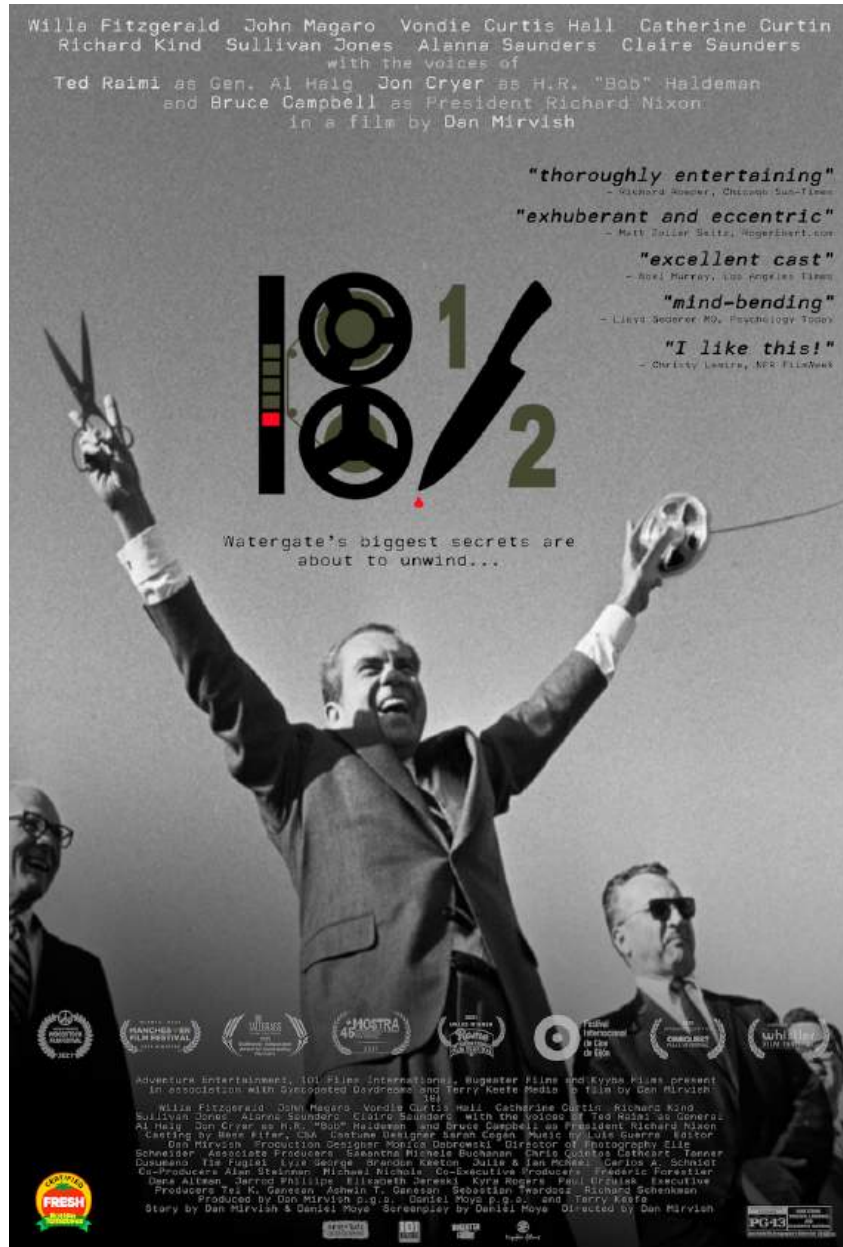


18½ Study Guide

Spring 2025



More information and downloadable stills:
www.18andaHalfMovie.com

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Production Notes (short version)

The day after the presidential election of 2016, Dan Mirvish went out to Shelter Island to show Oscar/Pulitzer-winner Jules Feiffer dailies on their film, *Bernard and Huey*. Inevitably, the conversation turned to comparisons between the new president-elect and former president Richard Nixon. Feiffer had drawn countless cartoons in the *Village Voice* about Nixon and even published a compilation of his Nixon cartoons in the early 70s. The conversation drifted towards Watergate and Feiffer's memories of the scandal ("I'm still pissed off I never made the enemies list!"). That night, Dan stayed at his pal Terry Keefe's motel in Greenport just north of Shelter Island. Terry, an indie film producer in his own right, was running the motel that his grandparents had first built in the 50s and 60s. He'd preserved its mid-century vintage look and often rented it out for fashion shoots, music videos and episodic shows, but never a whole feature. He told Dan, "We're closed in the winter if you ever want to shoot a film here." Hmm, Dan thought: Watergate as a theme, and the Silver Sands as a location. That's a movie!

To write the script for *18½*, Dan teamed up with recent USC-grad Daniel Moya, who'd also worked on *Bernard and Huey*. Coincidentally, Daniel's aunt helped run the Front Street Station Diner - a converted railroad car that's just a half mile from the Silver Sands. Another perfect location for the film! The team workshoped the script at the University of North Texas' Film Department in Spring of 2019 where Dan was guest lecturing.

The team started casting and raising money in earnest in Fall, 2019. With a very successful crowdfunding campaign through Seed&Spark as well as 501(c)3 fiscal sponsor, The Film Collaborative, they leveraged that into enough of a budget to start shooting the film in March, 2020. After filming successfully for 11 days, with about 80% of the movie in the can, the film went on a "pandemic pause" for six months. About a third of the crew spent stayed at the Silver Sands subsisting on left over product placement steak, beer and coffee.

Director Mirvish had returned to Culver City, California, with a hard drive and started editing the footage that he had. During quarantine, the team recorded the Nixon tape with actors Bruce Campbell, Jon Cryer and Ted Raimi all performing remotely from their respective homes. Dan worked with composer Luis Guerra and Brazilian singer Caro Pierotto on the soundtrack and score. Principal photography picked up where it left off in mid-September, 6 months to the day after "pausing," following strict SAG-AFTRA, DGA and New York State Covid-safety protocols. Since then, the team has primarily conducted post-production remotely, and made the most of it: Working with musicians in Mexico and Brazil, visual effects artists in Mexico, post-sound artists in Baltimore and Burbank and a colorist in the heart of Orange County. Mirvish was able to shoot insert shots of the reel-to-reel tape player in his garage with his kids and neighbors helping out. And writer/producer Daniel Moya worked from New York on essential accounting, fundraising and other aspects of post-production.

The film went on to play in 30 film festivals on 4 continents, earned "Certified Fresh" status on Rotten Tomatoes, got a 60+ city theatrical release in the US, played on Starz in the US and Sky Cinema in the UK, played on 11 airlines around the world, became an "Oscar Contender" according to all the trades, and the DVD proved to be a hit, with over 770 copies sold to public libraries in 43 states and 4 provinces.

Watergate Fact or Fiction?

In 1970, Howard Hughes paid Richard Nixon's associates \$100,000 in cash.

ITT, which owned Wonder Bread at the time, pledged \$400,000 to finance the 1972 Republican National Convention.

On June 17, 1972, burglars tied to the Nixon campaign broke into the Democratic National Committee headquarters at the Watergate Hotel.

Nixon resigned on August 9, 1974.

To this day, nobody knows what was on the 18-minute gap, or who erased it.

The film *18½* is historical fiction. None of the main characters seen in the movie ever existed. That said, large portions of the 18½-minute tape heard in the film are based on contemporaneous Nixon tapes and the historical record since that time. Sometimes truth is indeed stranger than fiction.

Facts:

On June 17, 1972, burglars (nicknamed "the Plumbers") tied to the [Nixon campaign broke into the Democratic National Committee](#) headquarters at the Watergate Hotel for the second time.

The 18½-minute gap is on a taped conversation between Nixon and his then Chief of Staff, H.R. "Bob" Haldeman, made on June 20, 1972. Haldeman's notes indicate that they were likely discussing the break-in at the Watergate during the gap. The gap was not discovered until November, 1973, after Watergate Judge John Sirica subpoenaed many of the tapes. After Haldeman resigned amid a wave of Watergate resignations and prosecutions, Nixon hired General Alexander Haig as his next chief of staff in May 1973.



In December, 1973, Nixon's loyal secretary [Rose Mary Woods admitted](#) to erasing the 18½-minute gap by accidentally hitting one button with her foot and another with her opposite hand. Known as "the Rose Mary Stretch," this idea was widely ridiculed at the time and by historians since.

President Richard [Nixon really did have multiple taping systems in the White House](#)

[complex](#), including the Old Executive Office Building (EOB) across the street. And there are indeed tapes of Nixon listening to tapes of himself. Plausibly, a tape such as the one Connie finds in the movie *could* have existed (and indeed, might still). To this day, nobody knows exactly why the burglars broke into the Watergate, who really erased the full 18½ minutes, and why it was the only tape that had erasures.

But there are some things we do know, that are alluded to in the film:

In 1970, [Howard Hughes paid Richard Nixon's associates](#)

[\\$100,000](#) in cash. Hughes' former associate Larry O'Brien was chair of the DNC at the time of the Watergate break-in, and there's been [speculation](#) over the years that the break-in was tied to the Plumbers finding out what, if anything, O'Brien may have told the DNC about the money Hughes paid Nixon over the years. Hughes was also connected to Nixon in [Project Azorian](#), the bizarre plot to raise a sunken Soviet sub from the Pacific Ocean.



International Telephone and Telegraph Corporation (ITT) pledged \$400,000 to finance the 1972 Republican National Convention at the same time it was negotiating with the Nixon administration to end anti-trust efforts. At the time of the Watergate break-in, the [ITT/Nixon scandal](#) was already [front page news](#). Less well known at the time was that among its conglomerate companies, [ITT owned Continental Baking Company](#), the maker of [Wonder Bread](#), from 1968 to 1984. On September 29, 1973, the Weatherman Underground was tied to a [bomb that exploded at the ITT building](#) in New York City, apparently protesting the company's activities related to the military coup in Chile. No one was hurt.

Nixon resigned on August 9, 1974.



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Themes and Discussion Topics

History & Political Science

- **The Cold War**

How or to what extent did Watergate affect US international relations with respect to the Cold War and detente? How did Watergate affect Nixon's relationship with Brezhnev and the Soviet Union on the one hand, and his monumental opening with China on the other.

- **20th Century American History**

How was Watergate a watershed moment in the US and World history in the early 1970s? What were the ripple effects of Watergate on subsequent presidencies, campaigns and US policies and laws? How did the "Watergate Class" of 1974 fundamentally affect Congress in the years after?

- **The Presidency**

How did Watergate affect the way Americans have viewed the Presidency since then? How did Watergate fundamentally create, change and/or solidify the relationship between the executive, judicial and legislative branches of the U.S. Government? How would Watergate come to affect the behavior of future presidents?

- **Watergate**

Explain the causes of the Watergate scandal and how the cover-up was worse than the crime. What do you think the reasons were for the initial break-in? How much did the 18 ½ minute gap galvanize a divided nation to turn again Nixon in the last 9 months of the Watergate scandal? To what extent did Watergate erode Americans' trust in institutions? What are the theories about why the Plumbers broke in to the DNC headquarters at the Watergate Hotel?



- **The 18½-minute Gap**

Explore the various theories about what was on the 18½-minute gap? What are the theories about what caused the tape and why it was implausible that Rose Mary Woods had erased it accidentally. What was the "Rose Mary Stretch" and what was its impact on the Watergate scandal and popular culture at the time?

- **Second Wave Feminism**

What are the implications for Second Wave Feminism of the 1960s and 70s for the Watergate Scandal and how it's expressed in 18½? How did feminism affect the reaction to Rose Mary Wood's explanation about the deletion of the tape? Did Nixon throw Rose Mary Woods under the bus or was she culpable? How was the Nixon Administration's

treatment of Martha Mitchell relevant to Watergate and how is it addressed in *18½*? In general, what was the role of women in and around the Nixon Administration?

- **The Vietnam War**

What were the root causes of the escalation of the Vietnam War? What was Nixon's famous promise to end the war? How did Nixon's policies wind up extending and expanding the scope of the War? And what was his role in finally ending the War?

- **The Military Industrial Complex**

Despite Pres. Eisenhower's famous speech warning America of the Military Industrial Complex, how did that nexus affect the ensuing Vietnam War and specifically to what extent did it affect decisions of the Nixon Administration?

- **Pres. Richard M. Nixon**

How did Richard Nixon's lifelong paranoia and disdain for the East Coast Ivy League elites affect his reaction to the Watergate break-in and the ensuing cover-up? To what extent was Nixon involved in the break-in? Why did he have such an extensive taping system? To what extent was he aware it was on at any given time? Should he have been pardoned by Pres. Ford for his role in Watergate? Did he consider that he had any Presidential Immunity?



- **Howard Hughes, Project Azorian, Nixon and Trump**

What was the relationship between famed recluse Hughes and Nixon and his brother? To what extent were Hughes' payments to Nixon and Bebe Rebozo considered "bribes" at the time? And did his payments go through Rose Mary Woods? How did Project Azorian affect the relationship between Nixon and Hughes? What was Hughes' connection to the DNC and the Watergate break-in? And trace the intriguing property in the Bahamas which Hughes owned and where he was hiding when he was indicted in early 1974... and how eventually that property came to be owned by Donald Trump. As the Atlantis Resort, it's also the site of where *18½* director Dan Mirvish won a Grand Jury Award for his film *Between Us* and where executive producer Richard Schenkman once wrote a children's book with his daughter. Is this a coincidence?

- **Government Bureaucracy**

In the film, Connie refers to herself as a "GS2...I'm nobody." How does the culture of government civil service manifest itself in Washington, and has that changed over time? How has it intersected with issues of race, gender and politics in Washington since the rise of the bureaucracy in the 1930s and beyond?

- **The CIA**

What were the role and limits of the CIA during the height of the Cold War, and particular its part in the destabilization of Latin American and other Third World regimes?

- **Latin American coups in Brazil, Chile and more**

Explore the rash of coups d'états in Latin America in the mid-20th Century, and to what extent the CIA as well as multinationals like ITT were involved? What are the lasting impacts on this destabilization of the region?

- **Democracy vs. Fascism**

Consider the rise of Fascism within a democracy and how there is a fragile line between the two. Was the Watergate scandal an example of democracy and the rule of law working, or collapsing? What are the implications for America and other democracies moving forward?

- **The 1972 Presidential Election**

Explore the extent to which Nixon's dirty tricks affected the 1972 Presidential Campaign, including if it had any affect on revelations about McGovern running mate Sen. Thomas Eagleton and McGovern's decision to kick him off the Democratic ticket.

- **ITT and the Scandal that Was Almost Bigger than Watergate**

Explore the brewing scandal involving ITT and the Nixon Justice Department and how it was poised to be the biggest scandal in the Nixon Administration until it was eclipsed by Watergate.

- **ITT and the Rise of Multinational Corporations**

Delve into the rise of multinational corporations and conglomerates like ITT. How did ITT in particular go from a telecommunications company to a defense contractor to owning Wonder Bread? What led to the collapse of ITT and other conglomerates?

- **Agri-Business Lobbying in Washington**

Some of the lesser remembered scandals of the Nixon administration involved agribusiness, including accepting a bribe in exchange for milk subsidies. But to what extent did ITT's ownership of Wonder Bread affect regulation or litigation involving the processed wheat industry at the time?

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Themes and Discussion Topics

Filmmaking & Film Studies

- **American Independent Filmmaking**

How does *18½* fit into the tradition of American Indie Filmmaking, dating back at least as far as Cassevetes and Altman in the 1970s, but perhaps stretching back to the dawn of cinema? How does the use of a primary location as the basis for shooting a film fit into the tradition of indie and low-budget filmmaking? What other production, financing or distribution techniques that the *18½* team used are consistent with the American Indie Film movement?

- **Filmmaking Techniques in *18½***

What were some of the unique techniques used in the cinematography, sound and music in *18½*? How did director Mirvish and cinematographer Elle Schneider achieve a "film look" while shooting digitally? How did use of, and choice of, lenses affect the cinematography? How did the use of "optical zooms" work within the context of the film? How was the filmmaking team able to avoid ADR in the film? How did the choice to use only techniques that could have been used in 1974 serve as an aesthetic principal that guided the filmmakers? How was music used in the film, in both diegetic and non-diegetic techniques?



- **The Casting of *18½***

How did the casting and performances of Willa Fitzgerald and John Magaro serve the story-telling purposes of the film? How does the casting of an iconic actor like Richard Kind work to subvert or serve the film? How did the last minute casting of Vondie Curtis Hall and Cathy Curtin affect the production and performances in the film? How did the casting of genre icons like Bruce Campbell as Nixon, Ted Raimi as Gen. Al Haig and Lloyd Kaufman as Jeffries, affect the audience expectations for the film?

- **The Financing and Distribution of *18½***

What are the different ways that the producers used to raise financing for the film (ie. crowdfunding, fiscal sponsorship, equity, product placement, state tax credits, etc.)? How was their crowdfunding campaign unique and/or successful? How did the onset of the Covid pandemic affect the financing and budget of the film? What unique ways did the producers use to carve out distribution rights and work with (or against) their distributors?

- **Racial Overtones and Subtext of *18½***

How did the casting of Vondie Curtis Hall as Samuel affect the subtext of his scenes with his wife (Catherine Curtin) as well as with Connie and Paul? Would his experiences as a Black veteran of World War II have affected his character's life choices differently than had

he been something else? Discuss the irony of his interracial marriage with his wife Lena at that time in American history, and how that might have affected their career choice as world traveling operatives? How did Barry (Sullivan Jones)'s character manifest different experiences as a Black veteran of the Vietnam War, and to what extent does that relate to Barry's life? What are the implications or subtext behind Connie's co-worker Cheryl being African American (and actor Marija Abney being a veteran of the *Black Panther* films), and what would her experience working as a civil servant in the Nixon Administration in Washington DC in the early 70s have been? What other portrayals of Black spies, agents and government workers were there in the cinema of the early 1970s? (hint: see *Klute*)

- **Film Festival Culture and Tradition**

What is the culture of international film festivals, and how do American film festivals compare to global festivals? How did the Covid pandemic affect film festivals during 2020-21, and what are the lasting ramifications on film festival culture, business and practice? How did Mirvish's history as cofounder of the Slamdance Film Festival affect his ability to get his own films into other festivals?



- **Gender and Diversity in Filmmaking**

How did this particular cast and crew reflect current trends in casting and crewing diversity in American filmmaking? Might the cast or crew have been different if the film had been made in a different era? How does, or can, diversity (or lack thereof) behind the lens affect the film itself? How do less obvious diversities and ethnicities (ie. religion, geographic origin, veteran status, educational background, height, etc.) affect the filmmaking process?

- **Affects of Covid Pandemic on Filmmaking Industry**

What other films were affected by the Covid shutdown and how did the film industry and especially the DGA and SAG lead the way towards safe and manageable methods of production? How did *18½* compare to Paul Schrader's *The Card Counter* in the approach to public health and safety when shutting down for Covid? How did it compare to bigger Hollywood productions at that time?

