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Presents

# BAGHEAD

Directed and Written by  
THE DUPLASS BROTHERS

(84 mins, USA, 2008)

Distribution

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**CAST**

Chad .....STEVE ZISSIS  
Matt .....ROSS PARTRIDGE  
Michelle .....GRETA GERWIG  
Catherine.....ELISE MULLER

**FILMMAKERS**

Directed, Written and Produced by....JAY DUPLASS  
.....MARK DUPLASS  
Producer .....JOHN BRYANT  
Co-Producer .....JEN TRACY DUPLASS  
Editor.....JAY DEUBY  
Original Music .....J SCOTT HOWARD  
Special Effects .....R. ZANE RUTLEDGE  
Sound Mix.....BYRON WESTBROOK  
Sound Mix.....GENE PARK

## DIRECTORS STATEMENT

In 1980, the New Orleans Saints were well on their way to another losing season. Some of the fans were losing hope and gaining shame. They stopped going to the games for fear of being seen as a blindly optimistic fool and ridiculed at work the next day. Some fans, however, would not abandon their beloved home team. Sure, they were embarrassed and ashamed, but they were loyal. They stayed. They believed. But, they needed something to hide their faces. Something cheap, something readily available. Something brown and crinkly, where the eyes and mouth could easily be punched out. Now, this story doesn't really have anything to do with our movie, but it kinda does. When one looks out over a sea of people in a major NFL stadium wearing bags on their heads, it's a bit hard to process. It's definitely a funny sight, but in the right light, it's kind of terrifying, too. That very dichotomy was exactly what we wanted to explore with Baghead.

## SYNOPSIS

While the Duplass Brothers were shooting their last feature film *The Puffy Chair*, a crew member raised the question "what's the scariest thing you can think of?" Someone immediately said "a guy with a bag on his head staring into your window." Some agreed, but some thought it was downright ridiculous and, if anything, funny (but definitely not scary). Thus, BAGHEAD was born, an attempt to take the absurdly low-concept idea of a "guy with a bag on his head" and make a funny, truthful, endearing film that, maybe, just maybe, was a little bit scary, too.

## **BAGHEAD: BACKGROUND**

Ever wonder about those who crowd (or maybe thinly populate) the seats at unheralded film festivals? The ones whose outstretched hands scream “pick me!” at every post-screening Q&A? And who scheme to make it past the bouncer at the ‘exclusive’ premiere party, only to discover a room filled with the Chamber of Commerce and a \$3 Bud special?

During the festival tour for their much-adored lo-fi first film *The Puffy Chair*, the Duplass brothers apparently got to meet a lot of these folks... and clearly developed a profound fondness for them.

With apologies to Diablo Cody, they also probably watched *The Blair Witch Project* on Starz about a thousand times.

But it says a lot about their second feature, *Baghead*, that it’s the first movie about would-be *auteurs* caught in the woods and not quite alone to be invited to Sundance in a very long time.

With *Badhead*, the Duplass brothers hand a *Scooby-Doo* narrative, which advances various pursuits of sex alongside a half-baked bid for instant fame, over to a quartet of incredibly naturalistic actors playing, well, actors.

In the gentle, patient hands of the Duplass Brothers, who managed to elicit genuine emotion from the vision of a burning La-Z-Boy recliner, the audience is invited to develop an overpowering affection for these desperate dreamers too.

## **BAGHEAD: ABOUT THE PRODUCTION**

### *The Meat:*

So what would this film, at its core, actually be about? Jay and Mark spent almost 2 years on the festival circuit promoting *The Puffy Chair*. During this time, they were confronted over and over again with one consistent element... desperate actors. Those poor, slightly pathetic characters always waiting outside in the cold to get into a party that doesn't want them. The ones who approach you as if you've been best friends for years, and hand you a bulky DVD with their "reel" and poorly designed business card. At first, Jay and Mark were (like everyone) disgusted and turned off by these actors. But, over the course of time, the Duplass Brothers had a change of heart and fell in love with the desperate actor (after all, the desperate filmmaker is a not-so-distant cousin of the desperate actor). Although highly tragic, these people showed enormous persistence. Almost like the classic hero structure... they prepare for a battle, knowing they are going to lose, but they go in anyway. Mark and Jay eventually found the humor and heart there that would form the backbone of the characters in *Baghead*. Four desperate actors head off into the woods to write the next great American screenplay, without a clue as to how to get it done. The perfect human vehicles for their unique blend of tragicomedy.

