

GUEST  
— *of* —  
HONOUR



**Competition**

The Film Farm & Ego Film Arts present



Toronto International  
Film Festival 2019

**Special Presentations**

# GUEST — *of* — HONOUR

a film by Atom Egoyan

**Featuring David Thewlis, Laysla De Oliveira & Luke Wilson**

Canada – 1.85 – 103 min.

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# Synopsis



Jim and his daughter Veronica, a young high-school music teacher, attempt to unravel their complicated histories and intertwined secrets.

After a hoax goes very wrong, Jim's daughter is falsely convicted for abusing her position of authority over 17-year-old Clive. Veronica is nevertheless convinced she deserves to be punished, but for much earlier crimes. Confused and frustrated by Veronica's intransigence, Jim's anguish begins to impinge on his job as a food inspector. He wields great power over small family-owned restaurants; a power he doesn't hesitate to use.



# Director's Statement

*Guest of Honour* is an emotional investigation of the bond between a father and a daughter. Their history has been rocked by events that neither fully understands. They're both in a suspended state for much of the film, trying to understand the nature of their connection to one another.

There's a very clear sense of time passing in this film. While we understand from the beginning that their physical relationship has ended with the father's death, the details of their past are revealed in a form of psychological autopsy. The film ends with an unexpected reconciliation.

As a food inspector, Jim – played by David Thewlis – has the power to close a restaurant down, and while he uses this authority to determine other people's destinies, he desperately tries to understand his own place in the world.

His daughter, played by Laysla de Oliveira, believes that she has found a way to a strange sort of peace in her life, until that is challenged by revelations of a past she never fully understood.

The character who holds the key to this past seems to be a priest, played by Luke Wilson. The biggest mystery in the film is whether the food inspector, Jim Davis, in asking for his eulogy to be performed by this particular priest, has somehow planned an emotional reconciliation he could never have achieved with his daughter in life.

As in most of my films, I'm trying to find a cinematic way of allowing the viewer to inhabit the particular world my characters are trying to navigate. What I'm interested in exploring is what might be called the 'emotional chronology' of Jim and his daughter, Veronica, a way of measuring their complex feelings. While the structure of the film is non-linear, it is actually based on a simple recounting of the scenes as they flow into the characters' minds.

While the situations specific to Jim and Veronica are extreme, the parent/child bond will be very familiar to audiences.

I think every child feels their parents made mistakes – certain ways in which the parent did not express love, or pay the right sort of attention. Those moments reverberate through our lives in sometimes painful ways.

There are at least five timelines woven through *Guest of Honour*, yet I wanted to create a sense that for Jim and Veronica the scenes all play in a continuous and sometimes shocking sense of the 'eternal present'. The film itself becomes a sort of machine through which the characters come to an understanding of what they mean to each other.



## The location

Hamilton (Ontario, Canada) has been an incredible gift to this production because it's a very open community. The ethnic enclaves you find in Toronto don't exist here. There's no formal Chinatown, Koreatown or Little Italy. It's much more fluid. At the moment, the second language of Hamilton is Arabic. Hamilton has been incredibly open to Syrian refugees and we've actually used that in the film. We're trying to be very specific about this being a tale that's set in the city.

## The photography

*Guest of Honour* is a story told through glass. Apart from the actual glass of the camera lens, which displays the way in which images of the past can be refracted and refigured, there is a literal use of a glass musical instrument woven through the film.

The use of glass as a distorting lens, as well as a material which allows the process of creative expression, was an important motif in *Guest of Honour*. It is woven into Mychael Danna's beautiful soundtrack in unexpected ways, as the characters come to terms with the complexity of their lives and the exoticism of their relationship to their own pasts.





## The cast

There are actors directors dream of working with. I'll never forget Mike Leigh's *Naked* and David Thewlis's searing performance. When I was writing this role, I had the idea that Jim came from 'somewhere else' - like most of the characters in the film. Luke Wilson is playing a Texan who is transplanted to Canada, and most of the restaurateurs in the film are also from somewhere else. Laysla is Canadian, but of Brazilian background.

**David Thewlis** is so attentive to the nuances of his character. He is the guardian of everything Jim would be, could possibly be. He really has invested himself quite completely and given it an inflection, a humour and humanity.

