

Amazon Studios Presents

A GED Cinema Production



THE VAST OF NIGHT



In Theaters March 13th, 2020

Directed by: Andrew Patterson

Written by: James Montague and Craig W. Sanger

Starring: Sierra McCormick, Jake Horowitz, Gail Cronauer, and Bruce Davis

RT: 89 minutes / PG13

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SYNOPSIS

“You are entering a realm between clandestine and forgotten.” So begins the story of one fateful night in 1950s New Mexico. Photographed in soft, inky-dark tones and shot in nearly real time, *THE VAST OF NIGHT* follows young, winsome switchboard operator Fay (Sierra McCormick) and charismatic radio DJ Everett (Jake Horowitz) as they discover a strange audio frequency that could change their small town and the future forever.

Set at the dawn of the space-race and replete with uncanny and ironic period details, *THE VAST OF NIGHT* falls down the rabbit hole of Rod Serling’s *The Twilight Zone* and stitches together a narrative scavenger hunt through dropped phone calls, AM radio signals, secret reels of tape forgotten in a library, switchboards, crossed patchlines and an anonymous phone call. The unexpected is explored both in the film’s twisty plot and its bold cinematic style, which includes stealthy long camera movements and even a spookily effective black screen.

McCormick and Horowitz are joined by a cast of Texas and Oklahoma locals, including scene-stealer Gail Cronauer as an elderly woman with a dark secret, and Bruce Davis, whose voice we hear during a spellbinding phone call scene. Director Andrew Patterson, an Oklahoma City native making his feature film debut, announces himself as a major new American voice in cinema and storytelling.

With allusions to classic television, old radio shows, and movie masters such as Michael Mann and David Fincher, *THE VAST OF NIGHT* is nonetheless a breathtaking original. The experience drops viewers into a time and a town hidden away — and with quiet mysteries which only present themselves to those curious and patient enough to hear them.

A CONVERSATION WITH DIRECTOR ANDREW PATTERSON

Can you describe your initial reaction to reading the script by James Montague and Craig W. Sanger?

What creative impulses fired off in your brain?

I was big into stage plays at the time, and so the most intriguing thing to me was all the closed spaces in the story. The switchboard room, the radio station, an old woman's living room. It felt like a play and that kind of blew open something in my mind. I thought, "We could do something here that transcends the medium a bit."

Transcends the film medium?

Yeah. I love cinema but I get a lot of inspiration from things outside of cinema. Whether it's 19th century literature or podcasts or old radio shows. And here I thought about how if you turned off the picture, you actually had a radio drama that was really compelling. I wanted the finished film to be one where you'd still have a pretty special experience just listening to the sound only.

You make pretty overt references to *The Twilight Zone*, especially via the use of a fictional TV show called *Paradox Theater*, which acts as a framing device.

Big time. You know, *The Twilight Zone* callbacks were a way to tell the audience that we know what we're doing here. I wanted to signal that we are telling a familiar story. One you've probably seen before. But we're going to be as inventive and fresh and clever as the story will permit and hopefully tell the story in a different way.

What do you mean by telling it a different way?

Well, the density of the story and the number of plot twists was very intentional. The idea was to make you care more about something than you normally would have. Trying to build characters that invited involvement and desire for their goal to succeed. And when you do that, you don't have to be real twisty. You don't have to jerk the rug out from underneath the viewer to get them to feel something. I'm not a fan of just overstuffing the narrative sausage. I don't like jamming too much into a story. The game plan was to make you care more about something very specific and two people at the center of it.

There are little Easter Eggs in the film, aren't there? For example, the call letters for the radio station are WOTW, an abbreviation for *War of the Worlds*.

That one's really on the nose. And not actually technically accurate because you wouldn't have a W call letter west of the Mississippi. But only a few people have caught that.

How many of the other ones can you disclose?

There are so many. There's a family that gets referred to at least two or three times in the movie. The Grimaldis, we never meet them. But that's the name of the first family that gets infected in the movie *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*.

Also there's the name Cayuga, New Mexico. We say that a lot of times in the movie. Cayuga is not an actual place. Cayuga Productions was the name of Rod Serling's production company. At the end of every *Twilight Zone* episode, there's a title card that says Cayuga Productions.

There are also many references to the San Mirial Valley, which is an homage to Santa Mira, which the name of a fake town in a number of sci-fi and horror films.

You've mentioned radio drama and, in fact, during one of the most spellbinding scenes in the movie, you do turn off the picture. What were your thoughts about doing that?