### *The Fixings:*

All of the roles were cast with unknown actors and, in most cases, the parts were written specifically for the cast members. There's Matt, the hottie Type-A group leader. Chad, is Matt's chubby best friend and sidekick. He is crushing hard on Michelle, the young mid-western transplant new to LA (though she may be more interested in Matt). And of course, there's Catherine... the painfully desperate "pushing 40" actress who wants to solidify her on again/off again relationship with Matt before she loses him to a younger girl.

### *The Bun:*

Although Jay and Mark had an offer from a major studio to make *Baghead* within the system, they chose to make it they way they knew best. Guerilla style. The entire production process was as stripped down as possible. The cast and crew numbered under ten people. Jay held the HD camera and Mark held the boom. The film was shot over the course of 3 weeks in the woods, everyone bunking together in the very locations they shot in. Actors carried lights, lighting guys offered script advice, and directors cooked dinner. Like *Cassavetes*, it was a true family-style collaboration.

### *Time to eat:*

The filming process was the same they used on *The Puffy Chair*. In order to get the most spontaneous, natural performances possible, there would be no rehearsals and no lighting set-up changes. Scenes would begin and run all the way through to the end without stopping. And, though they did work from a tightly structured screenplay, the actors had

the freedom to go anywhere and say anything they wanted inside of a given scene. Jay and Mark would follow the cast around like a documentary crew, catching it all on the fly. About 30-40% of what ended up in the film came from first takes, where the real surprises happened and the actors reacted accordingly.

*Digestion:*

The edit took about a year. Jay Deuby is the secret mastermind behind the Duplass Brothers movies. He makes them look good by sifting through the somewhat chaotic footage and putting together 90 minutes that make sense.

## OTHER NOTES ON BAGHEAD

Mark Duplass notes in the DVD extras for the first feature film *The Puffy Chair* that the main thing to focus on when you are making a film is storytelling. “It doesn’t matter if you have \$15,000 or \$15 billion, just point the camera, get your friends together and make a movie.”

This is exactly what the characters in their latest film *Baghead*, about four actor friends who take matters into their own hands and hole themselves up in a Big Bear cabin to write a movie that will, of course, star *them*, seem to do through the magic of third person cinema.

The Duplass’s use of naturalistic performances and improvisation to drive the story is reminiscent of the films of John Cassavetes filtered through the Lexapro® optimism of Mumblecore.<sup>1</sup>

Like Casavetes, the Duplass bros. make great use of an actress (Greta Gerwig) who, like Gena Rowlands, will likely be thought of years from now as the face of this particular cinema movement.

However, while acknowledging the movement’s influences on their work, the Duplass brothers also point out that a) their films tend to embrace genre a little more than those of the ‘Core and b) their characters don’t mumble as much.

“Our first feature film, *The Puffy Chair*, had a certain aesthetic that made it similar to a lot of the films in the movement. The characters in that film were almost archetypical Mumblecore kids,” Jay Duplass says.

“We try to keep our narratives pretty tight,” adds Mark, who starred opposite Gerwig in the first act of *Hannah Takes the Stairs* (he only got a little naked).

“We hire actors, Greta included, who are smart and funny and sweet and know how to bring real things to the roles (and make us look like good writers, *seriously*). So, when the actors show up on set, we encourage them to re-say the lines we’ve written however they please. Our unofficial motto, basically, is ‘say whatever you want as long as it feels real.’”

And although *Baghead* can be said to skewer aspiring *auteurs*, the festival mill, and the very films themselves, the Duplass brothers clearly possess a deep vein of empathy for the culture and those who populate it, to the degree that they are willing to share their

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<sup>1</sup> Mumblecore is primarily characterized by ultra-low budget production (often employing digital video cameras), a focus on personal relationships between twenty-somethings, improvised scripts, and non-professional actors. Other young filmmakers who are often considered core-mumblecorers are Andrew Bujalski (*Funny Ha Ha*), Aaron Katz (*Quiet City*), and Joe Swanberg (*Hannah Takes the Stairs*).

darkest film festival moment when in 2003, when they “almost” posed as David Arquette and Tim Blake Nelson to get into a party at Sundance.

