

Mother

Written and Directed By Siân Heder



Winner: Cannes Film Festival, Cinéfondation

Winner: Grand Jury Award, Florida Film Festival

Winner: Special Grand Jury Prize, Seattle Int. Film Festival

Official Selection: Boston International Film Festival

Official Selection: AFI Fest, 2006

A Five Dollar Films Production

STARRING Angela Featherstone, Ashleigh Sumner *DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY* Paula Huidobro
EDITOR Vince Oresman *ORIGINAL MUSIC BY* Ryan Adison Amen *LINE PRODUCER* Share Stallings
PRODUCED BY David Newsom *WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY* Siân Heder



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MOVIES



STEPHANIE CORNFIELD FOR THE TIMES

NEXT PROJECT: Siân Heder plans to spin out her darkly comic short film into a full-length feature.

A nanny's insight

An encounter as a baby-sitter with an incompetent mother laid the seed for Siân Heder's short film "Mother," which confronts a female dilemma.

By **ROBERT W. WELKOS**
Times Staff Writer

CANNES, France — When Siân Heder arrived in Hollywood a few years ago with dreams of becoming an actress and screenwriter, she made ends meet working for a nanny agency that provided baby-sitters for children of guests staying at four-star hotels.

"It was kind of the most perfect job for somebody who had other agendas, because they would call you and say, 'Can you be at the Beverly Hills Hotel in an hour?'" Heder said as she sat at an outdoor cafe here.

But there was one day when the door to the top suite at the Four Seasons Hotel in Beverly Hills opened and what happened next would lead Heder to write and direct a 15-minute dark comedy called "Mother" that is in competition at this year's Cannes Film Festival, in the short films category. It screens today.

"Right away it was clear she was drunk or something was off, she was on pills or something," Heder recalled. "The woman had been in the room for a day and it looked trashed."

"It was almost as though this woman had been looking to hire a friend or a confidant. She had come to the hotel to have an affair. She didn't have any friends, she was hiding out from her husband, she had this toddler with her, and she had never been alone with the toddler before, she'd only had a nanny, and she wasn't able to bring the nanny because the nanny would tell the husband about the affair. She had no clue how to put a diaper on the kid."

Over the course of the night, she learned that the woman had come from no money, married a wealthy guy who wanted children and got stuck with motherhood without really knowing what to do.

"I so wanted to take the kid," Heder said. "It was the most absurd kind of abuse I had ever seen. The little kid wasn't being

beaten. There was just this narcissism and neglect... So, I left the room and went to the concierge and said, 'I'm really worried about this kid. Can you do something about it?' And he said, 'If there is no abuse taking place, we really can't do anything.'"

Heder thought of calling the county or state, but then thought, "I'm really in this woman's life for one night. I have no idea what her history is, maybe this is just some bad time for her. I left the hotel, got in my car and cried the whole way home, and I thought, I should have taken that kid."

It so happened that Heder had been writing scenes and character studies about a wayward girl who lives out of her van for a possible screenplay. The idea then came to her for a short film about a young woman who sleeps in her car, eats from trays of food left outside hotel rooms and is unexpectedly thrust into baby-sitting a toddler with an irresponsible mother. The movie ends with a troubling scene that makes audiences wonder what happens next.

The script for "Mother" was one of eight chosen, out of hundreds of applicants, to be awarded a grant and a fellowship with the Directing Workshop for Women at the American Film Institute. She was given \$5,000 and then three weeks to raise the rest of the money to make the film.

Heder, 28, and her boyfriend, David Newsom, 44, a fellow actor who produced the film, said they raised the additional \$15,000 by writing to friends and acquaintances, and even setting up a website that solicited money for the project. Newsom said investors were told up front they wouldn't make money in return.

"I had people who sent me \$10 and I had people who sent me \$2,000," she said.

The film, which features Angela Featherstone as the boozy mother and Ashleigh Summer as the reluctant baby-sitter, was filmed over five days last summer at the Loews Beverly Hills Hotel. Heder said they contacted numerous hotels before they found one that was willing to cooperate.

