVI ZEPHYRA
BTS Photographer MYLES KEOGH

POST PRODUCTION
Audio Services ANOTHER COUNTRY
Supervising Sound Designer/Re-Recording Mixer DREW WEIR
SFX Editors PATRICIA RAMOS
CATHRYN STARK
LOGAN VINES
Executive Producer TIM KONN
Producer LOUISE RIDER

Color COLOROFFON
Producer MAGDALENA WIDUCH
Post Production Manager ANETA WYSZYŃSKA-URYŚ
DI Supervisors SEBASTIAN LIPIŃSKI
ROBERT ROGOWSKI
Color Grading KATARZYNA ŻEBROWSKA

Visual Effects ORKA
Managing Director MAGDALENA ZIMECKA
Producer RADOSŁAWA BARDES
Post Production Manager JUSTYNA JUSZCZYK
Compositing PAVLE MILICEVIC

Finishing and Digital Services FLAVOR AND CUTTERSTUDIOS
Executive Producer NEAL COHEN
Finishing Editor PATRICK KUJAWSKI
Chief Technology Officer RYAN SCHNIZLEIN
Digital Services JULIE KLOS
ELLIOET NEVILLS

Title Design CASSIDY KAPSON
End Credit Title Card Designer DAN STREETING
Web Designer JIM MACIUKENAS
End Titles ENDCRAWL.COM

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Camera provided DAUFENBACH CAMERA
Lighting and Grip Equipment 2ND CINE, INC.
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