

FINDING NEVERLAND WRITER BASKS IN OSCAR GLORY

# Screenplay Writer David Magee of SP Nominated for Oscar

By MICHELLE HELEN Le POIDEVIN  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

**SCOTCH PLAINS** - Although the screenplay for the Oscar-nominated movie *Finding Neverland* is the first he has ever written, it was enough to catch the attention and admiration of the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts & Sciences to earn four-year Scotch Plains resident David Magee a nomination for Adapted Screenplay.

Mr. Magee, who was also nominated for Golden Globe and Critics' Choice awards, explained how his golden writing opportunity had arisen during a telephone interview with *The Westfield Leader* and *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times*.



David Magee

Both Nellie Bellflower, who had optioned the play *The Man Who Was Peter Pan*, and Mr. Magee had been members of the 42nd Street Workshop in New York, where he staged his first play, *Buying the Farm*. An admirer of his work, Ms. Bellflower offered *The Man Who Was Peter Pan* to him to develop into a screenplay and *Finding Neverland* was born.

As a screenwriter, most of his job was done before filming began. However, some of the scenes that included Dustin Hoffman were written in at the end, requiring him to e-mail the director from Scotch Plains. He also found himself in Mr. Hoffman's backyard in London working on some of the scenes.

Mr. Magee noted that while production on *Finding Neverland* wrapped in enough time to be released last year, the fact that the film version of *Peter Pan* was being released at the same time would have conflicted with copyright issues. The one-year delay, however, "couldn't have worked out better," he noted.

Since the success of *Finding Neverland*, Mr. Magee has found himself among the Hollywood elite. When asked about his experience at the Golden Globe ceremony on January 16, he said, "It was all very surreal." Attending with his wife, Pamela, who is a retired Emmy Award-winning music director for soap operas, he was excited when asked by a photographer for an exclusive snapshot.

He noted that he sat a couple of tables over from Johnny Depp, who was nominated that evening for Best Actor in a Leading Role in *Finding Neverland* and who Mr. Magee had worked with on the movie set.

"It was an incredible day for star-seeing and being in a room for people that you normally think live in a world so far away from your own," he added.

Nominated along with screenwriters for *Million Dollar Baby*, *Sideways*, *The Motorcycle Diaries*, and *Before Sunset*, Mr. Magee said he genuinely means it when saying it is a pleasure to be in the same category with writers who crafted such "wonderful films."

"Of course, it would be incredible to win, but I'm not expecting the win," he told *The Leader/Times*. "But, I'll be smiling no matter what."

"The last 72 hours (since the Oscar nominations were revealed) have been completely unreal," he said. "There have been calls from the press, family, friends and it's funny how you reconnect with so many different parts of your life in such a short time and they're all so happy for you."

Soon, Mr. Magee will be flying to Los Angeles to attend the Academy Awards Nominees Luncheon on Monday, February 7, where he will receive a certificate acknowledging his accomplishment. Then, he will return to Scotch Plains before jetting off to London to attend the BAFTA (British Academy of Film and Television Arts) Awards ceremony, where he is also nominated for an award for Adapted Screenplay.

Then, he will return to Scotch Plains and attend the Academy Awards later this month. All of the travel has made Mr. Magee especially grateful that he resides in a peaceful community like Scotch Plains.

"I'm very happy to be coming home to New Jersey after all of this," shared the Michigan native. Four years ago, when he and his wife had their first son, they realized how "tough it was living in New York City with kids," so the couple, who is now expecting their third child, looked for a community outside of the city that would be ideal for their family.

Mr. Magee received his Bachelor of Arts degree in Theater Directing and Stage Design from Michigan State University and his Master of Fine Arts degree from the University of Illinois, where he taught voice and acting. He also studied at Northwestern University's National High School Institute, the New York Art Student's League and New York University's Intensive Film Workshop.

After doing voiceovers, Mr. Magee began recording audiobooks for various books. However, when he realized he could do a better job abridging the literature, he tried his hand at writing them and condensed 80 novels over five years.

He also penned audiobooks for 12 children's books and wrote a sking travelogue before staging his first play and performing at Guild Hall in East Hampton. He studied theater directing at the Hartford Stage as assistant to the artistic director, he has directed audiobook readings, and has appeared in soap operas and regional theaters.

The action-adventure film *Crisis Four* and the comedy drama *Natasha* were also written by Mr. Magee.

Most recently, he has written the films *Gesar* and *Lord of the Nutcracker Men*, a World War I epic. He is also completing work on two films - *Miss Pettigrew* and *The Tiger's Apprentice*, which focuses on a San Francisco boy who discovers his magical powers.

The 77th Annual Academy Awards are scheduled to air on Sunday, February 27, on ABC Television beginning at 8 p.m.

