

Nervy Girl Films Press Kit

Photos: nervygirlfilms.com
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Nervy Girl Films Presents

“WHAT HAPPENED AT THE VETERANS HOME?”

A film By Laura Wetzler

An inspiring story about three heroic women caught dead center in the pandemic who refuse to be silenced



- A timely story ripped from the headlines
- A 49:37 min. indie Drama shot in doc style with a touch of magical realism
- An emotional work focused on the people who go largely unrepresented as characters in film: a female disabled veteran, a single mother frontline nurse, and an older, hardworking, care worker who courageously blows the whistle on a mismanaged institution and a negligent society.
- Written, directed, produced & scored by a woman, first time filmmaker Laura Wetzler
- Starring a strong, multi-cultural, all-female cast: Sonya Joyner, Judith Nelson Dilday, Rydia Q. Vielehr, & Robin Burdulis

Synopsis

What Happened at the Veterans Home? is a fictional film inspired by worldwide events about three women caught dead center in the pandemic nursing home tragedy.

The film focuses on the intertwined stories of *Gloria Michaels*, (Sonya Joyner) a blunt, charismatic disabled veteran with a sense of humor; her daughter *Gwen Michaels*, (Rydia Q. Vielehr) an overwhelmed hospital nurse; and *Mary Emmett*, (Judith Nelson Dilday) a hardworking CNA care aide and whistleblower who insists on revealing the truth of what really went on inside the nursing home during the early days of the pandemic to an inquiring reporter we never see. Her own loss is slowly revealed. Throughout the story, we also hear the surprising, serio-comic point of view of the *Covid* virus itself. **These are women you want to know, who share their harrowing personal experiences directly with the audience in a series of intimate scenes. Gloria, Gwen & Mary never shrink from hard truths, or shy away from their grief, and still they manage to mine their wit, anger, and strength to demand better and fight on. Passionate and powerful.**

The music soundtrack, composed and performed by Laura Wetzler, is mostly derived from musical material found in her original song, *If I Could Sing You Well*, sung over the opening credits. The score ranges from guitar riff poignant, to woodwind dissonant, to veteran fanfare orchestral triumph. George Wurzbach assisted with orchestration, additional instrumental performances, and production, and Eric M. Berlin is featured as trumpet soloist.

Writer/Director statement: *This little film was written in a state of utter outrage and grief mid pandemic, completed on July 4, 2020. I wrote it in response to news reports about lock down conditions and the mounting death toll in nursing homes around the world, particularly in American facilities for veterans. As a professional musician, I love working with seniors, and I could always tell the staffing conditions and morale of a place the minute I walked in. I am horrified by the fact our most vulnerable folks, and the workers who care for them, are systemically abandoned in our culture. The script was composed mostly in monologues to accommodate the crisis conditions, and I began opening it out as shooting circumstances allowed, adapting it for film. With the help of special cultural advisor Keena Keel, I was fortunate to find four amazingly gifted actors from Boston and New York who give life to Gloria, Gwen, Mary and Covid. I found a wonderful DP/editor, and a sound person, and we began rehearsing by zoom in August, 2020. The film was fast shot in Western Massachusetts, safely in accordance with pandemic protocols, on a micro budget over a period of 8 days, in Sept. 2020. I am so grateful to the cast for their great performances, and hope this modest film inspires us all to take more responsibility for our fellow elders, vets and healthcare workers, and fight for change.* **Laura Wetzler, Writer, Director, Composer, Producer**



What Happened at the Veterans Home? Cont.

FILM BIOS

Laura Wetzler, Screen Writer, Film Director, Producer, Soundtrack Composer

Singer songwriter guitarist Laura Wetzler typically tours internationally in 75 to 100 concerts & lectures a year, performing original story songs, Worldbeat Jewish Music from Africa, Asia & Europe, and great hits of American song. "Superb performances," Robert Sherman NY Times. "Great Voice, Great Writing!" WBAI, New York. Laura has released six CDs of critically acclaimed original and traditional music (iTunes, cdbaby, laurawetzler.com) Her music can be heard in the film *State of the Art: Art of the State*, screened at the Whitney Museum. She is a published poet & essayist, a member of Straw Dogs Writer's Guild, and ASCAP. A native New Yorker now living in the Berkshire Hills of Western Massachusetts, Laura has a degree in music from Hofstra University, and has studied theater at The HB Studio in NYC, and The Happier Valley Improv School. While still touring, composing, and recording, Laura had the privilege of working under the direction of the Abayudaya Community of Uganda for 14 years, co-creating 25 different rural development projects. *What Happened at the Veterans Home?* is her first work as a filmmaker. Contact: info@nervygirlfilms.com or laura@laurawetzler.com

Keena Keel, Special Cultural Advisor

Ms. Keena Keel is a long time Equity and SAG actor with hundreds of film and theater credits to her name. Ms. Keel joined the project as a paid advisor on casting, cultural competency, and, as the proud daughter of a famous Tuskegee Airman, veteran's affairs. Her enthusiasm for the project was crucial to the creation of this film. Contact: keena@keenakeel.com

Sonya Joyner, Actor

Sonya Joyner portrays Gloria Michaels, a disabled Vietnam Vet and resident of a nursing home for veterans.