"We're approaching these hotels and saying, 'Hey, AFI is a nonprofit, we're poor filmmakers, we're struggling to make this film.' [and they said], 'OK, \$15,000 a night. We're going. That's our whole budget.' We finally found this hotel that gave us the presidential suite, the executive suite and use of the hallway for four days for \$4,500." Heder, who has worked off-Broadway as

well as in TV and films, grew up in Cambridge, Mass. The daughter of artists attended the theater program at Carnegie-Mellon University.

Heder said she submitted the film to various festivals and was rejected by about a dozen of them. But after someone at AFI submitted it to Cannes on her behalf, she received a call that she initially thought was a joke: A man with "a heavy, thick French" accent called her cellphone to say she had been accepted.

"I'm like, 'Who is this really?'"

Heder said her next project is a feature-length film, a spin-off of "Mother." She already has a screenplay called "Tallulah." Now she hopes to find financing, estimating she will need \$2 million to \$3 million.

She said her film explores a female dilemma: Who is meant to become a mother?

"I don't think every woman is a mother. I think there is some idea that because you're a woman, you have the capacity to be a mother. But I think there are women who really shouldn't have kids. That's why I don't have any animosity towards those women. I actually feel sort of feel sorry for them because they probably know they shouldn't have kids, but then they do it anyway."

Female directors face a different set of challenges, Heder said.

"It's a very lonely life," she said, noting that while the number of female producers is growing all the time, the number of female directors is not keeping pace. "You're on set a lot and you're away from your family if you have one, and I think that's easier for men to do..."

"I also think that women don't seem to help other women. I don't know why that is. It's almost like women who are successful, who have made it, are very protective of their place. I'm not sure whether they are afraid of being infringed upon by other women directors, but just in my limited experience, I've found there isn't a whole lot of support."

"I also think that women don't really get another chance. You get one chance to make a great movie and then if you have one failure, that's basically it for you. Whereas if you are a male director, you can make a hit and then a couple flops, and then maybe another hit. You're given more than one chance. With women, you get one shot."

FILM THREAT truth in entertainment .COM

MOTHER

by Michael Ferraro

(2006-05-05)

2006, Un-rated, 17 minutes, A Five Dollar Film Production

[CREDITS](#)



Lu is a lonely woman residing by herself inside a van near an upscale hotel. When dinnertime rolls around, she ventures inside the hotel to find leftovers in the hallways when Carolyn, a Beverly Hills mom, invites her into room. Inside the room roams a one year-old baby girl, naked and uncared for. This mother is too involved in her own world to care for the child. So she enlists Lu to baby-sit the kid while she goes out with a man that isn't her husband.



Carolyn is the kind of mom you'd imagine Paris Hilton or Tara Reid, or any of those other spoiled socialites, would be when they are parents. Especially now, at the peak of their partying days, how would they handle this responsibility when they never had to before? Writer/director Sian Heder used her real-life Los Angeles-area hotel babysitting experience to create a believably accurate portrayal of a socialite that is finally past their prime. *Mother* is a beautifully tragic and darkly comic story of odd encounters and parental neglect that won't be easy to forget.

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ABOUT THE AFI DIRECTING WORKSHOP FOR WOMEN

The script for "MOTHER" was one of eight, chosen out of hundreds of applicants to be awarded a grant and fellowship with the Directing Workshop for Women at AFI.

AFI, a non-profit organization dedicated to advancing the art of the moving image, established the Directing Workshop for women in 1974. The workshop is designed to provide women who have established themselves within film, television, and theater with the opportunity to direct narrative projects. Since its inception, many famous and talented women such as Lesli Linka Glatter, Joanne Woodward, Randa Haines and Maya Angelou have directed Workshop projects.

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Director's Note

When I first moved to Los Angeles, I worked as a baby-sitter for all of the four star hotels. Nightly I would pull up to the Four Seasons, The Bel air, The Beverly Hills Hotel and hand my five hundred dollar Buick over to a skeptical valet. I would check in with the concierge who would scan me from head to toe, assessing the cost of my outfit and then nod me towards the elevator and up to the room. I would stand waiting at the door for an inordinate amount of time until it was opened in a flourish by some over-highlighted, Mystic-tanned mom in some state of undress, who would usher me inside and return to her preparations. Her husband might be there, tying his tie in the living room of the suite, but often not. Mostly it was just the woman, dashing out the door, on her way to Spago or the Ivy, sometimes failing to ask my name, and failing to tell me the name of the child who was parked in front of the TV .