INSIDE: BRIANA FALCO'S EXHIBIT; CARMELO TARTIVITA'S BOOK

# Arts & Entertainment

FREEMAN'S MOVIE FEATURES 'BUFFY' AND 'CARNIVALE' STARS

## Native Westfielder Returns Home To Film His Latest Thriller, *Unholy*

By MICHELLE HELEN Le POIDEVIN  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

**WESTFIELD** - On Tuesday, a home on Hillcrest Avenue in Westfield became the backdrop for Sam Freeman's thriller, *Unholy*, which stars Adrienne Barbeau of HBO's "Carnivale" and Nicholas Brendon of WB's "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" fame.

*Unholy* is produced by Sky Whisper Productions in The Bronx, where Mr. Freeman serves as Executive Producer with Joshua Blumenfeld.

Mr. Freeman, *Unholy* Executive Producer and Scriptwriter, told *The Westfield Leader* and *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times* that he conceived of the movie's premise when he was "proofing through some paranormal websites."

"The film is inspired by an actual military document found discussing elements of Nazi witchcraft that were smuggled into small-town Pennsylvania (Dowington, changed to Dowington) following World War II by the U.S. administration," said Mr. Freeman.

"It intrigued me," said the 24-year-old, "but it also creeped me out." After researching various websites on the topic, he said he "sat down and waited for ideas to come" to him for the *Unholy* script.

According to Mr. Freeman, "the film deals with a grieving mother, Martha (Ms. Barbeau), trying to uncover the terrifying secret that is jeopardizing her family. Along with her son (Mr. Brendon), Martha becomes entwined in a conspiracy involving a fabled witch, Nazi occultists and the U.S. government."

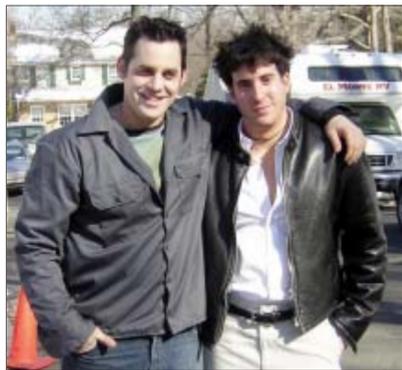
agreed to do the low-budget movie, noting, "she's an icon of the genre."

"It was a little bit of luck and a whole lot of fate having them agree to do the film," he told *The Leader/Times*. "They've been amazing and fantastic so far."

"I believe that this terrifying and unusual tale, along with cult genre



HILLCREST HORROR...Outside a home on Hillcrest Avenue in Westfield, Sam Freeman filmed scenes for *Unholy*. The Westfield native serves as the thriller's Executive Producer and Writer. Pictured, above, center, actress Adrienne Barbeau asks some questions about her script before running lines. Pictured, below, left, actor Nicholas Brendon poses with Mr. Freeman, right.



Calling himself a "huge fan of 'Buffy the Vampire Slayer,'" Mr. Freeman knew it would be a dream come true to have someone from the television show's cast starring in *Unholy*. He mentioned Mr. Brendon, who played Zander on the series, to the casting director, and was thrilled when the actor read the script and decided to sign up.

Mr. Freeman was especially honored when Ms. Barbeau

icons such as Ms. Barbeau and Mr. Brendon, is sure to guarantee a creation like none other," said Mr. Freeman. "There has never been a genre film like this before. Audiences will leave the theater scathed."

Other scenes in *Unholy* were filmed at Sam's Farm in Springfield, in Staten Island and Queens, N.Y.

A graduate of Solomon Schechter Day School in West Orange and Tisch School of the Arts at New York University, Mr. Freeman realized "late in his high school life" that he could combine his love of writing with his love of film and become a filmmaker.

While attending Tisch, he wrote the script for *The Peak*, which was produced in India.

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## Seven Westfield Women Steal Stage During Off-Broadway Show in NYC

By MICHELLE HELEN Le POIDEVIN  
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**WESTFIELD** - The January 16 deadline for half-price tickets to the Off-Broadway production, *Pieces*, was looming. Unfortunately, the eight local women vying for the tickets could agree on January 21 as the only date they could attend the show as a

Ms. Rediker sent out the initial e-mail, noted Ms. Yarusi during an interview with *The Westfield Leader* and *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times*.

"The e-mails went back and forth and soon everyone was getting into the act. It was almost comical," said Ms. Yarusi, adding that although they had missed the deadline, Ms. Rediker spot-

audience, to watch the local ladies deliver their comical lines.

According to Ms. Yarusi, the women were introduced by another woman, who served as the emcee or narrator of the show, before they began performing their skit.

