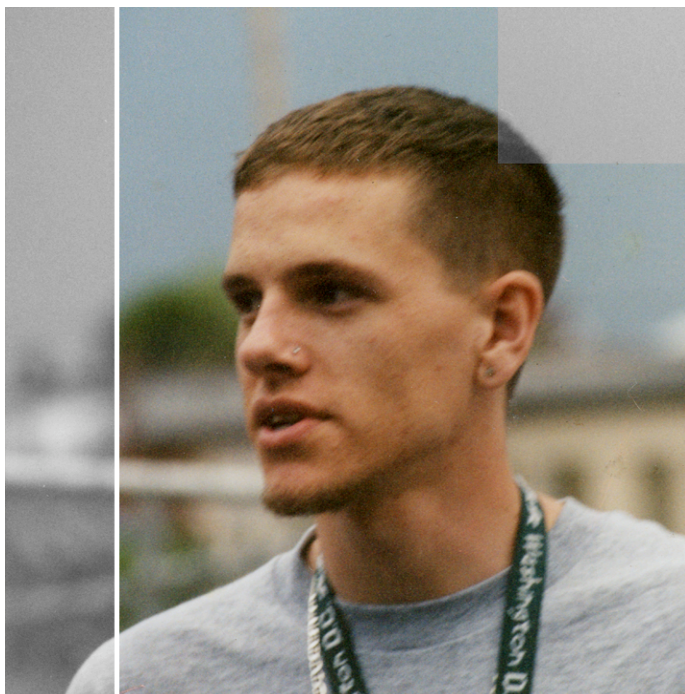




# HAMILTON

A FILM BY MATTHEW PORTERFIELD  
PRODUCED IN BALTIMORE, MARYLAND  
BY JORDAN MINTZER. FOR THE HFG, 2005  
JEREMY SAUVNIER, DIRECTOR OF PHOTO  
SOUND DESIGN + MIX BY SCOTT MARTIN  
SHOT + PRINTED ON 16MM COLOR, 1:1.85



# SYNOPSIS

*Hamilton* chronicles two summer days in the life of a young family: Lena, 17, and Joe, 20, two recent and accidental parents residing in a diverse, suburban neighborhood in northeast Baltimore City.

When the picture begins, Lena is looking for Joe. Lena, who lives with Joe's family, wants to see him before she leaves town for the month of August; she hasn't seen him for weeks. He's rented an apartment from a neighbor and works two jobs, providing her with money, but very little time. Through Lena's search, we are introduced to her daughter, her family and friends, her neighborhood, and Joe, her baby's father.

## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

The structure of *Hamilton* is simple and solid, suggestive, pared-down, in order to avoid narrative conventions that distort conflict, restrict story to plot, and oversimplify life. Initially conceived as a silent picture, *Hamilton* takes place over a weekend in a condensed window that facilitates the examination of detail, gesture, time, and movement, and allows for the cultivation and interpretation of things underlying.

We developed this film in Baltimore because it is home and because there is great beauty in the neighborhood during the summer months: the long days, the sun, the speed of the heat, the way it hangs humid above the trees and the pavement, the sounds of birds and insects, automobiles and lawnmowers; here, summer is a palpable action, detailed in the color of night, the color of skin, and the combination of water and sky: we want to see this action move on film.

# **BACKGROUND**

The names Lena and Joe were gleaned from William Faulkner's, *Light in August*. The idea of the search, vital to the first quarter of the novel, was compelling, so developing an original scenario to contain a search was an early concern.

Initially, the film was mapped in three acts, beginning in Baltimore in spring and summer, and ending in autumn on the eastern shore of Maryland. In its scope, this would have been difficult to execute, so we abandoned the idea of three seasons and pursued a three-month structure instead. Over time, the three-months became three days and the three days became two.

It was decided that Lena was from out-of-town, from a city with dying industry, spending summers in Maryland as a child. Originally, she was thought to be from Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, Baltimore's sister city in steel; but, in the end, as we were drawn to the legends told by Bruce Springsteen in "Greetings" and "The Wild, The Innocent, and the E. Street Shuffle," Bethlehem was abandoned in favor of Asbury Park, New Jersey. From such sources and combinations of connections – personal, factual, and coincidental – a history was written for Lena and Joe.

Socially, we are interested in the family construct at the point of conception. People create life easily; the task of creating the community necessary to support life is more challenging, for it's not automatic. We are interested in the choices the characters make toward that end – what they will and won't (can and can't) do – not in whether they are right or wrong, good or bad. Joe wants to make a clean start. Lena wants Joe to be a father. Their characters contrast and their priorities are disparate, but ultimately Lena and Joe experience similar needs both for community and for relief from exile and isolation.