- **The Cinema of the Covid Era**

Will there be a distinguishing era of Covid films made during, or influenced by, the Pandemic? How does *18½* fit into this context? How does this era compare with similar eras of filmmaking such as World War II or 9/11?

- **The Films of Robert Altman, His Techniques and Influence**

Discuss Altman's use of ensemble cast, individual lavalier mic'ing, avoidance of ADR, live musical performances, use of zoom lenses and setting a firm start date for his films, and their influence on filmmakers like director Dan Mirvish, who was mentored in part by Altman and continues to work with his grandson, producer Dana Altman.

- **The Films of Alan Pakula and His Influence**

Pakula's paranoid conspiracy trio: *Parallax View*, *Klute* and *All the President's Men* are

considered the gold standard of 70s conspiracy thrillers. But to what extent should they be treated equally? And what was Pakula's lasting legacy in other genres?

- **Paranoid Conspiracy Films of the 1970s and their Influence**

Beyond the films of Alan Pakula, what other films are considered part of the 70s conspiracy canon, and did it really start in the 70s, or perhaps much earlier with such films as *Five Days in May* and *The President's Analyst*? How did films like *The Conversation* and *Three Days of the Condor* influence *18½* and other films?

- **Watergate Cinema as a Genre**

Besides *All the President's Men*, *Secret Honor*, *Dick*, *Nixon* and *Frost/Nixon*, what other portrayals of Nixon and Watergate have appeared in film and/or television? How does *18½* fit into this genre or canon of Watergate Cinema? How did the release of *18½* during the 50th Anniversary of Watergate compare to the similarly timed and produced mini-series *Gaslit* (Starz), *White House Plumbers* (HBOMax) and the Oscar-nominated short *The Martha Mitchell Effect* (Netflix)?

- **Comparative Literature: Historical Fiction**

What are the techniques of historical fiction that *18½* uses? How does this approach of "plausible speculative historical fiction" (as director Mirvish has called it) compare to such filmmakers as Quentin Tarantino in his films *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* and *Inglorious Basterds*? What other works of film or literature use the technique of *18½* to incorporate fictional characters into a single day of history, and [spoiler alert] end up with a plausibly speculative fictional history?

- **The Films of Director Dan Mirvish**

How does *18½* compare to the other films in Dan Mirvish's personal oeuvre, including *Omaha (the movie)*, *Open House*, *Between Us* and *Bernard and Huey*? How does Connie (Willa Fitzgerald), compare to the character of Connie Beane Eisenstadt in the book Mirvish co-wrote, *I Am Martin Eisenstadt*? How does the hippie beach scene in *18½* compare to the fire ceremony scene in *Omaha (the movie)*? Discuss Mirvish's use of jump-cut editing in at least one place in all his films. Are there any other consistent thematic, cinematographic, editorial, sound or music choices in Mirvish's work?



- **Oscar and Other Awards Campaigns**

What are the low-budget techniques that the filmmakers behind *18½* used to conduct an Oscar campaign for the film? Despite not winning an Oscar, to what extent can they still claim to have had a successful campaign? How has the modern Oscar campaign evolved into a business and cultural movement unto itself?

- **Guerrilla Film Marketing**

How did Mirvish and his team use guerrilla film marketing techniques to help promote the festival and commercial release of *18½*? How did they find success in non-traditional markets like airlines and libraries? Who were the pro-Nixon Protesters and why were they following the release of *18½* around the world?

Themes and Discussion Topics

Cultural Cross Currents

• Journalistic Ethics and Whistleblowers

What are the ethics concerns a journalist has when soliciting information from a whistleblower or other source? How long is the statute of limitations for not revealing a source? How did the secret behind "Deep Throat" affect journalism for the next 50 years? How did Woodward and Bernstein affect journalism practice in the ensuing generations?

• Pres. Richard Nixon's Favorite Films

Research the Presidential records on what films he watched in the White House and at Camp David while he was in office. Find the part of the Nixon/Haldeman taped conversation right after the 18½-minute gap where they talk about *The Hot Rock*, the heist film starring Robert Redford and scripted by William Goldman which Nixon would watch just a week after the Watergate break-in. How was this tape re-written for the end-credit sequence in *18½*? Discuss the irony of Redford and Goldman collaborating just a few years later on *All the President's Men*. And discuss Redford's complicated relationship with *18½* director Dan Mirvish years later, when Mirvish co-founded the Slamdance Film Festival.

• Hippie Culture in the Early 1970s

18½ takes place in a specific era of January 1974. At this stage, how had the Hippie Movement already changed from the Summer of Love in 1968 to the dispiriting Altamont Concert of 1969. By the early 1970s, how and to what extent had the hippie movement morphed into cults (ie. the Manson Family) on the one hand, but also into the commercial mainstream.

• Conspiracy Theories

What are the cultural and media causes for how conspiracy theories get started? How long has society been subject to conspiracy theories? What makes conspiracy theories stick and spread? How much truth does there need to be in a conspiracy theory that is mostly lies?

• Fashion of the Early 1970s

How did fashion of the early 1970s distinguish itself from late 60s trends (in both counter-culture/hippie attire, as well as mainstream professional fashion trends), and how did things drastically change again with the rise of the Disco Era and the fashions that distinguish the late 1970s?



- **Music from Brazil: Bossa Nova**

How did the rise of Bossa Nova in the mid-1960s affect music in Brazil? How did it's global popularity spread to the US and beyond, both musically and linguistically? Who were the main musical players in this cross-cultural musical phenomenon? What were the musical instrumentation, rhythms and melodic structures that distinguished Bossa Nova? How did Bossa Nova then devolve into stereotypical elevator music by the late 1970s? How did composer Luis Guerra, songwriter Dan Mirvish and singer Caro Pierroto use modern techniques, as well as vintage ones, to compose a faux-period Bossa Nova soundtrack?



- **Music from Brazil: Tropicalia**

How did the international counter-culture and musical psychedelia influence and manifest themselves in Brazilian music in the movement known as Tropicalia? What specific musical influences affected Tropicalia bands and to what extent did Tropicalia itself influence musical artists in other countries?



Festival Premieres -

2021-2024

- **Woodstock Film Festival** - World Premiere (Oct 2-4)
- **São Paulo International Film Festival** - International Premiere (Oct. 21 - Nov 3)
- **Tallgrass Film Festival** - Midwestern Premiere (**WINNER** - Jury Prize - Stubbornly Independent Award for Best Narrative Film - Oct. 20 - 24)
- **Lake County Film Festival** - Illinois Premiere - (Nov. 4-15)
- **Belize International Film Festival** - Belize Premiere - (Nov. 5-14)
- **St. Louis International Film Festival** - Missouri Premiere - (Nov 4-21)
- **Rome International Film Festival** - Southern Premiere - (**WINNER** - Special Jury Award for Creative Vision - Nov 12-14)
- **Gijon International Film Festival** (Spain) - European Premiere (Nov 22-27)
- **Whistler Film Festival** (Canada) - Canadian Premiere (**TOP TEN BOX OFFICE** - Dec. 1-5)
- **Anchorage International Film Festival** - Alaska Premiere (**WINNER** - Runner Up/Audience Award for Best Narrative Feature, Dec. 3-12)
- **Big Muddy Film Festival** – Southern Illinois Premiere (**OPENING NIGHT FILM**, Feb 24)
- **Barbados Independent Film Festival** – Caribbean Premiere (March 5) (**WINNER** - Founders Award)
- **Kamloops Film Festival** – South-Central British Columbia Premiere (March 12)
- **Manchester International Film Festival** – United Kingdom Premiere (**WINNER** - Best Director - March 18)
- **Oxford Film Festival** – Mississippi Premiere (March 23-27)
- **Cleveland Film Festival** – Ohio Premiere (March 30-April 9)
- **Phoenix Film Festival** – Arizona Premiere (March 31-April 10)
- **Cinequest Film Festival** – California Premiere (**OPENING NIGHT FILM** - April 1-17)
- **River Run Film Festival** - North Carolina Premiere (April 21-30)
- **Mendocino Film Festival** - California Festival Premiere (June 3-5)
- **Southern Film Festival** - Southern Georgia Premiere (**WINNER** - Best Feature Film and Best Director, August 20)
- **Cinequest Film Festival** (live portion) - Bay Area Live Festival Premiere (August 27)
- **South Georgia Film Festival** (March, 2024)





Commercial Release Schedule -

2022:

- **Theatrical opening** in Los Angeles & New York (May 27)
- **Expands to 60+ cities** coast-to-coast in North America (June 3 - Nov 11)
- **VOD/digital release** in North America (July 5)
- **VOD/digital release** in UK/Ireland (July 11)
- **Airline release** on **JetBlue, Virgin Atlantic, Air New Zealand, Singapore Air, Emirates, Qatar Airways** (Sept. 1)
- **Television premiere (UK)** on **Sky Cinema** (Sept. 15)



2023:

- **Oscars® Awards campaign** for Best Original Song (Nov. '22 - Feb. '23)
- **Television premiere (US)** on **Starz** (Feb. 1)
- **University theatrical tour** to US and international colleges (ongoing)
- **Airline release** on **Batik Air, Boliviana, MIAT (Mongolia), Omni Air International**

2024:

- **DVD Special Edition** in North America (April 9)
- 830 DVDs to **public libraries** in over 500 cities in 47 states and 5 provinces

2025:

- **Kanopy** releases the film to universities and libraries (Feb. 1)



DVD Special Edition

MVD Entertainment is releasing **18½** on an exclusive Special Edition DVD on April 9, 2024 in North America. In addition to the feature film itself, the DVD also includes an exclusive behind-the-scenes documentary entitled ***Covid 18½: The Making of a Film During a Global Pandemic***.

The behind-the-scenes documentary chronicles how the production of *18½* was the last film shooting in North America when the Covid pandemic struck in March, 2020, and was one of the first films to come back to production using Covid-safe production protocols. The documentary also explores the mysterious pro-Nixon protestors who dogged the film during its festival and theatrical run, as well as the film's unique DIY Oscar® campaign and eerie parallels to the House January 6 Committee Hearings. The documentary also includes alternate takes and angles of scenes, bloopers and outtakes.



In addition to the **feature film (88m, 2.35:1)** and **documentary (1h53m, 1.78:1)**, the Special Edition DVD also includes:

- **commentary track by director Dan Mirvish and screenwriter Daniel Moya**
- **a live audience track from the World Premiere at the Woodstock Film Festival**
- **audio of full 18½-minute Nixon tape with Bruce Campbell, Ted Raimi and Jon Cryer**
- **a promo by star Lloyd Kaufman at the Tallgrass Film Festival in Wichita**
- **a theatrical promo by director Mirvish**
- **the official MPA-approved trailer**
- **a spoiler-filled international trailer**
- **an alt scene featuring Sullivan Jones ("The Gilded Age")**
- **subtitle options in English, Spanish, Portuguese and Chinese**
- **behind-the-scenes documentary has English closed captions available**

For more information on the DVD itself, go to:

<https://mvdb2b.com/s/1812/MVD11176D>

ASIN: B0CPZ8D8B7, UPC: 760137111764, SKU: MVD11176D

Cast Bios

Willa Fitzgerald (*Connie*)

A Nashville native, Willa Fitzgerald relocated to New York upon graduating from Yale University. She recently starred in the hit Amazon series *Reacher* and was nominated for a Critics Choice award for her role in *The Fall of the House of Usher*. She stars opposite Robert DeNiro and Jack Huston in the feature *Wash Me in the River*. Fitzgerald shared the screen with Nicole Kidman and Ansel Elgort in Warner Bros.' *The Goldfinch*, directed by John Crowley. She led the cast of the USA series *Dare Me*, and starred in the "JJ Sneed" episode of the Netflix anthology series *Dolly Parton's Heartstrings*. In the BBC America / PBS adaptation of Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*, Fitzgerald portrayed Meg March. She was nominated for a Teen Choice Award for her work in MTV's *Scream*. She recurred on Amazon's *Alpha House* and USA's *Royal Pains*, and starred in the UCP pilot *#Fashionvictim*, directed by Mark Waters. Additional television credits include *Law & Order: SVU*, *Bull*, *Gotham*, *The Following*, and *Blue Bloods*, as well as the pilots *The Novice* and *Untitled Wall Street Project*. Fitzgerald has appeared in several indie films, including Lucky McKee's *Blood Money*, opposite John Cusack, *Freak Show*, directed by Trudie Styler, and Jason Saltiel's *Beach House*. On stage, Willa starred in Michael Mitnick's *Spacebar: A Broadway Play By Kyle Sugarman*, the Berkshire Theater Festival's production of *The Cat and The Canary* and was featured in *Cow Play* at the New York International Fringe Festival.



John Magaro (*Paul*)

John Magaro stars in Celine Song's Oscar-nominated film *Past Lives*, and Kelly Reichardt's film, *Showing Up*, where he shares the screen with Michelle Williams, for A24. Recently he was seen in the Warner Bros./New Line feature film, *The Many Saints of New York*, the prequel to *The Sopranos* that reunites him with David Chase, and in *Lansky*, where he plays Young Meyer Lansky opposite Harvey Keitel and Sam Worthington. Magaro recently shot on A24's *Past Lives*, directed by Celine Song. John was nominated for a 2020 Gotham Award for Best Actor for his work in *First Cow* and was awarded Best Ensemble by the National Board of Review along with the cast of Paramount's *The Big Short*. Additional film credits include *Sylvie's Love*, *Overlord*, *Marshall*, *War Machine*, *The Finest Hours*, *Carol*, *Unbroken* and *Not Fade Away*, for which he received a "Hollywood Spotlight Award" from the Hollywood Film Awards. On the small screen, John has made memorable appearances on Netflix's *The Umbrella Academy* and *Orange is the New Black*, and Amazon's *Crisis in Six Scenes* and *Jack Ryan*. Magaro was last seen on stage portraying Joe Papp in The Public Theater's *Illyria*, and in the Broadway production of *The Front Page*.



Vondie Curtis Hall (*Samuel*)

Vondie Curtis Hall is an Emmy Nominated actor and filmmaker, appearing on screen this fall in Focus Features' *Blue Bayou* and Searchlight's *The Night House*. Vondie is known for his roles on episodic shows like *Chicago Hope*, Netflix/Marvel's *Daredevil*, Steven Bochco's *Cop Rock*, and he earned an Emmy nomination for his guest performance in *ER*. In feature films, he's performed in *Harriet*, *One Good Cop*, *Passion Fish*, *Sugar Hill*, *Falling Down*, *Coming To America*, *Crooklyn*, *Drop Squad*, *Clear and Present Danger*, *The Mambo Kings*, *Eve's Bayou*, *Die Hard 2*, *Turn It Up* and *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet*. Vondie's also an accomplished film and TV director (*Gridlock'd*, *Glitter* and *Waist Deep*), a board member of Film Independent, and he teaches filmmaking at NYU. He's married to fellow award-winning filmmaker Kasi Lemmons. **[please note: Vondie prefers not to have a hyphen between "Curtis" and "Hall" despite what IMDb says.]**



Catherine Curtin (*Lena*)

Catherine Curtin, is widely known for her long- running role as Wanda Bell on *Orange is the New Black*, and her co-starring roles Claudia Henderson on *Stranger Things*, Joanne on *Insecure* and Sandy Langmore on *Homeland*. Cathy's appeared in close to 70 films, including *Bad Education*, *Red Pill*, *Worth*, *What Breaks the Ice*, *Kendra & Beth*, *Inside the Rain*, *The Half of It*, *First One In*, *The Artist's Wife*, *Beauty Mark*, *Goldstar*, *The Light of the Moon*, *Crazy Famous*, *Breaking Brooklyn*, *Blush*, *Catfight*, *The Wolf of Wall Street*, *The Bourne Legacy*, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, and has received critical acclaim for her lead work in the recent sleeper hit *Werewolves Within*. On stage, she starred as Janis Joplin in the Off-Broadway hit, *Love, Janis* for which she received a Joseph Jefferson nomination. Additional TV roles were on *Tommy*, *The Loudest Voice*, *Blacklist*, *Mindhunter*, *Bull* and *Surveillance*. She won a SAG Award for Best Ensemble 2015 and 2016, *OITNB*, and was nominated SAG Award Best Ensemble 2018 *Stranger Things*. She has had numerous films at the Woodstock Film Festival.



Richard Kind (*Jack*)

A veteran of stage, TV and film, Richard Kind has performed in such films as Oscar®-winner *Argo*, Oscar®-winner *Bombshell* (as Rudy Giuliani), George Clooney's *Confessions of a Dangerous Mind*, the Coen Brothers' *A Serious Man* and Dan Mirvish's *Bernard and Huey*. Richard is known to many for his roles in TV, including such hits as *Spin City*, *Mad About You*, *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, *Red Oaks*, *The Goldbergs*, *Young Sheldon* and *Transparent*. He is also a fan favorite on *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver* and *At Home with Amy Sedaris* where he has appeared several times. As a voice actor, Kind has been a regular in the award-winning Pixar films, including *A Bug's Life*, *Cars*, *Cars 2*, *Toy Story 3* and perhaps most memorably as Bing Bong in *Inside Out*. Richard is a graduate of Northwestern University and Chicago's Second City Theater. He was Tony nominated for his performance in *The Big Knife* and has also appeared on Broadway in such productions as *The Producers*, *Bounce* and *The Tale of the Allergist's Wife*.



Sullivan Jones (*Barry*)

Having studied theater at Brown and UCLA, Sullivan Jones starred in the record-setting 12 Tony Award-nominated Broadway hit *Slave Play*. Currently, Jones is filming a lead role in George Tillman's feature *Heart of a Lion*, based on the life and boxing career of two-time heavyweight world boxing champion George Foreman, for Sony. He is also a series regular in Julian Fellowes' SAG-Award Ensemble-nominated series for HBO, *The Gilded Age*, set in the robber baron era of New York society. Sullivan has acted in the miniseries, *Halston*, and shows *The Politician*, *Parks and Recreation*, *Wu-Tang: An American Saga*, *The Blacklist*, *House of Cards*, *Blue Bloods*, *NCIS: New Orleans*, *The Good Fight* and was a regular on *The Looming Tower* miniseries. On stage, he was nominated for a Bay Area Theater Critics Circle Award for his performance in TheaterWorks' world-premiere production of *Clementine in the Lower 9*. Other stage productions he's been in include *Intimate Apparel*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Woyzeck*, *Twelfth Night*, *70 Scenes of Halloween*, *One Night in Miami...* and *Frankenstein*. Sullivan also appears in the video game, NBA 2k17.



Alanna Saunders (*Daisy*)

Alanna Saunders performed in *Peter Pan LIVE!* on NBC, and has appeared in the Broadway version of *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*, the Roundabout Theatre Company's *Scotland, PA*, and Fiasco Theatre National Tour of *Into the Woods*. Alanna got her BFA in Musical Theatre at the University of Miami, and also trained in London at the Mountview Academy of Theatre Arts.