Veronica is so unlike **Laysla de Oliveira**. For much of the film, she's playing a character who's broken, who makes impulsive, self-destructive decisions. We see her joy in music and we see her dark pain as well. With incarceration, she's found a way of medicating herself, I suppose.

I knew **Luke Wilson** through his comedic roles. Then I saw Reed Morano's *Meadowland*. It's beautifully made and Luke's work is just so sensitive - it was a revelation to me. I loved his earnestness and intensity and his ability to listen. That's what this role is about.

Father Greg is an unusual priest. He knows about Veronica who's come to see him to arrange a funeral for Jim. As he talks with Veronica to learn details for the eulogy, Father Greg comes to understand that he knows a great deal about her narrative. But he's bound by oath not to share his knowledge. He breaks his word because, he decides, it is critical for Veronica to understand her father. Rather than see her continue to suffer, living with false assumptions, Father Greg renounces his pledge. This role demands an exceptionally empathetic actor.

# Selected filmography

## FEATURE FILMS



### **2019 - GUEST OF HONOUR**

Venice Official Competition

Toronto International Film Festival, Special Presentations

### **2015 - REMEMBER**

Venice Official Competition

Toronto International Film Festival, Gala Presentations

### **2014 - THE CAPTIVE**

Cannes Official Competition

### **2013 - DEVIL'S KNOT**

San Sebastián Official Competition

### **2009 - CHLOE**

Toronto International Film Festival

### **2008 - ADORATION**

Cannes Official Competition, Prize of the Ecumenical Jury

Toronto International Film Festival

Best Canadian Feature Film - Special Jury Citation

### **2006 - CITADEL (DOCUMENTARY)**

Hot Docs International Film Festival, Premiere

### **2005 - WHERE THE TRUTH LIES**

Cannes Official Competition

### **2002 - ARARAT**

Cannes Official Selection, Out of Competition

### **1999 - FELICIA'S JOURNEY**

Cannes Official Competition

### **1997 - THE SWEET HEREAFTER**

Cannes Official Competition Grand Prix Winner,

FIPRESCI Prize, Prize of the Ecumenical Jury

Oscar Nominee for Best Director and Best Adapted Screenplay

Toronto International Film Festival, Best Canadian Feature Film

### **1994 - EXOTICA**

Cannes Official Competition, FIPRESCI Prize

Toronto International Film Festival, Best Canadian Feature Film

### **1993 - CALENDAR**

Berlin International Film Festival, The Forum of Young Cinema,

Interfilm Award Taormina Film Fest, Special Jury Prize

### **1991 - THE ADJUSTER**

Cannes Directors' Fortnight

Toronto International Film Festival, Gala Presentations,

Best Canadian Feature Film,

Moscow International Film Festival, Special Jury Prize

### **1989 - SPEAKING PARTS**

Cannes Directors' Fortnight

### **1987 - FAMILY VIEWING**

Berlin International Film Festival, The Forum of Young Cinema

Locarno Official Competition, Prize of the Ecumenical Jury

Toronto International Film Festival, Best Canadian Feature Film

### **1984 - NEXT OF KIN**

Toronto International Film Festival, Premiere

Mannheim International Film Week, Gold Ducat award





David Thewlis

One of the great advantages of working with Atom, or any director that works in this way, is his script. That's the most important thing. One feels that it's evolving daily, hourly, it's not a fixed thing that we must adhere to or seek outside permission to make changes. Everything is evolving organically in the making of it once you're on the location, once you're under the lights, once you're with an actor who's saying it slightly differently, once you think of a different way of doing it, once Atom gives you a note that makes you see a different way of doing it. And he's one of the great directors for giving notes. That's often underestimated, I think, in terms of what makes a great director. Some very prestigious directors aren't always the best at communicating what they want. They may be magnificent in many, many ways but aren't always that skilled in talking to an actor, helping an actor create the character, which is conversational, which is something to be discussed, days before, weeks before, in rehearsal or certainly during the process of different takes. After the first take something else is discussed, after the second take, something else again and so on giving the actor confidence and giving the actor new ideas, a new way of looking at things. This makes you take chances that you may not have thought about the night before.

The thing that attracted me to read the script quickly, almost the moment I got it, was Atom's name attached to it. I get all sorts of scripts and sometimes I procrastinate, but because it was Atom's script it got my attention straight away. And then there was the script itself, of course. I read it and knew immediately that I wanted to do it. It really captures my attention, my imagination. But it wasn't an offer, I had to go and meet Atom and see if it was possible that we could all get this done together.