# PRODUCER'S STATEMENT

*Hamilton* will succeed because its logic derives from a desire to capture reality without damaging its delicate fabric. The two-day plot structure allows the director to investigate his characters – to study their gestures, their faces, their movements – while at the same time the story pushes ahead towards its natural conclusion. There is a certain amount of freedom in this narrative restraint; in the course of a few days, circumstances and emotions escalating beneath surfaces, waiting to be seen and heard, can infuse seemingly minor events with great meaning. Thus, what appears to be a simple family gathering at church is in fact the culmination of lives thrown together by chance and desire. And the image of a mother bearing her child through the woods carries with it the weight of an unknown future.

It is through this reality – captured, transformed, and projected – that the film and its audience will come together. Because there is always a certain amount of trust a viewer places in a film – a tacit agreement one hopes the director will acknowledge. One wants to be ‘told a story’ without being lied to, one wants to see characters that are like humans but are also something else entirely, and one wants to experience emotions without regretting them afterwards. The action of *Hamilton* unfolds in that grey area where reality mixes with the cinema, and the audience will come to believe in the film the way one is lured to believe in any good work of art: through its intelligence and beauty, through the risks the artist has taken in exposing his inner self to the outside world, but above all through certain ideas that slip through the seamless web of the everyday to become part of those few universal truths we all share in.

# THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Hamilton is a diverse racial, ethnic, and intergenerational community located in northeast Baltimore. The history of the area is familiar: it is the story of the growth of an American suburb established within miles of the city at the turn of the twentieth century. In the 1890's, Hamilton, and the neighboring communities of Lauraville, Beverly Hills, and Arcadia were all farmland; North Avenue bound Baltimore City. Pennsylvania farmers, on their way to buy and sell goods in downtown markets, traveled the Harford Road corridor. It was a major toll road with a general store, a warehouse with feed and farm machinery, and a five-mile house providing the only tavern in town. The intersection of Harford and Tames (now Hamilton Avenue) has always been the center of activity in Hamilton. Street names - Christopher, White, Tames, Sefton, Fair Oaks, Wisteria - reflect the surnames or property characteristics of the men who once maintained the land. Hamilton Avenue was named for Captain Hamilton Caughey who authorized a road through his farm to connect Harford Road with York Road and Towson, the county seat.

Eventually, as the city line extended north and the horse-drawn car evolved into the "jerk-water" trolley, Baltimore's public transportation became the most efficient mode of travel on the corridor. When the country became accessible, city people visited Hamilton on vacation and decided to buy pieces of land while many folks who grew up in the area left to seek a new life in the city. What remains to this day is an interesting mix of city and country, old and new. Just as the city of Baltimore is a fascinating amalgam of North and South, so Hamilton is both urban and bucolic, a blue-collar neighborhood with a pastoral history, and a place where community and locality remain very important.

# DIRECTOR'S NOTES

Five years after finishing film studies at NYU, I was working as a kindergarten teacher in New York and decided I wanted to make a film or return to school. I chose the former and moved back home to Baltimore, Maryland, to the house I grew up in, and began work on a feature script, *Hamilton*.

It was nostalgic, in a sense, set in the blue-collar neighborhood of my youth and based on scenes I'd written while living in Brooklyn and thinking of home. Beginning with the images and sounds of summer and the desire to tell a small story in a simple way, I set out to develop a very controlled narrative, mapping in the screenplay every shot and shot transition that would occur in the chronology of the film's two days. Dialogue became secondary, conflict was subordinated; the film was first imagined as a silent picture, an effort to tell a story in a purely visual way.

Jordan Mintzer, a friend from New York, signed on to produce *Hamilton*. I would finish drafts, send them to him, and he would make revisions, while at the same time developing a detailed budget, finding money, insurance, crew, and equipment. Jeremy Saulnier, from Alexandria, Virginia agreed to shoot the picture, which was a monumental affirmation; I had admired his work at school, and, as he was shooting and directing videos and commercials in New York, he added a greater degree of professionalism to the project, eventually coercing an experienced AC (Danny Sariano) and Gaffer (Dave Bowers) onto the team. Scott Martin joined the production as sound recordist, and although he'd worked for a time in a well-respected post-production facility in Manhattan, he'd never recorded location sound before; yet, he brought a mixer's ear to the material and eventually went on to create the film's final track.