Claire Saunders (*Daffodil*)

Claire Saunders has performed in *Law & Order: SVU* on NBC, *Tell Me a Story* for CBS All Access, *The Good Cop* for Netflix, as well as Nancy Meyers' *The Intern* for Warner Brothers. On stage, she has appeared in *Cyrano* at Goodspeed, *School Girls; or the African Mean Girls Play* at Round House Theatre, and *The Skin of our Teeth* at Berkshire Theatre Group. Claire got her BFA in Acting/Musical Theatre at Carnegie Mellon University.



Marija Abney (*Cheryl*)

Marija Abney has had a recurring role in the Disney/Marvel Cinematic Universe, appearing in Ryan Coogler's *Black Panther*, as well as Anthony and Joe Russo's *Avengers: Infinity Wars* and *Avengers: Endgame* as one of Wakanda's Dora Milaje. She has also appeared in such films as Kasi Lemmons' *Black Nativity*, Todd Strauss-Schulson's *Isn't It Romantic*, Curt Faudon's *The Good Shepherds* and on Netflix's *Luke Cage* as well as numerous stage roles. Marija got her BFA in Dance at The Ailey School/Fordham University, and MA in Performance Studies at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts.



Lloyd Kaufman (*Jeffries*)

Legendary filmmaker Lloyd Kaufman is best known as the cofounder of Troma Studios with his business partner Michael Herz. A graduate of Yale and classmate of Oliver Stone, Lloyd's experience as an actor and filmmaker go back to his partnership with John G. Avildsen making such films as *Joe*, *Cry Uncle!* and the Oscar-winning *Rocky*. Lloyd worked on such films as *Saturday Night Fever*, *The Final Countdown* and *My Dinner with Andre*. At Troma Studios, Lloyd has shepherded such acclaimed cult classics as *The Toxic Avenger*, *Class of Nuke 'Em High*, *Tromeo and Juliet*, *Terror Firmer* and *Sgt. Kabukiman N.Y.P.D.* Kaufman has appeared in cameos for his protégé James Gunn's films, including the upcoming third installment of Marvel's *Guardians of the Galaxy*. Kaufman has written several indispensable filmmaking books and has been honored by film festivals around the world as well as institutions such as The Museum of Modern Art.



Ted Raimi (Voice of *Gen. Al Haig*)

Ted Raimi has performed in Sam Raimi's *Evil Dead* series as well as the *Spider-Man* trilogy for Sony. Other film roles include appearances in *Patriot Games*, *Clear and Present Danger*, *Drag Me to Hell*, *Oz the Great and Powerful*, *Darkman*, *Candyman*, *Intruder* and *The Grudge*. On television, Ted had regular roles on *Ash vs. Evil Dead*, *seaQuest DSV*, *Xena: Warrior Princess* and *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys*, as well as appeared on such series as *Twin Peaks*, *ALF*, *Baywatch* and *Supernatural*.



Jon Cryer (Voice of *H.R. "Bob" Haldeman*)

Jon Cryer starred in such features as *Big Time Adolescence*, *Pretty In Pink*, *Hot Shots*, *The Pompatus Of Love* and *Went To Coney Island On A Mission From God...Be Back By Five*. Jon won two Emmy awards for his lead role on CBS' hit sitcom, *Two And A Half Men*, and was honored with a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame for his body of work. He's had recurring roles on such shows as *NCIS*, and recently appeared as Lex Luthor on *Supergirl*.

Bruce Campbell (Voice of *President Richard Nixon*)

Bruce Campbell has starred in Sam Raimi's *Evil Dead* series as well as the *Spider-Man* trilogy for Sony, The Coen Brothers' *The Hudsucker Proxy*, John Carpenter's *Escape from L.A.*, *Sky High*, *Congo*, *McHale's Navy*, *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs*, *Cars 2* and *Bubba Ho-Tep*. Bruce directed himself in the indie film satire, *My Name is Bruce*. On TV, Bruce was critically acclaimed for his portrayal of President Ronald Reagan on FX's *Fargo*. He has starred in *Ash vs. Evil Dead*, *Burn Notice*, *The Adventures of Brisco County, Jr.*, *Jack of all Trades*, *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys* and *Xena: Warrior Princess*. As an author, Campbell has written three best selling books, culminating with *Hail to the Chin: The Further Confessions of a B-Movie Actor*.



Chris Quintos Cathcart (Voice of *Rose Mary Woods*)

Chris Quintos Cathcart is a writer/actor/producer making her debut as a voiceover artist portraying Rose Mary Woods in the 18½-minute tapes. Chris studied theatre at Colgate University and performed in such theaters as New Conservatory Theatre Center of San Francisco, Impact Theatre in Berkeley, and Playwrights Center of San Francisco.



Crew Bios



The crew of 18½ filming pre-pandemic.

Dan Mirvish (*Director, Producer, Story, Editor, Songwriter*)

Dan Mirvish is a director, screenwriter, producer and author. His newest narrative feature, *18½*, is a 70s Watergate thriller/dark comedy. He also directed the behind-the-scenes documentary *Covid 18½: The Making of a Movie During a Global Pandemic* which is included on the *18½* special edition DVD. Prior to that, he directed the award-winning feature *Bernard and Huey*, scripted by Oscar/Pulitzer-winner Jules Feiffer, and starring Oscar-winner Jim Rash and David Koechner which screened in over 30 film festivals on 5 continents, had a nationwide US theatrical release, and sold to over 51 countries. Dan is the author of the bestselling non-fiction book *The Cheerful Subversive's Guide to Independent Filmmaking* from Focal Press/Routledge. The fully updated, post-pandemic 2nd Edition starting selling on July 6, 2021 and hit #1 on Amazon's New Releases chart. His film *Between Us*, an award-winning feature



starring Taye Diggs, Melissa George, David Harbour and Julia Stiles played in 23 festivals in 7 countries, got a 50+ city theatrical release in the US, and sold to 145 countries, plus screening on Netflix, Showtime and Starz.

Dan was mentored by Robert Altman on his first film, *Omaha (the movie)*, which led him to co-found the upstart Slamdance Film Festival. Dan's film *Open House* prompted the Academy Awards to controversially rewrite their rules on the Best Original Musical category. Mirvish also co-wrote his bestselling, critically-acclaimed novel *I Am Martin Eisenstadt* (Farrar, Straus, Giroux) based on the fake McCain advisor who took credit for Sarah Palin not knowing Africa was a continent. Dan went on to get a master's degree from USC film school, is a member of the Directors Guild of America and has guest lectured at more than 70 film schools and universities around the world.

Short bio:

An award-winning indie filmmaker and cofounder of the Slamdance Film Festival, Dan Mirvish is a film director, writer and producer, as well as an author of many articles and several books.

Directing Filmography:

Features:

18½ (2021)

Bernard and Huey (2017)

Between Us (2013)

Open House (2004)

Omaha (the movie) (1995)

Shorts:

"Feiffer on Nixon" (2020)

"How to Win an (Oscar) Award" (2011)

"The Last Republican" (2008)

"The Few & the Proud" (2007)

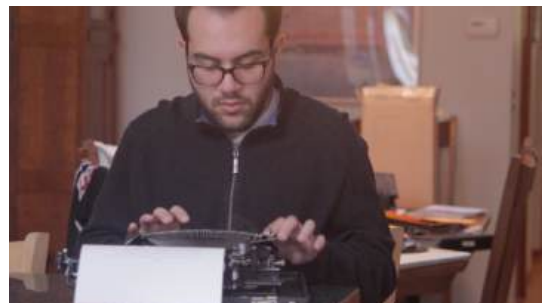
"Sheldon" (2007)

"A Message from the President of Iran" (2006)

"Open House" (2001)

Daniel Moya (*Writer, Producer*)

Daniel Moya is the writer and one of the producers of *18½*. After studying at the Lee Strasberg Theatre and Film Institute for ten years, he went on to graduate from the University of Southern California with a degree in Film/TV Production. His debut film, *Rental*, which he wrote, directed and produced, played several festivals and is now available on IndieFlix. His last co-writing/producing effort, *Killer Kate!* enjoyed a theatrical release via Freestyle/Entertainment Studios and is currently being sold internationally. He has several projects in development, including the satirical feature *The Doctrine of Discontent* for director Tiffany Kim Stevens and West 36



Productions. Daniel also worked on Dan Mirvish's film *Bernard and Huey* in various capacities, throughout pre-production, production, and post-production.

Terry Keefe (*Producer*)

Terry Keefe is a writer-filmmaker who recently produced the feature film *Altered Minds*, starring Judd Hirsch (*Taxi*) and Jamie Ray Newman (*The Punisher*), which was theatrically released and played in film festivals worldwide. Terry ran the internet production company Primitive Pictures and co-created the hit web series *The Last Date*, which has garnered over 100 million views on YouTube. Terry is the co-founder and editor of the popular film blog *The Hollywood Interview*, and was features editor of the Los Angeles-based monthly magazine *Venice* for over a decade. A graduate of USC Film School, Terry created and wrote the popular comic book series *Supernovas and Tesla*. Terry also runs the Silver Sands Motel & Cottages in Greenport, New York: www.silversands-motel.com



Tel K. Ganesan (*Executive Producer*)

The Founder and Managing Partner of Kyyba Films, Tel is also Founder, Chairman, and former Chief Executive Officer (2005-2016) of Kyyba, a Michigan-based global IT, engineering and professional services company. In addition, Tel Ganesan is a public speaker and mentors young entrepreneurs. He has also provided seed funding for projects he believes in. He was the immediate past President of the Indus Entrepreneurs (TiE) Detroit chapter for the second term (2016-2018) and previously the president of the chapter for two consecutive years (2009-2010), successfully chairing 5 mega annual tech conference TiECONs. He served as the past VP of the American Society of Engineers of Indian Origin (ASEI). Tel holds a Master of Business Administration from the University of Michigan. His previous credits as a film producer include *Christmas Coupon*, *Celebrity Crush*, *Devil's Night: Dawn of the Nain Rouge* and *Trap City*.



Richard Schenkman (*Executive Producer*)

Richard Schenkman is an award-winning author & filmmaker who began his career at MTV and went on to work in television, film, live theatre, video games, & more. He's written pilots for VH1 & 20th TV, directed episodes of Dick Wolf's *Arrest and Trial*, wrote & directed VH1 original *A Diva's Christmas Carol* – a perennial ratings blockbuster – and sold sitcom pilot "Drama Queen" to NBC. He also taught a Master Class at the Rhode Island Int'l Film Festival, taught



directing at Columbia College, and guest-lectured at USC and Cal Arts. His movies range from the hilarious & heart-rending festival hits *Went to Coney Island on a Mission from God* and *The Pompatus of Love* to the international cult-smash *Jerome Bixby's The Man from Earth*, consistently ranked among IMDB's top sci-fi films of all time. His romantic comedy *And Then Came Love* features Eartha Kitt in her final role. He also wrote & directed *Abraham Lincoln vs. Zombies*, *Mischief Night*, and the long-awaited sequel *Man from Earth: Holocene*.

Elle Schneider (*Director of Photography*)

A graduate of USC's School of Cinematic Arts, cinematographer Elle Schneider spent 5 years as the co-designer and creative director of Digital Bolex, the world's only crowdfunded cinema camera. She crafted a brand identity and advertising strategy that gained international recognition, and facilitated the camera's use on motion pictures like *Me and Earl and the Dying Girl*, *My Art*, and *Burying the Ex*, and hit TV shows like *Scandal*, *Empire* and *Glee*. Films she supported premiered at Sundance, SXSW, Tribeca, Slamdance, LA Film Festival, and the Venice Biennale.

Her work as cinematographer includes narrative feature *6 LA Love Stories*, documentaries *I Am Divine* and *That Guy Dick Miller*, which both premiered at the SXSW Film Festival, and most recently History's *The Food That Built America*, for which she also directed the tandem second unit. Other second-unit shoots as DP include *Half the Picture* (Sundance), *Framing John DeLoe* (Tribeca), *Robert Klein Still Can't Stop His Leg* (SXSW), and *Auld Lang Syne*. Elle has directed music videos for Gangstagrass, Mock Sun, and two for Speedy Ortiz, which premiered in *Vanity Fair* and *Billboard* respectively. Her short films have played at festivals like Slamdance, Sidewalk, HollyShorts, and Tallgrass. Elle writes for the International Cinematographer's Guild (Local 600) Magazine, and is a member of the International Collective of Female Cinematographers (ICFC).



Luis Guerra (*Composer*)

Luis Guerra is an award-winning composer and music producer. He composed the theme, and additional music for Malcolm Gladwell's chart-topping podcast *Revisionist History*. Gladwell described Luis as "a musical genius" and the two worked together recently on *The Little Mermaid* audio adaptation by Brit Marling featuring Jodie Foster, Glenn Close and Dax Shepherd. Luis also has published a series of compositions for *Freakonomics Radio* with Stephen Dubner, and recently toured with Dubner in a series of live shows on the West Coast. Luis was the composer/music producer for Dan Mirvish's *Bernard and Huey*. Other film scores include the Netflix documentary *Art of Conflict*. He also composed music for the TV documentary, *Superthief*, and has had music placed in *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* with Tina Fey. Luis has worked on TV shows, *Doc McStuffins* and



Henry Hugglemonster. His music has been featured on commercials for Honda, Samsung, and Mentos. For more, go to www.luisguerramusic.com

Monica Dabrowski (*Production Designer*)

A graduate of Montclair State University's film department, Monica Dabrowski is a New York-based production designer, art director and set decorator who's worked on such features as *Kid Happy*, *We Are Living Things*, *Viscous*, *The Other Child*, *Give or Take* and got her training on such films as *To Dust* and *Late Night*. She's also worked on music videos for such artists as Ellie Goulding, Jay-Z and Pussy Riot, as well as working on several episodic series and branded content. On 18½, Monica had the daunting job of production designing a 1974-accurate look and feel to our sets and props, all on a minuscule budget. Sourcing, fixing or building everything from working reel-to-reel players and IBM Selectric typewriters, to designing signs and faux vintage labels for our product placement partners.



Sarah Cogan (*Costume Designer*)

A graduate of UC Santa Barbara's Theater and Dance Design department, with an MFA from UC San Diego in Costume and Lighting Design, Sarah is a Brooklyn-based costume designer. She's got an incredible collection of not only vintage clothes, but also vintage patterns from which she hand-sewed and tailored many of the costumes in 18½. Sarah has experience working on such TV shows as *Blindspot*, *Kevin Can Wait*, *Adulthood with Jane*, *American Genius*, *The Slap* and *Us & Them*, features *Bushwick*, *Complete Unknown* and *Anesthesia* as well as numerous commercials, theater projects and industrials. Sarah was nominated for Best Design by the Academy of Web Television. She recently hosted the *Designing the Void* podcast, a series of film design and budgeting webinars from her quarantined cottage at the Silver Sands Motel in Greenport.



Bess Fifer, CSA (*Casting Director*)

Bess cut her teeth at New York's most in-demand casting office, Telsey + Company, where she worked on a diverse range of high-profile projects, such as *Sex And The City: The Movie*, *Jonah Hex*, *I Love You Phillip Morris*, *The Drowsy Chaperone*, *Rent*, *In The Heights*, and over 100 national commercials. After striking out on her own in 2010, Bess' keen eye for talent and her professionalism have been consistently sought after. Bess's most recent projects include the Emmy Nominated Series *It's Bruno* (Netflix), Dan Schechter's *Safe Spaces*, and the independent feature *Lingua Franca*. Prior features include SXSW's 2017 Audience Award Winner *The Light Of The Moon*, *Pottersville* (Netflix), and *The Humbling* starring Al Pacino and helmed by Barry Levinson.

Alan Steinman (*UPM, 1st Assistant Director, Co-Producer*)

Originally from Miami, Florida, USA, Alan Steinman is a career production professional with nearly 30 years of credits. Among them are Production Management and Assistant Director credits on numerous films and television programs including *The Usual Suspects*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Last Man Standing*, *Yellowstone* and Dan Mirvish's *Bernard and Huey*. In recent years he has focused on producing and was a key component in bringing the production teams for *War with Grandpa*, *Savage Dog* and *The Haunting of Sharon Tate*. Steinman graduated from the University of South Florida with a Bachelor's degree in TV Production, and also attended the University of Southern California Film School. Additionally he works as an Adjunct Faculty Instructor in Production Management at the Columbia College of Hollywood.

Caro Pierotto (*Featured Vocalist*)

A Brazilian artist based in Los Angeles, Caro Pierotto is releasing a double album: "Caro Pierotto in Portuguese," with seven tracks, and "Caro Pierotto in English," with four tracks in 2020. The bilingual project reinforces the artist's ability to express her art without borders, mixing rhythms ranging from xote to reggae, through pop and ballads with an American soul touch. Even during quarantine, Caro worked with composer Luis



Guerra on several songs that feature prominently in *18½*, in both Portuguese and English versions. Plans are underway to release a soundtrack album. www.caropierotto.com

Kyyba Films (*Production Company*)

Founded by Tel K. Ganesan and G.B. Thimothese, Kyyba Films is a film production company based in Detroit, Michigan. The company produces a diverse slate of feature films in all genres and music videos. In addition, Kyyba Distribution in partnership with Celebrity Films is distributing Liam Neeson's new action-thriller *The Marksman* in the Indian subcontinent. Kyyba has recently produced and released three feature films in North America and worldwide including *Christmas Coupon* (2019), *Celebrity Crush* (2020), *Devil's Night: Dawn of the Nain Rouge* (2020) and the upcoming *Trap City* (2021).

Bugeater Films (*Production Company*)

Bugeater Films is the umbrella name used by Dan Mirvish, and in the case of *18½* represents the formal entity, Waterbug Eater Films, LLC, which owns the copyright to the film. For *18½* the financing was raised through the combined contributions of close to 400 backers, through a combination of crowdfunding (a successful campaign on Seed&Spark), tax-deductible donations through the 501(c)3 fiscal sponsor The Film Collaborative, a tax credit from the New York State Governor's Office of Motion Picture & Television Development, and from the generous investment of several equity investors. Backers in the film range from a former presidential speechwriter for Bill Clinton, to a Trump-appointed US ambassador; and from gas station moguls in Omaha to A-list French film directors.

Synopsis

It's January, 1974. The Watergate scandal is at a boiling point. CONNIE LASHLEY, a low level government stenographer, obtains a tape of RICHARD NIXON listening to, and then erasing, the infamous 18½ minute gap that would eventually force him to resign the Presidency.

Connie takes the ferry to the isolated Chesapeake Bay town of St. Michaels to leak the tape to reporter PAUL MARROW. They meet at the Front Street Station diner and decide to listen to the tape discreetly at a motel which has private cabins along the shore. Connie and Paul pretend to be a married couple when they check in with JACK, the curious one-eyed desk clerk.

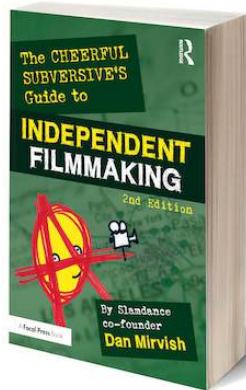
Connie and Paul discover Paul's reel-to-reel tape player is broken, and they must hunt for a new player. They ask a group of hippies obsessed with a conspiracy about white bread. No player there. Jack doesn't have one either. Finally, they run into LENA and SAMUEL, a Bossa Nova-loving older couple who invite them to dance and dine with them. A Frenchwoman who met Samuel during WWII, Lena prepares a fabulous, but decidedly awkward, dinner for the four of them.

