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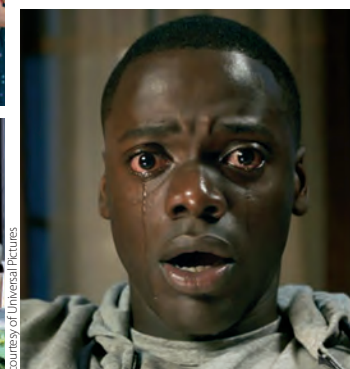
NETFLIX

THE THRILLER THAT TOOK DOWN AN EMPIRE

Perspectives From Different Filmmaking Disciplines

Reflections on *The Shape of Water*, *Dunkirk*, *Get Out*, *Lady Bird*, *Call Me by Your Name*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Darkest Hour*

By Robert Goldrich,
Road To Oscar Series,
Part 14



Along The Road To Oscar is a significant destination in and of itself—the DGA Awards. And four of this year’s five DGA nominees for Outstanding Achievement in Feature Film correspond with those in the running for the Best Director Oscar: Guillermo del Toro for *The Shape of Water* (Fox Searchlight); Greta Gerwig for *Lady Bird* (A24); Christopher Nolan for *Dunkirk* (Warner Bros.); and Jordan Peele for *Get Out* (Universal Pictures). (The remaining DGA nominee was Martin McDonagh for *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* while the other filmmaker up for the Best Director Oscar is Paul Thomas Anderson for *Phantom Thread*.)

SHOOT was on hand for the Directors Guild’s Meet the Feature Nominees symposium earlier this month (Saturday, 2/2) at the DGA Theater in Los Angeles where dual Oscar/DGA nominees del Toro, Gerwig, Nolan and Peele shared insights into their films. The session was

moderated by director Jeremy Kagan.

Later that same evening, at a gala ceremony in Beverly Hills, del Toro won the DGA Award, making him the odds-on favorite to take the Academy Award for Best Director.

During the DGA symposium, del Toro observed that directing entails such prime responsibilities as creating worlds and deftly dealing with the unexpected happenings that invariably come up during filmmaking. He likes to call the latter “orchestrating the accidents,” citing the adage, “the obstacle is the path.”

The director shared that there were “at least two major crises” every day on *The Shape of Water*. How a director and his team deal with these crises is crucial, he affirmed.

Those unexpected occurrences or crises are both the best and worst parts of being a director, continued del Toro. Out of the unexpected can come something positive and beautiful. It’s akin, he said,

to the sound barrier. It’s a challenge but “once you break through,” you can find “the true art.”

Most importantly, though, asserted del Toro, is thorough preparation. “When you prepare, an accident is benign.” But if a director isn’t properly prepared, an accident can turn opportunity into “disaster.”

In his preparation for *The Shape of Water*, del Toro knew he wanted to adopt a “dry for wet” approach to certain underwater sequences, which had cinematographer Dan Laustsen, DFF, using smoke, wind machines and projection to create a dripping, pulsating feel contributing to the illusion of water. This enabled the actors to perform with their eyes open, tapping into their facial expressions, serving to heighten feelings of both romance and mystery.

Del Toro said he knew dry for wet would work, having successfully deployed it in the feature *Hellboy*. The dif-

Continued on page 6

From top left, clockwise: A scene from *The Shape of Water*; Greta Gerwig (r) directs Saoirse Ronan in *Lady Bird*; a scene from *Dunkirk*; a scene from *Get Out*; Timothee Chalamet in *Call Me by Your Name*; a scene from *Darkest Hour*; Emilie Georges, one of the Best Picture nominated producers on *Call Me by Your Name*.

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BEST ACTOR

Daniel Day-Lewis

BEST DIRECTOR

Paul Thomas Anderson

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BEST ORIGINAL SCORE

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Directorial Insights Into Dunkirk, Get Out and Lady Bird

Continued from page 4

ference this time around with *The Shape of Water*, explained del Toro, was that the dry for wet technique had to yield a “painterly” feel.

As for the feel a director must have, del Toro related that “the set is a living thing” and a filmmaker has to serve in many capacities. In that vein, del Toro said he’s “good at comforting” and “confrontation” depending on whatever the situation calls for.

Christopher Nolan

For what’s believed to be the first time, all five DGA nominees also wrote the screenplays for the movies that earned them Guild nods. Nolan penned a script for *Dunkirk* that was about half the length of what he normally would write for a feature. An economical 76 pages contained “mostly stage direction and very little dialogue,” he said.

This also marked the first feature for Nolan depicting a true historical story, which necessitated him spending time up front in the actual filming locations, including Dunkirk beach. Prior to writing the screenplay he walked the locations, soaked them in, and researched the history extensively.

Making the transition from writing the material to realizing it cinematically as a director is a process that has changed dramatically for Nolan over the arc of his career. “My first film cost \$6,000,” he recalled, “and I wrote what I had access to, to what I could film.” As his career progressed and budgets grew, he was afforded the opportunity to “write things I didn’t know how to do, that I didn’t know

how to film.”

Challenging himself in this manner spurred Nolan’s growth as a filmmaker, a maturation which paradoxically makes it increasingly difficult to come up with something he hasn’t yet experienced. However, *Dunkirk* fit the bill, extending him into different realms—a true story, and logistically dealing with boats and how to best capture the experience at sea on film.

Casting also presented a different experience from what had been the star marquee actor norm for Nolan. For *Dunkirk*, he found himself instead looking for “unknowns in the leads,” portraying the 18 and 19-year olds who were in battle. As for what he sought on the acting front, Nolan said performers who could visually elicit “the mysterious quality of empathy.” He needed “a kid you need to care about,” someone an audience could relate to even though that character doesn’t talk a lot in the movie.

Also in the mix was an accomplished actor, Mark Rylance, whom Nolan had wanted to work with for decades. Rylance portrayed Mr. Dawson, one of many civilian mariners whom the British navy enlisted to help rescue soldiers across the English channel.

Dawson was one of the everyday heroes who piloted his own boat to Dunkirk for the mission. Nolan credited Rylance with pointing out a gap in his script—namely the relationship Mr. Dawson had with his son who’s on board for the mission. Nolan and Rylance then collaborated to bring that aspect of the story to the screen, underscoring the importance, said the director, of listening to the profes-

sionals around you.

