

BREAKUP SEASON
A film by H. NELSON TRACEY

Narrative Feature | 102 mins

Link to full-resolution still images

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Screening Link to Film & Talent Interviews: available upon request

Distributor: TBD, Worldwide Rights Available

LOGLINE

A young man brings his girlfriend to his rural Oregon hometown to introduce her to his family, only for things to go terribly wrong upon arrival.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

A young man brings his girlfriend to his rural Oregon hometown for Christmas and to meet his family. During their first night, an argument leads to them breaking up. But because of the winter weather, his newly minted ex is now stuck with him and his family for the rest of the holiday season.

FULL SYNOPSIS

Ben Russell (Chandler Riggs), an unemployed yet ambitious 24-year-old, brings his girlfriend Cassie (Samantha Isler) from Los Angeles to his rural Oregon hometown to meet his parents and siblings for the first time and spend Christmas with his family: his goofy dad Kirby (James Urbaniak), loving but stern mom Mia (Brook Hogan), aspiring vlogger younger sister Liz (Carly Stewart), and enigmatic deadbeat older brother Gordon (Jacob Wysocki).

The arrival is bumpy, and the family's dynamic unearths some internal conflict Cassie is having with her relationship with Ben. A late night conversation between the couple turns into a breakup, and Cassie determines she should go home for Christmas after all. But due to the winter weather and remote rural location, Cassie learns she is unable to travel. She becomes stuck with her newly minted ex's family for the rest of the holiday.

With a balance of comedy and drama, *Breakup Season* is an authentic look at early 20s love and heartbreak, with a holiday twist and added emphasis on the relationship that family plays into this dynamic.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

A first breakup is a monumental life experience of bereavement. I had not seen films that covered an early 20s breakup in the way I knew most people (including myself) experienced it - as an essential step in the modern coming of age story. I wanted to depict this with sincerity: there's humor, yes, but ultimately it's grounded in a sense of realism not often seen in holiday fare. This authenticity guided me to tell something both universal and hyper specific.

Breakup Season is my first feature film. I have been preparing for my entire life to direct movies, and this represents the culmination of all that effort to do it any way possible. It's 100% independent: I didn't want to see this story languish in development or get rolled into something more conventional. I'm so happy with how this turned out, and I cannot wait for audiences around the country to see this film, and spark their own conversations about breakups, family, and the lessons learned along the way.

-H. Nelson Tracey
Writer & Director

CAST

The film is driven by its tight-knit ensemble. Each of the six principal actors had the opportunity to try something for the first time and expand their artistic capabilities. For both leads, it is their first time playing a romantic lead. For the supporting ensemble, each have multiple scene-stealing moments. “Breakup Season” won Best Ensemble at its first film festival screening (Desertscape Intl. Film Festival).

Chandler Riggs “Ben”
(*The Walking Dead*)



Best known for his 8-season, 100+ episode run as “Carl” from “The Walking Dead,” Chandler Riggs literally grew up on screen, spending his entire teenage years as a principal lead on the global phenomenon. He maintains an active relationship with his loyal fanbase (3.4 million instagram followers) who are eager to see what he’ll do next. As his first role in his early 20s, his role as “Ben” marks the beginning of a new chapter in his career. Riggs received the Best Performance in a Feature award at the Waco Independent Film Festival for his work in this film.

Samatha Isler “Cassie”
(*Molly’s Game, Captain Fantastic*)



Coming off two supporting roles were in Oscar-nominated dramas, Samantha Isler is a rising star. In Aaron Sorkin’s “Molly’s Game,” she played the younger version of the titular role played by Jessica Chastain. In “Captain Fantastic,” she acted alongside Viggo Mortensen and received a SAG nomination for Best Cast Ensemble. Prior to these turns, Isler was a child actor who started with a leading role opposite Sean Hayes on the sitcom “Sean Saves the World,” and guest spots on “Grey’s Anatomy” and CW’s “Supernatural.” Like Riggs, this also marks Isler’s first time as a romantic lead, as she makes the transition from teen to young adult actress. Isler received the Best Actress award at the Desertscape Film

Festival and at the Cobb International Film Festival for her performance as Cassie. She was also inducted into the Tulsa Walk of Fame at the 2024 Circle Cinema Film Festival in conjunction with her work on “Breakup Season,” which was the closing night film of that festival in July 2024.

