

# *Birdbath*

*a film by Lila French*

*based on the play by Leonard Melfi*



*Electronic Press Kit*

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**FILM SITES**

<http://birdbathshortfilm.com>  
<http://facebook.com/birdbathshortfilm>  
<http://twitter.com/birdbathfilm>  
<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2445956>

## **SHORT SYNOPSIS**

During the course of one night, two strangers, a lonely waif and a prodigal poet, form an unexpected connection.

## **SUMMARY**

'Birdbath' is an adaptation of beloved Off Off Broadway playwright Leonard Melfi's most famous play. Since the play opened in New York's East Village in 1965, over 4000 productions of the have been done around the world. This is the first adaptation done since 1971, when a TV movie was made starring Patty Duke and James Farentino.

'Birdbath' takes place over the course of one February night in New York. It is, as Melfi described it, an “encounter” between two strangers, a lonely waitress and a prodigal poet, who meet and over the course of the night, form an unexpected connection. It is an archetypal Melfi piece in which the author skirts sentimentality and achieves a state of wistfulness. As Melfi explained, 'Birdbath' was written at a time when, as a bartender himself, “I was almost always dealing with people who were practically strangers to me, but that evokes a whole world of late-night collisions and broken individuals.”

'Birdbath' explores the theme of what it means and what it takes for people to ultimately connect in this large and often isolated world.

# *Birdbath* DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

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I first read 'Birdbath' in 2006. I was in a beginning level acting class and had read about the play in Michael Shurtleff's book "Audition".

In 2009, I performed the play at the Skylight Theatre in Los Feliz. We had a very long rehearsal period and a very short two-week run. At the time, the run length was a bit of a disappointment, since we had worked on it for so long, but now I'm happy it turned out that way. I didn't feel satisfied, and about 6 months after the play closed, I had the thought to make a short film.



I adapted the script and started planning. I originally thought someone else would direct, since I had never directed a film before (I had directed several scenes in my acting class, including a pivotal scene between Holden and his sister Phoebe from *Catcher in the Rye* which I adapted and directed, which proved useful). However, during the planning process, I realized I had a clear vision for my version of 'Birdbath', and I wanted to bring it to life.

I've always been tied to the character Velma. I feel like I'm a lot like her, only her emotions are all right on the surface; she doesn't have tools like sarcasm at her disposal to hide them. And I love her resilience. Everyone in her life is gone. When I did the play, I felt like I played more to the desperation of her situation. But in the film, I wanted to play more to the fact that this is her one opportunity to get what she wants, and she's going to go for it, no matter how awkward or potentially dangerous.

I feel very lucky to have had the opportunity to make this film. During the process, so many amazing things happened... a great DP came on board, a great actor, I was able to get the rights, I raised funds... I'm very happy with how the film has turned out, and I'm excited to share it with the world.

— Lila French

## **ADAPTATION & RIGHTS**

‘Birdbath’ is the most famous work of well-loved playwright Leonard Melfi, and this film is the first film/TV adaptation of ‘Birdbath’ since 1971. Lila French felt such a strong inclination to make the film, that she would have done so without the rights, even if it meant not being able to show it. However, fortunately, she was able to get the rights from Leonard’s brother, John, whom she had previously tracked down to obtain rights for the play (after unsuccessful attempts by others).

Melfi, who has had "numerous requests over the years", granted French the rights. The short film project was an exciting opportunity to bring this very special play to the screen.

## **KEY TEAM MEMBERS**

Veteran cinematographer Roger Chingirian was the first key team member to join ‘Birdbath’. After a meeting in Starbucks (one year before filming began), French knew that Chingirian was the right person for the project, and she made sure he stayed on board despite his busy schedule.



‘Birdbath’ cinematography by Roger Chingirian

Months later into pre-production, line producer Charis Hearn agreed to join the team. Her work ethic and intelligent, organized approach propelled the film schedule forward.

## CASTING

During the long pre-production phase, several actors passed through the role of Frankie. Finally, while production was held up to wait for snow in New York during the winter of 2011/2012 (it never came), the second to last Frankie dropped out. French's neighbor, reputed casting director Kerry Barden, suggested she meet with Chad McKnight, and the rest is film history!