Jim's relationship with his daughter is obviously highly complex, that's what the film is about. All the more curious, therefore, that I worked with Laysla, who plays

Veronica, for only two days. It was very, very helpful that my first day on this film I had no scenes with Laysla. On the first day, Jim was in the audience for 10-year-old Veronica's piano recital. I am the father of a 13-year-old girl so I know what it's like to have a 10-year-old. That scene brought home to me the depth of this relationship. I was so grateful that it happened that way, because it made it so utterly relatable. Realizing that the story really begins there, with the death of the mother. Jim is left on his own from then onwards, and it wasn't something I'd really thought about that much - the fifteen intervening years between Veronica as young girl and Veronica as a woman.

I understood what Jim so much loved about Veronica as a woman, a woman who's gone off the rails, a woman who now baffles him, a woman who seems absolutely so incomprehensible in terms of her motives. And seeing that little girl playing the piano, the whole story became clear for me on the first day. I was so grateful for it, because the story for me and for Jim Davis is all about his relationship with his daughter. Of course, there are sub-plots and various metaphorical issues and symbolism and storytelling, but it's about a man trying to communicate with his daughter, trying to communicate the love he has for his daughter.

Of course one doesn't always draw on one's own experience and indeed I couldn't in terms of the older Veronica. But I certainly know stories of other parents, or other young women back when I was of that age, who have enormously complex stories. Now we don't go into great detail of Veronica's back-story, but certainly Atom and Laysla

and I have discussed it, so we know what we're talking about. I find that utterly relatable in terms of how so many young people can get lost somewhere between adolescence and early adulthood, in all kinds of things that maybe one wouldn't anticipate in their earlier years and can be catastrophic. It's a terrible thing that's happened really.

One of Jim's characteristics is this sense of power he wields as a food inspector which may sound a rather banal job description. It doesn't evoke wonderful images of 'this is a fascinating character I want to get to know' until you really go down that hole and see what the issues are with food inspectors, and what a power-complex this man has. Simply, he can wreak havoc on people's lives, close down family businesses with the flick of a pen - based on opinion or perfidy. He starts to abuse his power and manipulate his occupation to his own ends. But he's rather delusional. He sees himself as some 'saviour', as some campaigner for health and safety, health and cleanliness, the health code is his bible and it takes him over. We have a backstory where he started a restaurant and that seems to have been scuppered by what happened to Veronica. He had to walk away from that business because of the vicissitudes of Veronica's life and whether he holds some resentment there is another thing to be discussed. Maybe he's doing this job as some kind of revenge. Now he enters a restaurant with the power to destroy the business, the lives of the owners. His vocation was taken away from him, and now he can visit the same fate on others. There are many levels to this film, you keep discovering them all the time.

## SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

2019

**GUEST OF HONOUR** by Atom Egoyan

**ETERNAL BEAUTY** by Craig Roberts

2017

**FARGO** (FX series) produced by Ethan & Joel Coen

**WONDER WOMAN** by Patty Jenkins

2015

**ANOMALISA** by Duke Johnson & Charlie Kaufman

**MACBETH** by Justin Kurzel

2014

**THE THEORY OF EVERYTHING** by James Marsh

**QUEEN & COUNTRY** by John Boorman

2013

**ZERO THEOREM** by Terry Gilliam

**RED 2** by Dean Parisot

2011

**WAR HORSE** by Steven Spielberg

**THE LADY** by Luc Besson

**ANONYMOUS** by Roland Emmerich

2008

**THE BOY IN THE STRIPED PYJAMAS** by Mark Herman

2005

**THE NEW WORLD** by Terrence Malick

**KINGDOM OF HEAVEN** by Ridley Scott

2004-2011

**HARRY POTTER** feature films by Alfonso Cuarón and David Yates

1998

**BESIEGED** by Bernardo Bertolucci

**THE BIG LEBOWSKI** by Joel & Ethan Coen

1993

**NAKED** by Mike Leigh

Cannes Film Festival - Best Actor Award



# Laysla de Oliveira

Veronica is a young music teacher who is passionate about her craft. But, she also carries trauma that bleeds into her relationship with her father. The film explores the complexities of family life. How family can absolutely make you or absolutely break you or both at the same time. The vast breadth of feelings - the turmoil those feelings cause! People will be able to relate to that. *Guest of Honour* covers such a wide range of time, you get to see the evolution of specific characters, which is very exciting.