James Urbaniak “Kirby”
(*Oppenheimer, The Fablemans, Palm Royale*)



A veteran character actor, James Urbaniak’s most recent acting credits include Christopher Nolan’s “Oppenhemier” and Steven Spielberg’s “The Fabelmans.” His extensive film career includes collaborations with directors Richard Linklater, Hal Hartley, Todd Haynes, Ang Lee, Julie Taymor and many more. TV credits include the lead role of “The Venture Brothers” and memorable guest appearances on “Better Call Saul,” “The Office,” “Sex and the City” and most recently, Apple TV’s “Palm Royale.” For this film, Urbaniak expanded his palette outside his usual casting conventions with the role of goofy but loving dad Kirby.

Brook Hogan “Mia”
(feature debut)



A local casting discovery, Brook Hogan has amassed a reputable resume as a theater actress in the Pacific Northwest, acting with multiple troupes in Portland including 21ten, Shoebox Theatre, Comedy Sportz, and The Studio NW. In addition to acting, she is an Air Force veteran and licensed realtor. This film marks her debut role on the silver screen, as the heartwarming yet stern matriarch of the family Mia.

Carly Stewart “Liz”

(*Fragile.com*)



A Pacific Northwest native, Carly Stewart’s introduction to the screen came as the lead of “Fragile.com,” an award-winning short film executive produced by Lena Waithe (“Master of None”). Stewart portrayed the lead role of Eleven in Netflix’s live theater adaptation of “Stranger Things.” As the loveable younger sister / Gen-Z vlogger Liz, “Breakup Season” marks Stewart’s feature film debut. Carly Stewart won Best Supporting Actress for her performance as “Liz” at the 2024 Blue Whiskey Independent Film Festival.

Jacob Wysocki “Gordon”

(*Pitch Perfect, Terri, Game Changer*)



A breakout discovery of Sundance 2011 as the titular role of “Terri,” in the decade plus since Jacob Wysocki has developed a formidable comedy career, performing as a regular member of the lauded Upright Citizens Brigade (UCB), and landing roles in successful comedies “Pitch Perfect” and “Neighbors 2.” Wysocki is currently on a hot streak online thanks to his viral appearances on the hit show Game Changer and the release of his short film “Tunnel Rave” which amassed 130K views in its first 10 days (and counting). “Breakup Season” allows him a chance to showcase a lesser seen vulnerable dramatic side as the enigmatic older brother Gordon.

FESTIVALS AND SCREENINGS - 2024 (Updated Aug 8th)

March 29th | Desertscape Film Festival | St. George, Utah
World Premiere
Winner: Best Feature, Best Actress (Samantha Isler), Best Ensemble, Audience Choice

April 19th & 20th | RiverRun Film Festival | Winston-Salem, NC
East Coast Premiere

April 21st | Blue Whiskey Film Festival | Chicago, IL
Chicago Premiere
Winner: Best of Fest, Best Director, Best Screenplay, Best Supporting Actress (Carly Stewart)

April 25th & 27th | Julien Dubuque Film Festival | Dubuque, IA
Iowa Premiere

June 17th & 19th | Manhattan Film Festival | New York, NY
New York Premiere

June 19th | The Esquire Theatre | Denver, CO
Colorado Premiere
Director H. Nelson Tracey's hometown premiere

July 13th | Red Cedar Film Festival | Menomonie, WI
Wisconsin Premiere

July 15th | Circle Cinema Film Festival | Tulsa, OK
Oklahoma Premiere
Special Tribute to Samantha Isler (hometown premiere) - Tulsa Walk of Fame Medallion Recipient

July 20th | Waco Independent Film Festival | Waco, TX
Texas Premiere
Winner: Best Feature Film, Best Performance in a Feature (Chandler Riggs)

