A close-up, high-contrast photograph of a man and a woman. The man is in the foreground, shown in profile, looking towards the right. He has dark hair and a small hoop earring. The woman is behind him, her face partially visible, looking towards the camera. The lighting is dramatic, with deep shadows and bright highlights. The overall mood is somber and intense.

THE WORST PRISONS
ARE THE ONES
WE CREATE FOR
OURSELVES.

tiff. toronto
international
film festival®
OFFICIAL SELECTION 2012

CONNOR JESSUP ALEXIA FAST MICHAEL BUIE

BLACKBIRD



BLACKBIRD

Logline:

A rebellious teenager, falsely accused of planning a school massacre, must survive a harrowing conflict with a prison gang leader while he attempts to prove his innocence to the community and those close to him.

Synopsis (Long):

In BLACKBIRD, sixteen year-old Sean Randall is in a constant state of war with the world around him. Recently settled in the small town of Eastport to live with his estranged father Ricky, Sean's fierce rebel persona immediately sets him at odds with the community.

An unlikely bond forms between Sean and a preppy teenage girl named Deanna Roy, who admires Sean and secretly aches to live a different life. Deanna's boyfriend Cory Simms is deeply threatened by Sean and Deanna's friendship, resulting in a violent confrontation. Seeking to protect himself, Sean issues an off-handed death threat – and is swiftly arrested.

When the police raid Sean's home, they find rifles, shotguns, knives and ammunition – all property of Ricky, an avid hunter. They also find a supposed “revenge plan” listing over twenty names of people who have tormented Sean, a story written in a fit of anger and long forgotten about – until now. The authorities and the media proclaim another Columbine has been narrowly averted. Sean maintains his innocence while Deanna, fearful of the repercussions, remains quiet.

Denied bail, Sean must endure Waterville, one of the toughest youth prisons in the country. Faced with bureaucratic delays and escalating abuse from Trevor, a sadistic and troubled youth in the same cellblock, Sean relents to the advice of his lawyer and pleads guilty to get released on time served. Once released, Sean is ordered to stay away from most kids in town, including Deanna. He changes his clothes, his disposition, everything that he can to fit in and be a “normal” part of society, but is permanently branded a psychopath. Sean quickly discovers the lengths a small town will go to keep this label stamped upon him.

However much he changes his outward appearance, Sean cannot alter his feelings for Deanna. Despite the danger, Sean begins to see Deanna again, who remains haunted by her role in Sean's imprisonment. When Deanna's father discovers Sean and Deanna's rekindled relationship, he ensnares Sean in a trap, and soon Sean faces a terrifying return to Waterville and an impending crucifixion in the public courts.

But Sean now understands the power of speaking his own truth, and not bending to the will of those who seek to intimidate and change others. In confronting Trevor and his gang within Waterville, as well as a justice system skewed by fear and prejudice, Sean discovers that redemption lies not in fitting in at all costs, but in summoning the courage to speak out, and stand up for who he really is.

BLACKBIRD

Synopsis (Short):

BLACKBIRD is a film about a troubled teen, Sean Randall, who is falsely accused of planning a Columbine shooting scenario. It all begins when an unlikely bond forms between Sean (Connor Jessup) and a prep-teenage girl named Deanna Roy (Alexia Fast). Deanna's boyfriend is deeply threatened by Sean and Deanna's friendship, resulting in a violent confrontation. Seeking to protect himself, Sean issues a death threat online, and is swiftly arrested. When the police raid Sean's home, they find rifles, shotguns, knives and ammunition – all property of Sean's father Ricky (Michael Buie), an avid hunter. They also find a supposed "revenge plan" targeting over twenty people who have tormented Sean. The authorities and the media proclaim another Columbine situation has been narrowly averted, and soon Sean faces a terrifying imprisonment in a youth detention facility. Sean's only hope is to overcome his dark image, and prove his innocence to Deanna and to his community.

BLACKBIRD is a film that explores the power, and the danger, of social media and cyber-bullying, while showing that the worst prisons are often the ones we create for ourselves.