Chad McKnight as Frankie, cast by Kerry Barden

**NEW YORK FILMING**

The play 'Birdbath' opened in 1965 at St. Mark's Church in the East Village, walking distance from the La MaMa theatre, where Leonard Melfi extensively wrote and developed plays. So, it seemed fitting to film in the neighborhood. Most of the exterior montage footage was filmed just outside of St. Mark's, and the exterior walking scene was filmed a few blocks away. The bustling-but-with-a-certain-serenity daytime atmosphere and colorful nighttime atmosphere of the area were just right for the film.



'Birdbath' exterior shot, morning at St. Mark's Church, NY East Village, where the play 'Birdbath' opened in 1965



Lila French as Velma, filmed in NY East Village

## LOS ANGELES FILMING / PRODUCTION DESIGN

For several weeks, French and production designer Jason Perrine scouted in Los Angeles for a location that could pass as a 50s New York basement apartment. Finding no satisfactory options, Perrine suggested building a set. With French's input, Perrine and art department designed and built 'Birdbath's apartment set. Every element was carefully selected—wallpaper, flooring, furniture, props. The walls were painted and distressed to appear water damaged, and period props were brought in to transport the viewer to the gritty, artsy era of late 50s New York City.



 CLIENT: BIRDBATH (short film)  
PROJECT: Set Design & Furniture Layout

'Birdbath' apartment set design by Jason Perrine



'Birdbath' apartment set built by Jason Perrine and team

## EDITING

Chad McKnight put Lila French in touch with several people at the post house Soapbox Films, where she was introduced to Brian McGuire. McGuire was working there as an assistant editor, and he contacted French about the possibility of editing 'Birdbath'. French, being fairly green herself, was initially uncertain about working with an also fairly green editor, but his professionalism and openness won her over. McGuire's passion for and love of movies worked to the production's benefit. His understanding of the technical and artistic aspects of film editing and his deep understanding of storytelling far transcended his experience.

## FILM SCORE

Lila French plays various instruments so partnering with the brilliant Bruce Chianese was an extraordinary experience for the debuting director. French was thrilled to learn that Chianese shared an appreciation for the carefree style and humor of jazz pianist Thelonious Monk, whose rendition of *Smoke Gets In Your Eyes* she had already chosen for the film's opening. They chose several other appropriate jazz tunes to use throughout the piece, including Monk's upbeat *Blue Monk* and others by Miles Davis. French felt the sentimental but not overly indulgent quality of the songs seamlessly fit with the tone of the film.

Chianese then created a perfectly quirky muzak version of *Smoke Gets In Your Eyes* for use in the diner scene, and he masterfully arranged two gorgeous renditions (one full and one abbreviated version for different cuts of the film) of Rodgers/Hart's jazz standard *My Funny Valentine*, with Chianese on piano, which provided the perfect complement to 'Birdbath's bittersweet close.



Morning birds near St. Mark's Church,  
NY East Village



Lion bust outside St. Mark's Church,  
NY East Village



Chad McKnight as the poet Frankie,  
working in a diner



Lila French as the waitress Velma



Lila French as Velma



Chad McKnight as Frankie

*Birdbath* FILM STILLS (CONT.)

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Chad McKnight as Frankie and  
Lila French as Velma



Lila French as Velma



Chad McKnight as Frankie



Chad McKnight as Frankie



Chad McKnight as Frankie



Lila French as Velma



**LILA FRENCH** – Director/Producer/Actress (“Velma”)

Lila French grew up in Metairie, Louisiana (a suburb of New Orleans). She graduated from MIT with Bachelors and Master’s degrees in Computer Science in just four years. Aside from her scholastic endeavors there, French was a pole vaulter and heptathlete on MIT’s Track & Field team. A woman of many talents, she lends her unlimited energy to art, acting, music, and software development. She is also an avid practitioner of Ashtanga yoga. For more about Lila, visit <http://lilasfrench.com>. Lila French!



**CHAD MCKNIGHT** – Actor (“Frankie”)

Conceived in Kentucky, born in Carolina, and educated everywhere, Chad McKnight has always loved the performing arts. He discovered acting in the French Quarter of New Orleans at a young age, where he starred in children’s plays. Years later, leaving the theater and the Big Easy behind, McKnight moved to Chicago where he began trading futures at the Board of Trade. It didn't take him long to realize that playing a day trader on television was much more appealing than the real thing. He decided to follow his heart out west, where he learned the ropes of professional acting from his uncle, actor Harry Dean Stanton. Shortly thereafter, McKnight landed his first union gig, playing the recurring role of "Officer Wilson" on the long running NBC hit drama *ER*. His first feature film, *Last Goodbye*, was a festival favorite.