While Nolan’s films are ambitious and often involve complex logistics that require extensive, detailed planning, he still likes to leave some room for the unexpected, happy accident that can occur during production. That’s why, he explained, that his preference is to do “as much in-camera as possible.” Computer-generated imagery, he pointed out, doesn’t typically have the flexibility to accommodate such serendipity.

Immersing himself in the Dunkirk story which unfolded in 1940 proved to be a learning experience that went beyond just the event itself. It showed Nolan that like many people he had “an inadequate grasp of history and its importance.” He is now striving to address this, not so much as a filmmaker but personally to become a more informed person who better understands the past, its significance and the implications it carries relative to the present and the future.

When presented with his nomination medallion at the evening DGA Awards ceremony, Nolan said that doing justice to history weighed heavily on him in the making of *Dunkirk*. He met several people who were part of that history firsthand, now in their 90s, and felt a profound responsibility to them to be true to their stories, honoring those who didn’t survive the event, as well as the heroism of both the civilian rescuers and those in the military service who lived to tell about it.

Being entrusted to bring this story to the screen so that younger generations could learn about it, said Nolan, “is one of the great privileges in my career.” He noted that what the civilians and military forces endured and achieved in the face of insurmountable odds as well as in the face of tyranny will “stand in eternity.”

Jordan Peele

As a first-time director, Jordan Peele described the audition process for actors “as much an audition for me working with actors. I learned I needed to experience the emotions as much as the performer did.” For *Get Out* auditions, Peele found himself at times teary-eyed, having cathartic moments with actors. “I didn’t know that would happen,” he shared.

Even with a tight turnaround time

whereby *Get Out* was shot in just 23 days, Peele often made time to break away from takes to “walk and talk” with actors, take them aside to gain their feedback and provide them with counsel before resuming shooting. As a director, Peele observed “the illusion I like to present to actors is that we have all the time in the world.”

Peele’s approach to *Get Out* was powered in part by dealing with all the inevitable, unexpected “curveballs” thrown at him during the course of production as if they were welcomed “gifts.”

Budgetary limitations often fostered such “gifts” as reflected in a party scene where Peele would have liked 40 people in the background to create the desired vibe for the story.

But Peele learned that instead he would have to make do with 16 or so backgrounders. This prompted him to place the performers in the scene in a choreographed fashion which wound up feeling “creepy” and “eerie,” promoting an uneasiness that wound up complementing his horror film.

Get Out was a transformative experience for Peele, achieving a long-held aspiration. “Since I was 12, I wanted this (to direct a film). I wanted it so bad, it gave me a pain in my stomach. There were so many reasons I doubted myself.”

Peele thought he had relinquished his dream awhile back but now realizes, “I never actually abandoned my dream.” Rather, he was “developing a skillset to do this movie. I’m so glad I didn’t try to do it earlier.”

Waiting paid off—not just with the DGA nomination in the marquee category, but also with a DGA Award win for Outstanding Achievement of a First-Time Feature Film Director.

Greta Gerwig

Gerwig discussed her dual role of writer and director of *Lady Bird*, noting, “My movie is almost entirely on the page. My cuts are on the page. I need to know what the rhythm is in an editorial sense on the page. I don’t like finding it in the edit.”

As a writer and director, she likes to attain a story that is “something familiar but not what you could have imagined,” making it relatable for an audience but a

Continued on page 8



A scene from *Dunkirk*

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The Washington Post ANN HORNADAY

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For more on this film, go to www.FocusFeaturesGuilds2017.com

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Gerwig's Takes On Directing

Continued from page 6

new experience at the same time.

Gerwig also likes when “the opening of a movie feels like the entire movie in a scene,” a reference to the mother-daughter exchange in the car between Laurie Metcalf as the mom and Saoirse Ronan as Lady Bird.

Still, there are times when a director may face doubts about how to bring to life what he or she has written—or for that matter doubts about the script itself. Gerwig thus valued the counsel of Tracy Letts, who portrayed Lady Bird’s dad. A playwright, Letts offered Gerwig what she described as a well-timed relevant piece of advice along the lines of “you have to trust the person you were when you wrote it. You’re not the same person anymore—now you need to direct it.”

While a director may need to make adjustments to the story if something doesn’t work, Gerwig said you still need to “respect the person who wrote it.”

Based on her experience as an actor, Gerwig finds herself innately “sympathetic” with performers, recalling the horror of auditioning.

Asked to describe that horror, Gerwig

of Julie, Lady Bird’s best friend. At the audition, Gerwig recalled that she “knew right away” that Feldstein was right for the role.

Once actors were cast for *Lady Bird*, Gerwig got them to meet, exchange phone numbers and get connected to one another. She likened this process to “laying sediment,” building a foundation for an ensemble cast to help foster a good working rapport which is conducive to their characters relating to each other.

Gerwig acknowledged that she has an affinity for doing lots of takes. “I like to see where actors go when they get bored of their ideas,” she explained. Oftentimes, you see the most interesting performances “on the other side of boredom.”

Gerwig said that directing is something she’s been “working towards and wanting to do for a very long time.” *Lady Bird* marks her first turn as a solo director (she had earlier co-directed *Nights and Weekends* with Joe Swanberg).

For Gerwig, *Lady Bird* was like “realizing that you have the ability to breathe under water.” She related you may be apprehensive about diving into the ocean, thinking “what if I drown?...But what if



Saoirse Ronan (l) and Laurie Metcalf in “Lady Bird”

remembered going to an audition as an actor only to hear, “You better be a good actor if you wear overalls.” Gerwig thinks she replied, “You betcha.”

As a director, Gerwig said she’s not a fan of an actor sharing everything in one fell swoop during an audition. She prefers to get a sketch, “an opening gambit” that shows the promise of what a performer can offer.

Gerwig saw that in Beanie Feldstein when she auditioned and won the part

you don’t?” Then you dive in, “and you don’t drown,” laughed Gerwig.

Directing, she affirmed, has been a transformative experience.

At the evening DGA Awards ceremony when she was presented with her nomination medallion, Gerwig said to her peers in the audience, “Storytellers are healers and I am so honored to be included among you.” She then referred to the symposium earlier in the day which had

Continued on page 9

Hot Locations

L.A. Lensing Marks 2nd Strongest Year On Record

On-location filming in the Greater Los Angeles region achieved its second best year on record in 2017, according to data released by FilmL.A.

Last year on-location filming decreased 3.4 percent (from 39,627 Shoot Days to 38,284 Shoot Days) for a second-place annual finish compared to 2016. Meanwhile, according to new data, L.A. area sound stage occupancy remains above 92 percent.