DAVID MILLER, *Producer* | A71 Productions | +1 416.778.5571 x241 | miller@agency71.com
MARC ALMON, *Producer* | Story Engine Pictures | +1 902.442.1715 | marc@storyenginepictures.com

www.blackbirdthefilm.com

BLACKBIRD

TEAM:

JASON BUXTON - WRITER / DIRECTOR

Jason Buxton is a writer-director with over twenty years experience in the film and television industry. His films focus on themes of identity, loss, and isolation. His first short, A FRESH START was shown at various international festivals, including the Toronto International and Clermont-Ferrand. THE GARDEN premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival, and THE DRAWING has played in over a dozen international festivals. An accomplished cinematographer, Buxton has shot numerous short and mid-length narratives, most notably the Gemini-nominated TUCKED INTO BEDLAM. BLACKBIRD is his first feature film.

Prior to making films, Buxton worked behind the scenes as a camera assistant, where he learned the craft observing many established filmmakers at work, including James Cameron on TITANIC and Lasse Hallström on THE SHIPPING NEWS.

Buxton is currently developing two projects, the feature length comedy ORDINARY JOE and the dramatic feature BLOOD. Buxton studied film at Simon Fraser University and is a BFA graduate of the Nova Scotia College of Art & Design.

MARC ALMON - PRODUCER

Marc Almon is a producer based in Halifax, Nova Scotia, and founder of the boutique production company Story Engine Pictures. An award-winning writer and director, Almon is focused on producing exceptional feature films and narrative web content by nurturing the work of great storytellers in the service of entertaining and inspiring audiences.

Almon developed and produced the feature film BLACKBIRD (Official Selection of the 2012 Toronto International Film Festival). Almon has written, directed and produced numerous short films including THE WAKE OF CALUM MACLEOD and D'UNE RIVE À L'AUTRE, which have screened at over forty international film festivals, and have aired on CBC, Global, BBC, Bravo! and the Sundance Channel. Marc has been nominated for a Genie Award for Best Live Action Short Film, won the National Screen Institute Drama Prize, and was a finalist for TIFF's Pitch This! competition.

Almon is set to produce the comedy feature A GOOD GIRL and webseries GAMERZ in 2013, and has three other features in development. He is a graduate of the University of King's College and Norman Jewison's Canadian Film Centre.

BLACKBIRD

DAVID MILLER - PRODUCER

David Miller is an internationally established producer, who has overseen independent productions both within Canada and abroad.

Miller has garnered numerous international awards and received a 2009 Genie nomination for Best Motion Picture for the multi-award winning feature film AMAL (by Richie Mehta). The film has garnered more than twenty awards – ranging from Best Feature Film at the Santa Barbara International Film Festival to Best Feature at the Indian Film Festival of Los Angeles to the Audience Award at the AFI Dallas Film Festival.

Miller has recently completed three feature films – KIVALINA VS EXXON (Best Documentary, Whistler Film Festival), BILLY BATES (Jennifer DeLia & Julie Pacino) and Jason Buxton's BLACKBIRD (Official Selection, Toronto International Film Festival) – and is in post-production on SIDHARTH (Richie Mehta) and pre-production on IT WAS YOU CHARLIE (Emmanuel Shirinian). Miller is also currently in development on a number of feature films including BASEBALLISSIMO (written by Jay Baruchel & Jesse Chabot), MY FOOLISH HEART (Emmanuel Shirinian), BURDEN (Hubert Davis) BROBOTS (Skyfarm Entertainment), and two television series.

Miller also served as the Director of Creative & Business Development at Channel Zero Inc. (home of Movieola—The Short Film Channel, Silver Screen Classics and Quat Media Distribution) and wrote and produced the 18th Annual Gemini Awards (Night 1 and 2). Miller also worked in Public Relations for the National Film Board of Canada, the Academy of Canadian Cinema, and freelanced on various films. During his time at the NFB Miller achieved success leading the organization's 2004 Oscar® campaign, where the NFB received their 67 and 68 Academy Award® nominations and an Oscar® for the film RYAN.

David Miller is a standing member of the Canadian Media Producers Association (CMPA), sits on the CMPA Feature Film Committee. In addition, Miller is partner in Agency 71 inc., a North American based marketing and branding company in Toronto, Canada, and resides on the Board of Directors for Channel Zero Inc. (a digital and cable broadcaster).