Connie and Paul return to their own cabin with the new player and listened to the tape: It's Nixon speaking to aide AL HAIG, deciding what to delete from a tape of Nixon discussing Watergate with Chief of Staff H.R. "BOB" HALDEMAN. But it turns out Connie and Paul aren't the only ones looking for the tape. Nefarious forces are at work, but who, and just how far will they go to stop Connie and Paul from listening?



Pre-Release Press

In July, 2020, the Hollywood trade publication, [The Wrap](#), carried the exclusive news about the principal cast for *18½*, particularly highlighting Bruce Campbell's involvement as the voice of Richard Nixon.



On August 3, the prestigious *Filmmaker Magazine* published a 3,100-word story by director Dan Mirvish called "How to Shoot a Film in a Global Pandemic."

The article was the main featured story on the [Filmmaker Magazine](#) website for over two days and was widely shared on social media. In November, the legendary trade magazine [Variety](#) ran a follow-up article Dan wrote called "How to Shoot an Indie in a Pandemic" about our September shoot during Covid and how this is a uniquely good time to film movies at this budget level. The article appeared in a 3-page spread in the print AFM special weekly issue as well as online, featured on the Variety homepage. In December, 2020, [Diabolique Magazine](#) had an extensive interview with Dan that focussed on the casting and making of *18½*. Dan also has been featured on a number of indie film podcasts in recent months.



Dan adapted the *Filmmaker* and *Variety* articles into a standalone chapter in his new book, the fully updated [2nd Edition of The Cheerful Subversive's Guide to Independent Filmmaking](#) (Focal Press/Routledge) which came out July, 2021, in hardback, paperback, e-book and soon to be audio book versions. The book shot up to #1 on Amazon's bestseller list of New Releases for Film books. The chapter is called "Covid 18½: How to Shoot a Film in a Global Pandemic."

On Oct 13, 2021, Dan wrote another influential piece for *Filmmaker Magazine*, called [The Year of the Hybrid: 9 Ways to Make the Most of a Hybrid Festival Premiere](#). Dan also wrote the article [Festivals Boost Awards Contenders but Shouldn't Lose Role as New Talent Launch Pads](#) for *Variety's* print and digital issues on January 11, 2022. [Deadline](#) announced our theatrical release on April 30, 2022. Since the release of the film, we've gotten amazing press coverage including review, and interviews with all our cast and many of the crew.



Reviews



"Yes, another Watergate movie, **but this one's fun and totally fictional**...Just when you thought we might have covered this dark chapter in American history from all angles, along comes **the slyly subversive, occasionally loony and thoroughly entertaining '18½,'** which is fictional and yet contains essential truths and clever insights throughout.....Neither Connie nor Paul existed in real life, and the events in "18 ½" are **pure fancy**. Still, this is an **eccentrically intriguing** and thought-provoking chapter in the long history of Watergate-based TV series and films." – Richard Roeper, *Chicago Sun-Times*

"I like this! This is weird and small and unexpected and it keeps changing as it goes along and it kind of **pulls off some tough tonal balances quite well**. It's got a **dreamlike kind of vibe** to it from the very beginning but then increasingly **surreal** things happen as it goes along. **I really like Willa Fitzgerald in this!** She's got a Rachel McAdam thing going on. She's calm and still and smart and sharp in the midst of chaos. It's tough to do that. She's got a great presence about her. **You just never really know where this is going....I was amused!**" – Christy Lemire, *Film Week, KPCC/NPR*

"The infamous 'gap' in President Nixon's White House tapes functions as a McGuffin in **the imaginative indie drama, '18½,'** which stars Willa Fitzgerald as Connie, a government clerk who stumbles across a second recording containing that missing audio....Directed by Dan Mirvish — who also co-wrote the story with producer/screenwriter Daniel Moya — '18½' isn't all that concerned with Watergate or Nixon....Instead, this movie is about creating **the hazy feel of early '70s American cinema,** filled with **kooky and paranoid characters** who talk nonstop. The film's centerpiece is a dinner party Connie and Paul are invited to by an eccentric older couple, played by Vondie Curtis-Hall and Catherine Curtin. Because nobody in the room is entirely sure what anyone else's agenda is, they cover for their mutual mistrust with **rapid-fire chatter**. Mirvish's **excellent cast** approaches this sequence like a one-act play, swinging at every curveball their fellow actors throw. Nothing they're saying matters much, but they say it **with such verve and passion that they pull the audience right into the free-floating anxiety of a fraught time in American history,** a half-century ago." – Noel Murray, *Los Angeles Times*

"Dan Mirvish, cofounder of Slamdance - so he

CHICAGO SUN *TIMES

"Yes, another Watergate movie, **but this one's fun and totally fictional**...Just when you thought we might have covered this dark chapter in American history from all angles, along comes **the slyly subversive, occasionally loony and thoroughly entertaining '18½,'** which is fictional and yet contains essential truths and clever insights throughout.....Neither Connie nor Paul existed in real life, and the events in "18 ½" are **pure fancy**. Still, this is an **eccentrically intriguing** and thought-provoking chapter in the long history of Watergate-based TV series and films."

– Richard Roeper, *Chicago Sun-Times*

knows this territory well. A capable low-budget filmmaker. People should not expect this to be a Watergate film....A little bit of a **dark comedy**. It's a little bit of a social commentary. It's **got a lot on it's mind for a small film**. If you can get into the **groove** of its certain unique **eccentricity**, it's **quite an impressive little tiny gem**.”
– Wade Major, *Film Week, KPCC/NPR*

“**Stylish, Kooky 18½ Finds the Weird in Watergate**...a stylish, **off-kilter**, Watergate comic thriller. It's a small-scale **flight of fancy that blends truth, fiction and conspiracy**, imagining fictional characters on the fringes of the real-world scandal.... **Fitzgerald** and **Magaro** keep the story grounded, creating a partnership that's built on mutual dependence and mistrust.... **Sullivan Jones** plays a **bread-based revolutionary**, delivering some of the most ridiculous lines in the movie with deathly sincerity. Meanwhile, **Vondie Curtis Hall** and **Catherine Curtin** bring a mesmerizing unreality to their roles as a loved-up older couple who take an interest in the newlyweds....It might seem like an unusual choice for a thriller, but the **spaced-out wooziness** and the unhurried approach only adds to the retro sheen.” – Sarah McDermott, *CNET*

[tweet] “Here’s a review of a peculiar and uncategorizable independent film that **I like quite a bit**, a Watergate riff titled 18½. **Excellent direction** by Dan Mirvish. **Outstanding cast**.” [review] “it's a film that sticks in the mind after you've watched it. Every choice is made with confidence, but from an intuitive place, like decisions made by a lucid dreamer.....Samuel and Lena capture the film's oddball energy in microcosm. The instant they appear onscreen, they set off all sorts of alarms, but it's hard to know why, other than that they're exuberant and eccentric. Curtis-Hall and Curtin, both veteran character actors, get to show sides of their talent that we've never seen. Samuel is a World War II veteran and sophisticated world traveler who wears a knotted plaid ascot and will start dancing sinuously by himself with no provocation, arms and hips swiveling, while Lena is Frenchwoman who talks and talks, and whose riffs are sometimes so nonsensical that they verge on beat poetry....This feature is [Dan **Mirvish's**] **best-directed work** and also his most Altman-like, with its creamy lighting and overlapping dialogue and long takes and fluid, sometimes arbitrary-

seeming zooming towards and away from the actors.....All this backstory and comparison is of interest to a narrow slice of the movie-watching population, admittedly —but in fairness, so is the film, a private art-house joke that does its own thing and doesn't seem to care if you approve of it, or like it, or watch it. What is it up to, besides doing what it pleases? Hard to say. But **those who declare it pointless should be prepared to eat their words** at some future date, as some detractors of Altman's supposedly minor 1980s films did once they took the trouble to think about what the thing was, instead of fixating on what it wasn't.” – Matt Zoller Seitz,

Los Angeles Times

“The infamous ‘gap’ in President Nixon’s White House tapes functions as a McGuffin in the **imaginative indie drama**, ‘18½,’ which stars Willa Fitzgerald as Connie, a government clerk who stumbles across a second recording containing that missing audio....Directed by Dan Mirvish — who also co-wrote the story with producer/screenwriter Daniel Moya — ‘18½’ isn’t all that concerned with Watergate or Nixon....Instead, this movie is about creating the **hazy feel of early ‘70s American cinema**, filled with **kooky and paranoid characters** who talk nonstop. The film’s centerpiece is a dinner party Connie and Paul are invited to by an eccentric older couple, played by Vondie Curtis-Hall and Catherine Curtin. Because nobody in the room is entirely sure what anyone else’s agenda is, they cover for their mutual mistrust with **rapid-fire chatter**. Mirvish’s **excellent cast** approaches this sequence like a one-act play, swinging at every curveball their fellow actors throw. Nothing they’re saying matters much, but they say it with **such verve and passion** that they **pull the audience right into the free-floating anxiety** of a fraught time in American history, a half-century ago.”

– Noel Murray, Los Angeles Times

www.18andaHalfMovie.com

“Director Dan Mirvish’s comedy has two things going for it, one being a **clever premise**: What if those 18½ minutes were discovered, like Amelia Earhart’s airplane, among the otherwise unremarkable records of the Office of Management and Budget?... And what if that worker was played by the movie’s other **major virtue, Willa Fitzgerald**?...Here, she makes professional transcriber Connie Lashley **eminently watchable**, even plausible.... loquacious one-eyed desk clerk, Jack, played by the reliably **hilarious Richard Kind**, whose contributions are in line with the better eccentricities of Daniel Moya’s screenplay....occasional **flashes of Ginsu-knife-edged humor**....Getting **groovy** at the lakefront by the motel, the hippie leader (Sullivan Jones) goes on a **dreamy**, convoluted rant about the connections between Wonder Bread and its then-owner, ITT.... ‘You can’t spell vitamin without Vietnam.’ ...The **outright laughable** material—what’s included in that fabled 18½ minutes—is unfortunately obscured by a lot of extraneous action, but if a viewer listens hard, he or she can hear an account that “confirms,” in a **humorous**, exaggerated fashion, more crimes than the most passionate Nixon-hater of the day could possibly have imagined. In this, **18½ really makes fun of everybody**.” – John Anderson, *The Wall Street Journal*

“A New Watergate Comedy Is as **Weird as the Scandal Itself**....a **madcap ensemble** of hippies and swingers, a conspiracy that links Wonder Bread with Howard Hughes, and a whole lot of bossa nova. The film is **paranoid, slapstick, and a bit surreal**....About two minutes after the gap ends, Haldeman mentions the movie *The Hot Rock*, a **Robert Redford** hit about a bungled diamond heist. “It’s kind of like this thing here,” Nixon replies, laughing. “They screw everything up.”...White House records show that Nixon actually watched *The Hot Rock* at Camp David a few days later....Mirvish finds it **delightful** that, in the midst of concocting the cover-up that would later end his presidency, Nixon watched a movie about bumbling diamond thieves, perhaps to make sense of his own situation....**Screwball** as it is, Mirvish’s **weird political satire** has apparently **resonated worldwide**....This record encapsulates the **rigorously weird aura** of Mirvish’s whole endeavor.” – Sylvie McNamara, *Washingtonian Magazine*

“Dan Mirvish’s 18½ is a **hilarious** take on an infamous ‘What if?’...some **hilarious and strange** set of occurrences ensue....In a more **shocking** correlation, **ITT actually owned Wonder Bread**, and the company was on the brink of a scandal with Nixon during that time before it was overshadowed by Watergate....But delving into the interesting points of history (which the **writing team did beautifully**, expect almost everything from the music to the food to have meaning)....18½ overall offers a **fun look** at a historical conundrum, and explores the possibilities of such a **captivating**

WASHINGTONIAN

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– Sylvie McNamara, *Washingtonian Magazine*

www.18andahalfmovie.com

occurrence in American history. However, along the way, themes are explored, **laughs are had** and the identities of certain characters are revealed...and audience will undoubtedly leave the story thinking, "What if?" – Molly Given, *MetroPhiladelphia*

"It should be no surprise Omaha native filmmaker Dan Mirvish keeps finding ways to make indie features. After all, the L.A.-based **mensch** is the author of the **bestselling** book, *The Cheerful Subversive's Guide to Independent Filmmaking*, and cofounder of Slamdance Film Festival. His latest offering, *18½*, is a **cockeyed Watergate political thriller meets screwball-romantic comedy**. ...Mirvish's six features make him **the most prolific living Nebraska filmmaker** outside of Alexander Payne....Mirvish's bet that the scandal's "built-in resonance and gravitas" would land names paid off in John Magaro as the reporter and Willa Fitzgerald as the transcriber. The **earnest pair navigate eccentrics, villains and mutual attraction**." – Leo Adam Biga, *The Reader*

Psychology Today

"We are catapulted into another universe, utterly different from CBS and NBC. That's when **I surrendered to the film, could not stop watching it**, and had a clue as to its **rave reception (100 percent Rotten Tomatoes)** at 20 or more film festivals, and its soon national release.... Regardless of time and space, then and now, we witness an idiosyncratic rendition of how evil unfolds in our world.... **18½ is a mind-bending, hammed-up, highly paced, farcical, funny, and suspenseful dark fairy tale**. This makes it a timeless curveball aimed to hit the strike zone of our minds. The truth will not set you free."

– Lloyd Sederer, M.D., *Psychology Today*

"**There is no movie out there is quite like 18½**. A comedy about a government coverup that also is a drama about a whistleblower, it flaunts a typical tone to become **something all its own**....What seems like it should be a straightforward meeting at a motel where she gives him the information turns into **something far more silly**. Making use of a **quirky cast** of characters, including the **legendary Richard Kind in rare form** as the hotel clerk, it is a slapdash experience that is hard to fully pin down. However, **it really hits all the right notes** when it needs to, even as it frequently throws you for a loop. It becomes **an indie gem** that finds a more **joyous** sensibility against the backdrop of a serious chapter in American history." – Chase Hutchinson, *Collider.com*

"**Shot in a witty, lurid style**....Assembled in a **superb pastiche** of the period, filmmaker Dan Mirvish creates a **lively** tone that generates suspense while **gleefully** throwing amusing distractions into the **quirky**, gently paced narrative. It's **an inventive take** on an iconic moment in American history....**Engagingly jittery**, Fitzgerald and Magaro make a **terrific** double act, reacting differently to everything that happens....the **script is inventively structured** as a quest that continually takes random detours. There are continual moments along the way that **carry pointed kicks**, including knowing political conversations that feel **eerily resonant** today. And it's **riotously clever** how the Mirvish and writer Moya deal with the contents of the tape within Connie and Paul's increasingly **unhinged** situation. While never losing the comical tone, the film becomes a **harrowing** tale about taking on the system." – Rich Cline, *ShadowsOnTheWall.co.uk*

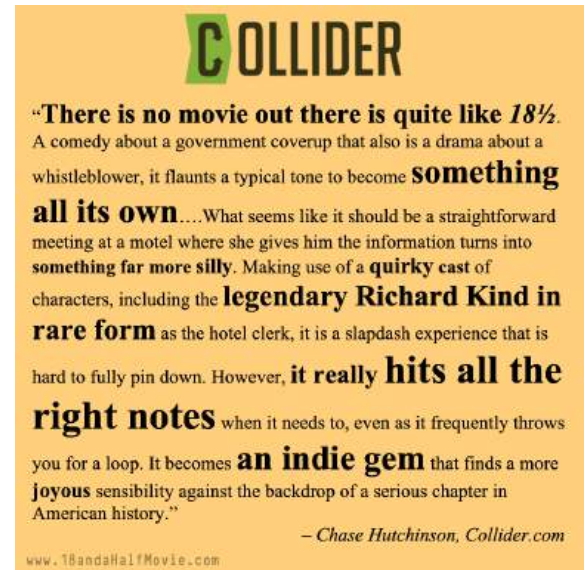
"Shot using a Panasonic Varicam with vintage 1970s era Kowa Anamorphic primes and Cooke Varotal Zoom lenses, **the period-accurate sets, wardrobe, and styling feels like more a movie from the actual time period than modern**. The story and film fits the period, and doesn't feel like something that was forced or modernized

to make it fit audience expectations. Is a Presidential scandal from almost 50 years ago something that will draw audiences into the theater? That is what makes **this movie so intriguing**. While it's not a story that a ton of younger audience members may be drawn to, **the mystery and unlikely subject matter make it compelling**. *18½* is a bit artsy, out of the box and a step away from the norm that we're used to seeing at the theater. But **that is just what makes it so interesting**....This is a **must-see movie** for history buffs or people who just want to watch something out of the box.”— Becky Fixel, *week99er.com* [4/5 stars]

“In Dan Mirvish’s new **Nixonian comedy 18½**, the decades-old mystery of what might have taken place during that fateful eighteen-and-a-half minute gap in secretly recorded White House audio on June 20, 1972, serves as the true story premise for an ensuing eighty-eight minutes of (mostly) fictitious speculation....some **cleverly** interwoven references to actual historical events and details....Though Mirvish’s mishmash is mostly made up, *18½* made me **ruminate** on Republicans of both then and now, and whether the GOP has really changed over the past half century....Rose Mary Woods’s eighteen-and-a-half-minute faux pas has been trumped by a **seven-hour gap** in the White House call logs for January 6, 2020...As we come up on the half-century anniversary of the Watergate break-in, **18½ is a droll reminder of the White House scandal** which left the nation reeling.”— Ed Rampell, *The Progressive.com*

“Dan Mirvish’s *18½* is an exercise in **speculative paranoia** set against the Watergate scandal. Junior functionary Connie (Willa Fitzgerald) tries to share the famously missing 18-and-a-half minutes of White House tape with reporter Paul (John Magaro). **In farcical fashion**, they are thwarted by a broken-down reel-to-reel player and have to pose as newlyweds to charm an **eccentric couple** (Vondie Curtis Hall, Catherine Curtis) in the next motel cabin into lending them the machine they use to fill the evening with **bossa-nova** tunes **Fitzgerald** – of the *Scream* TV series and *Reacher* – **delivers a focused performance** while everyone else cracks up. Bruce Campbell, Ted Raimi and Jon Cryer are heard on the tape as White House conspirators.”— Kim Newman, *Empire Magazine*

“Dan Mirvish’s **sprightly comedy thriller** returns to the subject with a fictional tale about a rogue White House transcriber who manages to get hold of the missing material and aims to share it with a journalist....The two leads have **natural chemistry** and bring **plenty of energy** to the screen, yet manage to keep their characters feeling **real and vulnerable** throughout. ...The **liminal** environment of the resort, where every connection is temporary, provides **the perfect backdrop**, but **the film’s real power** lies in the fact that despite all the shenanigans on display, there is real human emotion underneath. **Comedy and tragedy blur** together at both federal and personal levels,



making this an **appealingly different** but nonetheless **potent entry into the Nixon-inspired cinematic canon.**”– Jennie Kermode, *EyeforFilm.co.uk*

“**Outrageous**, shameful behaviour from our leaders became routine. That was just how **President Trump**, and his British tribute act **Boris Johnson**, did business. The president complicit in orchestrating a break-in to a rival’s HQ to wiretap their phones?