Paul Audley

FilmL.A.’s longest-running reporting effort, focused on production that takes place on-location within its service area, determined that filming levels in 2017 remained high despite finishing below 2016 totals.

On-location television production finished 2.1 percent above its five-year rolling average in 2017, despite slipping 7.6 percent (to 15,218 SD) compared to the prior year.

TV dramas ended last year 11.2 percent over the category’s five-year average, slipping 1.3 percent (to 4,385 SD) year over year. A 21.3 percent fourth-quarter increase helped, as did the California Film and TV Tax Credit program which continues to sustain local production. TV dramas saw 1,401 incentive-linked Shoot Days in 2017, which accounted for 32 percent of all activity for the year.

“Our ability to achieve and sustain a high level of production over the past few years is substantially due to the California Film and Television Tax Credit—which is creating thousands of jobs and returning high economic benefits to California,” said Paul Audley, FilmL.A. president.

Incentive-linked TV projects that filmed in 2017 included *This Is Us*, *SWAT*, *Westworld*, *Lucifer*, *Shooter* and the TV pilot project, *Mayans*.

On-location TV comedy production decreased 12.8 percent in 2017 (to 2,155 SD). TV pilot production also decreased 40.2 percent (to 441 SD). FilmL.A. analysts attribute the pilot decline to the significant number of scripted television series already available through broadcast, cable, and digital channels.

Television subcategories ineligible for state incentives also decreased compared to 2016, including TV reality (down 8.3 percent to 4,383 SD), and web-based TV production (down 9.2 percent to 1,918 SD).

Meanwhile, on-location feature production decreased in 2017 (down 19.8 percent to 3,901 SD). FilmL.A. analysts note that while the total number of feature shoot days is down, the economic value of projects in this category may be increasing over time. Features that qualify for California’s Film & Television Tax Credit tend to generate larger job and spending impacts than non-incentive-linked projects. In 2017, 61 feature projects filmed in Los Angeles, including 19 incentive-linked projects with a cast and crew count above 75 persons on-location. This is nearly twice the number of incentive-linked, similarly-sized projects the region captured in 2016. Incentive-linked features shot on-location in L.A. included *Destroyer*, *A Wrinkle In Time*, and *Bumblebee*.

Commercial production increased 9 percent in 2017 (to 5,548 SD) compared to the prior year. This is the strongest annual showing for commercials that FilmL.A. has ever observed.



Nick Maniatis

New Mexico Milestone

This past December marked the beginning of a yearlong celebration for New Mexico, commemorating the 120th year of filming in the state. Events extending throughout 2018 will recognize the milestone.

Nick Maniatis, director of the New Mexico Film Office, stated, “For 120 years, New Mexico has been at the heart of the film industry. We are continuing to build on that strong tradition by attracting new productions to New Mexico and creating the film industry’s greatest economic impact in New Mexico history, three years in a row.”

The film industry contributed over half a billion dollars of direct spending into the state’s economy last year.

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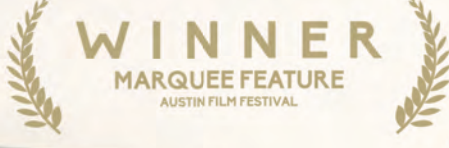
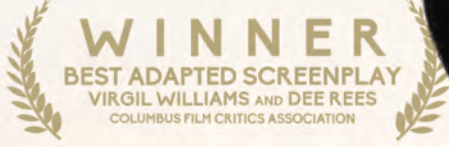
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NETFLIX

A Producer's Perspective On *Call Me by Your Name*

Continued from page 8

her and fellow nominees talking about directing and their different approaches to the work as being “one of the most exciting three hours of my life.”

Emilie Georges

Producer Emilie Georges earned her first career Oscar nomination with *Call Me by Your Name* (Sony Pictures Classics) which is up for Best Picture—one of four nods, the others being for Best Adapted Screenplay (James Ivory), Leading Actor (Timothée Chalamet) and Original Song (Sufjan Stevens for “The Mystery of Love”).

Georges shares the Best Picture nomination with producers Peter Spears and Marco Morabito, and producer/director Luca Guadagnino.

Among the prime artistic challenges that *Call Me by Your Name* posed, observed Georges, was to do justice to the

story, “the representation of the characters’ emotions and resilience, how to properly create the emotions of first love,” and to depict that love in the context of “giving life to a multilingual family, the fluidity between an American father (portrayed by Michael Stuhlbarg), a French mother (Amira Casar) raised partially in Italy during the summers, and a son (Chalamet) who comes out of this trilingual environment,” discovering the beauty and heartbreak of love through a relationship with a visiting grad student (Armie Hammer).

In terms of delving into characters’ emotions, Georges noted that director Guadagnino gets close to these people by keeping a distance from them with the camera. “He went for very long shots in certain scenes, capturing characters within their environment, which gives insights into the general mood and their relation to the world.”



Sarah Greenwood

That world was set in 1983 in a 17th century villa where the characters spent the summer. Georges said that Guadagnino had an “obsession” for artistic coherence relative to the time period.

Georges described *Call Me by Your Name* as “an incredible adventure,” a journey yielding critical acclaim and Oscar nominations while “emotionally moving a lot of people all over the world.”

As for what Georges’ first Oscar nomination means to her personally as well as professionally, she is “very proud” of the work, adding that it affirms her commitment as a producer “to continue to protect authors and directors who have strong visions, giving them the opportunity to act upon and realize their vision.” Georges finds it particularly gratifying to offer European directors a bridge to the U.S., being entrusted with bringing their talent to people throughout the world.

Sarah Greenwood

Production designer Sarah Greenwood added two Oscar nominations to her filmography this year—for *Beauty and the Beast* (Disney) and *Darkest Hour* (Focus Features). She now has six career Academy Award nods; the first coming in 2006 for *Pride & Prejudice*.

A common denominator across these
Continued on page 10

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A Production Designer's POV On Her Two Nominations

Continued from page 9

half-dozen noms is that Greenwood earned them in collaboration with her long-time set decorator, Katie Spencer. With a track record together spanning some 20 years, Greenwood and Spencer first met at the BBC.

"We have a real kind of simpatico," said Greenwood. "There's something about working with someone you really know and understand, who has similar taste. We don't always agree, but it's all good. It's part of a very creative partnership. Now I wouldn't know how to work with somebody else. We choose projects together. I don't choose a project without her saying it's good for us to pursue."