I encountered a kind of abuse I had never seen before. The kids were well fed and well taken care of. They wore Prada onesies, stayed in five star hotels, yet they were utterly neglected. Child Services was not going to storm into the room and say, "Ma'am, your child is not allowed to match your shoes and your purse, we are taking the kid." The babies were alone, objects among shopping bags, virtually ignored.

One night I was so disturbed by the behavior of the mother, I reported it to the hotel staff. They were unwilling to interfere. "It's a private room," they told me "it's not our business."

I sat in the car on the way home thinking: who would interfere? What if I were a different person? What if I were someone who lived outside of the boundaries of society, a fringe person who acted from instinct rather than rationale, someone who came from a similar background and knew the dangers of growing up with a mother who was only a toddler herself? What if that person had been in that room?

So "Mother" was born. A meditation on a kind of narcissism that seems to exist in abundance among the wealthiest of Los Angeles. A dark and funny look at neglect.

- Siân Heder, September 22, 2005

Production Notes:

17 years in front of the camera does little to prepare one for a few months laboring in independent film *behind* the camera. I suspect this kind of naiveté is useful for a neophyte producer; after all, what's the use of panic if the boat's going over the falls anyway?

Early on, things seemed more like herding cats than actually organizing a fine tuned production machine. With the bulk of our budget still unaccounted for, a large majority of Los Angeles crew-people already employed on television shows and cast unknown 4 weeks prior to shooting, we had our moments of doubt. Luckily, Siân's script attracted talented crew and cast alike, and with the gentle hand of our line producer, Share Stallings, we managed to at least shoot the falls facing forward and not dump over broadside.

Casting was tricky. Lu is a woman of few words, struggling to make sense of her bizarre dilemma, while Carolyn, our former party girl turned aggrieved mother, must turn from seductive confidante to woman-facing-the-abyss in an instant. As Lu, Ashleigh Sumner brought a kind of wary animal beauty to the part. Angie Featherstone found a Carolyn of stunning opposites. Once Siân put the two of them together, it was clear we had a ball game.

The ship continued speeding forward. We raised 15,000 in three weeks, via a website and a brilliant little party with some of LA's finest singer songwriters donating their talent. Our DP, the subtle and brilliant storyteller Paula Huidobro, worked out a shot list with Siân that would make the most of what is essentially a two-hander on a small set. Siân's sister, Thyra, drew exquisite storyboards that literally saved us during filming. Editor Vince Oresman took on the story as his own, visiting set every day, and conferring with Siân and Paula about changes and flow. Our production designers, Monica Wille and Becky Sapp, pulled off miracles on a tight budget, turning Lu's van into world of mobile kitsch. For Caroline's hotel room, they created a lair simultaneously lush and suffocating. The crew in general pulled one rabbit from the hat after another and by day 2 of filming we were loping along.

Of course, there were bumps here and there. Siân kept a little log during filming, day four being my personal favorite:

“Day Four: My lead actress has the flu, and in a moment of inspiration, we have scheduled the babies right in the middle of their nap. Welcome to totally different babies. Screaming tiny basket cases wailing through every shot. Right in time for our hotel hallway shot, the elevator dings open and a swarm of Beverly Hills ladies and their tiny dogs come prancing through our set. The hotel had failed to mention there was a 400 person doggie convention happening on the same floor, a couple doors down. The whole day begins to feel like an episode of "the amazing race", everything down to the wire, the Studio teacher pulling the babies, the entire crew running with the steady cam through the hallways, trying to get the last shot of the day. And we did.”

Now, having sat through countless screenings during post, we are happy that everyone who hung in there, offered their support and worked so hard has “Mother” to show for it. It's a little gem, and we're proud of it and everyone who had a hand in making it.

