

My Dinner with Schwartz



LIFEDREAM & 91 CENTRAL PRODUCTIONS PRESENT

ZOE WILSON & JAMES PRAVASILIS IN "MY DINNER WITH SCHWARTZ"

WITH JEANINE BARTEL DEMETRIUS BLOCKER DENIS OOI & JENNIFER PLOTZKE

ORIGINAL SCORE BY LATE NIGHT LICENSING MUSIC BY MICHAEL BUTLER AND ANDY EVAN COHEN

EDITED BY EVAN METZOLD DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY ALEXA WOLF

COSTUME DESIGNER DEBBI HOBSON PRODUCTION DESIGNER APRIL LASKY LINE PRODUCER/UNIT PRODUCTION MANAGER EVAN METZOLD

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER THOMAS C. JACKSON PRODUCED BY MELISSA SKIRBOLL & PENNY JACKSON STORY BY PENNY JACKSON

SCREENPLAY BY PENNY JACKSON & MELISSA SKIRBOLL DIRECTED BY MELISSA SKIRBOLL



My Dinner with Schwartzey

Logline:

When a starry-eyed 16 year-old is introduced to NYC's outrageous downtown art/rock scene by a powerful music producer with a penchant for teens, she is tempted by the glitz and the glam until a mystery woman provides a glimpse into her possible future.

Synopsis:

Fiona, a precocious 16-year old with dreams of rock and roll stardom, has become the "special friend" of Schwartzey, a powerful music producer with a penchant for teens, who promises to make her dreams come true..for a price.

Fiona and Schwartzey party in the back of a limo on the way to dinner at the hottest club in town. Once they arrive, they bypass the line hoping to be admitted, Inside a crowd filled with the elite of the downtown NYC art and music scene gawk and gossip as they are led to their table. Dining with them tonight are Jane Alberta James, a Vogue cover model, and her new husband, Rupert, a rock god, and his date.

The scene, as seen through Fiona's eyes, is a bit surreal. Glimpses of a white rabbit hopping through the club, paired with a disturbing encounter with one of Schwartzey's ex-lovers serve to illuminate the danger hidden by the glamour of this world. Will Fiona succumb to Schwartzey's seductions or find her way out with her innocence intact is the question at the center of this dark comedy.

Directors Statement:

When Penny Jackson approached me to help adapt one of her short plays or stories into a short film, I immediately suggested "My Dinner with Schwartzey." I was familiar with the piece that had started life as a short story, published in 1989 (in Penny's "L.A. Child and Other Stories") as I had directed a staged reading of an adaptation at Dixon Place in NYC 2 years prior. The world that the protagonist Fiona describes is one I felt would suit the visual medium of film particularly well.



Populated with denizens of the downtown music and art scene, the world she describes is vivid and magical and seductive and scary – all at the same time. Like Alice through the looking glass, Fiona is in a world where reality is fluid. The Mad Hatter's Tea Party by way of Andy Warhol's Factory.

Underlying the fantastic setting is a story that seems ever more timely as the #metoo and #timesup movements have gained traction. Fiona may want the world to think she's all grown up but she's just 16 and in way over her head. While she would never think of herself as a victim, the adults in the room have all checked their responsibility at the door.

To explore the journey through this world was an invitation I couldn't pass up. One of the themes I find myself drawn to repeatedly is the nature of reality, fantasy, dreams – where one ends and the other begins. Add in alcohol, drugs, and a venue that's designed to make the jaded gasp, and the lines dividing truth from fiction start to blur. On that line is where "My Dinner with Schwartzey" lives.

Melissa Skirboll

Writers Statement:

"My Dinner with Schwartzey" was a short story I published as a college student in the 1980s. I was a fan of the punk rock scene at CBGB and was fascinated by the people who made up the downtown scene: musicians, models, artists, all hoping for Warhol's "15 minutes of fame." I remember being fascinated by a young teenage girl trying her best to channel Deborah Harry, sitting in the club with a much older man and his entourage of beautiful people. There was something about this girl, who – for all her makeup and eyeliner – reminded me of Alice lost in a wonderland of pretentious people and nonsensical rules.

Fast forward to August 2016, when the Dixon Place in New York City asked me if I could dramatize several of my stories for theatrical presentation. My Dinner with Schwartzey, was one of the pieces, directed by Melissa Skirboll, which was warmly received. Then, in October 2017, major New York media outlets published stories about Harvey Weinstein, and everything changed. Melissa texted: "Schwartzey could be Weinstein," I said. "Let's make a film!"

Melissa and I worked together on the script, to create a nuanced story, told from the young female's point of view. We are both fans of Alice In Wonderland, and as the story developed, the echoes of Alice served to enhance Fiona's journey. In addition to the confused teen, what particularly interested us, was the group of adults who enable influential men like Schwartzey with a code of silence. Like Carroll's Alice, Fiona is surrounded by unreliable and even dangerous adults.