BLACKBIRD

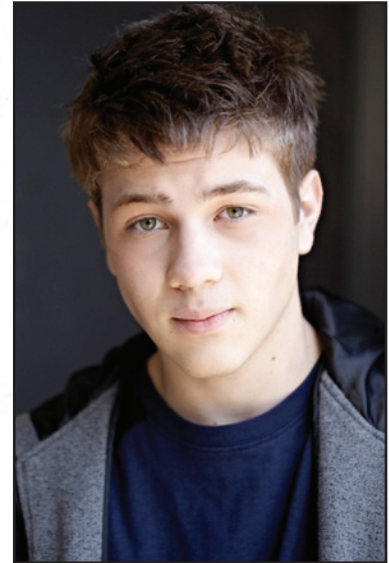
CAST:

CONNOR JESSUP (SEAN RANDALL)

Connor Jessup stars on Steven Spielberg's sci-fi drama series FALLING SKIES on TNT. Opening in the chaotic aftermath of an alien attack that has left most of the world completely incapacitated, Jessup plays Noah Wyle's kidnapped son, 'Ben Mason.' Currently in its second season with a strong character arc, 'Ben' is now rescued and at a place where humans and aliens intersect, unsure of which direction to take. Critics have touted Jessup's performance this year as "masterful."

Writer, producer, director and actor Jessup won the "Rising Star" Award at the 2012 Toronto International Film Festival and will next star on the big screen as the lead role in the independent film BLACKBIRD at TIFF this year, in which he plays 'Sean Randall,' an angry and troubled teenage boy who is wrongfully accused of and arrested for a crime that he did not commit. Randall finds himself in a juvenile detention facility where he realizes a change must be made if he is to survive.

Jessup is best known for his leading role in the Discovery Kids TV series "Saddle Club" in which he played Simon Atherton, a thirteen-year-old computer geek.



Jessup credits his love for the dramatic arts and entertainment industry to his involvement with local Youth Theater growing up: his skills extend far beyond the scope of acting on the big or small screen as this teenage prodigy has been writing, directing, producing, and editing films from the tender age of eleven.

His producing credits include the independent film AMY GEORGE, which won the Spirit Award at the Brooklyn International Film Festival in 2011, and was shown at both the Toronto and Wisconsin International Film Festivals. The independent film, shot in the summer of 2010, follows a thirteen-year-old boy's quest to become an artist, whose dreams are halted because he believes his mundane life has left him unprepared to make his dream a reality. After reading a book on what it takes to become a true artist, this seemingly unlikable boy finds himself in a life of risk, ecstasy, wilderness, and women.

Jessup also completed the short film SOMETHING, in which he wrote, directed, produced, and edited. SOMETHING follows 10 year old Jack as he struggles to find beauty in life after he survives the collapse of the human existence. He also wrote, directed, and produced the short film, I DON'T HURT ANYMORE!, in addition to the play Pushing Normal, in which he received the 'Award of Distinction' for the script at the 2010 Sears Drama Festival.

An avid writer, reader, and environmentalist, Jessup was also the youngest student to ever participate in the scientific expedition to the Arctic with Students on Ice at just 13 years old. Academics have always played an important part of Jessup's life as he has managed to maintain a 98% grade point average throughout his high school career, making him the top student in his school. Jessup is an insatiable film buff and lover of all things cinema, both classic and contemporary; when not writing, acting, or producing, Jessup enjoys playing squash, horseback riding, golf, skiing, scuba diving, chess and debate. Jessup currently resides in Toronto.

DAVID MILLER, *Producer* | A71 Productions | +1 416.778.5571 x241 | miller@agency71.com
MARC ALMON, *Producer* | Story Engine Pictures | +1 902.442.1715 | marc@storyenginepictures.com

www.blackbirdthefilm.com

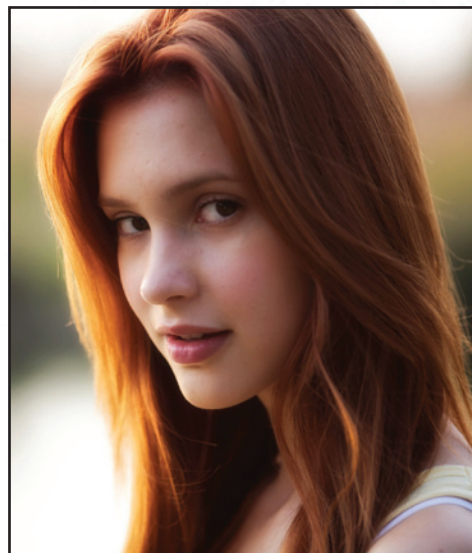
BLACKBIRD

ALEXIA FAST (DEANNA ROY)

Actress Alexia Fast is quickly making a strong impression as a rising star in the young Hollywood community.