July 31st | San Antonio Film Festival | San Antonio, TX

August 2nd | Cobb Intl. Film Festival | Kennesaw, GA
Georgia Premiere
Special Tribute to Chandler Riggs (hometown premiere)
Winner: Best Domestic Feature, Best Actress in a Leading Role (Samatha Isler), Best Editing

August 24th | Madison Film Festival | Madison, WI

August 25th | Queens Film Festival | New York, NY

September 19-22 | Port Townsend Film Festival | Port Townsend, WA
Washington Premiere

September 19th | Phoenixville Film Festival | Phoenixville, PA
Opening Night Film
Pennsylvania Premiere

September 21st | Klamath Film Festival | Klamath Falls, OR

September 21st-22nd | Mystic Film Festival | Mystic, CT
New England Premiere

September 26-29 | Hell's Half Mile Film Festival | Bay City, MI
Michigan Premiere

September 27th | El Paso Film Festival | El Paso, TX

September 27th & 28th | Gig Harbor Film Festival | Gig Harbor, WA

September 29th | Richmond Film Festival | Richmond, VA
Virginia Premiere

September 29th | Footcandle Film Festival | Hickory, NC

October 4th-6th | Monadnock Film Festival | Keene, NH
New Hampshire Premiere

October 10th-12th | Louisville Intl. Film Festival | Louisville, KY
Kentucky Premiere

October 18th | Eastern Oregon Film Festival | La Grande, Oregon
"Homecoming" Premiere

MORE FESTIVALS AND SCREENINGS TO BE ANNOUNCED


Filmmaker
Q&A


FMASU PRESENTS
DESERT

AWARDS

<u>Desertscape Film Festival:</u>

Best Feature Film

Best Actress (Samantha Isler)

Best Ensemble

Audience Choice

<u>Blue Whiskey Film Festival:</u>

Best of Fest

Best Narrative Feature

Best Director (H. Nelson Tracey)

Best Screenplay

Best Supp. Actress (Carly Stewart)

<u>Circle Cinema Film Festival:</u>

Tulsa Walk of Fame Medallion - awarded to Samantha Isler in 2024

(Annual award for Oklahomans who have made significant contributions to the entertainment industry)

<u>Waco Independent Film Festival:</u>

Best Feature Film

Best Performance in a Feature (Chandler Riggs)

<u>Cobb International Film Festival:</u>

Best Domestic Feature Film

Best Actress in a Leading Role (Samantha Isler)

Best Editing







STORY BEHIND THE FILM (or: why'd you make a movie in rural Oregon?)

In the summer of 2018, director H. Nelson Tracey visited the Oregon/Idaho border and directed *Picture Jasper*, a 20-minute documentary about mining in the Northwest. What started as an impromptu trip with a former colleague ended up turning into a documentary that kickstarted a love of the Eastern Oregon region. The film was accepted into the Eastern Oregon Film Festival (EOFF) in October 2019, and Nelson traveled to La Grande, Oregon for the very first time, where the film played to a standing-room only audience. Nelson met Christopher Jennings, the festival director, and he took affinity to the small town and its festival, likening it to "a model train village." The following year's festival was virtual due to the pandemic. Nelson had another short film *Conspiracy Party* in the lineup. During the filmmaker zoom happy hour, Chris mentioned that EOFF was in early stages of forming a Filmmaking Residency program, with hopes of bringing film production to the region, specifically targeting filmmakers on the precipice of directing their first feature film. Nelson leapt at the opportunity to be involved and became active in the development of this new program.

In May of 2021, EOFF officially launched the Eastern Oregon Filmmaker Residency program. Nelson was one of six inaugural participants selected to participate, developing a screenplay set in this region that would become *Breakup Season*. Time spent writing in La Grande gives the film's location a distinctive grit that would not have been achieved without immersive time on location.

The concept of a "Christmas breakup movie" had been rattling around in Nelson's mind for the better part of a decade, having loose inspiration from a real life story he heard only in passing, but taking most of the ideas from the life experiences that nearly every one of his peers had gone through: a difficult post-college breakup. Time in La Grande gave the story an authentic texture and key details he wouldn't otherwise have added to the narrative.