With characters ranging in age from eight months to eighty years, *Hamilton* was difficult to cast. We held auditions at local public schools, some with performing arts programs, and found many of the young players there (including Stephani Vizzi, who was cast as Lena). Some roles were filled by family and friends (Candace, Marie), and casting calls, posted on local internet billboards, led to further auditions and more roles filled. Finding a young man to play the male lead, Joe, proved most difficult. It reached the point where I was literally approaching young men, cold, on the street or at the mall, and asking them if they wanted to be in a movie. That didn't get me very far, but it didn't get me beat up either. Eventually, Chris Myers answered an open call I'd posted on an actor's forum and I quickly cast him for the part.

We shot *Hamilton* on 16mm at 1:1.85 over the course of thirty days in July of 2002. After we wrapped, I took a full year off to save money and gain a little distance from the material. I set up a small editing suite in my apartment, learned Final Cut Pro, and acquired the necessary hardware - a DVCAM deck, an NTSC monitor, and a large external hard drive - to allow me to cut the picture.

*Hamilton* took another two years to edit and complete, five years in all from conception to print. In 2006, I began sending *Hamilton* out to festivals. It has screened for audiences in sold-out theatres at both the Wisconsin and Maryland Film Festivals. And, in August, we are very honored to have a week run at Anthology Film Archives in New York City.

I've started work on a new feature, *Metal Gods*, about a group of adolescents in northeast Baltimore, circa 1989, who live and love heavy metal. In January of this year, I was awarded a media grant from the Maryland State Arts Council that will enable me to begin this new project.

# REACTIONS

**"A minor miracle. Matthew Porterfield's first film, barely an hour long, made for a pittance in his native Baltimore with nonprofessional actors on 16mm film, is one of the most original, moving, and accomplished American independent films in recent years. The story alone is touchingly simple – a teen-age mother, about to leave town for a month, wants her baby's young father to pay her a visit – but Porterfield's genius is revealed above all in the way he brings it to life. Exquisitely composed, unfolding gradually, suffused with light and color, his tender yet unsentimental images convey the graceful rhythms and quiet sorrows of young lives on hold. Porterfield is a master of time: here, an eight-minute trip takes eight minutes, but its progress is rich in visual epiphanies. The film builds to an unlikely, wondrous chase, and leaves the viewer astonished, hungry for more, and eagerly anticipating what Porterfield, who is still in his twenties, will do next."**

**- Richard Brody  
Film Critic, the New Yorker**

**"Matt Porterfield directs in a near-subliminal style...his frequently wordless images capture mood and emotion with surprising effectiveness. [*Hamilton*] builds an ineffable sadness around the loneliness of teenage parenting and the disconnect between sex and its consequences."**

**- Jeanette Catsoulis  
Film Critic, The New York Times**

**"Utilizing lots of long takes, minimal camera movement, and most importantly, Scott Martin's ambient sound design, *Hamilton* immerses itself in the summertime rhythms of one particular blue-collar Baltimore suburb."**

**- Joshua Land  
Film Critic, the Village Voice**



"The crucial thing to know about director Matthew Porterfield's feature debut, *Hamilton*, is that it's fantastic. This is a film that believes you can learn as much or more about a character's inner space from watching them walk to a destination as you can from the things they do and say once they get there. In taking this stand, Porterfield's film aligns itself not only with Bresson, but also with works like Gus Van Sant's art-house comeback trio of *Gerry*, *Elephant*, and *Last Days*; Tsai Ming-Liang's visually lush *What Time Is It There?*; Claire Denis' gorgeous fever dream *Trouble Every Day*; and Vincent Gallo's *Brown Bunny*. *Hamilton* meets world-class art-film aspirations often set but rarely met by indie filmmakers."

- Eric Allen Hatch  
Film Critic, Baltimore City Paper

"The two best films I saw at the festival were made in America, although neither of them are likely to be released in a theatre near you. *Hamilton*, a 65-minute tone poem, has an elusive, almost nonexistent narrative and a sympathetic remove from its naturalistic characters; you're overwhelmed by director Matthew Porterfield's honest, unflinching cinematographic eye. *Hamilton* feels, almost in spite of its low-key poetry, like it's exploring new cinematic terrain."