Greenwood's first collaboration with director Bill Condon, *Beauty and the Beast* appealed to the production designer on many levels.

"I very much liked that it wasn't set in fairy tale land," explained Greenwood. "Rather it was a period film, set in 1740s France. That gave it a grounding for me as a production designer—so I could build from there and then figure out how to enchant it, make it be magical."

Also enticing were the unique characters and the questions they sparked for Greenwood. "How would a candlestick walk, a clock dance?"

And then there's the production designer's dream of creating an 18th century village. Initially the plan was to shoot in France as Greenwood and her colleagues scouted there and found a number of viable options.

But ultimately the decision was made to build the village on a backlot. Greenwood asked rhetorically, "What production designer wouldn't want to build such a world? And because we had been to France, what we had seen there made a great reference point for us—to take the best of what we saw, capture that in the village we built while making this world work in terms of the choreography."

Greenwood observed that *Beauty and the Beast* was the best of old Hollywood—physical construction, painting, designing and shaping—meshed with on-the-edge modern tech.

"If we had built the sets in CG, it would not have been a true live-action film. But CG helped to bring certain

characters to life, "giving us a combination of the old and new working together to make something quite special."



courtesy of Disney

Beauty and the Beast

While she worked with Condon for the first time, Greenwood has maintained an ongoing, long-time creative relationship with *Darkest Hour* director Joe Wright. It's been a most fruitful collaboration. In fact, of Greenwood's six career Oscar nods, four came for her work on Wright-directed films: *Pride & Prejudice* in 2006, *Atonement* in 2008, *Anna Karenina* in 2013, and now *Darkest Hour*. (Greenwood's other Academy Award nomination came for the Guy Ritchie-directed *Sherlock Holmes*.)

"I go back a long way with Joe (Wright)—not quite as long as with Kate

Oldman who delivered a stellar performance as Winston Churchill" (which has earned a Lead Actor Oscar nomination),

and Joe's vision which "made an historical drama into a political thriller."

"We all helped Joe turn a story with gray men in gray rooms into this political thriller," affirmed Greenwood whose production design had to reflect not only the time period leading up to World War II but also "the feeling of the moment—depressed, quite grim, gray, being underground in a British war room, claustrophobic."

Greenwood noted, "Everything that came out of that space ran the war—and before that, the decision to go to war emerged from that room. And it was from this gray room that they went up against

ing, seemed a bit tawdry, a bit low key, a bit sad." Greenwood and her colleagues built The House of Commons based on original drawings from that era, recreating what it looked like during Churchill's war time reign as Prime Minister.

Overall, said Greenwood, "We had to do a lot within a tight budget, a tenth of what we had on *Beauty and the Beast*. But Joe and I are used to making things work no matter the limitations."

Greenwood noted that enough can't be said about Oldman's incredible transformation into Churchill.

"He became Churchill. It was so astonishing, it gives you a shiver. For all three months of shooting, I never saw him as Gary. He was always made up as Churchill. It was odd to once in awhile see him as Churchill and to hear him talk as Gary off-camera."

Greenwood added that fortuitous timing has given us a movie season in which both *Darkest Hour* and *Dunkirk* were released. And she believes the two films "work brilliantly" to tell the story of Dunkirk from distinctly different yet fascinating perspectives.

From the gray war room, Churchill in *Darkest Hour* put the wheels in motion for civilian mariners to take their boats across the English Channel to rescue the country's trapped military forces. And in *Dunkirk*, we see that rescue come to life—the horrific deaths, along with an overlapping heroism and triumph of the human spirit depicted in both films.

Greenwood conjectured, "I think *Dunkirk* and *Darkest Hour* will one day be part of the same curriculum to teach people about an important chapter in history, taking us from the London underground to across the Channel."



photo by Jack English/courtesy of Focus Features

Gary Oldman (center) as Winston Churchill in *Darkest Hour*

(set decorator Spencer)," said Greenwood. "Joe is simply a great director to work with. He is very collaborative, very open to what you have to offer."

As for what *Darkest Hour* had to offer, Greenwood cited "a great script," Gary

the German war machine. It's quite remarkable what was accomplished out of that little space"

Historical accuracy was essential, continued Greenwood, pointing out that Buckingham Palace back then was "ag-

This is the 14th of a multi-part series with future installments of *The Road To Oscar* slated to run in the weekly SHOOT>e. dition, The SHOOT Dailies and on SHOOTonline.com. The series will appear weekly through the Academy Awards gala ceremony. The 90th Oscars will be held on Sunday, March 4, 2018, at the Dolby Theatre at Hollywood & Highland Center in Hollywood, and will be televised live on the ABC Television Network. The Oscars also will be televised live in more than 225 countries and territories worldwide.

Winning Directors Reflect On Their Work

Insights from Guillermo del Toro, Jordan Peele, Matthew Heineman, Reed Morano and Martin de Thurah

By Robert Goldrich



If history stays true to course, it's most likely that the Best Director Oscar will take the "Shape" of the DGA Awards which recently bestowed its coveted Outstanding Directorial Achievement in Feature Film honor upon Guillermo del Toro for *The Shape of Water*. All but seven of the DGA Award winners since 1948 have gone on to garner the corresponding Academy Award. In terms of recent history, 13 of the past 14 DGA Award winners have wound up garnering Oscars for directing, including last year's winner, Damien Chazelle for *La La Land*. (The one departure from that norm during this span came in 2013 when Ben Affleck won the DGA Award for *Argo* in 2013 while Ang Lee scored the Academy Award for *Life of Pi*.)

Further bolstering del Toro's current prospects and those for *The Shape of Water* in general are other recent indicators such as the film winning the Producers Guild Award—and topping this year's Oscar tally with 13 nominations, including for Best Picture and Best Director.

In accepting the DGA Award, first-time nominee del Toro choked back some tears as he thanked his mother and father, the latter who has been ill. The director said that *The Shape of Water* is "full of many reasons why it shouldn't work and they are the reasons that it works." He added that the DGA recognition is a reaffirmation of sorts, relating, "And for you to tell me today to keep doing these insane fables that I've believed in for 25 years means the world to me."