Fast will be seen next in the Paramount feature, JACK REACHER, releasing December 21st. She plays "Sandy," a pretty and seductive young siren, who is involved in setting up "Jack Reacher," played by Tom Cruise. She also stars in the indie film, BLACKBIRD, opposite "Falling Skies" Connor Jessup, which will have its world premiere at the 2012 Toronto Film Festival.

Fast last appeared in Carl Bessai's indie feature REPEATERS with Dustin Milligan and Amanda Crew. Other film credits include the indie western HUNGRY HILLS, with Kier Gilchrist, which premiered at the 2009 Toronto International Film Festival, and the indie feature HELEN, with Ashley Judd, which follows a manic-depressive woman and her family, and premiered at the 2009 Sundance Film Festival. Fast also starred in TRIPLE DOG with Brittany Robertson and Scout Taylor Compton, KICKIN' IT OLD SKOOL with Jamie Kennedy, the indie thriller PAST TENSE, and FIDO with Carrie Anne Moss.



In television, Fast recently guest starred as the recurring character "Eva" on CW's SECRET CIRCLE. She has starred in a number of television movies including THE 19TH WIFE for Sony Pictures Television, Syfy's TIN MAN with Zooey Deschanel and Richard Dreyfus, A&E's WILDFIRES, Nickelodeon's GYM TEACHER with Christopher Meloni and TMN's FAKERS. She has also appeared as a series regular on MTV's KAYA with Cory Monteith, in a leading role in the CBC pilot THE CULT, and has had guest starring roles on USA's THE 4400, CBS's FLASHPOINT and the CW's SUPERNATURAL.

Fast's impressive body of work has garnered her a number of Leo Award nominations and wins, including a win in 2007 for "Best Lead Actor in a Feature Film" for PAST TENSE, a win in 2011 for "Best Supporting Actor in a Feature Film" for REPEATERS, and a nomination in 2009 for "Best Supporting Performance by a Female in a Feature Length Drama" on behalf of HELEN.

Fast began her career in film at the age of 7, when she wrote, directed and starred in the short film, THE RED BRIDGE, which premiered at the 2002 Atlantic Film Festival, and Reel to Reel film Festival. Fast currently resides in Los Angeles.

DAVID MILLER, *Producer* | A71 Productions | +1 416.778.5571 x241 | miller@agency71.com
MARC ALMON, *Producer* | Story Engine Pictures | +1 902.442.1715 | marc@storyenginepictures.com

www.blackbirdthefilm.com

BLACKBIRD

MIKE BUIE (RICKY RANDALL)

Michael was born in Kitchener, Ontario yet started his film and television career in Vancouver where he starred and guest starred in numerous MOWs and series including FOR THE LOVE OF NANCY, MILLENNIUM, THE OUTER LIMITS, MADISON, WONDERFALLS and THIS IS WONDERLAND. Later in television, he was a series lead in the TNT cop drama HARD TIME opposite Charles Durning and Burt Reynolds. Most recently, he guest starred on NBC's PRIME SUSPECT and CBS's HAWAII FIVE-O as a psychotic killer.

His first big break in film happened when he starred opposite Russell Crowe in the hockey film MYSTERY, ALASKA directed by Jay Roach as Connor Banks, the best player in town. He worked opposite Crowe again, this time as his brother Mick Brennan in the Paul Haggis thrilling drama THE NEXT THREE DAYS also starring Elizabeth Banks, Liam Neeson with Brian Dennehy as their father. Other films include CEDAR RAPIDS (d. Miguel Arteta) with Ed Helms and John C Reilly, Nantucket based ROPEWALK and Bradley Buecker's debut film MOON GARDEN.

Recently, Michael directed the "If You Wanna Start Again" video for The Trews. Also, he has written and produced THE MASSEY PACT to be shot in early 2013.

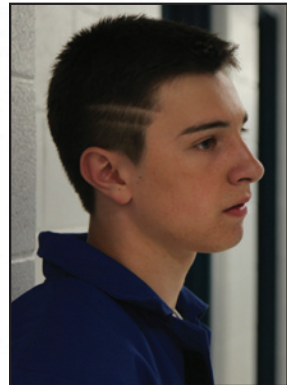
Michael plays Ricky Randall in the upcoming release BLACKBIRD, premiering at TIFF 2012.