That would be one of the least serious offences Trump committed during his time in office. Compared to inciting a mob to riot through the offices of government, what’s the big deal?...[Willa] Fitzgerald’s new **film fits in perfectly with such tortured times.....**The lost 18-and-a-half-minute gap is real, supposedly accidentally deleted by Nixon’s secretary, but the film is fiction, **a darkly comic caper that transforms into a madcap, down the rabbit hole farce. Very on brand for 2022.** 18½ is permeated by a **spiralling sense of paranoia.** Connie teams up with a reporter to break the story but their attempts to listen to the recording are repeatedly thwarted – either by awful luck, or **a series of kooky conspirators** determined to protect the cover-up at all costs.”– Steven MacKenzie, *Big Issue* magazine [UK]



“This isn’t your standard retelling of historical events; **it’s a twist on what a satire can be.** Very little of the film is based on anything in reality. While it touches on the events of the Watergate scandal, it also **dives into a world** that is there **just for fun.....**You should be well prepared for anything but the norm with Lloyd Kaufman, Ted Raimi, and Bruce Campbell. **The film’s cast was fantastic**, and I think they all **embodied their characters perfectly.**This wasn’t meant to be a live-action retelling of the Watergate scandal. If that’s what you’re looking for, I would suggest ALL THE PRESIDENT’S MEN, THE FINAL DAYS, NIXON, DICK, FROST/NIXON, and others.....I need to mention that this was a **fantastic-looking film**; the **style, visuals, sets, clothing, everything just made you feel like you were exactly where you were supposed to be.**”– Chris Jones, *The Mail Newspapers*

"**The Best of Cinequest 2022:** 18 1/2 is the festival’s Opening Night film, **a dark comedy that sends up the paranoid thriller genre.** A low-level government clerical worker (**an excellent Willa Fitzgerald**) finds herself in possession of the infamous 18 1/2 minute gap in the Watergate Tapes. Of course, co-writers Daniel Moya and Dan Mirvish had to devise a way to get this MacGuffin in her hands; given the paranoia, deviousness and clumsiness of the Nixon White House, their solution is **surprisingly plausible. Double crosses and red herrings escalate, as does the dark, dark humor. Richard Kind and Vondie Curtis-Hall sparkle in supporting roles.**" - [TheMovieGourmet](https://www.themoviegourmet.com/2022/01/18-1-2-the-best-of-cinequest-2022/)

Director's Statement

by Dan Mirvish

While making my recent film *Bernard and Huey*, I'd often visit with screenwriter Jules Feiffer, who lives on Shelter Island near the Hamptons. Apart from talking about the film itself, Jules and I spent a lot of time discussing his own experiences with politics. We talked extensively about comparisons between Nixon and Trump, who'd just been elected the day after we wrapped production on *Bernard and Huey*. During those visits, I'd sometimes bring my old friend Terry Keefe with me to see Jules. I sometimes stayed with Terry, who owns the vintage Silver Sands Motel, in the quaint town of Greenport, New York. Terry said I should come up with a 70s-era period script that could be shot at the Silver Sands over the winter when the motel is closed. So perhaps not surprisingly, my mind gravitated straight to Watergate.

I distinctly remember being in an upstate New York hotel watching Richard Nixon resign while my family was on a trip to the East Coast in 1974. I've been a student of Watergate for years - my mentor in college was Sen. Thomas Eagleton who was McGovern's first choice as running mate. I once spoke to Elliot

Richardson on the phone - Nixon's attorney general who resigned during the Saturday Night Massacre. I've worked in Washington, DC, as a senate speechwriter (for Sen. Tom Harkin) and journalist (*The Washington Monthly*, etc.), so I can relate to the characters that were caught up in the scandal - both the real ones and the fictional ones in our script. And I've even written about Watergate in the pages of the historical fiction novel I cowrote, *I Am Martin Eisenstadt* (Farrar, Straus, Giroux)



In the wake of the Trump presidency, it was clear that now was the time to make a movie that is ostensibly about Watergate, but has so many stark parallels to the recent administration and the conspiracy-driven zeitgeist. Knowing that films take a while to write, shoot, edit, and get released, I also knew that making a Watergate-era parable would ensure that the film will continue to be topically resonant, while staying thematically relevant for years to come.

Working on the script and production with Daniel Moya was a fantastic collaboration. Generationally, he's much younger than me, which was incredibly helpful in our efforts to insure that the screenplay and the film itself would work with audiences regardless of the age of the viewer and their intrinsic familiarity with Watergate. Daniel's also a rigorous researcher whose commitment to authenticity in the details of the film and the drama of the scenes was second to none. And when tested with the huge challenges of making a film during a pandemic, his commitment to the safety and health of the crew was beyond reproach, and truly helped set the standards for Covid-safe filmmaking.

When I premiered *Bernard and Huey* at the São Paulo International Film Festival (Mostra) in 2017, that trip to Brazil would be a huge influence on the writing, production and soundtrack to *18½*. I'd worked with composer Luis Guerra on *Bernard and Huey*, and I knew his knowledge and expertise in Brazilian bossa nova and tropicalia music styles would be a perfect fit for *18½*. They were genres of music that were emblematic of the 70s, but avoided the normal clichés of most 70s period films and soundtracks filled with pre-existing needle-drop songs. Luis is based in LA



but knows musicians around the world and was able to find a range of Brazilian and Mexican musicians, including singer Caro Pierotto, who filled out the soundscape of the film. We were fortunate that we had some of Luis' tunes and the songs we wrote together even while Daniel and I were still writing the script, and had them available for the actors to dance and sing to during shooting.

My cinematographer, Elle Schneider, and I used techniques and elements of the canonic 70s films to shoot *18½*. Specifically, we explored frame-within-frame techniques, slow zooms, push-ins and dollying, the use of long lenses and using vintage lenses.

In crafting this early-70s spy film, I strictly avoided guns and cigarettes - I personally find that both become easy cliches for filmmakers to use, and it's more of a creative challenge to eschew them and dig deeper into more aesthetic, character and thematic choices (ie. how can you use a reel-to-reel player as a weapon itself?). My father was an influential cancer researcher and in part as an homage to him, I've avoided cigarette use in all of my films. As a father of three myself, I also am cognizant of the impact of both tobacco use and gun violence on younger audiences, so given the choice, I avoid both.

In terms of sound, for my last several films I've successfully adopted Robert Altman's technique of putting individual lavalier mics on each actor and recording those onto unique audio tracks. This allows the actors to overlap dialogue freely, resulting in much more realistic performances. It really frees up the actors to simply act, and it's a subtle thing that makes a huge impact on the audience. It also guarantees that there will be no need for ADR (or dubbing) that is always a distraction (and an expensive addition to post-production). As Altman once told me, "Why let the boom operator – the lowest paid member of the crew – decide who to listen to? That's the director's job." And by mic'ing actors on individual tracks, the director can make those decisions in the relative calm of post-production. Sure enough, the quality of our production audio was impeccable and there was no need for ADR.

One unique aspect to *18½* is the recreation of an audio tape of Nixon and Al Haig listening to, and then erasing, the original 18½- minute tape of Nixon and Haldeman talking in the White

House. While our version of this tape is completely scripted, the challenge was deciding how and when to record those tapes, and then how to cast them. We decided that we'd only have a scratch-track on set to help the other actors. Then we recorded the actual audio of the tape during post-production. Ironically, since Coronavirus has normalized actors working remotely at home, this actually simplified the process and we were able to record the Nixon tape with Bruce Campbell, Jon Cryer and Ted Raimi during quarantine. We set up Zoom calls with them, but simultaneously had each record quality audio with their own mics and recording software. We got those files and everything sunc up perfectly.

Throughout post-production, I was hunkered down in my home in Culver City, California, working almost exclusively remotely with all our creative partners: Composer, musicians, visual effects, post-sound team and the colorist. I relied extensively on my own bubble, which is to say, my kids, wife and my immediate neighbors for help. For example, when it came time to film insert shots of a reel-to-reel player, I filmed those in my own garage, with my kids holding the lights. My daughter Mimi even painted her fingernails blue to match Willa's character Connie so she could be a hand double, hitting the buttons on the tape player. In order to get my neighbors to help out, I employed a strategy of "sourdough bartering" - using the same sourdough starter that I'd used to feed the cast and crew during our September shoot, making a variety of breads and cinnamon rolls.



Director Dan Mirvish in March, 2020, before the pandemic shut down production.

“Oscar Contender” Soundtrack



Featured song "Brasília Bella" from the *18½* soundtrack was declared an **Oscar® Contender for Best Original Song** by *Variety*, *The Hollywood Reporter*, *IndieWire*, and *Gold Derby*. *Awards Radar* listed it as a Top Ten Contender for the Academy Awards Best Original Song. Coverage of “Brasília Bella” and *18½*’s Oscar run was included in articles on five continents, in outlets in such places as India, Nigeria, Brazil, Spain, Turkey, Poland, Greece, Bangladesh and more. Songs “Wonder Bread” and “Baked and Toasted” were also contending for the Oscars® and similarly were covered in the press.

A full-length soundtrack is available digitally on all major outlets with the full score as well as all the instrumental and vocal bossa nova and tropicalia-inspired songs that you hear in the film.

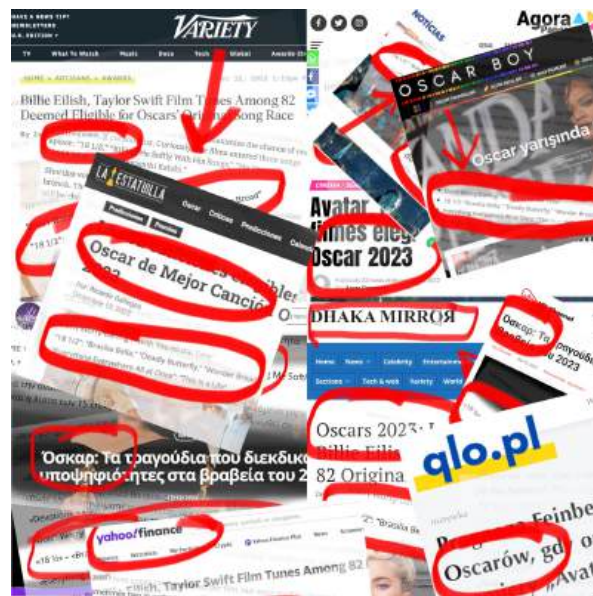
Currently, traditional vinyl records are backlogged by up to a year, so instead, the *18½* team decided to make a two-song “Flexi” disc record, which will be available for sale starting in May, 2022.

Though fondly remembered as promo discs in the West from the 1960-80s, this particular kind of Flexi is being manufactured in a secret facility in the Czech Republic. This technique was developed in the Soviet Union through the pressing of illegal pop songs onto old X-Rays. Our Flexi features the songs “Brasília Bella” (English Version) and “Wonder Bread,” both of which are heard over the end credits of the film. The songs have music by Luis Guerra, lyrics by Dan Mirvish and vocals by Caro Pierotto. A truly international project, they were recorded by musicians working in studios in Los Angeles, Mexico City and Brazil.



English, Portuguese and instrumental versions of “Brasília Bella” appear in the film. Luis and Dan wrote the song early in the screenwriting process of *18½* itself, as a recurring theme for Connie (Willa Fitzgerald). It is emblematic of the 1960's era of bossa nova multi-lingual crossover hits like "Girl from Ipanema," but lyrically and thematically owes more to the "The Mary Tyler Moore Show" theme song.

“Wonder Bread,” which is heard coming out of the Hippies’ 8-track player during the film, and then again in the end credits, is Dan and Luis' interpretation of the character Connie's journey



through the whole movie itself, as an analogy to *Alice in Wonderland*. Notice that things only start getting weird for Connie once she eats the Wonder Bread in the diner.

The complete digital soundtrack is currently available on Spotify and other digital outlets in most of the world.

“The music is really fun in the film.... The other reason to sit through the credits is because these great songs, ‘Baked and Toasted,’ and there’s ‘Wonder Bread.’ Wonder Bread, which plays such a deadly menace in the film gets its own song!”
- Robert Bennett, *KJFC-FM*

“The film also boasts a wonderful original musical score by brilliant Los Angeles composer Luis Guerra.”
- Monica Reid, *Far Out Magazine*

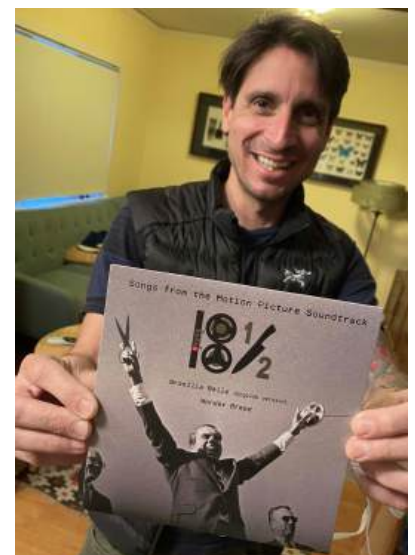
“Speaking of Bossa Nova, all the film's music was composed by Luis Guerra, an eclectic mix perfectly suited to this film's alternate period universe”
- Laura Clifford, *Reeling Reviews*

“a big brassy bossa nova score...the film emerges as a delightful bit of escapism.”
- Stephen Saito, *The Moveable Feast*

“I even liked the songs in the movie, which were written specifically for it, rather than trying to get some very expensive known '70's songs to enforce the film's period”
- Edward Douglas, *The Weekend Warrior*

“In this movie, violence breaks out to the sound of an early bossa nova!”
- Wesley Pereira de Castro, *Críticas de um Cinema Nu*

“The score by Luís Guerra brings Brazilian roots, inspired by Bossa Nova and Tropicalia, giving a dynamic rhythm to the movie.”
- Pedro Lima, *Letterboxd* (at São Paulo International Film Festival)



Production Details/Cast/Crew Overview

18½

Running time: 89 minutes

Original format: Panasonic Varicam with vintage 1970s era Kowa Anamorphic primes and Cooke Varotal Zoom lenses

Exhibition format: DCP Dolby 5.1, 2.35:1 (scope)

MPA Rating: PG-13

101 Films International, Bugeater Films and Kyyba Films present
in association with Syncopated Daydreams and Terry Keefe Media
a film by Dan Mirvish

Cast:

Willa Fitzgerald as Connie

John Magaro as Paul

Vondie Curtis Hall as Samuel

Catherine Curtin as Lena

Richard Kind as Jack

Sullivan Jones as Barry

Alanna Saunders as Daisy

Claire Saunders as Daffodil

Marija Abdy as Cheryl

Lloyd Kaufman as Jeffries

Gina Kreiezmar as Deb

with the voices of

Caro Pierotto as featured song vocalist

Chris Quintos Cathcart as Rose Mary Woods

Ted Raimi as General Al Haig

Jon Cryer as H.R. "Bob" Haldeman

and Bruce Campbell as President Richard Nixon

Crew:

Directed by Dan Mirvish

Screenplay by Daniel Moya

Story by Dan Mirvish & Daniel Moya

Produced by Dan Mirvish p.g.a. Daniel Moya p.g.a. and Terry Keefe

Executive Producers: Tel K. Ganesan, Ashwin T. Ganesan, Richard Schenkman, Sebastian Twardosz

Co-Executive Producers: Paul Orzulak, Kyra Rogers, Elisabeth Jereski, Jarrod Phillips, Dana Altman, Frédéric Forestier

Co-Producers: Alan Steinman, Michael Nichols

Director of Photography: Elle Schneider

Production Designer: Monica Dabrowski

Music: Luis Guerra

Editor: Dan Mirvish

Costume Designer: Sarah Cogan

Casting: Bess Fifer, CSA

Social Media Handles:

18½ – www.18andaHalfMovie.com

Facebook: @18andAHalfMovie / Instagram: @18andAHalfMovie / Twitter: @18andAHalf

Dan Mirvish (director/producer) – www.DanMirvish.com

Twitter: @DanMirvish / FB & Insta: @dmirvish / TikTok: @danmirvish

Daniel Moya (screenwriter/producer):

Insta: @daniel_moya

Terry Keefe/Silver Sands Hotel (producer/location):

Insta: @silversandsmotelgreenport

Tel K. Ganesan (executive producer):

Facebook: /telkg

Willa Fitzgerald (Connie):

Insta: @willafitz

Vondie Curtis Hall (Samuel):

Insta: @vondiecurtishall

Catherine Curtin (Lena):

Insta/Twitter: @catecurtin

Lloyd Kaufman (Jeffries):

Insta: @tromateam / Twitter: @lloydkaufman

Ted Raimi (General Al Haig):

Twitter & Insta: @tedraimi

Jon Cryer (HR "Bob" Haldeman):

Twitter: @MrJonCryer

Bruce Campbell (President Richard Nixon):

Twitter: @GroovyBruce

Luis Guerra (composer):

Insta/Twitter: @luisguerramusic

Caro Pierotto (singer):

Insta: @caropierotto

Elle Schneider (DP):

Twitter: @elleschneider Insta: @attentionsoldier

Book Excerpt (extended production notes)

[The following is an exclusive chapter excerpt from director Dan Mirvish's new book, the fully-updated 2nd Edition of The Cheerful Subversive's Guide to Independent Filmmaking, published by Focal Press/Routledge ©2021, Dan Mirvish. Reprinted with permission. Feel free to use select quotes from this.]

Covid 18½: How to Shoot a Film in a Global Pandemic

If you're going to get stuck shooting a film in a global pandemic, it helps if you're already pretty much self-quarantined and living off product placement steak and coffee. That's the situation I found myself in on my film, *18½*, which we started shooting in early March 2020. What could possibly go wrong?

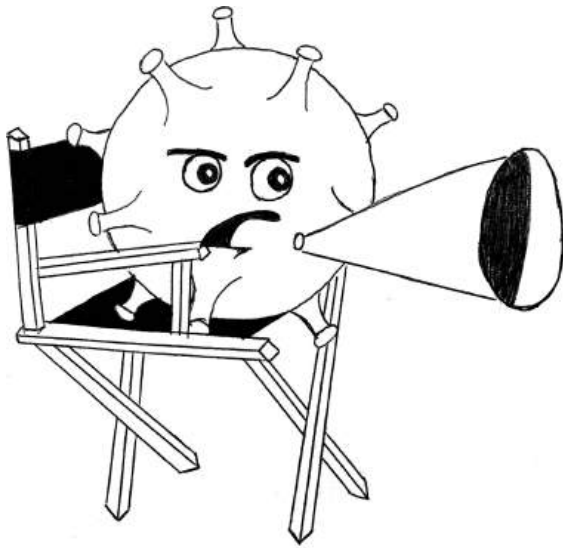


Illustration: Miriam Mirvish.