Earlier in the evening Richard Jenkins, a Best Supporting Actor Oscar nominee for *The Shape of Water*, observed that del Toro's legacy is that he brings a distinctly different vision to cinema. Jenkins observed that del Toro asks, "Why can't the creature get the girl," a reference to the love story at the center of *The Shape of Water* in which a mute woman falls for an underwater creature. Jenkins said that del Toro's legacy entails showing us that what is conventionally feared is something that should be "embraced," providing a fresh perspective on life and love.

During the Meet the Feature Directors symposium held earlier in the day and setting the stage for the evening's DGA Awards ceremony, del Toro asserted that attention to every detail, every role to be cast, is essential. He said of directors, "What we do is symphonic. One wrong note can ruin a movie."

Del Toro topped a field of DGA nominees which consisted of Greta Gerwig for *Lady Bird* (A24), Martin McDonagh for *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* (Fox Searchlight), Christopher Nolan for *Dunkirk* (Warner Bros.), and Jordan Peele for *Get Out* (Universal Pictures).

Peele's work on *Get Out* was honored in another DGA Award category, winning for Outstanding Directorial Achievement of a First-Time Feature Film Director. In his acceptance remarks, Peele affirmed, "This has been the best year of my life, hands down," citing the success of *Get Out* as well as he and his wife welcoming a beautiful baby into the world. At the same time, though, Peele said he had to balance this joy with what he regards

From top left, clockwise: Guillermo del Toro; Sally Hawkins (l) and Octavia Spencer in *The Shape of Water*; Jordan Peele; a scene from *Get Out*; Reed Morano; Matthew Heineman; and Martin de Thurah.

as “not a good year for this country and not a good year for many of us,” alluding to the impact of the Trump administration. Peele said that the stories being told by DGA members can shed light on humanity, spark empathy for others and push back against hate and bigotry. He assessed that *Get Out* gives a voice to “victims of oppression” while “reaching out to people who might not have experienced” racial prejudice and injustice but through the movie get to “walk in the shoes” of those who are living through that experience. Peele called on the filmmakers in the DGA audience to continue to “use your voice,” which is “the most powerful weapon we have against evil.”

During the aforementioned daytime DGA symposium—during which it was noted that the five marquee feature film category nominees all wrote what they had directed—Peele said that while words are important, “ideas are crucial.” And making discoveries along the way can give a director a better handle on how he wants to tell a story—and/or what he can tap into in order to better tell that story and the ideas behind it. Plus there are inspiring ideas to be had during the process. For example, Peele recalled that he saw in rehearsal that Daniel Kaluuya and Allison Williams “didn’t feel like a couple in love” during the first couple of readings. At the same time, though, Peele could see that they shared a strong sense of humor, making one another laugh. For the purposes of *Get Out*, Peele went with that shared humor as something Kaluuya and Williams could build upon as a dynamic that attracted their characters to one another, sparking their falling in love.

Reed Morano, another first-time DGA nominee, won dramatic TV honors for her helming of the pilot for *The Handmaid’s Tale* (Hulu). In her acceptance remarks, Morano thanked her producers and Hulu for being “the rare people who were seeking the opportunity to work with women instead of fearing it.”

Earlier during last year’s Emmy season—which saw her earn the Emmy for best director of a dramatic series for the same pilot episode (“Offred”) of *The Handmaid’s Tale*, Morano told *SHOOT* that among her prime challenges on the project was “finding the right tone” for the show. “My natural instinct used to be

to gravitate to what is most real, authentic and grounded. But for *The Handmaid’s Tale*, another dimension was needed. To tell the story and connect with an audience, the experience had to be made more epic and not one that just totally drags the viewer down. You can’t just strike one note all the way through. You have to create more of a roller coaster ride. For me the goal was to find a balance between realism and heightened elements here and there.”

Helping with this heightening was cinematographer Colin Watkinson whom Morano described as simply “spectacular.” She and Watkinson looked to bring new life to what can be visually mundane voiceover and flashback sequences. Of course, the beautiful and poetic writing of *Handmaid’s Tale* author Atwood imbued the voiceover with a stirring spirit. Morano and Watkinson in turn worked to make the point-of-view story of greater visual interest. “We thought,” shared Morano, “if everything we do with the camera is psychologically driven, getting into the mind of the character, then these sequences could be all the more engaging.”

Engendering gender reform

Morano was one of several female winners during the evening; others including Beth McCarthy Miller who won in the comedy series category for HBO’s *Veep*; and Niki Caro who took the children’s program competition for an episode of *Anne with an E* (Netflix). Gerwig meanwhile earned her nomination for *Lady Bird*. And Alma Har’el of Epoch Films was nominated in the commercials category. The latter is one of a select few women directors to gain Guild recognition in the spotmaking competition—the first being Amy Hill as half of the directorial duo Riess/Hill in 1999; followed by Katina Mercadante as half of the team known as The Mercadantes in 2015. That same year, Lauren Greenfield also received a nomination, making her the first individual female helmer to earn that DGA distinction in commercials. Har’el becomes the second solo woman director to be nominated for Outstanding Directorial Achievement in Commercials since this category was established in 1980.

DGA president Thomas Schlamm kicked off the awards ceremony calling

for more opportunities for women, greater ethnic diversity and overall inclusion. He said strides have been made—noting that more than half of the Guild’s national board consists of women—but much more must be done. Schlamm also tackled the sexual misconduct issue, saying, “Today we are witnessing a historic cultural shift in our industry and hopefully our society as well. Our Guild has been outspoken about our commitment in the drive to more respectful and inclusive workplaces, which includes a world where our members and others can show up for work without any fear of sexual harassment.”

Schlamm further noted that the DGA has joined the Commission on Sexual Harassment and Advancing Equality in the Workplace, an industry-wide coalition which has set goals to lead the entertainment community toward alignment in achieving safer, fairer, more equitable and accountable workplaces. The Commission is under the aegis of law professor Anita Hill who brought the sexual harassment issue to the national stage in 1991 when she testified during the Supreme Court confirmation hearings of Clarence Thomas.

Documentary, commercials

Winning the DGA Award for Outstanding Achievement in Documentary was Matthew Heineman for *City of Ghosts* (Amazon Studios) which introduced audiences to a group of citizen journalists who came together after ISIS took over their land. Heineman came on stage to affirm, “In the era of fake news where facts seem to be malleable and journalism is under fire, it’s important to celebrate groups like RBSS (Raqqqa Is Being Slaughtered Silently) that are courageously speaking truth to power.” (Heineman is handled for spots by Superprime Films.)