Fiona's journey, filled with rock and roll and magic, is ultimately an assertion of power. In 1987 a movement called "#metoo" would have been unimaginable: We lacked – if not the will, certainly the technology. I greatly enjoyed revisiting this story and recreating it for film, where the magic and music could be rendered visual. Of course we had to include a white rabbit – who was not harmed in the making of this film!

Penny Jackson



My Dinner with Schwartz



My Dinner with **Schwartz**

Festival Screenings

2020

Brightside Tavern Film Festival
Fort Myers Beach International Film Festival

2019

Bermuda Film Festival
Beeston Film Festival
Indie Visions Film Festival
Genre Celebration
May Day Film Festival
6° Firenze Film Corti International Festival
Manhattan Film Festival
Long Island International Film Expo
East Hampton TV Fest
Fort Worth Indie Film Showcase
Action on Film Megafest
Hollywood Dreams
VOB Film Festival
Golden Door International Film Festival
Oaxaca Film Festival
Västerås Filmfestival
Filmchilla
YoFi, The Yonker Film Festival
Clifton Film Festival
Reel East Texas Film Festival
NYC TV Festival

My Dinner with **Schwartz**

AWARDS

Västerås Filmfestival

Filmmaker 2019 of the Year:

Melissa Skirboll

Best Film

Manhattan Film Festival (Dramedy)

NYC TV Festival (Dramedy)

Changing Face International Film Festival (Comedy)

DMOFF – Best Film of the Month

Best Director

Melissa Skirboll

Brightside Tavern Film Festival (Comedy)

DMOFF

Best Cinematography/DoP

Alexa Wolf

Long Island International Film Expo

DMOFF

Best Editing

Evan Metzold

Long Island International Film Expo

Best Actress

Zoe Wilson

East Hampton TV Festival

Top Indie Film Awards

Southern Shorts Awards

Award of Excellence for Production Design

Awards of Merit: Music, Sound Design, Cinematography

My Dinner with **Schwartz**

Nominations

EHTVFest:

Best Drama Pilot

Fort Worth Indie Film Showcase

Best Noir Short

AIF Megafest:

Best Soundtrack, Stella Adler Award for acting (Zoe Wilson)

Hollywood Dreams:

Best Soundtrack, Best Score

Golden Door Film Festival:

Best Actor (Jimmy Pravalis)

Clifton Film Celebration

Film Provocateur, Best HMU & Wardrobe

Reel East Texas Film Festival

Best Actress (Zoe Wilson)

Best Supporting Actor (Jimmy Pravalis)

NYC TV Festival

Best Actress (Zoe Wilson)

Best Actor (Jimmy Pravalis)

Genre Celebration Festival

Best Drama. Best Editing

Brightside Tavern Film Festival

Best Comedy, Best Script, Best Ensemble,

Best Actress (Zoe Wilson)

Top Indie Film Awards

Best Short Film, Best Directing, Best Screenwriting,

Best Concept, Best Cinematography

My Dinner with Schwartzey

Cast and Crew

Fiona	Zoe Wilson
Schwartzey	James Pravasilis
Dorothy	Jeanine Bartel
Jane Alberta James	Jennifer Plotzke
Rupert	Denis Ooi
Jane's Husband	Demetrius Blocker
Sleepy Boy	Skyler Gallun
Jose	Rob Figueroa
Mikey	Bryan Hamilton
Woman at Bar1	Taylor Graves
Man at Bar1	Nitin Madan
Woman at Bar2/Tuba Player	Linda Collins
Man at Bar2	Robert McEvily
Woman from Queens	Maureen Van Trease
Man from Queens	James B. Kennedy
Singer	Michael Butler
Bongo Player	Andy Evan Cohen
Dancer	Titania Galliher
Lou Reed?	Sammy James Jr.
Directed by	Melissa Skirboll
Written by	Penny Jackson Melissa Skirboll
Story by	Penny Jackson
Produced by	Penny Jackson Melissa Skirboll
Executive Producer	Thomas Campbell Jackson

My Dinner with Schwartz

Line Producer
Associate Producer
Production Manager

Evan Metzold
James B. Kennedy
Evan Metzold

Director of Photography
Editor
Production Design
Costume Design
Wardrobe Supervisor
Hair and Makeup
First Assistant Director
2nd Assistant Director

Alexa Wolf
Evan Metzold
April Lasky
Debbi Hobson
Kelsey Sasportas
Shannon Rae Mulligan
Samantha Winter
Tom Chandler