70s, Steaks and Swingers

18½ is a 70s-era Watergate conspiracy thriller/dark comedy we were filming in Greenport, New York, which is on the far northeastern tip of Long Island, about three hours from Manhattan. Our cast and crew were all staying at the Silver Sands Motel and Cottages, a 30-acre complex on the beach, about a 20-minute walk from town, run by my pal (and one of my producing partners on the film) Terry Keefe. We had a

15-day shoot scheduled, with a couple days off, with most of the days filming on the Silver Sands property itself. The cast and crew all had their own rooms and there was plenty of extra cottage space for hair, wardrobe, props and group meals. We'd brought all our equipment in from New York, the weather was picture-perfect and everyone was getting along great. It was literally a textbook example of how to shoot an indie feature film. (See, it's already in *this* book.)

And honestly, it was fun! The entire cast and crew stayed at the Silver Sands, which Terry's grandparents had built in the 50s, and which Terry has maintained as a mid-century time capsule. Still a very busy resort in the summers, Terry often rents out the Silver Sands for fashion still shoots, music videos and episodics. But with the motel closed in the winter, ours was the first feature that had ever shot there, not least because my writing/producing partner Daniel Moya and I had written the script around the location. In addition to meals brought in from local restaurants, we'd arranged for product-placement steaks and veggie burgers from my old friends at

omaha Steaks, coffee from Conscious Coffees in Boulder, Colorado, pinot noir from McCall, a local North Fork winery, homemade cookies my mom sent from omaha and Girl Scout cookies my daughter sent from LA.

Being able to stay and shoot a film in one beautiful location was a luxury. We never had to worry about cast or crew getting tired driving home. At nights, we celebrated the career successes of our lead actors: The season finale airing of *Dare Me* for Willa Fitzgerald, and we toasted John Magaro, on the opening weekend of his new Kelly Reichardt film, *First Cow* for A24. We shot for one day in Daniel's aunt and uncle's converted railcar diner, the Front Street Station. We filmed on the ferry to Shelter Island, and a local couple let us use their bright red 1969 Dodge Dart "Swinger" in exchange for a couple of nights at the motel. It was community indie filmmaking in the best sense possible.

Of course, there were plenty of run-of-the-mill challenges along the way. We were still doing some casting a week *into* shooting. The logistics of moving all this equipment and crew from New York was a nightmare to coordinate. And we were still desperately raising money to make it through the shoot. But we were overcoming all those obstacles with lets-put-on-a- show grit and gumption! We were getting great performances, the footage looked and sounded amazing, and the 70s-period costumes and production design felt like a million bucks' worth of production value. We were knocking out 11-page days and 4-minute oners like a well-oiled machine, staying (mostly) on schedule and (more-or-less) under budget.

We weren't completely oblivious to the Coronavirus pandemic. I remember the week before shooting, on my flight to New York, watching President Trump on CNN say there were barely any cases in the US and everything was going to be fine! Naturally, that made me nervous. Lockdowns were already well underway in China and Italy. There were a smattering of people on the plane wearing masks, and I did have the good sense to buy a couple little packs of hand sanitizer. It was only a matter of time before the pandemic took root in the US, but I figured we'd be wrapped and I'd be safely back in LA editing the film long before that happened.

With each day, we heard chatter about new events being cancelled. The NBA! South-by-Southwest! International flights! And through the production grapevine, we began to hear about TV shows and films delaying start dates or shutting down completely. *Their* decisions were governed by multinational companies, armies of lawyers and insurance companies sweating over risk management actuarial tables.

Our little troupe of 24 people had no such corporate overlords to answer to. Communally, we all felt about as safely self-quarantined as any production could be: We were far from any urban center, had almost no outside visitors, and were largely self-sufficient. The crew and cast unanimously believed we were probably safer on location, still working, than returning to our respective homes. We were doing a lot of

things right, as it turned out: Telling people to use the bathrooms in their own rooms, sharing my tiny quantity of hand sanitizer with actors and crew, and keeping unwanted visitors away from set. This blissful determination kept us going well into our second week of shooting.

The DGA, the CDC and the ABCs of Shutting Down

On one of our last days of production, we did get one unannounced onsite visit from our DGA rep from New York. She was so excited we were still shooting and lavished praise on our self-quarantined resilience. But I was struck by a few other things she said: She was the first person who introduced me to the term “social distancing.” And she told us we were one of the last remaining DGA productions still shooting in North America—there was one in Puerto Rico, and maybe one in Chicago. And that was *it*! Later that same day, we started to hear that actors that were scheduled for our last week of production were backing out. With our 70s-based sets and costumes, we were starting to feel like some bizarro crossover episode of *The Brady Bunch* stuck on *Gilligan’s Island*.

With our last scheduled day off around the corner, we were reaching the time to make a critical decision. Keep plowing ahead with just four days to shoot in our last week, or pull the plug and take a “pandemic pause”? Cast and crew were rightfully nervous: Loved ones back home were asking about them. Friends were beginning to shame them for still working. And there was chatter in the air that domestic air travel and New York subways were on the verge of shutting down. Paranoia on set and in the town of Greenport was percolating. A vicious town dog bizarrely bit one of our team members while they were on a walk. The grocery store clerk accused our assistant editor of having “the Vah-rus” and banished him. The exigencies of the outside world were starting to cave in on us, and shit was definitely getting weird.

We looked for guidance from the DGA and SAG-AFTRA, which all said to go by what the CDC and local health officials said. The CDC was still recommending that groups of under 50 people could gather in one room, so we were well within that range. But the writing was on the wall: Just days later, that number would drop to 10 and within a week, to zero.



Pre-pandemic filming of *18½*.

Photo: Greg Starr (courtesy: Bugeater Films).

I was ultimately responsible for the health and safety of the production, so in close consultation with my team, I decided the time had come to call it quits. That last “day off” became our wrap day. We whisked away our actors back to New York and the crew started packing things up for our vendors (what few of them were still open for returns). The overwhelmingly young crew was heartbroken—for most, this was the first time they’d been on a shoot that had been shut down in the middle of production. Even veteran actor/filmmaker Vondie Curtis Hall, one of our leads, had never had a film shut down midstream, but agreed this was the right decision at the right time. Everyone on the cast and crew vowed that we would return: somehow, someday.

As for me, I packed up our main editing hard drive (leaving two backups in the Tri-State Area) and was able to get a flight out of Islip, Long Island, back to LA the next day. I was comforted to know that at least we weren’t alone shutting down and facing an uncertain future. No less an indie film icon than Paul Schrader had just five days left to shoot his film, *The Card Counter*, when they shut down for Coronavirus. He publicly castigated his producers for making that decision and wrote on Facebook, “I would have shot through hellfire rain to complete the film. I’m old and asthmatic, what better way to die than on the job?”

The Show Must Go On

Terry very kindly offered to let anyone on the crew stay at the Silver Sands and ride out the pandemic for as long as they wanted. Seven of our crew members, mostly the

single Brooklyn types, took him up on the offer and six stayed for over two months, and one for six months. This hearty group of survivors (the self-termed “QuaranTeam”) included our cinematographer, production designer, costume designer, most of the camera crew and a PA. They subsisted on what was left of the production food: Steaks, hot dogs, hamburgers, cookies, coffee and beer, as well as cautious food runs into town. Fortunately, they still had a camera, a vintage zoom lens, tripod and other basic production equipment. They wound up shooting two short films, a couple of music videos, a webinar, and some extra B-roll exteriors and insert shots for *18½*. Some of the rest of the cast and crew kept returning to the Silver Sands for extended quarantine retreats throughout the spring and summer.

The good news for us was that we’d already gotten about 80 percent of the film in the can. So, with plenty of time on my hands, I could edit throughout quarantine (when I wasn’t baking sourdough for my family every day). Now that my composer, Luis Guerra, and all the musicians he works with (from LA to Brazil) were stuck in their respective home studios during the pandemic, they were all chomping at the bit to get creative and work on the score and the full soundtrack. We even did a Corona-safe recording session with our featured LA-based Brazilian vocalist, Caro Pierotto, locked in a glass booth in Luis’ studio.

As the title implies, a big part of the film has to do with the 18½-minute gap in the Nixon Watergate tapes that in large part led to his downfall. During production, my script supervisor, writing/producing partner and I recorded a scratch tape to get the on-set timing right for our actors. The plan was always to record the final tape with our “real” actors during post- production, so we used our quarantine time to record the “tape.” Ironically, the pandemic had normalized stay-at-home recording for actors, so it was probably easier (and definitely cheaper) to do these sessions remotely. Instead of scheduling the actors to be in the same city and go to an expensive studio, we set up Zoom calls from wherever they were hunkered down. Simultaneously I had the actors (Bruce Campbell, Jon Cryer and Ted Raimi) use mics and audio software to record “clean” versions of each take. Then the actors just emailed those tracks to me, I synched them up to the Zoom tracks, and we had ourselves an 18½-minute Nixon tape. Thank you, Coronavirus!

Like everyone else in production, we had to wait until it was safe and healthy to film again. We needed to wait for Corona protocols to be developed and tried out on other people’s productions. It was one thing to be the last production standing, but we were in no rush to be the first ones back filming. Then in late August, Terry called to say that his family was selling the Silver Sands, and if we didn’t shoot right away, there might not be a location to come back to at all. Between the location, cast and crew availability, we had a narrow window of opportunity to shoot in September. I was the only one coming in from California, so I had to pack up my sourdough starter and spend a state-mandated 14-day quarantine in a cabin at the Silver Sands before we

could start shooting. It was about seven days into that quarantine that we finally got approval from SAG on our Covid- safe shooting plan: It involved multiple swab tests for everyone on the cast and crew, once every 72 hours, and we had to do it at hospitals in Manhattan before we shot, and then again in Greenport. Actors had to be brought out to our location in individual Covid-safe ride services. We had to rigorously sanitize everyone's rooms, cater individual meals, have an on-set Health Safety Supervisor, and abide by strict social distancing and PPE requirements. Luckily for us, we'd already shot our kissing, dancing and fighting scenes (and never had any crowd scenes anyway), so unlike some productions, we didn't have to resort to blow-up dolls or CGI extras.

During the Fall of 2020, there was still no Covid insurance or liability protection for films, which led to some interesting ironies and advantages for true indie filmmakers. For the big Hollywood productions, like Netflix series or studio films, they had the means to self-insure, or wait out any delays (as when Robert Patinson got diagnosed on the set of *The Batman* and they had to shut down for two weeks). Even Tyler Perry could use his private jet to fly entire casts and crews to his unique studio campus in Atlanta for a massively quarantined film eco-system. But for "independent" films in the roughly \$1–10 million range, things were next to impossible to figure out: Those films rely on bonds in order to cashflow the films from bank loans. And film bonds require cast insurance, based on the "bankable" actors committed to the films. During this period, though, cast insurance wouldn't cover Covid, so those films were stymied.

Meanwhile, the kinds of sub-\$500,000 indie films that I make, whose finances are raised from private equity investors, donations or crowd- funding, don't usually get cast insurance even in the best of times. We're also not as reliant on a single "name" actor to trigger our start dates. And as for liability protection, the biggest and only "risk-mitigation" protection was just to be as safety conscientious as possible, not do anything stupid and have contingency plans and built-in redundancy in case anyone did test positive for Covid (or even, as was more likely the case, test results just came back late). For us, we planned that if our lead actor tested positive, we'd shoot those scenes as POVs and add voiceover remotely. If a supporting character dropped out, we'd give their lines to a different character, or recast using crew members already on site. And we made sure that every single person on the crew had a backup in case we had to send them home or quarantine them. So, the 1st AC became our backup cinematographer, the 1st AD became my backup director, and I was the backup sound recordist and DIT. Thankfully, we never had to act on these plans, but it did give us peace of mind knowing that the show would go on no matter what.

By the time you read this, hopefully production protocols will have normalized a little bit. All the Covid testing and transportation costs probably added about 20 percent to our budget. But what struck me were the little changes and nuances that made

shooting in Covid so different. On a normal production, if you're directing, you can and should have discreet, whispered conversations with actors between takes, and with your cinematographer, 1st AC or script supervisor even in the middle of a take. But between social distancing rules, masks, faceshields and ventilation fans running between takes, it's impossible to whisper anything. You wind up shouting direction across the room to actors, in earshot of every other actor and crew member on set. In the middle of takes, I'd hear my scripty shouting "Boom in the shot!" or I'd yell at my DP "Zoom in now!!" or I'd hear a disembodied voice yell, "Have we started rolling yet!?!?" halfway through a



Willa Fitzgerald and Daniel Moya filming during Covid.

Photo: Dan Mirvish (courtesy: Bugeater Films).

shot. In short, all the subtle, quiet nuances you normally have on set to keep things running smoothly and without bruising egos, are yelled out loud for everyone to hear. And because the faceshields bounce sound waves from behind, I was constantly turning around wondering who was talking to me. It's a complete recipe for paranoia and disfunction on a set.

For the four days we had to shoot, we made it work, and we wrapped with all the shots we needed to finish out the movie. A number of other productions managed to shoot full features, TV series or commercials under these conditions. Even after the pandemic, I'm sure many of these basic health and safety measures will still be standard practice on sets.

February 2023



The International Publication of the American Society of Cinematographers

American Cinematographer



Linus Sandgren, ASC, FSF
Shoots *Babylon*

American Cinematographer

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On Our Cover:

Linus Sandgren, ASC, FSF on location during production of *Babylon*. (Photo by Scott Garfield, courtesy of Paramount Pictures.)

Vintage Infamy: 18½



Cinematographer Elle Schneider helps indie filmmaker Dan Mirvish create a 1970s ambience for a political-conspiracy caper.

By Matt Mulcahey

Writer-director Dan Mirvish accomplished a remarkable feat with his latest film, *18½*, shot over just 15 days on a modest budget. Drawing on his experience in making independent movies for nearly 30 years, Mirvish devised a project that is basically a blueprint for shooting a low-budget feature with a small cast, a skeleton crew and a story that unfolds over a single day amid a handful of practical locations.

However, he made one deviation from conventional thrifty wisdom:



The film is a period piece, a work of speculative fiction centered on the infamous 18½ minutes of missing audio from former U.S. President Richard Nixon's White House tapes.

To pull off a period setting on a frugal budget — and a tight shooting schedule — Mirvish leaned on existing locations whose décor had been practically preserved in amber for the last half-century. He also turned to Elle Schneider, a cinematographer with a boundless affection for vintage lenses, split diopters, hand-pulled zooms and 1970s cinema. “It was an extremely conscious choice to make our movie look different than the films of today,” says Schneider. “Everything — from the camera and lenses that we chose, to the framing and the way we moved the camera — was designed so that we would feel more immersed in the time period. Dan gave me a great opportunity to play in a way that I don’t usually get to play, and to show some of my own artistic influences.”

Chasing History

The mystery of the missing minutes began in 1973, when the infamous stretch of silence on one of Nixon's tapes was revealed in court. The following year, facing impeachment, the president resigned. Since then, 3,000 hours of Nixon's surreptitious recordings, which had been amassed via a voice-activated system installed in the White House, have been made public. But those 18½



PHOTOS BY GREG STARR AND DAN MIRVISH. ALL IMAGES AND FRAME PULLS COURTESY OF WATERBUG EATER FILMS, LLC.



Opening spread: Connie (Will Fitzgerald) and Paul (John Magaro) listen to an infamous and long-lost historic recording. This page, top: The Silver Sands Motel, owned by producer Terry Keefe, became one of the production's primary locations. Bottom: Cinematographer Elle Schneider is assisted with a shot of the Dodge Swinger by dolly grip Greg Antonopoulos.

minutes — recorded three days after the Watergate break-in, and whose erasure was blamed on Nixon's secretary — were never recovered. To this day, no one knows what was on that tape.

In Mirvish's fictitious conflation of screwball farce and paranoid conspiracy thriller, Willa Fitzgerald stars as Connie, a transcriptionist who inadvertently comes into possession of the original 18½ minutes of audio. She turns to a reporter named Paul (John Magaro) to get the tape out to the world, and the pair spend the rest of the film searching a tiny East Coast resort town for a reel-to-reel player.

Key Locations and Props

The inspiration for *18½* came to Mirvish the day after he'd finished shooting his previous feature, *Bernard and Huey*. With that film wrapped, he made the journey out to the tip of Long Island to share footage with its screenwriter, renowned satirical cartoonist Jules Feiffer. The date was November 9, 2016 — one day after Donald Trump was elected president. Mirvish spent the night at the Silver Sands Motel, owned by his friend and producer Terry Keefe. The Greenport, N.Y., lodging was built in 1957, but its furnishings had remained essentially unchanged since the 1970s. That time capsule of a location — closed in the winter, and therefore perfect to house a crew — mixed with the unfolding political upheaval in Mirvish's mind, sending him down a rabbit hole that led to *18½*.

As it turned out, Daniel Moya, the film's eventual screenwriter and producer, had an aunt whose partner owned a nearby diner whose



interior could also pass for the early 1970s, giving Mirvish two practically pre-dressed locations where nearly 90 percent of his story could unfold.

Production designer Monica Dabrowski further embellished the locations by foraging for existing props that were already on site. Costume designer Sarah Cogan, a collector of vintage patterns, assembled the characters' attire, hand-sewing some of the pieces herself. Reel-to-reel tape players and typewriters were acquired on eBay. "Then, Terry put the word out to a Greenport Facebook group and asked, 'Hey, does anyone have a vintage car? I'll give you a free night in the motel,'" Mirvish recalls.

The next day, production had Fitzgerald's hero car — a Dodge Dart Swinger.

It then fell to Schneider to turn those elements into a picture that would recall paranoid 1970s thrillers such as *Klute*, *The Parallax View* and *The Conversation*.

Visual Instruments

For Schneider, that creative process started with the lenses. Though she used a 135mm Arri Ultra Prime for a handful of close-ups, the rest of the film was shot on 1970s glass — specifically, a set of Kowa Prominar anamorphics (a 40mm, 50mm, 75mm and 100mm) and an original Cooke Varotal 20-100mm zoom. "The Kowas have an interesting visual compression on the edges," explains Schneider. "They're not clean and precise across the entire image circle, a quality that was very much of the time period."



Top: Director Dan Mirvish (standing at left) works through a dinner scene with actors Fitzgerald, Vondie Curtis-Hall, Magaro and Catherine Curtin, while Schneider (at back wall) interacts with other members of the crew. Bottom: Connie and Paul make nice with Lena (Curtin) and Samuel (Curtis-Hall) in the hope of borrowing their reel-to-reel player.

"One of the benefits of working on a low budget is that you can take risks, and Dan was very invested in experimenting."



Connie and Paul discuss their quest over lunch.