ALEX OZEROV (TREVOR)

Alex Ozerov is a Canadian actor in Toronto, Ontario. He originated from Russia and came to Canada in 2004. During his school years he began taking drama, and in 2006 started studying acting for film and TV with actor/director Walter Alza (GET RICH OR DIE TRYIN') in the Alza Acting Studio, Toronto. As the youngest one attending the studio, Ozerov's passion for the craft allowed him to land numerous roles at a young age, including TRANSPORTER, the television movie SALEM FALLS, based on the best selling novel and featuring James Van Der Beek, and the Disney Channel show WHAT'S UP WARTHOGS.

Ozerov makes his film debut in Jason Buxton's BLACKBIRD, playing the lead antagonist, Trevor. BLACKBIRD will make its world premiere at the 2012 Toronto International Film Festival.



TANYA CLARKE (PAULA RANDALL)

Tanya Clarke was raised in Ottawa, Canada. She spent many years in New York City performing on Broadway, off-Broadway and regional stages.

Since her transition to the west coast, her recent TV credits include: the upcoming CBC pilot LEILAH AND JEN, AMERICAN HORROR STORY, GLEE, HAWAII 5-0, DEFENDERS, CSI MIAMI, NCIS L.A., HEARTLAND. Film credits include: the upcoming features THRIFTSTORE COWBOY and BLACKBIRD. She also played in REPO MEN opposite Jude Law, A BEAUTIFUL MIND and TENDERNESS opposite Russell Crowe, THE LAST GAMBLE, DELIVERY METHOD, THE BEST THIEF IN THE WORLD (Sundance Film Fest.).

She received a Best Actress Nomination at Method Fest Independent Film Festival ('Delivery Method') & Best Actress Nomination at New York City International Film Festival ('The Last Gamble').



BLACKBIRD

DIRECTOR NOTES

The idea for BLACKBIRD dates back to 2005 when I was researching a documentary about online death threats, and how the teenagers making these threats were perceived and often persecuted by the media and their communities before any indicting evidence came to light. The documentary didn't go forward, but these stories stayed with me. It was easy to put myself in the shoes of these teens. When I was a teenager death threats were commonplace, often made from the window of a passing car. Now they are made online and become computer forensic evidence. These teenagers are interrogated for their propensity toward reactivity – a character trait well suited in the formation of dramatic construction. And so SEAN RANDALL was born, a post-punk Goth with a provocative nature, a teenager paradoxically wanting to stand out and be left alone. It was important not to create too large a victim, to show a teenager who participates in his own misperception so that he can learn from the experience. Audience sympathy would be easily attained in the scenario of the wrongfully accused, and this gave me certain liberties to push the character and the narrative further, to explore youth prison culture and at risk youth.

I was able to keep Sean somewhat unsympathetic on the page because I knew that casting an actual sixteen year old in the role would boost audience identification the instant that young face hits the screen. Sean is in every scene (and almost every shot!), so I knew the film would sink or swim on the strength of this central performance. After an extensive search across the country, it became clear to me that Connor Jessup wasn't just my first choice, he was my only choice. Yet Connor was not the Sean I wrote. He was a gentler, more passive Sean, but I handed the role over to him with eyes wide open. He would change the film that ran in my head, but he would change it for the better.

Alexia Fast was attached to play Deanna Roy prior to greenlight. Due to budget restraints I was unable to get her and Connor together in the same room for a screen test, so casting them as romantic leads opposite each other was an act of blind faith. But I got lucky – their on-screen chemistry is palpable, and because of this and because of Alexia's sublime performance as an intelligent but confused teenager, her presence is felt during her long absence in the middle section of the film. Alexia's natural charm and sincerity imbue every frame she's in, and what we're left with is an indelible portrait of a teenage girl rarely depicted on film.

My extensive cross-country search for a young actor to play Sean's chief antagonist, prison bad boy Trevor, ended the minute Alex Ozerov walked into the audition room. Alex is raw, emotionally on fire – a natural talent. I was discovering what people will be seeing for years to come: that rare breed of actor who just has it, that special quality that can't be taught. Alex has the ability to say one thing and convey another. The character he evokes is alive, immediate, and utterly captivating. With the flick of a switch, Alex's Trevor goes from danger and menace to open and vulnerable, his fear cloaked in an intensity that lights up the screen.

To round out my main cast, I chose LA-based Canadian actor Michael Buie to play Ricky, Sean's father. Ricky is a broken man who walks in shadows. The journey to reconnect with his son and to find a way to stand up for him, needed to be subtle and nuanced. Michael has a remarkable ability to disappear into his roles. We need to see the man, not the actor, and Michael achieved just that, embodying the complexities of Ricky the everyman – tough and intimidating on one hand, scared and intimidated on the other.