During the long phone call scene, yeah. Well, I read this 24-page interaction between two or three characters on the page, which I absolutely loved. That was super ballsy writing and I thought, man, what should we do here to keep people invested while still honoring this incredible scene. So I made a decision to experiment with a blank screen.

How long is that scene in the movie?

It's about 16 minutes. And we did experiment with turning off the picture for the entire scene, but it was just a little too "bold." But there's about five minutes on the whole where the screen is completely black.

And the audiences you've watched the film with so far, do they get what you're doing there?

They dive in, man. People warned me that the audience would all turn around to see if the projector was broken, but the exact opposite happens—they sit there so still, like if they move or breathe they're

going to disrupt the flow of information coming. And we had sound designed it in a way to make sure that you knew it was intentional. It's really fun.

The actor who plays that voice on the phone is phenomenal. What can you say about him?

His name is Bruce Davis. I was working on commercials in Oklahoma City, where I live and where he lives, and he came in for an open call. He asked if I wanted to hear a monologue he'd recently delivered in a movie. And I thought, "Oh, brother." But then he sat there and he started to speak out this monologue and he was amazing. He told me, "Well, I was an Oklahoma City police officer for 25 years and I just retired and all I'm doing is acting now." I'm like, "I'm going to earmark that."

Then when we were casting Billy, the man who calls into the radio station, I asked him to come to my office and audition for it. He read it freely and his read was so good that some of it even ended up in the movie. Certain lines of his dialogue in the movie are from his audition. He was just that good.

This is a film that takes place entirely at night. Did you shoot it entirely at night?

We did, yeah. We shot for 17 days, 6:00 p.m. until 6:00 a.m. And we were so locked-in during the entire shoot that even when we were doing interior scenes, we weren't going to offset our biological clocks.

You must have all felt like you had jet lag.

For sure. On Saturday or Sunday nights, when the crew had a night off, we literally were meeting up at the hotel at 2:00 a.m. to play Cards Against Humanity or whatever. Just to all stay awake and alive with our internal clocks.

So that spooky, tense scene in the living room of the old woman was a night shoot?

That scene was actually shot all on night number two. That actress, Gail Cronauer, is an old pro in Dallas and a great acting coach. She had so much dialogue but she was so prepared, which meant that we could polish off the whole scene in one night, thanks to her.

What was involved in the casting of the two lead actors, Sierra McCormick as Fay and Jake Horowitz as Everett?

I think I saw 200 guys out of Texas and I saw 600 girls out of Texas and Oklahoma. But I didn't see my leads. So when Sierra was mentioned, I thought, "This girl is not going to want to come from Hollywood

and do this movie.” But we put out a feeler to her agency, sent her the script. She loved it. She and I got on a Skype call and I thought she great. But what really convinced me was that I got a message on my phone from Sierra, saying, "I will work harder for you than anybody ever will. I love this role. I am Fay. I will do anything you need me to do for this role."

That's what actually convinced me. I knew we'd be getting down in the mud to make this movie. We didn't have trailers, we didn't have chairs. I don't have chairs on my sets. I don't want people sitting around on my set. And Sierra just dove in and did anything. It didn't hurt that she's about the biggest cinefile I've ever met. Actually, I mentioned to Sierra something about Gaspar Noé and *Irreversible* and she's said, "I love that movie." I was like, "You're too young to love that movie."

And Jake is a New York theater actor. How did he end up on your radar?

His audition came to us out of New York, once we had exhausted Texas and Oklahoma. Jake was a total discovery. He had done one movie that was unreleased as well as a bunch of theater. But the thing I could see in him was that he had the control I needed to pull off the role. The stillness to hold the frame.

And like Sierra, he fits into the period quite convincingly. Perhaps because we're not super familiar with them as actors yet.

Completely. There was an old photo we'd seen of a guy from a local radio station in Oklahoma City called KOMA. This guy looked a lot like Jake sitting in the control booth. So I always had this vision of a guy that kind of looked like that, with the glasses and the hair and the cardigan and all.

Where did you film the movie?

Whitney, Texas is where 75 to 90 percent of the filming happened. That's like 45 minutes south of Fort Worth. Whitney is where the gym and the downtown are located. The other city that we shot in was Hillsboro, Texas. The most notable thing about Hillsboro is that was where Wes Anderson shot his first movie, *Bottle Rocket*. So I'm hoping to join the ranks of his career.