A longtime Panasonic user dating back to the DVX series, Schneider opted for the VariCam LT for the single-cam shoot, recording in AVC-Intra 4K422 and favoring 800 ISO from the cam's dual native ISO options. "I find that the Panasonic cameras are more chameleon-like," she says. "They don't have as much of a built-in look of their own like a Red or an Arri, which can look very contemporary. If you were using one of those cameras to try to sell the movie's period, you'd really have to beat up the images." Tiffen Warm Diffusion was used throughout to keep contrast, "while warming the image for a period vibe and decreasing fine detail."

When using the Cooke Varotal, Schneider paid homage to the period by hand-pulling many of the zooms rather than utilizing a motorized zoom control. A particularly difficult pull was needed for a scene in which Fitzgerald and Magaro exit the motel office to initiate a nearly two-minute oner. "That shot was one of the few times we went all the way to the 100mm end of the Varotal, and you can really see the fuzz and distortion that the lens has when it's zoomed in all the way," says Schneider. "There were so many potential points of failure in that shot. You have an incredibly fast dolly move out of the gate that stops abruptly, then a slow zoom-in before the actors very quickly walk back toward the camera — and they have to nail a mark while I nail the zoom."

Another favorite shot of Schneider's occurs when Fitzgerald and Magaro's characters are dining at the cottage of their amorous neighbors (played by Catherine Curtin and Vondie Curtis-Hall) in the hope of borrowing their reel-to-reel player. "At the end of the dinner, John is looking at the tape player, and as Catherine comes over to him, I'm shooting up from the hip," Schneider recalls. "The scene has very 'Mrs. Robinson' vibes, echoing scenes in *The Graduate* where Anne Bancroft looms over Benjamin, taking power from him in the frame. In our shot, Catherine is very much taking the power from John."

Mirvish had a pair of ironclad rules for *18½*: One, the camera couldn't move in any way that wouldn't have been possible in 1974 (meaning no Steadicam or gimbals), and two, there could be no cuts while the Nixon recording was playing. Both of those dictums come into play when Fitzgerald and Magaro finally get a chance to listen to the tape, which features voice performances by Bruce Campbell as Nixon, Jon Cryer as H.R.

Haldeman and Ted Raimi as Alexander Haig. A series of long dolly shots covers the scene as Connie and Paul finally listen to the tape — and are interrupted by a succession of characters as the film reaches its climax. "Technically speaking, that was the most difficult sequence to shoot," Schneider asserts. "It was night. We were looking in through the windows, which were very large and very reflective. The cottage was a practical location with very low ceilings, so it was very hard to hide lights, and we were shooting two- to three-minute takes with dolly moves and zooms." Schneider and dolly grip Greg Antonopoulos dressed in black to cut their reflections, and Schneider hid the camera and tripod under a sheet of duvetyne when needed. To light the scene, lamps were used practically in the set, augmented by fixtures tucked away at angles the camera wouldn't see.

Indie Resourcefulness

Of course, there weren't many lights on the truck to worry about hiding. The production had the equivalent of a 1-ton grip package equipped with a single Arri M18, one Source Four, two LiteGear LiteMats, a tungsten Chimera Triolet kit and Schneider's personal Rotolight Neo 2 kit, which gaffer Yaniv Glaser taped to low ceilings when necessary. Another crew member secured the loan of two Luxli Taiko 2x1 panels, which Schneider used for a nighttime flicker gag on Connie and Paul's cottage, which is being subtly illuminated by a fire lit earlier in the film by a group of late-stage hippies (played by Sullivan Jones and twins Alanna and Claire Saunders).

To move the camera, Schneider chose a Dana Dolly and doorway dolly, both for budgetary and practical reasons. "Many of the locations we shot in were extremely narrow; there's no way a Fisher would have fit," she says. To accomplish booms, Schneider utilized a counter-weighted Matthews Elevator, which could be attached to either the Dana or doorway dollies in a small space. "There was one shot in Lena and Samuel's cottage where, in order to shoot a side shot of all four main characters, we had to clear out a closet and put the tripod as far back as it would go," Schneider recalls. "This was an incredibly scrappy film."

That scrappiness extended to the show's small but dedicated crew.

Top: Connie peers out into the night.
Bottom: Mirvish and Schneider angle in
on another night-exterior shot framed
through a picture window.



The camera department consisted of just 1st AC Kerri McConnell, who also operated a handful of shots. Schneider's grip and electric team was three strong: gaffer Glaser, key grip Antonopoulos and swing Paul Wallace. "For the most part, the 1st AD would slate, but it would kind of be whoever was nearby with free hands," says Mirvish. "Sometimes it would even be the actors."

Cures for Covid

18½ began shooting in March of 2020, but 11 days into the 15-day schedule, Mirvish made the difficult decision to shut down production as the Covid-19 pandemic emerged. Filming resumed six months later, in September. Nearly a third of the crew took Silver Sands owner Keefe up on his offer to stay at the motel during the initial shutdown.



Tech Specs: 2.39:1
 Camera | Panasonic VariCam LT
 Lenses | Kowa Prominar anamorphic, Cooke Varotal,
 Arri/Zeiss Ultra Prime



The mounting tension of the characters' situation is captured in close-ups.

The final day of production — a flashback scene in which Connie discovers the missing recording in her D.C. office — was always intended to be a stage day. That decision was prompted by the requirement that productions shoot at least one stage day to be eligible for New York's tax-credit program. Mirvish had planned to use a stage in Brooklyn or Queens, but after Covid arrived, it didn't feel safe to transport the entire crew back and forth to the city. "I called the film office and asked, 'Are there any approved stages on the eastern part of Long Island?' And they were like, 'No, there aren't,'" he recalls. "Then I asked, 'What does it take to become an approved stage?' And they said, 'Actually, not much: It just

has to have at least 7,000 square feet of uninterrupted stage space."

The production began searching for a spot in Greenport that would meet those requirements, scouring everywhere from warehouses to equestrian centers. Finally, they found an American Legion hall that doubled as a roller-skating rink. It measured 8,000 square feet. As an added benefit, it was less than a mile from the Silver Sands.

"We used one of their existing walls and put up three flats to create the office," says Mirvish. "If Willa moved her head back six inches, you could see a sign that said, 'Please return your skates.'"


On the day of the shoot, the results of the crew's final round of Covid





tests weren't ready at call. Schneider recalls, "Dan and I were cleared early, and we popped off some stolen shots of Willa going into the diner. Then we were just waiting to see who else was going to get cleared so we could start loading in."

Call time was 1 p.m., but the full unit didn't begin shooting until after 8. "That was our hardest day," says Mirvish. "Our costume designer had to double as the set dresser. Elle was out buying extra costume pieces from thrift stores. It was all hands on deck." But in the end, the last shot made on the last day was Schneider's favorite shot of the film.

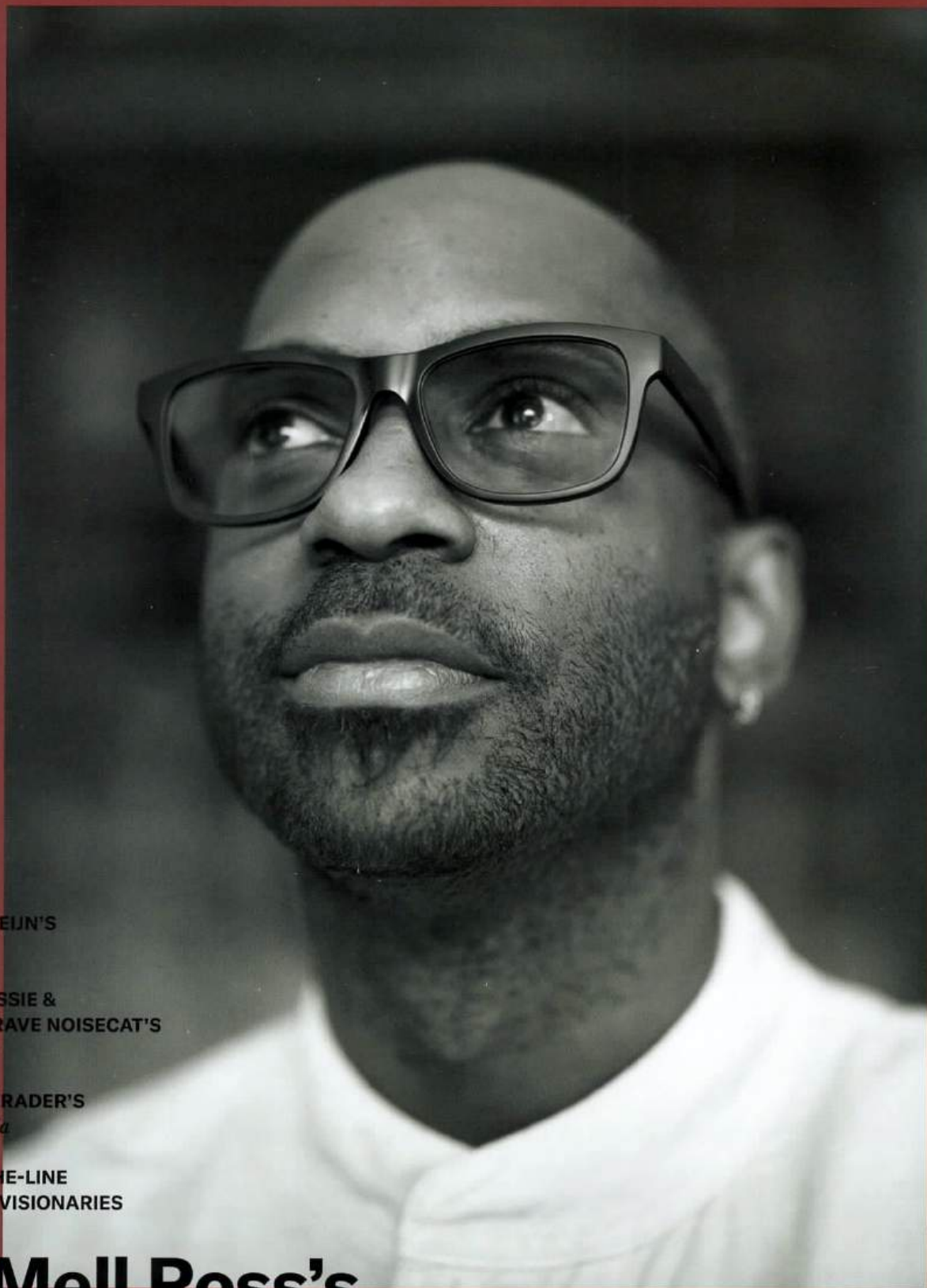
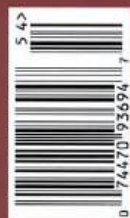
Schneider found that communal spirit — and Mirvish's willingness to take creative leaps — invigorating. "One of the benefits of working on a low budget is that you can take risks, and Dan was very invested in experimenting," she says. "We all had to say, 'We don't have this, and we don't have that, but how do we still make it awesome?' And that's very indicative of who Dan is as a filmmaker." 



Top: Gaffer Yaniv Glaser, 1st AC Kerri McConnell, Schneider and Mirvish consider their next shot. Bottom: Connie and John approach hippies Barry (Sullivan Jones), Daffodil (Claire Saunders) and Daisy (Alanna Saunders) at the waterfront.

FILMMAKER

Nº 129



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Immersive Cinema / Sundance Hits and Misses / 35mm Prints for Digital
Pictures / Selling Your Film to Libraries / Bluesky / Hurricane Filmmaking

HALINA REIJN'S
Babygirl

**EMILY KASSIE &
JULIAN BRAVE NOISECAT'S**
Sugarcane

PAUL SCHRADER'S
Oh, Canada

**BELOW-THE-LINE
SOUND & VISIONARIES**

RaMell Ross's *Nickel Boys*



MY HOT LIBRARIAN SUMMER

Filmmaker Dan Mirvish argues for public and university libraries as audience-building and revenue-generating parts of a film's distribution plan.

It can take two or more years for independent films to progress through festival, theatrical, VOD, streaming and maybe airline releases, after which their discoverability fades. For filmmakers, the question then becomes, "How will people discover my movie now?" For many, the answer revolves around libraries. Across public, college and university libraries, there are estimates that up to 30 percent of library checkouts are movies, not books. Filled with DVDs, libraries have become the new Blockbuster—but, increasingly reliant on library-specific streaming services, they're also becoming the new Netflix.

Many independent filmmakers are so excited to sign a distribution contract (*any* contract) that they fail to read the fine print. When it comes to the inevitable paragraph on "ancillaries," most of us (and even our entertainment lawyers) glaze over the sections detailing topics like "physical media,"

"non-theatrical" and "educational." But there's gold in those paragraphs. If you are an independent filmmaker with a distribution offer, before you sign on the dotted line, you should consider trying to hold back some of these rights. At the very least, ask your distributor if they have a clear strategy for what they plan to do with these rights.

For my most recent film, the Watergate thriller/comedy *18½*, we aggressively divided our distribution rights between several different U.S. and international distributors. One, MVD Entertainment, was tasked with handling our physical media in North America, but we carefully carved out educational rights for ourselves. As a result, my *Brat Summer* was simultaneously my "Hot Librarian Summer," during which I approached public and academic librarians to learn how films wind up in libraries and, ultimately, in the hands of their patrons.



IT ALL STARTS WITH YOUR CONTRACT

It's important to understand the deep legal, linguistic and especially cultural differences between public libraries and academic libraries and how a savvy independent filmmaker can make the best of working with both, whether they have a distributor or are attempting self-distribution.

Public libraries in North America blossomed in the 18th century and expanded considerably in the late 19th century, thanks in large part to robber barons like Andrew Carnegie who were trying to buff up their civic images. But by the 20th century and on into the 21st, they were generally supported by municipal, county, state or provincial taxpayer dollars. Even the smallest towns and villages in the United States and Canada proudly boast a library, with bigger cities having scores of library branches across all kinds of neighborhoods. Far from just having stacks of books, modern public libraries have become true community centers that morph into classrooms for everyone from tots to grandparents, voting booths on election day, cooling centers during heat waves, sites for tabletop gaming and crafting, used bookstores, high-tech maker centers and tool, seed and even ukelele checkouts.

One facet of public libraries is that by definition they are open to anyone in the community and almost always offer their collection and services to

their patrons for free. A more recent phenomenon is that public libraries are also on the frontlines of the culture wars in America. Attempts to ban books at public libraries (as well as school libraries) have radically increased in just the past few years, with significant censorship attempts in at least 17 states. In the small Iowa town of Vinton, the local public library had to shut down completely when the staff quit en masse due to harassment by anti-LGBT forces in town.

Academic libraries, on the other hand, are designed to be exclusive collections intended only for the college or university communities they serve—primarily students and faculty. So, in addition to individual use, academic library collections are often checked out by faculty in order to be shared with students in their classrooms. When it comes to films, that's a key distinction between academic libraries and most public ones, where films are viewed by individuals only, not by groups.

One challenge with incorporating libraries into a film's distribution strategy is that, depending on which sort of libraries and how they're used, there are potentially several different buckets of rights they could fall into. If public libraries are buying a film for their patrons to use individually, those purchases are just part and parcel of either "physical media" rights (i.e., DVD/Blu-ray/4K) or general streaming or VOD rights, depending on whether or not that library uses



a library-specific streamer, like Hoopla or Kanopy. Completely separate from that, if a filmmaker plans to do any one-off, community-based screenings that happen to take place inside a public library (common for many issue-based documentaries), then those are usually considered non-theatrical exhibition. But academic libraries and screenings at colleges and universities are a whole different kettle of fish that tend to fall under “educational” rights in most contracts. In all those cases, if there’s any ambiguity at all (and there usually is), filmmakers and/or their attorneys should contractually clarify these distinctions. Not certain whether non-theatrical exhibition includes library screenings? Make sure to spell it out when defining the term. Is it vague if “educational” rights include academic library purchases (as opposed to, say, on-campus screenings for classes or student groups)? If so, spell it out for clarity.

LET’S GET PHYSICAL (MEDIA)

Physical media is where things get really interesting for libraries and where there is a unique opportunity for independent films in particular.

In the past few years, standard-definition DVD use has been dropping, almost to the point of the format’s obsolescence. Many studios aren’t even releasing films as old-school DVDs, instead opting

for high-tech, high-priced, high profit margin 4K and UHD Blu-rays. But remember how everyone said vinyl records were dead, and now they’re the hottest thing in music retail? Something similar is going on in the home video world. Many of those rediscovering the joys of physical media are doing so because they are realizing they never really “owned” any films in the streaming world—or even those they “purchased” digitally. Streaming films are as fragile and fickle as Amazon or Netflix’s latest streaming model—or David Zaslav’s stock options at Warner.

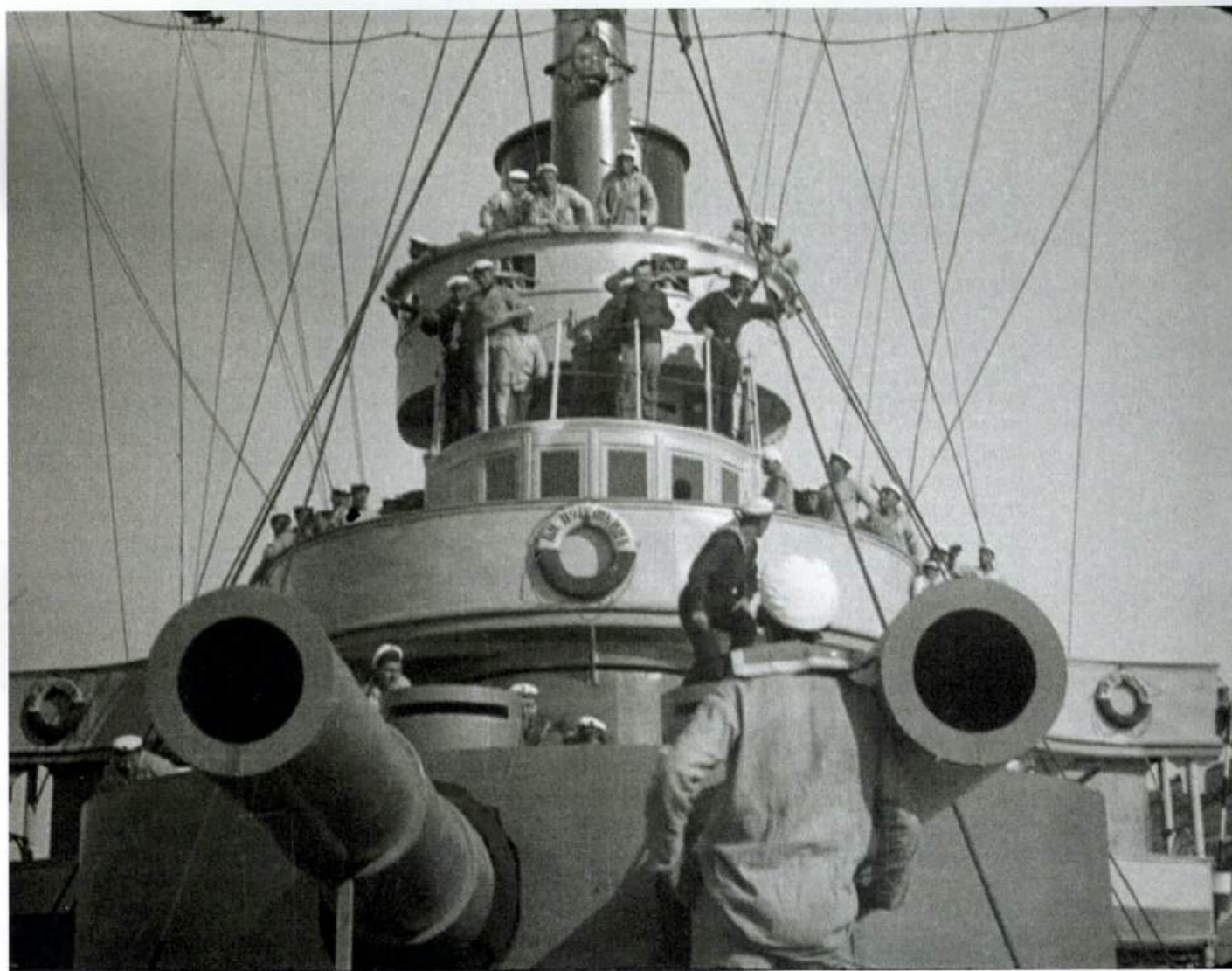
This is where the demographics of public libraries start to explain why so many are still reliant on old-school standard-def DVDs. For one thing, many public library patrons don’t have streaming channels. Some are the elderly, who cling to their cords and can’t figure out this newfangled model of streaming subscriptions. Some are in rural America, where high-speed internet simply hasn’t arrived yet. Some are the economically precarious who struggle to put food on their plates, lacking the means to buy a 4K UHD player or a Netflix subscription—and that’s just for the people who check out movies and bring them back to their homes. Many library branches also have viewing stations for patrons but haven’t had the budgets to upgrade their own hardware in years. And with the long-ago demise of Blockbuster, the end of Netflix’s red envelopes and the more recent collapse

of Redbox, there literally isn't any other place people can "rent" movies. So why not "borrow" movies from their local public library, for free!