Our family has been around us for our entire lives, they're everything we know. Sometimes we project our feelings onto them, sometimes we feel their words are hurtful, but that's what having a family is all about, and I think *Guest of Honour* really explores that.

I learned how to conduct from Shannon Graham who is the composer of 'Puppet Master' (Veronica's band composition), which we use in *Guest of Honour*. She taught me the basic motions, the beats, and then I did a lot of YouTube research to figure out what Veronica's style would be. I knew that by reading the script, Atom wanted it to be something very passionate. She's very lively when she conducts. I say she's a condancer, conductor-dancer. I thought it was so important to show her moments of joy and happiness. It's a big contrast to her darkness.

## SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

2019

**GUEST OF HONOUR** by Atom Egoyan  
**LOCKE & KEY** (Netflix series)

2018-2019

**THE GIFTED** (Fox series)

2018

**ACQUAINTED** by Natty Zavitz

2016

**LEA TO THE RESCUE** by Nadia Tass



# Luke Wilson

I'm feeling very lucky to work with Atom. To me it's always the really special director who changes things on the fly. That always comes from a position of confidence and strength. Whether it's because of an actor's idea, or Atom hearing his words out loud, or the way it looks in the location - each day, we've made adjustments. You have to be nimble, fast on your feet.

Father Greg is one of those characters that's woven throughout the story. Not quite a narrator, and not the protagonist, but a figure that intersects with the different characters. In that way, he knows all of the people that the audience meets, at different times and in different situations. And often times, as we find out, he knows these very personal parts of some of the characters' histories.

Father Greg's character is a way for the audience to keep up with the storyline and these characters whose lives interrelate. You have these imperfect, interwoven characters and then there's the priest who's something of a psychiatrist, or a psychologist, or a doctor, somebody that people go to and share their personal stories.

## SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

2019

**GUEST OF HONOUR** by Atom Egoyan

**THE GOLDFINCH** by John Crowley

2016

**DEAR ELEANOR** by Kevin Connolly

**ROCK DOG** by Ash Brannon

2015

**THE RIDICULOUS 6** by Frank Coraci

2014

**RIDE** by Helen Hunt

**THE SKELETON TWINS** by Craig Johnson

2010

**DEATH AT A FUNERAL** by Neil LaBute

2007

**3:10 TO YUMA** by James Mangold

2006

**IDIOCRACY** by Mike Judge

**MY SUPER EX-GIRLFRIEND** by Ivan Reitman

2005

**THE WENDELL BAKER STORY** by Andrew & Luke Wilson

2003

**OLD SCHOOL** by Todd Phillips

2001

**THE ROYAL TENENBAUMS** by Wes Anderson

2001 - 2003

**LEGALLY BLOND** feature films by Robert Luketic and Charles Herman-Wurmfeld

2000 - 2003

**CHARLIE'S ANGELS** feature films by McG

2000

**MY DOG SKIP** by Jay Russell

1998

**RUSHMORE** by Wes Anderson

1996

**BOTTLE ROCKET** by Wes Anderson





# Cast

David Thewlis  
Laysla De Oliveira  
Luke Wilson  
Father  
Rossif Sutherland  
Alexandre Bourgeois  
Arsinée Khanjian

Jim  
Veronica  
Greg  
Mike  
Clive  
Anna

# Crew

Director Atom Egoyan  
Screenwriter Atom Egoyan  
Producers Simone Urdl, Jennifer Weiss & Atom Egoyan  
Production Companies The Film Farm & Ego Films Arts  
Executive Producers Sébastien Beffa, Nicolas Brigaud-Robert, Valéry Guibal, François Yon, Laurie May, Noah Segal, Adrian Love  
Cinematographer Paul Sarossy  
Production Designer Phillip Barker  
Music Composer Mychael Danna  
Editor Susan Shipton  
Composer Veronica's Theme 'Puppet Master' Shannon Graham  
Sound Steven Munro, Daniel Pellerin, Rob Fletcher  
Canadian Distributor Elevation Pictures  
International Sales Playtime