Speaking of commercialmaking, taking the DGA Award in that discipline was Martin de Thurah of Epoch Films. It’s the second career DGA win for de Thurah who this time around earned best spot director of 2017 on the basis of three entries that exhibited a mix of humor and cinematic acumen: StubHub’s “Festival” and “Machines” for Goodby Silverstein & Partners; and WealthSimple’s “Mad World” from the client’s in-house agency.

De Thurah topped a field of nominees

which also consisted of his Epoch colleague Har’el; the Hoffman/Metoyer duo from MJZ; Miles Jay of Smuggler; and Isaiah Seret of Biscuit Filmworks.

In brief acceptance remarks, de Thurah said he was deeply honored by the award and by being in the company of such talented fellow nominees. He then gave a shout-out to Har’el, sharing that he thought she was going to win the award based on her high-caliber work. He also cited her efforts to open up opportunities for women directors, a reference to the Free The Bid program she launched a little more than a year ago. The nonprofit initiative, which has picked up widespread industry momentum, asks ad agencies to include a female filmmaker on every triple-bid project, production companies to sign more woman directors, and marketers to seek one woman’s bid on each of their commercial productions.

De Thurah additionally thanked Epoch Films and his support team which included first assistant director Charles Connor on the two StubHub commercials, and first assistant director Jey Wada and second assistant director Custis Smith who worked on the WealthSimple entry.

De Thurah first won the DGA Award in 2014 for two spots he directed in 2013: Hennessy’s “The Man Who Couldn’t Slow Down” for Droga5, and Acura MDX 2014’s “Human Race” for Mullen L.A.

Among the other DGA winners this year were Glenn Weiss for directing *The 89th Academy Awards* (ABC), Don Roy King for helming the Jimmy Fallon-hosted episode of *Saturday Night Live* (NBC), and Brian Smith for helming an episode of reality show *MasterChef* (FOX).

Special honors

Director and past DGA president Michael Apted received the DGA Honorary Life Member Award in recognition of leadership in the industry, contribution to the Guild and the profession of directing, and outstanding career achievement.

Dwight Williams was the recipient of the 2018 Frank Capra Achievement Award for career achievement in the industry and service to the Guild.

And Jim Tanker received the 2018 Franklin J. Schaffner Achievement Award in recognition of career achievement in the industry and service to the DGA.

Breaking The Glass Lens Ceiling

Rachel Morrison, ASC, makes industry history at ASC Awards, Oscars

By Robert Goldrich



Rachel Morrison, ASC earned her first career ASC Award nomination last month on the strength of director Dee Rees' *Mudbound* (Netflix). The nod carries historical significance because it broke the glass ceiling as Morrison became the first woman to be nominated for an ASC Award in the competition's marquee Theatrical Feature category for Outstanding Achievement in Cinematography.

Two weeks later, Morrison broke more glass with *Mudbound* as the first female nominee ever for a Best Cinematography Oscar. "I hadn't even remotely thought about breaking ceilings," said Morrison. "It's always been just about the work. I would have thought that other women had been nominated in the past, like Mandy Walker. It's eye-opening to think that in 90 years of the Oscars, I'm the first woman nominated (for Best Cinematography). It's momentous and an incredible honor."

More importantly, Morrison hopes the ASC and Oscar recognition will inspire others. "I would like to see it help open the floodgates for other women, encouraging them to pick up a camera and follow their dreams."

Morrison is part of an ASC Award nominees crop this year which also consists of: Roger Deakins, CBE, ASC, BSC for *Blade Runner 2049*; Bruno Delbonnel, ASC, AFC for *Darkest Hour*; Hoyte van Hoytema, ASC, FSC, NSC for *Dunkirk*; and Dan Laustsen, ASC, DFF for *The Shape of Water*. This is the same lineup of DPs in the running for the Best Cinematography Oscar.

Based on the novel by Hillary Jordan with a screenplay by Rees and Virgil Williams, *Mudbound* centers on two families—one black, the other white—in the rural American South dur-

ing World War II. The white McAllen family—headed by Henry (Jason Clarke) and his wife Laura (Carey Mulligan)—moves to the Mississippi Delta from Memphis and isn't fully ready for the harsh demands of tending to the land. Their lives intersect with a black family headed by Henry and Florence Jackson (Rob Morgan, Mary J. Blige). While segregation, discrimination and racism stack life against the Jacksons, the sharecroppers persevere with great dignity. Though the McAllens do not face such race-related adversity, the two families have other struggles in common—coping with the ravages of Mother Nature, and each with loved ones who go off to war overseas and ultimately return to the battle of adjusting to everyday life on the homefront. The war vets—Jamie McAllen (Garrett Hedlund) and Ronsel Jackson (Jason Mitchell)—develop a fast and at first uneasy friendship, each bearing the scars of war only to then have to return to the brutality and cruelty of the Jim Crow South.

Mudbound—which marked Morrison's first collaboration with Rees—carried varied creative challenges for the cinematographer. "When you have a single character driving the story, it's easy to know where to put the camera," Morrison related. "This ensemble cast was so strong that we effectively had six main characters as driving forces in various scenes. We had to take six different points of view and make it work as a feature film. Dee was able to weave it into a narrative that was poetic and functioned as a whole."

Mother Nature itself was another prime challenge in the lensing of *Mudbound*, a film that pitted its characters against the elements. Morrison observed, "The elements always win. We are all put in our place by the elements—rain, wind, the harsh sun. It doesn't matter how prepared you think you are." The DP further observed that even in a world of racial disparity, the elements "level the playing field," impacting people no matter their race or gender. She described nature as "the great equalizer." Morrison shot widescreen as a means of isolating people in the frame against a landscape of fields, conveying human insignificance in the face of nature.

At the same time, Morrison captured more than the onslaught of the elements; she also conveyed the flip side of Mother Nature, its beauty which evokes hope and inspiration.

Morrison said that she and Rees wanted to shoot *Mudbound* on film but budget realities necessitated they go digital. Morrison estimated that the cost of film would have translated into two less shooting days as compared to digital. They couldn't afford to lose two precious days on an already extremely challenged shooting schedule.

Morrison thus opted for the ARRI ALEXA Mini, which she coupled with a mix of lenses—Panavision B, C and D series ana-

From top left, clockwise: Rachel Morrison, ASC; Roger Deakins, CBE, ASC, BSC; Bruno Delbonnel, ASC, AFC; Dan Laustsen, DFF.