**ROGER CHINGIRIAN** – Director of Photography

Born in Turkey, but having lived most of his life in the United States, Roger Chingirian sees himself as a citizen of the world. He prides himself in taking a pragmatic approach to everything he does based on a firm technical understanding of the medium. Chingirian has always had a fascination with light and its various incarnations. In many ways lighting was the first thing that attracted him to the art of filmmaking. He was inspired to enroll in Chapman University,

Orange, where he further explored how light and film combines to fulfill the imagination. While at Chapman, Chingirian earned a reputation for his work ethic and artistic prowess. There he shot over 20 student films.

Since graduating in 2001, Roger has shot numerous features, several documentaries, a dozen commercials, music videos, and short films. Learn more about Roger at <http://rogercdp.com>.

**CHARIS HEARN** – Line Producer

Charis Hearn hails from Portland, Oregon. She left the rain and trees behind to study at Southern California's Loyola Marymount University's School of Film & Television, where she obtained a Master's degree. For 9 years Hearn worked in non-theatrical distribution, but decided to pursue a career in film, her passion. As a result, Hearn is working freelance in Los Angeles' thriving entertainment community.



**JASON PERRINE** — Production Designer

Jason Perrine began his film career in Austin, Texas working for the Austin Film Society. There he became involved in the thriving independent film scene by creating short films with friends and working on crews around town. His work as an assistant on the feature film *Stop-Loss* was his first foray into the Art Department field, and a move to Los Angeles soon followed.

With a budding interest in architecture and the L.A. art scene, Perrine immediately felt at home working in the Art Department. He has worked on films such as *The Informant*, *Green Lantern*, *Tron* and *Super 8*. Since becoming a member of the Art Director's Guild as a graphic designer, Perrine has designed for *Gangster Squad*, *Dark Skies*, *Her*, and *Hangover 3*, as well as various television and commercial productions.

## **BRIAN MCGUIRE** – Editor

Brian McGuire grew up in Atlanta and graduated with a film degree from the University of Georgia. He currently works as an assistant editor and all around go-to person at Soapbox Films in Burbank. While not spending extended hours on regular work projects, McGuire works on passion projects in a variety of capacities, including editor, line producer, camera operator, and more. A former competitive swimmer, he also makes it to the pool regularly. An avid film enthusiast, McGuire has read numerous filmmaker biographies and watched many film documentaries, giving him a unique skill and perspective he brought to 'Birdbath'.



## **BRUCE CHIANESE** – Composer

A truly unique blend of engineering skill and creative talent is brought together in Bruce Chianese. His musical pieces and capabilities encompass a broad range of genres, from animation to heavy drama. Bruce loves music and what it can do for a film. He is passionate about using his talent to further evoke emotion and is a true believer in the ability of music to set the mood.

After performing as a keyboardist and starting his first studio in San Diego, Chianese went on to attend Berklee College of Music in Boston, graduating Magna Cum Laude with a degree in Film Scoring and Composition. He then moved to Los Angeles where he teamed with highly regarded composer, Geoff Levin. Together they collaborated on a wide range of successful musical endeavors which led to award-winning scores for feature film, television, record albums, animated children's programming, theme park attractions and large-scale theatrical productions.

Chianese has received numerous accolades and awards, including the prestigious **Cine Golden Eagle** for his score for the film, *My Neighborhood*, an **Emmy nomination** for *Disney's Spaceship Earth*, and an **Oscar nomination** for his contributions to the short, *The Janitor*. His music for *Qwerty* was voted the **Best Original Movie Score for 2012 at the Nashville International Film Festival**, and his film score for *You Can't Kill Stephen King* debuted at the **Cannes Film Festival** and won the **People's Choice Award** at the **Auburn Film Festival**. His score for *Power of Choice* won a **Telly Award**. Learn more about Bruce at <http://brucechianese.com/>.