"Some of us have intense stage fright," she added, noting that those fears were combated once they took the stage a few weeks ago.

When asked how the ladies felt about

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Photo Courtesy of Lori Yarusi

TELLING THEIR STORY...In the tradition of the Off-Broadway show, *Pieces*, during which "real women tell their stories," seven local ladies were invited to relate the tale of how they got to the New York City stage. Pictured, left to right, are: Jill Freeman, Liz Byer, Jill Strauss, Lori Yarusi, Pam Rediker, all of Westfield, Leslie Fleischman of Scotch Plains, and Diane Rembiz of Westfield.

group. While they had missed the deadline for the discount, they hadn't missed out on a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

During the process of hunting down a date when everyone could attend, the eight women (seven are Westfield residents and one resides in Scotch Plains) began sending each other rhyming e-mails.

The group of ladies includes Jill Freeman, Liz Byer, Jill Strauss, Lori Yarusi, Pam Rediker, all of Westfield, Leslie Fleischman of Scotch Plains, and Diane Rembiz of Westfield. Vivian Gold of Westfield was an original member of the group who could not be in the show.

Released in January, the book combines examples of how memories have gone awry, memory tests and easy techniques for improving memory.

According to Mr. Rosenbaum, the book details the causes of memory loss, termed "Memory Busters," which range from "information overload and inattention." For every "Memory Buster," the authors recommend a system established by Ms. Houlihan, named "Memoryology."

"After my husband passed away, I was so overwhelmed as the single mother of five children that I needed a system to help me organize my thoughts and my

## Former Westfielders Publish Book on Memory Improvement

**WESTFIELD** - Joan Houlihan and Adam Rosenbaum, former Westfield residents, have published a book on memory improvement entitled, "How to Remember Not to Forget by Joan Who? and Adam Rosensomething."

Released in January, the book combines examples of how memories have gone awry, memory tests and easy techniques for improving memory.

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"After my husband passed away, I was so overwhelmed as the single mother of five children that I needed a system to help me organize my thoughts and my

life. Otherwise, I might have forgotten myself" she said.

Ms. Houlihan is the Executive Director of an assisted living facility in Falmouth, Mass. She speaks frequently in the Boston area on the top of memory and senior healthcare. She lived in Westfield from 1974 to 1995.

Mr. Rosenbaum, who resided in Westfield from 1971 to 1995, is the president of a consulting company that provides learning services to clients deploying certain accounting and manufacturing computer systems. He has been involved with corporate training programs in North and South America since 1994. He graduated Westfield High School in 1989.

To purchase a copy of the \$11.95 paperback, please visit [www.iUniverse.com](http://www.iUniverse.com).

## Union County Seeks Volunteers For Annual Teen Arts Festival

**COUNTY** - Volunteers are needed to work with artists, students and teachers during the Union County Teen Arts Festival on Thursday and Friday, March 10 and 11, at Union County College in Cranford.

Sponsored by the Union County Department of Chosen Freeholders and the Division of Cultural and Heritage Affairs in the Department of Economic Development, the annual arts celebration is open to all students from public, private and parochial middle and high schools in Union County.

"At the festival, 3,000 students participate in performances, critiquing seminars, master classes and workshops with a staff of 50 professional artists in

every discipline - visual art, music, creative writing, theater and dance," said Freeholder Bette Jane Kowalski, liaison to the Union County Cultural and Heritage Programs Advisory Board.

"Volunteers are needed to assist artists with workshops, manage performance sites and staff information stations," she added. "We appreciate the invaluable assistance of our county residents with this exciting program."

To volunteer, please contact the Union County Division of Cultural and Heritage Affairs at 633 Pearl Street, Elizabeth, 07202, call (908) 558-2550, or e-mail [kleary@ucnj.org](mailto:kleary@ucnj.org). Relay users may dial (800) 852-7899.

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### Mid-Day Musicales Concert Series Slated

**WESTFIELD** - The First Congregational Church of Westfield has announced the resumption of their Mid-Day Musicales concert series. The free, half-hour noon concerts on Wednesdays feature programs of classical, jazz and world music presented in the church sanctuary. A soup and sandwich luncheon is available following each concert for \$5.

The schedule for this winter is:

- February 9 - Westfield High School Chamber Orchestra, Director Raymond Wojcik;
- February 16 - Karen Lindquist and Andre Tarantiles, duo-harpists;
- February 23 - Soprano Sarah Arneson and pianist George Kern;
- March 2 - Pianist Gail Niwa;
- March 9 - Bones, Inc. (four trombones and rhythm section, jazz);
- March 16 - Violinist Anton Miller, cellist Eliot Bailen, and pianist Brandt Fredriksen.

For more information, please call the church office at (908) 233-2494.

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