Sonya Joyner is at heart, a Boston performer of stage, television and film. She embarked on an acting career in 2003 and still hasn't come up for air. Currently, Sonya is spreading her wings and dipping her toes into the Producer and Director pools with the upcoming Short-Form Digital Drama Series, *Love Undone*. She will reprise her role from *Unconditional Love* (an Award-Winning Short-Form Digital Drama Series) as Juanita Hill, but this time as a lead! She is also directing her first Zoom play, "The Killing of Big Tony", Part 1, by Lou Johnson. Sonya is a performing member of *Red Sage Stories, Playback Theatre & Art for Social Change*. RSS is a predominantly BIPOC theatre troupe that helps folks feel heard and validated through storytelling and dramatization. Sonya's credits include: *The House of Bernarda Alba* (María Josefa); *Doubt, A Parable* (Mrs Muller), in RI where she was nominated Best Supporting Actress and in MA; *Milk Like Sugar* (Myrna); *Good People* (Kate); *Henry IV, part 1* (Lady Worcester); *Avenue Q* (Gary Coleman); *Grease* (Mrs Lynch); *Seussical The Musical* (General Genghis Khan Schmitz); *Twelve Angry Jurors* (Juror 8); *Rowan & Martin's Laugh-In* (Ernestine & many others); *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot* (Gloria); *The Vagina Monologues* (Boston, Somerville, Providence & Newport); and over sixteen *SLAMBoston* performances. Sonya has worked in many local independent short and feature films, including "Mama V", Boston International Film Festival picks, "School Reunion", "Standing up", and "Permanent", the 48 hour film project (Boston, Portland & Providence), corporate videos, and television commercials in New England. She has appeared in several television and major feature film productions such as *Brotherhood, Unhitched, Underdog, The Great Debaters, and 21*. For two years, Sonya hosted "The BEE Bear Book Club" (a local cable show, in Brookline, addressing literacy, math & science for preschool aged children. When not acting, Sonya is seeking thrills, cooking and posting pictures for her Instagram page. Contact: amythyststar2003@yahoo.com

Judith Nelson Dilday, Actor

Judith Nelson Dilday portrays Mary Emmett, a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) who works at the Veterans Home.

Judith Nelson Dilday is thrilled have been cast in *What Happened at the Veterans Home?* Her Massachusetts credits include *Broken, Healed and Holding On* at The Gloucester Stage in collaboration with Our Place Theatre, *20th Century Blues* (The Burlington Players), *The Audacity: Women Speak* (Sleeping Weasel), *Slam Boston* (Open Theatre Project), *Top Eye Open* (Hibernian Hall), *The Crucible* (Franklin Performing Arts Company), *Bold Moves* (Hibernian Hall), *The Women of August Wilson* (Our Place Theatre), *Healing Waters* (Our Place Theater), and *Black Nativity* (National Center of Afro-American Artists). Ms. Dilday is a Boston-based actor, a French linguist, and a pioneering Massachusetts lawyer and jurist who retired as an Associate Justice of the Middlesex Probate and Family Court. Contact: nelsondilday@gmail.com

Rydia Q. Vielehr, Actor

Rydia Q. Vielehr portrays Gwen Michaels, Gloria's daughter, who works in a hospital as a COVID care nurse.

Rydia Q. Vielehr is a singer and actress in the Boston Area and a graduate of MIT with a Theater Arts Minor. Her stage career focuses around Shakespeare and musicals and she has performed in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (playing roles from

Puck to Hippolyta/Titania) six times, working with Commonwealth Shakespeare, Apollinaire Theatre, Shakespeare Now! and more. She is most recognizable from any number of car commercials or the Museum of Science's Hall of Human Life. Rydia is also a frequent guest in the gaming industry at conventions from New York Comic Con to PAX and more. In addition, she hosts a weekly podcast with The Wolf Doctor. Contact: rydia@rydia.com

Robin Burdulis, Actor

Robin Burdulis portrays the COVID virus.