Sound Editor
Sound Mixer

Todd Lockwood
Samuel Stevenson-Yang

Assistant Camera
2nd Assistant Camera

David Merino
Richard Baldomero
Eva Joti
Christine Li

Key Grip
Dolly Grip
Gaffer

Austin Castelo
Taylor Myers
Dan Debrey

original score
original music/songs
original music

Late Night Licensing
Michael Butler
Andy Evan Cohen

production assistant
production assistant
assistant to the producer
rabbit handler

Nicole Maupin
Tommy Schultz
Mela Sierra
Delaney McDonough

Still Photography

Solanne Fardel
William Lide Powell

My Dinner With Schwartzey is one of my favourite films out of the material the pre-screeners & I selected for the 2019 BIFF Shorts Programme. It has a ferocious garage-band quality, along with a kinetic—and what I would call *Latin*—energy wrought from the editing by Evan Metzold. Based on a short story by Penny B. Jackson (who co-wrote the script with Skirboll) it chronicles a brief, warped journey into the New York rock scene, complete with an almost Lynchian cast of characters who bounce back & forth into the frame like adult versions of that kid at your school who ate glue.

Under halfway through the film a man (Lou Reed, perhaps?) leans over to Schwartzey to talk to him. Schwartzey's date Fiona turns to another guest and mutters, 'Is that...?' after which the guest is like, Shut up. Be cool.

'We had a David Bowie lookalike,' director Melissa Skirboll remembers on her couch in her New York apartment, 'he was supposed to fly in that morning but he got stuck in a weather thing.'

A bit stumped. 'W-Where was the David Bowie lookalike flying from?'

"From Florida, but I guess there was a storm. It was April when we shot it, so it could have been, like, hurricaney weather. I don't remember, exactly. But his flight was cancelled.

Then the *second* flight got cancelled. And I was like, 'So Lou Reed! You're on!'" your correspondent imagining a rather androgynous individual stuck in Tampa International Airport trying to kill time in sub-par cafés & restaurants, 'cuz the David Bowie lookalike would've been a much bigger audience recognition when she's like, 'Oh, is that...?' but I think it works with Lou Reed too.' Poor Lou. No one knows him.

Skirboll and writer Penny B. Jackson had worked together before when the pair adapted several of Jackson's stories for the stage. 'When we sat down to decide which one of her pieces might work as a film, this one [*My Dinner With Schwartzey*] came up,' raising her eyebrows, "and then the whole Weinstein story broke and we were like, 'You know what? This is really topical.'"

'He [James Pravalis] does look a lot like Harvey Weinstein,' your correspondent's sincerest apologies to Mr. Pravalis, 'I mean – a good-looking version of Harvey Weinstein.'

Melissa laughs. 'That's why I picked him.'

Walker Zupp: Talking to Melissa Skirboll (cont.)

One asset of the film is its performances. Each actor's dialogue (none of which was dubbed: 'We couldn't afford to do a dub.') and gestures are flawless. 'When you're working on a low budget,' explaining in an unpretentious & seasoned manner, 'having actors who you don't have to coax into a good performance, like, they're there, they inhabit the body: that's 90% of it. Then it's just, like, let them do their thing and let them play.' Although much of the film is stylized, there's always this organic thread roping together the Schwartzey-dollhouse. 'These people were so amazing that I don't think we cast anybody who wasn't just right.'

As #MeToo broiled in the background of the film's production, I asked Melissa if she thought she was a political filmmaker. 'I would not describe myself that way. I'm trying to remember who the quote is, but the personal is political—'

(1969: Carol Hanisch publishes an essay called *The Personal is Political* in which it is written: '*One of the first things we discover in these groups is that **personal problems are political problems**. There are no personal solutions at this time. There is only collective action for a collective solution.*')*

'—I think as a filmmaker—or as a storyteller in general with theatre, with film, with any of the creative stuff I do—it's about entertaining, and creating something that's interesting, that makes you think, that makes you laugh, that makes you cry,' she nods, 'and if it's not entertaining, being political is—just—*boring*, you know, getting up on a soapbox and spouting your creed.'

'That's what I liked about the film: it's very, 'here's some stuff, what do you think about it?' It never says what you should think is good or bad.'

'Well, also, this stuff doesn't happen in a vacuum. So I remember being 16 and being able to get into clubs and not wanting people to treat me like a child [*we subsequently discuss a famous individual who shall remain nameless*] it wasn't just one person, it was her parents, it was the people she hung out with, it was the director, it was a whole lifestyle. So it was more,' in terms of the film we know as *My Dinner With Schwartzey*, "of 'let's make this entertainment, and then you decide.'"

Ten of the *My Dinner With Schwartzey* production team are flying to Bermuda for the film's premier. With any luck, the David Bowie lookalike will accidentally board their flight, have an existential crisis, and live in Bermuda for the rest of his life.

* For the entire Carol Hanisch essay visit: <http://www.carolhanisch.org/CHwriting/PIP.html>