“We had a short there and found our access to the cool parties was a bit limited,” recalls Jay. “We waited outside this one party for forty minutes, preparing our characters, and then chickened out and went home. It was so lame.”

“We created the characters in *Baghead* because we *know* these people really well, too well,” concludes Mark. “A desperate actor is a strange, terrible, beautiful, funny, tragic thing. And, we ultimately love the people in *Baghead*, as screwed up as they are.”

# # #

## ABOUT THE CAST

**ROSS PARTRIDGE (Matt)** has film credits that include Steven Spielberg's *the Lost World, Black and White* with Gina Gershon, *Amityville Horror* with Terry O'Quinn and *The Wedding Murders* with Canadian director Bashar Shibib. Television credits include: "NYPD Blue," "CSI," "Law and Order," "Hudson Street," "Quantum Leap" and "The Net." In addition, Ross wrote and directed the feature film *Interstate 84* starring Kevin Dillon and Clifton James, and executive produced by Kevin Spacey. He was also a producer on the award winning documentary film *Uncle Frank* and the PBS documentary *America Rebuilds*.

**STEVE ZISSIS (Chad)** has been part of numerous plays and independent films over the years. Most notably, he starred in the Duplass Brothers' *The Intervention* which won the Silver Bear and Teddy Awards at the 2005 Berlin Film Festival and the Grand Jury Prize at the 2006 Gen Art Film Festival in New York City. He currently resides in Los Angeles.

**GRETA GERWIG (Michelle)** appeared in Joe Swanberg's second feature film, *LOL*, and is excited to work with him again, this time outside of a cell phone. She will soon star in Swanberg's upcoming *Nights and Weekends*. An accomplished playwright, Greta has had her works produced at the Minor Latham Playhouse, the Columbia University Graduate School of the Arts, the Lion Theatre at Theatre Row Studios and the Dorset Playhouse. During the summer of 2006, she was a writer-in-residence at the Vassar College and New York Stage & Film's Powerhouse Theater Festival. Greta is a graduate of Barnard College, Columbia University, where she studied English and philosophy.

**ELISE MULLER (Catherine)** grew up on Chicago's north shore, where she realized her love for performing while at a summer acting camp when she was nine years old. Her passion for acting led her to the University of Arizona where she obtained her B.F.A. in Acting/Directing. Soon after, Elise made the transition to Los Angeles where she has had numerous roles in television and feature films. Recent film credits include the Sci-Fi Original Movie *Raging Sharks*, *Hammerhead* (opposite William Forsythe), and *Trapped In Perfection*. Elise currently resides in Southern California, where she is represented by Daniel Hoff Agency.

## ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

**MARK AND JAY DUPLASS (DIRECTORS)** first made a name for themselves with a string of award-winning short films, including *This is John* and *Scrapple*, which each premiered at Sundance, in 2003 and 2004, respectively. Recently, they made *The Puffy Chair* one of the breakout hits from the 2005 Sundance Film Festival. The film won the Audience Award at SXSW 2005 and was nominated for two Independent Spirit Awards. It was released theatrically by Roadside Attractions and Netflix in 2006 and is now available on DVD and Showtime. The Duplass Brothers are currently writing and directing a slate of films for both Universal and Fox Searchlight and have sold a television show co-produced with The Weitz Brothers to NBC.

**JAY DEUBY, EDITOR** has worked with the Duplass brothers for several years now. *BAGHEAD* is the second feature and fourth film he's edited that has been accepted to Sundance. Originally from Detroit, Jay now lives in Los Angeles with his wife and two dogs, where he lies awake nights worrying about his gigantic mortgages.

**JOHN BRYANT, PRODUCER** is a writer/director/producer based out of Austin, TX. His favorite cartoon growing up was "Thundercats." He loves the movie *Commando*. Once, he managed to continuously belch the alphabet all the way up to the letter "V" . . . only 4 letters shy of achieving his special life goal.