# *Birdbath* CREDITS

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FRANKIE Chad McKnight  
VELMA Lila French

director Lila French  
director of photography Roger Chingirian  
line producer Charis Hearn  
production designer Jason Perrine  
editor Brian McGuire  
composer Bruce Chianese  
casting director Kerry Barden

associate producers Dana Lewis  
Susan Taylor  
Ed Walker

very special thanks to John Melfi

original play by Leonard Melfi  
screenplay adaptation by Lila French

## LOS ANGELES CREW

1st assistant directors      Charis Hearn  
   Raquel Scott

1st assistant camera      Nick Bianchi  
2nd assistant camera      Evan Stulc  
    camera technician      Nick Medrud  
chief lighting technicians      Carlos Jimenez  
   Steve Lundgren  
swing grip & electric      Joe Webb  
    sound operator      Fernanda Starling

    hair & makeup      Carrie Mercado  
    costume designer      Manee Leija

    art director      Matt Jones  
    painters      Katie Childs  
                                 Jesse Vogel  
art department PAs      Tina Clark  
                                 Sonia Knape  
                                 Matt Smith

    script supervisor      Mary Shellogg  
    digital utility      Kevin McKee  
production assistants      Eric Hamidi  
                                 Francisco Ramirez  
                                 William Sime  
                                 Nick Woodard  
                                 Alex Zuckerman

## NEW YORK CREW

unit production manager	Jean-Marceau Sécheret
director of photography	Chris Levitus
1st assistant director	Jean-Marceau Sécheret
1st assistant camera	Daniel Lam
gaffer / grip	Justin Lee
sound operator	Marcus Black
key production assistant	Simão Cayatte
production assistant	Danny Karapetian
additional photography	Lila French
makeup consultant	Rebecca Yanez

## POST PRODUCTION

special thanks to	SOAPBOX FILMS
colorist	Brian McGuire
additional editing	Lila French
	Courtney Marcilliat
audio post facility	PRIVATE ISLAND AUDIO
supervising sound editor	Michael J. McDonald
audio post coordinator	Robyn Whitney
post audio booking	Julia Scott
sound effects editor	Matt D. Hall
dialog editor	Leobardo Ledon
background editor	Frank Buckner
foley recordist	Jeremie Cuellar
foley artist	Jason Abell
ADR recordist	Leobardo Ledon
foley editor	Jason Abell
re-recording mixer	Michael J. McDonald
additional audio post	TONE COLOUR ENTERTAINMENT
sound mixer	Sean Price

VERY SPECIAL THANKS

Alice & Charles French  
Pam & Alvin Jones

SPECIAL THANKS

Ken Atchity  
Kerry Barden  
Allen Barton  
Brian Bean  
Dan Bender  
Rebecca Birdsall  
Matt Blundell  
Janine Buseman-Williams  
Todd Chamoy  
Ejnar Christiansen  
Jonathan Coogan  
Jorge Garcia  
Jason Giroir  
Steve Goodman  
Gary Grossman  
Diana Hopkins  
John Houghton  
Gary Huckabay  
Wendy Jung

Shuja Keen  
Matt Kerin  
Dep Kirkland  
Marco Landi  
Sherry Larson  
Magie Li  
Vanessa Li  
Sylvia Lin  
Hunter Maats  
Chad McKnight  
Jeana Mamer  
Stephanie Maugham  
Monisha Merchant  
Kayoko Mitsumatsu  
Ayman Nawash  
Don Oliver  
Ilo Orleans  
Kristin Overn

Alvin Parra  
Carolyn Pitre  
Shira Piven  
Richard Powell  
Elizabeth Prestel  
Arun Ram-Mohan  
Steve Rauske  
Susie Ray  
Carlos & Lina Rivas  
Martin Rohlf  
David A. Smith  
Halston Taylor  
Brynn Thayer  
Neeta Verma  
Lauren & David Widener  
Liz & Phil Widener  
David Wiesendanger  
Steven Woodruff  
Doug Wyatt

# *Birdbath* SPECS

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<b>Forms:</b>	Narrative Fiction, Short Film
<b>Genres:</b>	Drama, Independent, Period (50s-60s), Art, Adaptation (play)
<b>Exact Run Time:</b>	00 hours : 40 minutes : 00 seconds
<b>Date of Completion:</b>	January 2013
<b>Country of Production:</b>	USA
<b>Country of Filming:</b>	USA
<b>Print Details:</b>	Color
<b>Film Sound:</b>	Dolby Digital
<b>Aspect Ratio:</b>	1.78 (16x9 VIDEO)
<b>Exhibition Formats:</b>	DVD NTSC Region 0, Blu-ray Region 0, HDCAM