- Matt Levine  
Staff Writer, The UW-Madison Leader

"Proving that there's still a fiercely independent spirit in American Indie cinema, Matthew Porterfield's self-produced debut feature *Hamilton* is a richly textured and gorgeously shot portrait of a young couple living in suburban Baltimore. The film takes place over the course of two sweltering hot summer days and is ostensibly about accidental parents, Joe and Lena, coping with the task of raising their child. Yet Porterfield's restrained narrative and

meditative camera create a visual poem that emphasizes the everyday activities of the teenage couple – mowing the lawn, spending the afternoon in the backyard pool – rather than moments of conflict. The evocative sounds of summer (birds, insects, lawn mowers) and sumptuous long-take cinematography create a vivid milieu that will linger in your mind days after seeing the film.”

- Tom Yoshikama  
Programmer, UWM Cinemetheque

“The dreamy, near-silent milieu, slight narrative, and oblique biblical allusions – Faulkner’s in here too – are sufficiently Malickian to generate comparisons to David Gordon Green, but Porterfield’s no rank pretender. Visual poetry aside, what makes *Hamilton* a treasure is its thoughtful, unsentimental fleshing out of lives often glimpsed (in movies and elsewhere) but rarely considered.”

- Mark Holcomb  
Film Critic, Time Out New York

“Matthew Porterfield’s small-scale, 16mm slice-of-life drama has the hazy, sticky rhythms of a hot summer day and the minimal narrative of a classic European art film. A Baltimore native and NYU-film-school dropout, Porterfield improvised his film with local actors and nonprofessionals; while it’s been compared to David Gordon Green’s equally noncommercial *George Washington* (2000), with which it shares sleepy rhythms and blue-collar, multiethnic small-town settings, it’s a far more organic piece of work. Porterfield and his cast capture the halting eloquence of everyday gestures and plain speech set against a backdrop of natural sounds: the deafening chatter of cicadas and crickets, the lapping of water in ponds and backyard pools, cooing mourning doves and humming traffic.”

- TVGuide.com

**"PLOT? Who needs a plot? Certainly not neophyte director Matt Porterfield, whose *Hamilton* gets along just fine without one. Porterfield isn't in any more of a hurry than his characters, allowing mundane events like mowing the lawn, looking through family snapshots and going to church to unfold at their own pace. Shot on 16mm for just \$50,000, with a nonprofessional cast, and five years in the making, *Hamilton* is a tribute to the power of observation and mood."**

**- V.A. Musetto  
Film Critic, The New York Post**

**"A delicate, meditative drama, *Hamilton* proved so popular that it attracted 200 or so filmgoers to an impromptu Saturday showing. Although his movie is just over an hour long, Porterfield takes the time to let events unfold at their own pace, to linger over an image for long moments after the action has moved on, to give audiences the chance to digest and ponder what they've just seen. There's an honesty to the film that's hard to resist."**

**- Chris Kaltenbach  
Film Critic, The Baltimore Sun**

**"Matthew Porterfield pays respect to [his characters] without passing judgment, as they glide by his camera in their normal routines – all intentionally mundane, but sometimes, as when young mother Lena cradles her crying child outside of church, subtly illuminating. They look unremarkable but their souls radiate truth. *Hamilton* understands the real struggles as well as the real heroism of working-class America."**

**- Paul Schrodt  
Staff Writer, Slant Magazine**

## CREW BIOGRAPHIES

**DIRECTOR** Matt Porterfield was raised in northeast Baltimore. He moved to New York City at eighteen, studied film for two years, taught kindergarten for three, and remained there for eight before returning home to make *Hamilton*, which he also wrote and edited. He lives in the city with his wife Sara and their two cats, Francis and Noah. His favorite numbers are fourteen and twenty-three.

**PRODUCER** Jordan Mintzer was born in Queens, NY, and has been working in and out of the movie business for the last 10 years. Before producing *Hamilton*, his first feature-length production, he assisted on projects by directors such as Hal Hartley, Tony Bui, Amir Naderi, and Vojtech Jasny. Currently living abroad in Paris, France, he has developed a second career in international tax law, all the while maintaining a healthy cinèphile quota of at least one movie per day. His other interests include basketball, locking keys in running cars, and breaking expensive computers.

**CINEMATOGRAPHER** A native of Alexandria, VA, Jeremy Saulnier studied film at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts, graduating with honors in 1998 as recipient of the Undergraduate Cinematography Award. He continued his training at the International Film Workshops in Rockport, Maine, completing the Cinematographer's Master Class with John Toll, ASC. With his production company, the Lab of Madness, Jeremy is in production on his first feature, *Murder Party*, and beginning pre-production on a new feature script, titled *Mustache*. The Lab of Madness has completed two award-winning shorts, *Crabwalk* (2002), and *The Zombie Goldfarb* (1999). Jeremy resides in Brooklyn, NY, working as a freelance director and cinematographer.