DAVID MILLER, *Producer* | A71 Productions | +1 416.778.5571 x241 | miller@agency71.com
MARC ALMON, *Producer* | Story Engine Pictures | +1 902.442.1715 | marc@storyenginepictures.com

www.blackbirdthefilm.com

BLACKBIRD

I approached my search for creative collaborators much the same way I approached the casting of the film – extensively and exhaustively. I didn't just want technicians and yes men. I wanted people who connected with the story and the characters. And above all, I wanted innovators, people who operate from their own instincts and not from the current trends and flavours of the day. For cinematography I engaged Montreal-based Stephanie Weber Biron, best known for her work with writer-director Xavier Dolan. Stephanie is tireless and passionate, bringing an energy to the set that is infective and inspiring. Together we set-out to establish a shooting methodology that would plunge the spectator into the emotional perspective of our lead character Sean. This meant placing the camera at the heart of the action, never removed and never safe, but bearing in on Sean, intimate and imposing. It was also important, given our small budget, to preserve the quality of the film by limiting set-ups, choosing to cover many scenes with just one shot, often tracking and handheld, in an authoritative style that breaths with the character.

I worked closely with veteran production designer Bill Fleming in designing a world that was cohesive and specific. Not an easy task on a low budget. But Bill's easy-going presence, his natural curiosity in the world, and his ability to see solutions where others would see problems, were essential qualities that made my job a lot easier in the thick of it. The majority of our locations were found, spaces augmented effectively and efficiently, but the true reflection of Bill's talents were in his solitary confinement set he built on a shoe-string, a remarkably authentic, "real" space that blended seamlessly into the world.

For editing I brought on Kimberlee McTaggart, best known for her Gemini-award winning work on the TMN series Call Me Fitz. Although Kim brings twenty years experience to the table, Blackbird was her first feature film. But drama is drama, and Kim has an innate ability to cut for the emotion of the given moment. In this way, she's an actor's best friend, and deservedly so – the way she shapes and sculpts the performances in the film lifts the material to a higher level.

I could not have asked for a better experience making my first feature film. From top to bottom, I was surrounded by true professionals and artists. The director may steer the ship, but the success of a film comes down to its occupants. When resources are tight, it becomes that much more important for the team to be on the same page, making the same movie. Without exception this was my experience in making Blackbird.

- Jason Buxton, Director BLACKBIRD

DAVID MILLER, *Producer* | A71 Productions | +1 416.778.5571 x241 | miller@agency71.com
MARC ALMON, *Producer* | Story Engine Pictures | +1 902.442.1715 | marc@storyenginepictures.com

www.blackbirdthefilm.com

BLACKBIRD

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

DAVID MILLER, *Producer*
A71 Productions
+1 416.778.5571 x241 | miller@agency71.com

MARC ALMON, *Producer*
Story Engine Pictures
+1 902.442.1715 | marc@storyenginepictures.com



FOR DOMESTIC SALES:

DAVID MILLER, A71 Entertainment
+1 416.778.5571 x241 | miller@agency71.com

FILMS *Boutique*

FOR INTERNATIONAL SALES:

Jean-Christophe SIMON | Cell: +49.173.59.15.767
Cristina Cavaliere | Cell: +49.176.75.48.29 52
German Films Booth | Hyatt Regency (Mezzanine Level)

www.blackbirdthefilm.com

facebook.com/blackbirdthefilm | Twitter: @BBBlackbirdFilm

STORY ENGINE PICTURES A71 PRODUCTIONS INC. FESTINA LENTE PRODUCTIONS PRESENTS "BLACKBIRD" CONNOR JESSUP ALEXIA FAST MICHAEL BUIE ALEX OZEROV
PRODUCTION DESIGNER BILL FLEMING DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY STEPHANIE WEBER BIRON COSTUME DESIGNER KATE ROSE EDITOR KIMBERLEE MCTAGGART CASTING BRIAN LEVY JON COMERFORD
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER THOM FITZGERALD CHAD MAKER PRODUCED BY MARC ALMON DAVID MILLER JASON BUXTON WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY JASON BUXTON
Produced with the participation of Telefilm Canada and with the financial participation of the Shaw Rocket Fund. Produced with the participation of Film Nova Scotia and in association with Super Channel. © 2012 Blackbird Pictures (Nova Scotia) Inc. www.blackbirdthefilm.com