-David Newsom, Producer

“Mother” Bios

Siân Heder- Director



Siân Heder is one of eight women chosen this year to take part in the prestigious Directing Workshop for Women at AFI. Siân grew up in Cambridge, MA in a community of artists. Her mother is a renowned sculptor and her father a public artist. Siân received her Bachelor of Fine Arts in theater from Carnegie Mellon University and has studied with the British American Drama Academy in London, The Moscow Art Theater and at the Museum School of Fine Arts in Boston. She has worked as an actress Off-Broadway as well as in television and film. She is the writer of two feature screenplays, “South Third” and “Tallulah”. She continues to work as an actress and producer, developing work through the New York based company, Naked Angels. She wrote and directed her first short film, “Guera”, which explored the tensions between a young latino boy and his older white neighbor. Her most recent film, “Mother” a dark comedy about narcissism and neglect, was developed through the Jessica Kaplan writing series at AFI and supported by the Directing Workshop for Women.

David Newsom- Producer



David, a New Jersey native and graduate of the Ithaca College Film Program, has been working on both sides of the camera since 1986. He spent his early days in New York City working production on commercials and rock videos before moving to Los Angeles where he has worked extensively as an actor in film and television. He has starred in series such as, “Homefront”, “The Days”, is currently recurring on NBC’s “Inconceivable” and has appeared on “CSI”, “24”, “Will & Grace” and many other programs. His book, “Skip” a photo essay of his brother and the landscapes of Idaho, will be published this fall by Perceval Press.

Paula Huidobro- Director of Photography



Paula Huidobro was born in Mexico City. She studied at the London Film School and obtained her MFA in cinematography at the American Film Institute. She has shot commercials in Mexico and the US for brands like McDonalds, Pfizer and Coca Cola among others and music videos for Emi Music and Univision Records.

She has also shot more than a dozen short films, which have screened around the world in festivals like Camerimage, Deauville Film Festival, DGA Student Awards, London Film Festival among others. Her thesis film, “Wednesday Afternoon”, recently won the gold medal at the Student Academy Awards.

She is currently on the pre production of “Jake Lead”, a feature directed by Josh Evans.

Vincent Oresman-Editor



Vincent Oresman is a film editor whose feature work includes Vincent Gallo’s “Brown Bunny” and Rob Nillson’s “Nine at Night.” His commercial credits include award-winning television campaigns for HP and Nissan. He is currently editing the documentary “Bomb It,” a worldwide history of the graffiti art movement with director Jonathan Reiss.

A graduate in film from San Francisco State University, Vincent has directed and edited several films with the Los Angeles based Alpha 60 film collective as well as the award winning short, “A Formal Apology.”

Ryan Adison Amem-



Growing up either running through the Colorado mountains or with a trumpet practically glued to his lips, the young Ryan Adison Amen found he had an inextinguishable passion to play and create music. Coupled with his delight in movies, he was compelled to meld the two mediums. A recent graduate of the University Of Southern California's Scoring for Motion Pictures and Television, Ryan now spends nearly all his time involved in creating music for the screen. As a team producer/composer at Barton:Holt Music & Sound Design and as a freelance film composer, Ryan has had the opportunity to score three feature films, numerous commercials, dozens of student films, and short subjects. For Ryan, the fun lies in collaborating with great people to create something unique. And then watching it and saying, "Is it me, or did you just get chills from that?!"

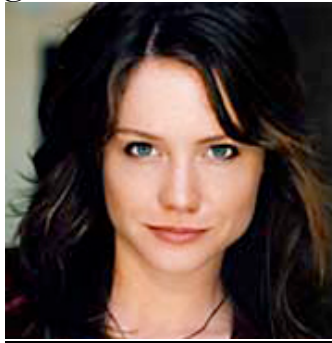
Angela Featherstone- “Carolyn”



Angela Featherstone, a native to Nova Scotia, began her acting career in 1994, working with Sam Rami in “Army of Darkness”. She has since appeared in such comedies as “Seinfeld”, “Friends” and “The Wedding Singer”, and indie drama’s such as Nick Gomez’s “Illtown”, Tamara Davis’ “Skipped Parts” and Jake Kasdan’s “Zero Effect”. Though she once credited both old movies and books as her early acting instructors, she now works closely with famed L.A. acting coach Leigh Kilton-Smith.

Ms. Featherstone, an accomplished writer, has been published in “Jane Magazine”, “Time”, and “Flare” and has written several comedy screenplays currently under development.