But if nobody's renting, buying or subscribing to your film at a library, how can you actually make money on public library DVD sales? First, it's worth understanding that almost every public library in North America buys its DVDs from a single source: Midwest Tape, an obscure company in the Toledo, Ohio, suburb of Holland. It's a jovial operation that started as a video store in the 1980s and has since almost entirely captured the physical media market for public libraries in the United States and Canada. So, if a public library has a budget for movies, which almost all of them do, they just look at Midwest Tape's weekly newsletter and order new DVDs/Blu-rays/4K UHDs from those listings. Midwest Tape, in turn, buys all those discs directly from either the studios or independent film distributors.

One look at the numbers explains why lo-fi DVDs still persist. Libraries essentially pay retail

prices to Midwest Tape, not saving much more than buying them on Amazon or directly from distributors. But Midwest Tape offers unique added value to libraries by streamlining ordering, cataloging and even providing security labels. A library might pay Midwest Tape \$12 for a DVD, \$24 for a Blu-ray or \$40 for a 4K of the same movie. If you're a librarian with a fixed acquisition budget, your goal is probably to get the greatest number of movies that most of your patrons can actually watch rather than the highest quality movies that fewer patrons can watch. At the end of the year, you've got to justify those expenses to your local city council or county supervisor who's approving your budget. So, if you've got a fixed monthly budget of \$1,200, wouldn't you rather buy 100 different DVDs than 50 Blu-rays or only 30 4Ks? And if you're the purchasing librarian for a large county or municipal library system that may have as many as 40 or more individual branches, it behooves you to spread the wealth and buy the lower-tech movies that you can spread across most of your branches.



It's true that most public libraries are tapering down their DVD collections, either starting to upgrade to higher-def physical formats or shifting entirely to streaming models. But at least for now, while it lasts, independent filmmakers are uniquely positioned to take advantage of this one particular market. If studios have already written off lower-priced DVDs, then independents are able to swoop in and capture the library market. Not answering to Wall Street investors and hedge funds, independents and their distributors can justify much smaller per-disc profit margins.

As a result, public library purchases can easily represent the lion's share of a film's total DVD sales. For *18½*, public libraries accounted for a whopping 75 percent of all DVD sales, according to statements from our distributor, MVD Entertainment. We might be the outlier, but *18½* has been a bona fide hit in the public library world. One big reason is that the film was featured in Midwest Tape's weekly PDF newsletter as one of five "staff picks" the week it went on sale. Their staff selected the film based largely on our good reviews, recognizable talent, PG-13 rating and subject matter that relates to an event people were familiar with: Watergate. Midwest Tape was able to sell well over 800 individual DVDs to libraries in more than 480 cities and towns in 45 states and five provinces, from Anchorage to Miami, Newfoundland to Vancouver. Many library systems bought multiple copies to distribute across many branches: 31 in Los Angeles County libraries, 34 throughout the Bay Area, 16 in St. Louis city and county libraries. You know what's cooler than getting a film into the Toronto International Film Festival? Knowing that your film is in a staggering 34 individual Toronto library branches! (In comparison, only nine Toronto branches have copies of *All the President's Men*, and that's been rereleased on DVD or Blu-ray about five times over the decades.)

To be sure, you and your investors won't get rich from library sales. But it isn't just about the money. Many rural and underserved urban communities don't have local film festivals, thriving art-house theaters or robust streaming options. For them, the local public library may be the *only* way patrons can even watch your independent film, and librarians know that and are happy to focus their limited resources on independent films.

The other upside is that by getting DVDs into libraries across North America, independent filmmakers are essentially crowdsourcing archived versions of their films throughout the United States and Canada. In 15 years, when your distributor goes bust, your hard drive plugs are obsolete and earthquakes and floods have taken out the coasts, you'll still be able to find a working, viewable copy of your film in the middle of Nebraska and Saskatchewan. Instead of paying a single facility to archive your

film, you're essentially getting paid by hundreds of archives. What's not to love about that?

IT'S ALL ACADEMIC

Unlike public libraries, academic libraries can't get rid of their DVD collections fast enough. College and university libraries that once held vast stacks of DVDs are largely forgoing them in favor of streaming models geared specifically toward the academic market. That said, a considerable number of academic librarians I spoke to are starting to have buyer's remorse about those decisions.

Academic libraries don't just buy the film itself. Instead, they also usually buy the accompanying "public performance rights," or PPR, which allow professors to legally show the film to their entire class all at once. Instead of paying \$12 for a DVD, most university libraries are accustomed to spending around \$300 for the DVD that includes PPR. So, while a public librarian blissfully can spend \$300 buying 25 different movies, a beleaguered academic librarian has to choose very carefully to buy a single film for the same price.

Consequently, most academic librarians limit their collections to films that a particular faculty member is requiring students to watch for a specific class. This might work out nicely for a niche documentary that dovetails with a commonly taught class at multiple schools. Professors happily assign docs for homework or, better yet, screen them in class and eat up half a period where they don't have to lecture. But for fiction narratives, it's much harder for professors to justify ordering them based on either the subject matter or the intrinsic value of the film. Even in film schools, most classroom assignments are for decades-old classics, rather than contemporary indies.

Meanwhile, the infrastructure for projecting films in college classrooms has changed dramatically in just the past few years. Ten years ago, a professor could walk into class, plug their MacBook into the classroom projector and slip a DVD into the built-in drive. Laptops with DVD players? Not so much anymore. Classrooms with hardwired DVD players started to crap out and weren't replaced due to dwindling budgets. It's become simpler and easier to just let the professor log onto either a library server, or better yet, an academic streaming company that licenses films to that school's library. A couple clicks on the professor's laptop, and voila! The students can watch *Battleship Potemkin* while the professor naps.

"Ten years ago, we still purchased hundreds of DVDs a year for films that were well reviewed or because they were just interesting," one librarian at a top ten film school told me. "That is how we amassed a collection of over 8,000 DVDs. We probably only purchase 10 to 20 DVDs a year now and only for faculty requests."

For a few years, many academic libraries hosted their own campuswide servers. Filmmakers and distributors could sell and upload .mov files directly to these libraries, which happily paid several hundred dollars for the PPR in perpetuity. Many would buy the DVD as well as streaming files. One documentary filmmaker I know made close to \$50,000 just selling these digital files and DVDs to libraries.

SWIMMING UPSTREAM

However, between the pandemic and changing streaming patterns, these internal library servers are becoming nearly as obsolete as DVD collections. Instead, most academic libraries are relying on academic-specific commercial streaming companies. As that film school librarian told me, "Now, instead of building collections 'just in case,' we acquire access 'just in time.'"

There have been several players in the academic streaming world for years, most of which focused on documentaries (like Academic Videos Online, a product offered by the database Alexander Street Press, and Docuseek), and some more geared toward second-run studio fare (like venerable 16mm

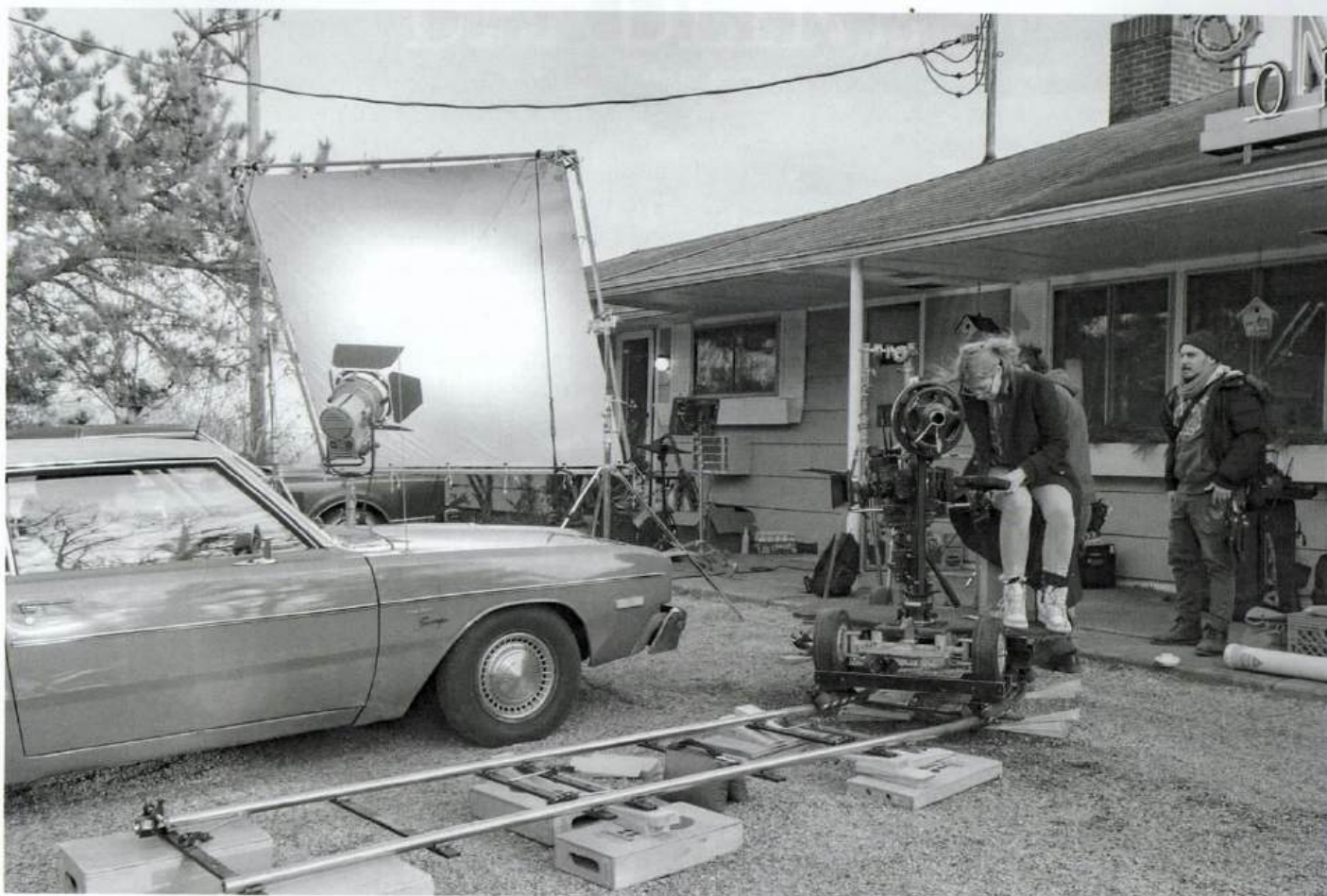
distributor Swank). To fill the void for narrative fiction films—older classics and newer indies, as well as many documentaries—Kanopy has quickly become the dominant streamer on campuses. Kanopy is now available in most North American college campuses and about a quarter of public libraries.

Meanwhile, Midwest Tape has Hoopla, the dominant player in the public library streaming space, available in more than 14,000 North American public libraries. Hoopla works similarly to Kanopy, and many of these public libraries have nonexclusive deals with both streamers. Hoopla and Kanopy also are expanding their global footprints, so you have to be careful in your contracts to stipulate clearly which territories you want covered (just North America, or other countries, too?). Like a commercial streamer, once you're a subscriber to either Hoopla or Kanopy, you can watch films on your own device easily and pretty much anywhere.

For academic libraries, Kanopy offers various ways for them to pay for public performance rights. One way or another, these "patron-driven acquisition" models mean that a library only pays for the rights to a film if a certain number of students or faculty watch it, then it resets back to zero and rolls over with each new semester. (When a modern librarian

Mind the gap...





embraces or bemoans “PDA,” this is what they’re likely referring to, not students smooching between the stacks.)

But some libraries are balking at these price structures. If three students watch a film, the library might get charged \$150 per semester. Some schools are specifically telling students and faculty they must get permission before watching a film, or that they need to “request access” and justify how or why they want to watch it. Likewise, some public libraries limit patrons to a certain number of Hoopla movies a month.

Another pitfall is endless license fees for a regularly taught film. If an Intro to Film class screens *The Godfather* every single semester, the library could be paying \$300 each year for the next 20 years. Compare that to a one-time \$300 perpetual PPR license for a DVD or downloadable file. Library costs for streaming films are ballooning just as their budgets are cratering. This dissatisfaction has led to a rise in more affordable options for academic libraries, like upstart streamer Projectr, which is being embraced by academic libraries (CalArts, Duke) and public ones (like the New York Public Library).

One other downside to academic streamers (not to mention commercial streamers like

Netflix) is that they don’t typically come with all the fun bonus features, behind-the-scenes documentaries and commentary tracks that a typical disc might have. For film students in particular, eager to find out how a given film got made, this is a big problem with the shift away from physical media. And for filmmakers, sharing the inside struggles of our process is often as much a part of our creative expression as the films themselves. On our *18½* DVD, for example, we have an almost two-hour-long BTS documentary called “Covid 18½: The Making of a Film in a Global Pandemic.” Naturally, it’s a half hour longer than our feature itself and, at least for now, it’s only available on our physical disc.

UNFAIR USE?

Some other academic librarians are taking a different tack by buying cheap DVDs but refusing to pay the three-figure public performance rights out of spite, principle and/or sloth. These librarians adhere to a theory that in-class screenings of films are tantamount to “fair use,” and they don’t need to pay the filmmakers for their hard work, labor and creativity. While many documentary filmmakers may use similar fair use doctrine for 10-second clips of network

news or studio films for their docs, I can't think of a filmmaker who'd willingly embrace the glorified piracy of entire features that some of these librarians advocate. It's one thing when a financially strapped community college serving first-generation students buys your DVD straight from Amazon for \$12, but when an Ivy League school with a \$21 billion endowment buys your cheapo DVD but happily sloughs off your \$300 public performance fee, it's downright insulting. If film schools and film studies programs want to keep charging exorbitant tuition to students and their parents, they should work with their own libraries to cultivate a more sustainable ecosystem for professional filmmakers.

For filmmakers, all this instability, competition, anger and resentment among academic librarians struggling to survive can still provide opportunities. Kanopy and Hoopla are happy to talk to individual filmmakers, although ultimately they prefer to make deals through established distributors (which might easily take 30 percent off the top or charge a couple thousand dollars for a set-up fee). Some filmmakers have made good money through Kanopy, but for others, just being listed on Kanopy doesn't actually mean people are watching the film or that money is changing hands. And if your educational or library streaming deals are through one of your distributors who's already paid your minimum guarantee or otherwise has creative or lax accounting, you might still never see a dime.

Remember, "educational" rights encompass one more thing: in-person live screenings on campuses. Many film departments, student clubs and other on-campus groups might well pay in the range of \$200 to \$500 for a screening fee, which you can often combine with guest lecture fees, flights, accommodation and meals. It usually takes a lot of planning to pull off these screenings, but according to filmmaker Betsy Kalin, campus tours for her documentary *East LA Interchange* provided a sustainable income for several years and eventually inspired her to become a film professor. Sometimes you can combine campus screenings with film festival screenings

in the same city and walk away from a film festival with money in your pocket. For *18½*, we've had about a dozen in-person educational screenings in the past few years, and because of them, we actually *made* money on our film festival tour.

But again, it's not all about the Benjamins. From Greenwich Village to Palo Alto, with stops in New Jersey, Indiana, Miami, St. Louis and Iowa, I happily can say that *18½* is already in the permanent collection at "top five" film schools, Ivy League institutions, upper-crust private universities, public state schools and smaller colleges across the country. As independent film producer Mike Ryan has said, sometimes "cultural capital" is more important than actual capital.

Where does that leave the savvy indie filmmaker? On balance, it still behooves you to keep your educational rights for yourself as best you can and for as long as you can. It's not rocket science, but it is a lot of time to try doing any of this yourself. I spent most of my Hot Librarian Summer sending three personalized emails apiece to 1,490 academic librarians at about 880 colleges and universities throughout North America (and yes, I had the dutiful help of a college intern). Just figuring out which librarian to contact is half the battle. At academic libraries, it's sometimes the "electronic resource librarian," sometimes the "liaison to the film department" or often someone with an entirely different title who has the authorization to buy your film.

While the conversion rates of DVD and streaming sales were only about one percent of all those emails, that still meant that we netted more money on academic sales than on all those 800 public library DVD sales put together. And for many of those other 99 percent of librarians who didn't buy the DVD or streaming file, they were still valuable conversations to have. Now, when Kanopy does release our film (which I'm happy to say will start in mid-December), I'll have a handy-dandy list of librarians to contact whom I know are eager to order *18½* that way. If there's one thing I've learned, be kind to your neighborhood librarian!

Images: John Nagaro (pg. 125, left, and 127), Willa Fitzgerald (pg. 125, right) and Catherine Curtin (pg. 126) in *18½*, key art for the film (pg. 130) and an on-set image (pg. 131), all courtesy of Waterbug Eater Films. Bettleship Potemkin (pg. 128), courtesy of Kino Lorber.

Dan Mirvish is a filmmaker, author, educator and cofounder of the Slamdance Film Festival. For more info on his film *18½* and how to buy or borrow the DVD from public and academic libraries, go to www.18andahalfmovie.com.