ASC AWARDS PREVIEW

morphics in addition to Vintage Super Speeds from the 1960s and '70s that lent themselves to reduced contrasts, among other desired features.

Mudbound piqued Morrison's interest for the chance to depict the historical era. Archival photographs of the post Depression South commissioned by the Farm Security Administration provided key visual references for Morrison—these included images by Arthur Rothstein, Ben Shahn, Dorothea Lange and Gordon Parks. That work, noted Morrison, was integral to the design of the movie and many of her compositional choices.

Roger Deakins, CBE, ASC, BSC

In sharp contrast to the firsts garnered by Morrison, Roger Deakins, CBE, ASC, BSC, added to his record ongoing haul of ASC Award nominations over the years. In fact, it might be more newsworthy to report the years Deakins has not been an ASC nominee in light of the 15 nods he's received thus far dating back to his first in 1995 for *The Shawshank Redemption*, for which he won the award. He also received the ASC Award for *The Man Who Wasn't There* in 2002, and for *Skyfall* in 2013.

Blade Runner 2049 marks Deakins' third collaboration with director Denis Villeneuve—all of which have earned ASC Award nominations, the first two being *Prisoners* and *Sicario*. Those three films also each garnered a Best Cinematography Oscar nomination, giving Deakins a career total of 14, though he is yet to win an Academy Award.

Deakins said of Villeneuve, "We just hit it off right out of the gate on *Prisoners*—and it's continued since then. When you meet and work closely with a director, some you get on with better than others. Denis and I have similar kinds of feelings about filming and style, trying to make something true to the story."

Blade Runner 2049 posed its own unique challenges, with a seemingly simple "goal" proving to be easier said than done. "We were adamant about everything we shot outside had to be in gray light. Both Denis and I wanted this very kind of smoggy, foggy, gray, claustrophobic atmosphere for the film. Something simple like shooting an exterior scene on the backlot, though, became more challenging as we had to hold out for gray light. It's easy to

want, but hard to schedule."

Taking some of the difficulty out of realizing the filmmaker's vision, continued Deakins, was the meticulous mapping out of that vision through the painstaking task of storyboarding the whole movie. "Denis is very minimalistic as am I. We spent a long time in Montreal thinking of specific ways to shoot each scene," said Deakins. "Of course, things change on set, scenes evolve. But we had storyboards drawn out going into the shoot. It kept us in touch with the original vision."

After much research, Deakins again gravitated to the Alexa XT as his camera of choice for *Blade Runner 2049*. He also returned to another long-time lens ally, Zeiss Master Primes. Deakins described the Alexa XT as "a user-friendly camera. I operate myself so that's important. I also like the camera system because the images it produces are as close to what I see by my eye."

The Zeiss Master Primes, were chosen simply because they are "about the fastest, sharpest lenses around," assessed Deakins. "They're sharp and clear, with less flare in them from light sources."

Regarding whether he was influenced by the original iconic *Blade Runner*—directed by Ridley Scott and shot by the late, great Jordan Cronenweth, ASC—Deakins said, "I'm very aware of the original *Blade Runner*. I've seen it a number of times. But I don't think you can go the way of being influenced by that. I work differently, have a different sensibility than another artist. I didn't want to be inspired by the original *Blade Runner*. I instead took the script for *2049* as if it were any other script and approached it from there."

That approach entailed Deakins being involved in the process—extensive pre-pro, production and post—for "a very long time. I was involved in visual effects all the way through. It was absolutely crucial for Denis that we do as much as we could in camera and that the effects wouldn't look like effects so that the audience could get fully immersed in this world."

Bruno Delbonnel, ASC, AFC

Darkest Hour garnered Bruno Delbonnel, ASC, AFC his fourth career ASC Award nomination, the other three being for *Amelie* in 2002, *A Very Long Engage-*

ment in 2005, and *Inside Llewyn Davis* in 2014. *Darkest Hour* is Delbonnel's fifth Best Cinematography Oscar nod, four of which correspond to his ASC Award nominations, Delbonnel's other Academy Award nom came in 2010 for *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*.

Darkest Hour marked Delbonnel's first collaboration with director Joe Wright. The DP had been contacted in the past, including being reached out to for the movie *Pan*, but scheduling conflicts prevented him from teaming with Wright. Happily they were finally able to come together on *Darkest Hour*.

Delbonnel went with the ARRI Alexa to lens *Darkest Hour*, noting he has a comfort level with the camera and its pairing with Cooke lenses. *Darkest Hour* is the fourth feature Delbonnel has lensed digitally.

Delbonnel said he was drawn to *Darkest Hour* for the opportunity to delve into Winston Churchill, portrayed by Gary Oldman who landed a Best Lead Actor Oscar nomination on the strength of his performance. Delbonnel said that Churchill was an amazing person, initially unwanted, sort of "a dark horse" who resided in the shadows and was then thrust into the spotlight. "Playing with the idea of dark and light was how I translated Churchill, looking into the reality of his character," said Delbonnel.

The cinematographer shared, "I try to think of lighting as a musical score. Basically when I work, I don't follow the daylight or what is written in a script in terms of light setting. Instead I place a valuation on lighting that is like a piece of piano music—this kind of melody inside the script that I try to follow. Some scenes have much more contrast than others; there's a rhythm with the light. Like a melody, lighting can underscore the emotion of a particular scene. It's like a symphony which has varied movements. That's the approach I've developed to my lighting."

Dan Laustsen, DFF

The Shape of Water marks the first career ASC Award nomination for Dan Laustsen, DFF and the third feature he's shot for director Guillermo del Toro—the first two being *Mimic* (1997) and *Crimson Peak* (2015). *The Shape of Water* also garnered Laustsen his very first Best Cin-

ematography Oscar nod.

In *SHOOT*'s The Road To Oscar prequel coverage, Laustsen said he found it comforting going into the film that he and del Toro "have the same taste and opinion when it comes to lighting and camera movement. Guillermo knows exactly what he wants to do and how. As a cinematographer, I find him very easy to be around. We understand each other. A lot of stuff we don't even have to talk about."

The Shape of Water is a fairy tale set during the Cold War era of America circa 1962. In the hidden high-security government laboratory where she works as a janitor, Elisa (Sally Hawkins), a mute, is trapped in a life of isolation. Her life, though, takes on hope, when she and co-worker Zelda (Octavia Spencer) discover a secret classified experiment—a hybrid man/sea creature with whom Elisa makes a special connection. Elisa and this amphibian man (Doug Jones), who too is mute, fall in love.