Ashleigh Lauren Sumner-“Lu”



After graduating with a B.A. in Theater Arts from Western Carolina University. Ashleigh Sumner worked professionally with the Warehouse Theater in South Carolina for a season appearing in such classics as, "Servant of Two Masters," "Measure for Measure," "The Vagina Monologues," and "Danny and the Deep Blue Sea." Recently, she has had the pleasure of performing on stage with Angelica Huston and Sir Ben Kingsley in the Actor's Fund of America's production of, "Sunset Boulevard" at the Pantages Theater in Hollywood.

Aside from her work on stage, Sumner's television credits include a supporting role on the CBS/Hallmark Hall of Fame television movie, "The Locket," and two co-star appearances on the WB's "Dawson's Creek."

Upcoming projects include a guest star appearance on CBS's, "CSI: Crime Scene Investigation." Also, Ashleigh will be assisting Tony Award Winning Director, Peter Hunt, on a staged version of, "Casablanca," starring Christian Slater and Anne Heche.

Lauren and Maddy Wesch



Lauren and Madelyn Wesch, born Oct. 15, 2005 in Mission Viejo, CA and currently live in San Clemente, California. They filmed a California Cheese/"Happy Cows come from California" commercial in June 2005, which is currently running on national television. They love going to the beach, playing with their dogs, and being outdoors. They are involved in a toddler gymnastics class, as well as a toddler music class - where they get to dance and play around with different musical instruments.

MOTHER Credits

WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY

Siân Heder

PRODUCED BY

David Newsom

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Paula Huidobro

EDITOR

Vince Oresman

STARRING

Angela Featherstone

Ashleigh Sumner

ORIGINAL MUSIC BY

Ryan Adison Amen

LINE PRODUCER

Share Stallings

CAST

Angela Featherstone	Carolyn
Ashleigh Sumner	Lu
Lauren Wesch	Madison
Madelyn Wesch	Madison
Halbert Bernal	Room Service
Alex Furth	Valet

PRODUCTION DESIGNERS

Becky Sapp

Monica Wille

ART DIRECTOR

Lynda Lopez

COSTUME DESIGNER

Darragh Marmorstein

COSTUME SUPERVISOR

Riley Salyards

HAIR & MAKEUP

Erika Garcia

STORYBOARD ARTIST

Thyra Heder

SCRIPT SUPERVISOR

Kristina Lear

PRODUCTION MANAGER

Melcher Fabi

PRODUCTION COORDINATOR

Alyssa Lightbourn

ASSISTANT DIRECTORS

Shea Farrell

Carrie LeGrand

Jonathan Hall

Cynthia Graner

CAMERA OPERATORS

Dan Hertzog

Terry Schroth

STEADICAM OPERATOR

Mark Meyers

ASSISTANT CAMERA

Nick Hiltgen

2nd ASST. CAMERA/SWING

Jen Willis

SOUND RECORDIST

Sam Hamer

BOOM OPERATORS

Edmond "Pete" Johnson

Greg Inverso

GAFFER

Torrey Schoerner

Neal Mhaskar

GRIPS

Jon Miller

Jeff Noble

Matt Debacker

PRODUCTION ASSISTANTS

Thyra Heder

Brigitte Liebowitz

Shawna James

Hill Shan Hon

ONLINE EDITOR

Tony Tong

COLORIST

Tom Overtone

STUDIO TEACHERS

Pamela Wood

Geraldine Needle

PRODUCTION SERVICES BY

Complex Corporation

CATERERS

Production Gourmet (John Woodard)

Pitfire Pizza Company

SOUND DESIGN and MIX

William Levins

MUSIC MIX

Chris Justice

PERCUSSIONIST

M.B. Gordy

"Wired for Sound"

Written by Jason Asnes & John Easley

Performed by Crown Heights

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24P HD camera equipment courtesy of Sony Corporation of America

Screenplay developed in the Jessica Kaplan Writing Series at the Directing Workshop for Women

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Andrew Briskin and Dr. Susannah Briskin

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Director Sian Heder choreographs a moment between Angie Featherstone and Halbert Bernal



Carolyn (Angie Featherstone) in "Mother".



“Lu” (Ashleigh Sumner) in “Mother”



Lu (Ashleigh Sumner) gives Maddy (Lauren Wesch) a bath.