Robin Burdulis was a child prodigy of pots, pans, alarm clocks and garbage cans. Now she is a versatile percussionist performing in a wide variety of musical projects. The New York Times says that, "Robin...makes her percussion instruments sing like a symphony," Robin has performed for renowned Bollywood composer A.R. Rahman in his first North American tour. Her percussion has been featured on numerous recordings, and she has performed and arranged for many theatre and dance companies. During the 2020 pandemic lockdown Robin composed, performed and recorded the score for the Streaming Musicals online production of "Marry Harry." Her most recent Streaming Musicals project is the score for "Cockroaches and Cologne," released on Valentine's Day, 2021. She has traveled to Ghana, The Gambia, Uganda, Ethiopia, Brazil and Cuba to research, study and perform. Her research specializes in women and drumming worldwide. Her creative improvisation workshops have been presented throughout the East Coast and were featured on BBC Radio. She has appeared on PBS' "Reading Rainbow" and many other radio, TV and online broadcasts. Robin has performed as a percussionist with Laura Wetzler for years and she traveled to Uganda and Ethiopia with Laura to do cultural exchange work with communities of the African Jewish diaspora. *What Happened at the Veterans Home?* is Robin's first acting gig. Contact: robinburd_tacoord@yahoo.com

Jared Skolnick, Director of Photography and Film Editor

Jared Skolnick is a freelance videographer who has written, directed, photographed and edited several short films that have screened at 30 international film festivals. Jared is a graduate of Fairfield University, where he produced his first short, an adaptation of H.P. Lovecraft's short story "The Music of Erich Zann". Since then, he has worked in the independent film industry in numerous capacities in the production process, from the set to the editing room. Jared is currently developing a feature project *The Earth Rejects Him*, an expansion of his acclaimed short. As a freelancer, Jared fosters strong relationships with local businesses and media outlets, providing video content to help build their reputation and outreach in the community. He currently resides in Western Massachusetts, where he continues to plan out strange new films to unleash upon the world. Contact: jskolnick1@hotmail.com

T. James Hanaburgh, Sound

T. James Hanaburgh, a career sound engineer in live events, is known for his work on the 2018 independent films *SILENCED* and *AEON*. Sound Producer and Sound Director for *SILENCED*, Associate Producer for *AEON*, and Foley Artist for both films. Apart from sound recording for *WHAT HAPPENED AT THE VETERANS HOME?* James is currently working on a rockumentary series titled, "*The Cold Moon Project*" which chronicles the tribulations of western Massachusetts venues, artists, producers, and tech staff out-of-business due to COVID. He is CEO of Ronin Audio Productions. Contact: jameshanaburgh@gmail.com

George Wurzbach, Orchestrator and Music Producer

George Wurzbach is a multi-award winning music producer, orchestrator, composer and performer described in *Performing Songwriter Magazine* as, "A welcome mix of wit, wisdom, and wonder". The unique appeal of his songs is reflected in the number of artist songwriters who have recorded them including, Tom Paxton, The Kingston Trio, David Wilcox, and many others. His recent work with Paxton was featured on the Grammy Nominated Album, *Comedians and Angels*. As a composer, George wrote theme and segment music for the PBS series *Real Simple* and scored a National Geographic trailer for a biopic on the life of Queen Elizabeth I. George works in NY as a producer, sideman and session player, and has collaborated with Laura Wetzler as co-producer on several celebrated projects, including her benefit single, *The Fracking Blues*, and her critically-acclaimed albums, *Flying*, and *Again! Again! Songs for Kids*. When not producing and performing, George serves as a professor at Monmouth University where he teaches music theory and composition. Contact: Mail@georgewurzbach.com

Rikk Desgres Pinehurst Pictures and Sound, Color

Pinehurst founder Rikk Desgres got his start cutting film for Florentine Films and Ken Burns, and now heads his own a full service post production company with hundreds of commercially released films to his credit. Contact: rikkd@pinehurstpictures.com

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A film by Laura Wetzler

Completed: May 31, 2021

Genre: Drama

Running time: 49:37

Starring: Sonya Joyner, Judith Nelson Dilday, Rydia Q. Vielehr & Robin Burdulis

Sound mastered: 5.1 to Stereo Mp4

Closed Captioned

Tentative formal release: Fall 2021

Production specs: The film was shot in 8 days with the Sony A7SII camera at 1080p HD at 23.976 frames per second using the Rec.709 color space. It was edited and color graded on Adobe Premiere Pro. The film is framed for 4:3, exporting at 16:9. Sound: Mastered to 5.1 to Stereo mp4. Closed Captioned.

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