There's a very long one-shot take at about the 30 minute mark, in which the camera moves all the way across town at night. What was your motivation with that shot?

It was twofold. The narrative purpose was, "Here's where everyone is," so the audience could see how the people in the town are spaced out geographically. And why that matters in the plot about two

secluded kids in small town New Mexico. The second thing was to shake things up a bit at that point in the story. So that's what I was thinking, how can we sort of take this shot and catch people off guard while doing something that matters in the narrative.

And how did you accomplish it?

Every crew member, they thought it was kinda nuts. We intermixed equipment to get our specific "impossibly long" shots. Camera gear that would let us hand off walking shots to a go-kart and latch into bungee cords to minimize bounce over fields and dirt and gravel. Ultimately, we deputized three local high school kids in Whitney who had a Go-Kart and a Gator and a willingness to solve problems.

We tested several different gas-powered all-terrain skateboards, mopeds, Gators and golf carts and eventually landed on a very robust Go-Kart. Then we laid another one of our producers, Marcus Ross, on his stomach, holding the camera just inches above the ground. The driver was an 18-year-old farm boy who lived in Whitney and wanted to make movies. He would pull watermelons all day in the fields, then work all night with us, then pull watermelons again the next day.

For the slower pieces of the shot, I would run the camera at six or seven miles per hour. Then to hand it off, I would start walking, then running, then sprinting and hand it off onto a bungee camera cradle being held by the guy on his stomach on the Go-Kart.

What was the contribution of your cinematographer, Miguel Ioann Littin Menz?

He was incredible. That's a weird thing to ask a guy to light like half a mile of a city. But his experience was valuable beyond anything we could have paid him. He basically figured out a way, with no money, to create the visual aesthetic of very dark, very soft lighting. I told him what I wanted and he came up with it. So my relationship with him will span into multiple movies, I'm sure.

The movie takes place nearly in real time. Was it a challenging film to edit?

Well, it's supposed to be a 95 minute story at 90 minute running time. The real challenge was in creating engaging interactions and dynamics in the moments you would normally cut past. Like quick drives to and from one location in the town to another. There's so much in modern cinematic language that we cut past and move quickly around, so it was a major challenge to find a way to leave those in and make them compelling.

With the editing, I didn't want it to draw attention to itself or stick out at all. In movies that grow old and continue to look graceful, they don't have a heavy hand in the editing. And I always wanted this movie to date and age gracefully. There's only 700 shots in the movie, which is less than half of the average. Right now the average is 1300 to 1500. And so the editing was less than most films and that was by design.

Can you talk about specific movie influences on *The Vast of Night*, especially ones that might be unexpected?

There's a movie called '71 by a director named Yann Demange. It's about a soldier in Belfast. If you look at the aesthetics and the lighting and the color palette and the narrative timeline, we obviously owe that film a lot of credit. It made me think, what if we made a sci-fi movie set in the 50s that was like that? That had this same breakneck pace, with things being discovered in real time. So that was huge.

David Fincher's *Zodiac* was also a big one. The digital photography in *Zodiac* was so fresh when it came out in 2007. Aesthetically, I loved digital photography in a period film.

All the President's Men was huge. A movie about phone calls and that feeling of being slowly dragged into a mystery you weren't expecting to uncover.

And in terms of the one night storytelling approach, a movie like Michael Mann's *Collateral* was very special to me. When that came out, it really opened my mind to how much a filmmaker could do in a single night. If I owe anybody credit for inspiration, it's Michael Mann.

What about in terms of the camera movements and the specific forward-moving photography?

In terms of that quality, I was thinking about Gaspar Noé. Definitely *Irreversible*. I've only watched it one time and I feel like it stained my soul. I loved it. But Noé would film characters running down a street and then the camera comes running after them and catch up. And so the beginning of this movie is a lot like that. Where you're catching up.

As a director, you do seem to like that challenge to the audience.

Oh, I love it. I always want to feel like that kind of, “Catch up, catch up, catch up” quality when I’m watching a movie. The best is when I am watching a film and I like the characters and I like the world but there’s so much going on that keeping up is a challenge. And I hate when the dialogue is just characters saying things to each other they would never say at that moment or in that dynamic. And so I like making movies where you don’t feel like you are getting all the answers handed to you early on. Eventually you get the answers, but maybe not right out of the gate. So building the trust in a viewer that you will get a chance to catch up all the while not handing them everything is the real challenge.