Fast forward a year and Nelson decided, it was time to pursue the lifelong dream of directing movies and committing to seeing this through. The Christmastime setting gave a very real deadline: shoot it this February while still within La Grande's snowy season, or punt it a whole year and lose all momentum. It is here where Stephen Mastrocola joined as a producer. His friendship with Nelson runs a decade plus from their time at Chapman University as well years living in LA together. Stephen was coming off a streak of producing 4 different indies with Static Films, alongside fellow producers Rafi Jacobs and Liana Montemayor. Static Films is a boutique production company whose lineup includes *Easter Bloody Easter, Max Dagan, Crossword, and Wine Club,* all shot in 2022 and being released in 2024. With well-oiled, boots-on-the-ground production experience from Team Static, combined with Nelson's creative and fundraising efforts and Chris's local La Grande / Oregon Film connections, the team had the makings of producing an independent film.

Having this winter deadline kept Nelson accountable and hungry to churn out draft after draft and make the story as strong as it could be. He conducted three live readings, held in Los Angeles and La Grande, all of which informed stronger iterations of the script, including a pivotal title change that wasn't solidified until December. In the casting and crew hiring process, without previous features to Nelson's credit, the story and screenplay is what drew everyone to come spend 3 weeks filming in rural Oregon.

The state of Oregon has long been a haven for independent cinema, with legendary filmmakers such as Gus Van Sant and Kelly Reichart making it their state of choice to shoot a movie. With an Oregon based producer in Chris Jennings, *Breakup Season* qualified for the film's tax incentive for independent features, with a bonus rebate due to its rural setting, making it much more plausible to bring an indie production to rural Oregon. OregonFilm Executive Director Tim Williams has a lauded career in independent cinema and first made his way to Oregon because of his involvement in the 2014 film *Wild*, directed by the late Jean-Marc Valee and starring Reese Witherspoon and Laura Dern, both of whom were Oscar-nominated for their roles in that film. This production is credited with kickstarting the state's new set of tax incentives for low-budget independent movies to receive support and keep production and film related jobs in the state of Oregon. In the case of *Breakup Season*, it meant bringing on a crew that was over 80% composed of Portland or La Grande based film professionals to populate the crew.

While there are more cost effective places to shoot an indie movie, the team agreed that the location of La Grande would bring so much to this story it would be hard to deny the intrinsic value of shooting in this location. 4 hours away from Portland, this was the first major production to be shot in this area in 25 years. Prior to *Breakup Season*, only 2 feature length films were ever shot in La Grande. Independent FIlm *Sammyville* (1999) and the classic Western-musical *Paint Your Wagon* (1969), starring Lee Marvin and Clint Eastwood.

Director of Photography Eric Macey and 2nd Unit DP T.G. Firestone come from a background of working with acclaimed auteur Kelly Reichart (*Showing Up, Certain Women*) among other talented filmmakers they've collaborated with. Their work gives an irreplicable visual flavor to every shot, embracing the winter exterior light. Both knew how to utilize the evocative location to its maximum impact, and the results speak for themselves in the final film.

On many indie movies, the cast is what clinches funding and finalizes production dates. But on *Breakup Season*, the dates were pre-determined based on the winter weather, and it meant finding cast that was available for the 15-day shoot in February 2023. This ended up working as an advantage: a quiet time for the industry meant many more talented actors participated in the casting and auditioning process. With no time to spare, the incredible ensemble cast one by one found their way into roles on the production. While each actor a unique pedigree, what binds the six actors together is that every one of them got to do something new as performers on this production and hone new skills as actors. For both Chandler Riggs and Samantha Isler, it marked their first time playing romantic leads, as they make the transition from teen to young adult actors.

In the end, production was fortunate to receive enough snow to tell the film's story, but not enough to be disruptive to production. Many individuals in La Grande stepped up to support the production, and the film makes great use of the many locations available in this town, and ends up being a showcase for a wonderful location not often seen in cinemas. The film also features original music from many artists local to the Pacific Northwest, and two original songs by Bag of Hammers, a songwriting duo from La Grande. A location rich with charm and character, La Grande is a vital part of what makes *Breakup Season* a unique and compelling film.