A relationship between mutes, steeped in a rich emotional silence, is a premise, said Laustsen, that is "very cinematic." The visual becomes all the more important in showing their special connection, against a backdrop of espionage, danger and government Cold War era secrecy. Adding to the fairy tale mystery is how the creature is photographed. "You have to reveal enough of him so that the audience can feel a connection but at the same time," noted the DP, "the key was not to show too much."

Hoyte van Hoytema

Hoyte van Hoytema, ASC, FSE, NSC, who was unavailable for an interview at press time, previously collaborated with director Christopher Nolan on *Interstellar*, for which the DP received a BAFTA Award nomination. Coming together again with Nolan on *Dunkirk*, van Hoytema earned both an ASC Award nomination and his first career Best Cinematography Oscar nom. *Dunkirk* marks the second time that the DP has landed an ASC nod, the first coming back in 2012 for director Tomas Alfredson's *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*.

ASC Award feature and TV winners will be announced and honored during a gala ceremony on Saturday, Feb. 17, in Hollywood, Calif.

VES AWARDS PREVIEW



Joe Letteri



"Hero's Journey" for Kia



Tom Graham



War for the Planet of the Apes

The Long and Short Of It In Visual Effects Artistry, Invention

Reflections on VES-nominated fare from a Super Bowl ad to War for the Planet of the Apes

A SHOOT Staff Report

In culling through this year's Visual Effects Society (VES) Award nominations, *SHOOT* coverage across the board in 2017 carried a connection to many of those in the running for honors, ranging from commercials to features. On the latter score, for example, *War for the Planet of the Apes* (Twentieth Century Fox) tied with *Blade Runner 2049* (Warner Bros. Pictures) for the most noms with seven. And one of the prime contributors to the *Apes* saga, Joe Letteri—sr. VFX supervisor on *War* and a partner in New Zealand-based studio Weta Digital—knew before the awards gala (2/13) that no matter how *War* fared, he would be leaving with some hardware in that he had already been named the next recipient of the VES Georges Méliès Award which honors lasting contributions to the art and science of the visual effects industry by way of artistry, invention and groundbreaking work.

Letteri's creative vision and inventive techniques have garnered him four Academy Awards for Best Visual Effects on *Avatar*, *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*, *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* and *King Kong*. Last month on the strength of *War for the Planet of the Apes*, Letteri scored his 10th Best VFX Oscar nomination.

SHOOT editorially crossed paths with Letteri on several occasions last year—including interviewing him on stage after a screening of *War for the Planet of the Apes* at The James Blakeley Theater on the Fox studio lot in Los Angeles, as well as earlier gaining his reflections

on the film in our prequel to this awards season's continuing The Road To Oscar series of feature stories. In both the prequel and on stage, Letteri shared insights into *War for the Planet of the Apes*, which was nominated for VES Awards in the following categories: Outstanding Visual Effects in a Photoreal Feature; a pair of nods for Animated Character in a Photoreal Feature (for Caesar and for Bad Ape); two more for Created Environment in a Photoreal Feature (for Hidden Fortress and for Prison Camp); Effects Simulations in a Photoreal Feature; and Compositing in a Photoreal Feature.

For Letteri, character is king in that the only way to strike a responsive chord with viewers is through a story advanced by its characters. Letteri cited the development of ape leader Caesar, portrayed by Andy Serkis, as a marquee example of how a character can continue to grow and develop in the realm of performance capture. Serkis' performance in *War* reaches inward as Caesar battles demons within, grappling with crossing a moral boundary which has him seeking vengeance for the murder of his family, causing him to abandon his long-held vision of humans and apes somehow peacefully co-existing.

The brilliance of Serkis and Weta's penchant for being in the moment with the character, delving into what's happening behind Caesar's eyes and the subtleties of translating human performance to an ape performance help to propel the narrative. This artistry is

what evokes empathy and connects audience to characters and story.

Spectacular spots

Among the commercials nominated for VES Awards were "Hero's Journey" for Kia Niro and "Do What You Can't: Ostrich" for Samsung. The former was selected by *SHOOT* editors as the #4 entry in our rundown of the Best Work of 2017, while "Ostrich" emerged as #5.

"Hero's Journey" was up for the VES Award recognizing Outstanding Visual Effects in a Commercial as was "Ostrich," which scored two other VES nods—Outstanding Animated Character in a Commercial (for the Ostrich); and Outstanding Compositing in a Photoreal Commercial. MPC Life, MPC Advertising's character development team, helped realize "Ostrich." Directed by MJZ's Matthijs Van Heijningen for Leo Burnett, the ad gave MPC the opportunity to create a fully photo-real and anatomically correct ostrich—and give him his own quirky personality. Opening with a curious ostrich stumbling into a VR headset, the spot shows the character beginning to dream of achieving the impossible. Via Samsung VR, the ostrich reaches new heights to the beat of "Rocket Man."

A reference shoot involving several real ostriches took place in South Africa before the CG counterpart was re-born via MPC London creative director Diarmid Harrison Murray, MPC LA creative director Michael Gregory and a global team of experts in LA, London, Paris

and Bangalore. Murray noted, "A photo-real ostrich definitely ranks as one of the toughest CG creatures I've faced, bar none. Their feathers are insanely fluffy and dynamic, and not like any other bird we have created before. We completely upgraded our existing feather system to deal with these challenges."

Van Heijningen also directed the Kia 2017 Super Bowl spot "Hero's Journey," this time collaborating with VFX house The Mill. In the :60 from agency David&Goliath, Melissa McCarthy is out to save the environment, learning that it can be perilous to do so. Each time she gets the worst end of the exchange, including when a surging whale emerges from the sea and dives back down onto her small motorboat, catapulting McCarthy towards the side of a distant ship with a cartoon-like thud. Luckily, McCarthy drives a Kia Niro, the vehicle that's up for any adventure, underscoring that "it's hard to be an eco-warrior but it's easy to drive like one."

The Mill LA primarily worked on "Hero's Journey" with its London office also contributing. The Mill's Tom Graham, who served as VFX shoot supervisor and 3D lead artist, related, "Everyone was in agreement that the CG had to be completely seamless. With full CG ocean shots with a whale and a digital double, a tree falling off a cliff, icebergs crumbling, and a rhino, we knew it would be tight in the amount of time we had. The clients were mainly concerned with keeping the story clear to the viewers with so much happening."