ABOUT THE CAST

SIERRA McCORMICK (Fay)

Sierra McCormick was born in Asheville, NC and grew up in Palm Springs, CA. She began performing in film and television at a young age, and had a number of roles on network television shows beginning in 2007, including *Criminal Minds*, *Supernatural*, *Monk*, and *Curb Your Enthusiasm*. As her career progressed, she worked on studio films including *Land of the Lost* and 20th Century Fox's *Ramona and Beezus*.

From 2011 to 2013, she was a series regular on the television show *A.N.T. Farm*, and in 2014 starred in the horror film *Some Kind of Hate*, for which she was nominated for the Fangoria Chainsaw Award. Following this, she worked in many genre-spanning features including Lionsgate's *The Honor List* and Lifetime's *Sorority Nightmare*. She is starring in the upcoming film *The Vast of Night*, which won the Slamdance Film Festival audience award and the Overlook Film Festival's Jury Prize. She also appears in the upcoming ensemble horror film *V.F.W.*

JAKE HOROWITZ (Everett)

Jake Horowitz stars as Everett in *The Vast of Night* which had its North American Premiere and won the Audience Award at the 2019 Slamdance Film Festival. *Vast* also took the top JURY Award for Best Narrative Feature at the 2019 Overlook Film Festival. Helmed by first time director Andrew Patterson, *The Vast of Night* has quickly become an audience favorite and garnered high praise from filmmakers and critics alike. Jake's other film projects include upcoming starring role in *Agnes*, Cinestate's/Fangoria's reboot of *Castle Freak* (Release 2020), Patterson's *The Rivals of Amziah King*. He also stars in Julie Taymor's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Adam Bloom* (now streaming on Amazon Prime). Theatre is at the root of all passion for Jake; with his New York Off Broadway Debut in *Our Town* directed by David Cromer at the age of 15 he has gone on to star on Stage in *Dutch Masters* (Wild Project) directed by Award Winner André Holland, *The Sensuality Party* directed by Danya Taymor (The New Group), *King Lear* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* directed by Julie Taymor (Theatre for a New Audience). He is a founding member of Zoo City, a proud graduate of LaGuardia High School, trained at Calarts and will be The Julliard School Class of '22. Jake is New York/Brooklyn based.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKER

ANDREW PATTERSON (Director/Writer)

Director Andrew Patterson works and resides in Oklahoma and has received a strong reception to his debut film *The Vast of Night*. *Rolling Stone* called it an “ingenious debut” and *Slash Film* declared it will “leave you wanting more films from Patterson down the road”. Amazon Studios acquired the film after its Slamdance debut before the film went on to The Overlook Film Festival, TIFF Midnight Madness, Fantastic Fest and The Palm Springs Film Festival.

END CREDITS

Teleplay by

James Montague And Craig W. Sanger

Produced by

Adam Dietrich, Melissa Kirkendall
James Montague

Executive Producer

Eric Williams

Executive Producers

Caleb Henry
Marcus Ross

Director of Photography

Miguel I. Littin Menz

Production Designer

Adam Dietrich

Edited by

Junius Tully

Visual Effects Producer

Marcelo Garcia

Visual Effects Supervisor

Rodrigo Tomasso

Casting by

Toni Cobb Brock and Sally Allen

Sound Design

Johnny Marshall and David Rosenblad

Original Score by

Erick Alexander and Jared Bulmer

CAST

FAY CROCKER	Sierra McCormick
EVERETT SLOAN	Jake Horowitz
MABEL BLANCHE	Gail Cronauer
BILLY	Bruce Davis
BERTSIE	Cheyenne Barton
GERALD	Mark Banik
BENNY WADE	Gregory Peyton
RODKEY OLIVER	Adam Dietrich
SUSAN OLIVER	Mallorie Rodak
MARJORIE SEWARD	Mollie Milligan
GRETCHEN HANKINS	Ingrid Fease
SAM	Brandon Stewart
LON STEMMONS	Kirk Griffith
DAISY OLIVER	Nika McKenna
FRED SEWARD	Brett Brock
MRS. MCBROOM	Pam Dougherty
RUTH REYNOLDS	Lynn Blackburn
SPEARES	Richard Jackson
RENNY	James Mayberry
WINEFRED	Pam Dougherty
JANE GREER	Pam Dougherty
JOSEPHINE	Nicolette Doke
ARLO	Grant James
GRACE	Libby Villari
PRUITT	Gordon Fox
CAVAGE	John Gindling
ETHEL	Brianna Beasley
BENSON	L.A. Young