

MARKING TIME

Two producers share their experiences of making the projects that earned them the Producers Mark certification.

Certification via the Producers Mark indicates that a producer performed a major portion of the producing functions on the motion picture. The full list of Producers Mark certifications can be viewed at producersguild.org.

Unplugging

Debbie Liebling, p.g.a.

In an effort to experience a “digital detox,” a husband and wife plan a weekend getaway from their busy lives without kids, phones or social media. They go into this mission hoping to get clean, fresh air from the great outdoors so they can rekindle that spark in their marriage. All is good, until they realize they can’t use GPS to guide them, which results in a comedic adventure that could either reconnect their relationship—or cause some serious network connectivity problems.

Out in theaters April 22.

UNPLUGGING IS ABOUT DISCONNECTING, BUT CONSIDERING THE CURRENT SOCIAL LANDSCAPE AND WHAT THE WORLD HAS BEEN THROUGH, HOW DID YOUR PERSPECTIVE ON THE STORY CHANGE FROM THE FIRST DAY YOU BOARDED THE PROJECT?

My perspective has not changed radically, since I think the issues of staying connected to your partner are ubiquitous through time—just with different distractions. I am not sure we

are any less phone-dependent than we were pre-pandemic. Perhaps we are more dependent now given the limited opportunities these past two years for direct human interaction. While we may have been running around more before and not connecting with each other, instead we are in our homes in different rooms on our own devices still not connecting with each other. The story is relevant either way, as many couples find ways to distract themselves from dealing with each other. Technology has replaced other avoidance techniques—golf, martini lunches, watching sports, chatting on the phone, Instagram, Zoom meetings, Wordle, online shopping, more sports, bingeing streamers. *Unplugging* is a story for folks in any relationship who find ways to distract themselves from true intimacy and connection.

WHAT WAS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE YOU ENCOUNTERED DURING THE COURSE OF UNPLUGGING PRODUCTION AND HOW WERE YOU ABLE TO OVERCOME IT?

We shot this film early in the pandemic when folks were really afraid to fly, so several actors who had been cast in supporting roles understandably



Above: Matt Walsh and Eva Longoria in *Unplugging*

Right: Debbie Liebling



lost their nerve to travel as the crisis worsened. We had to scramble to fill a few roles while we had already begun shooting with no schedule flexibility. Fortunately, between Matt Walsh, Brad Morris and me, we were able to reach out to friends in the comedy community who were happy and willing to help us out.

WHAT SURPRISED YOU THE MOST WHILE PRODUCING THIS FILM?

The best surprise was shooting in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The tax credit is extremely generous. The film office was so accommodating, from housing to location to food and crew. The city itself is more versatile for locations than I thought it could be. Folks opened their doors to their homes, and stores and offices and were very excited to have us there. We also discovered a cool foodie scene in Tulsa. I would love to shoot there again.



The Devil's Light

Jessica Malanaphy, p.g.a.

Sister Ann, age 25, believes that performing exorcisms is her calling. However, she is met with resistance from the religious institution because only priests—not nuns—are allowed to perform exorcisms. With the support of a mentor, she is allowed to observe training sessions. While trying to prove herself, she meets one of the school's most disturbed patients and is faced with a demonic force that is tied to her own past.

Out in theaters October 28.

THE DEVIL'S LIGHT IS ABOUT EXORCISMS, WHICH HAVE BECOME AN ENTIRE GENRE WITHIN THE HORROR/THRILLER SPACE. WHAT IS IT ABOUT THIS STORY THAT RESONATES WITH YOU PERSONALLY?

I love the ability that genre movies have to talk about serious issues—emotional trauma, societal inequalities, etc.—in the context of an entertaining film. For me, *The Devil's Light* is about a young woman battling sexism and the patriarchy—in this case, within the Catholic church. Sister Ann's talents are undeniable, but her unconventional approach to exorcism, drawing strength from her own vulnerabilities, is deemed dangerous by the establishment. I also love that we've flipped the female role here. Women are traditionally victims in exorcism stories, but Sister Ann is both caretaker and warrior.

WHAT WAS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE YOU ENCOUNTERED DURING THE COURSE OF *THE DEVIL'S LIGHT* PRODUCTION AND HOW WERE YOU ABLE TO OVERCOME IT?

The rite of exorcism is centuries old and seen in some of the most iconic genre films of all time. So to reinvent what exorcism could look like from a woman's perspective was a big challenge. As we were developing the project, we wanted to make sure we were faithful to the canon, but then departed from it in ways that were entirely character-based. Then, (director) Daniel Stamm and (actor) Jacqueline Byers worked with amazing stunt performers, choreographers and contortionists to physically show Sister Ann's internal struggle as she battled these demons.

WHAT SURPRISED YOU THE MOST WHILE PRODUCING THIS FILM?

We shot this in July 2020, so for most of us, it was the first time working in this new pandemic world. We

were figuring out all of the protocols and new tech as we were going. I was initially concerned that editing remotely, with our team literally spread out across the world, would make collaboration more difficult. But because we were all able to focus just on this while the rest of the world was shut down, it made the partnership stronger in a lot of ways. That and having our kids make appearances on Zoom during our sessions. ■



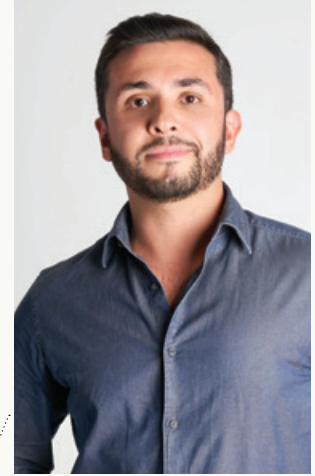
Jessica Malanaphy



Jacqueline Byers and Lisa Palfrey in *The Devil's Light*

NEW MEMBERS

A SPOTLIGHT ON SOME OF THE NEWEST MEMBERS OF THE PRODUCERS GUILD AND WHAT MAKES THEM TICK



Javier Gonzalez-Rubio

Gonzalez-Rubio was inspired to go into filmmaking after his father, a film buff and actor, encouraged him to do so—but he didn't know he wanted to be a producer. It wasn't until his father gave him Robert Evans' autobiography *The Kid Stays in the Picture* that his fate as a producer would come into focus. Now as a producer, Gonzalez-Rubio hopes to create a series about the brief and tragic story of the rule of Emperor Maximilian and Empress Carlota during the Second Mexican Empire.

What's the best piece of advice you've ever received about producing?

My go-to person when it comes to advice is my good friend and mentor, Marie Cantin. She's such an amazing producer. I think the best advice she has given me is to always have a plan B, C and D to make things happen.