**SOUND** As a New York-based sound designer, Scott Martin is particularly interested in ambience design, natural recordings, and all forms of barbecue. An avid traveler, reader, and eater, he speaks five languages and would like to help preserve the Siberian and Bengal tiger populations. In 2006, he will begin medical school at Bennington College.

**COSTUMES** Born in NYC, Jessica Gwynn was raised in Baltimore City until returning to New York to live in Brooklyn and study fashion design at Pratt Institute in 1999. As a student, she cultivated an interest in film and theater costume, which allowed her to freely explore and blend the realms of fantasy and reality through clothing. This love of fantasy served her well, granting her an award for her senior project, shortly before her long-awaited graduation. Since then, Jessica has planted herself firmly in the real world. After briefly working as a designer of eveningwear for a Brooklyn based bridal shop, she is now working full time at a fashion merchandising company on 7th Avenue in New York.

**ART DIRECTOR** Sara Jane Gerrish moved to Baltimore in 2002 from New York City. Born and raised in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, she relocated and entered the teaching residency program at John's Hopkins University. Sara now teaches kindergarten and maintains a collection of eighty-five cat whiskers. This spring, she will design the costumes for the Baltimore Shakespeare Company's production of the Tom Stoppard play, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*.

**SCRIPT + CONTINUITY** Mélanie Leroy-Terquem was born in Paris, France, and is currently pursuing a PhD and giving classes at La Sorbonne (Université Paris 4). She is a specialist in obscure 19th century French literature, the Romantic and Surrealist movements, and rare, antique late-20th century milk glasses from the Baltimore-Washington area. *Hamilton* remains her only film experience to this date.

**HAIR + MAKEUP** Juliette Schrameck was born in Paris, France, where she obtained both an undergraduate degree in political science at l'Institut d'études politiques de Paris (Sciences Po) and a Master's degree in film distribution and theatrical exploitation from l'École nationale supérieure des métiers de l'image et du son (La Fémis). She currently works in the distribution department at Les films du losange, the famous new-wave production company founded by Eric Rohmer and Barbet Schroeder.

## CAST BIOGRAPHIES

**LENA** At sixteen, a junior at the Baltimore School for the Arts, Stephanie Vizzi woke up each morning at five-thirty to train in a bakery on Harford Road for her role as Lena in *Hamilton*. She traveled to Asbury Park, read *Light in August*, and endured weeks of pre-production during her summer vacation. Four years later, she enters her junior year at Humboldt State University, on California's redwood coast. After a summer in Berkeley, she will return to school to begin a major in International Studies.

**JOE** Chris Myers loves everything Baltimore. Born and raised in charm city, he's one of the town's most talented unknown actors, adding texture and color to some of television's greatest, grittiest programs. In numerous and diverse supporting roles (as a young crack-head on *The Wire*, a skinhead in *Homicide*, a well-bred high school student in *Young Americans*, even in drag, as a body-double for Pam in *Cecil B. Demented*), Chris brings commitment and a passion for the details of his craft, earning himself a reputation as the "one-take wonder." Along with *Hamilton*, Chris has appeared in the feature, *Baltimore*, and the short, *Hair of the Dog*, both shot locally and awaiting completion.

**CANDACE** The role of Candace was written with Sarah Seipp-Williams in mind. In 2002, at the time *Hamilton* was in production, she had just finished high school and was considering a career as a model, but quickly found it dull. That summer, she discovered film acting could be quite dull too; yet, she vows to try it again someday. Without training, Sarah has a natural, understated screen presence, openness with other actors, and a familiar, warm way with everyone on set. She will begin nursing school in Baltimore in 2006.

**LINDA** Gina Mooers lived in Alexandria, VA for fifteen years, where she settled after leaving a stint in the military. She received her BA in International Relations from Trinity College in Washington, DC and pursued work in the political arena, culminating in two years at the Clinton White House. However, politics wasn't

as interesting a milieu as she anticipated, so Gina pursued acting in her off time as a creative outlet. She appeared in several plays in the greater Washington, DC area and worked as an extra on *The Wire* and *The District*. She now works at Yahoo! and lives in Berkeley, CA with her partner, Kellie, and their menagerie of animals.

**APRIL** Megan Clark was integral in the development of her character April. Every Saturday, during the months before production, she'd meet director Matt Porterfield after she got off work. They'd have a soda, share ideas, and write and re-write April's scenes. Since graduating from Patapsco High School, where she concentrated on theatre arts, Megan has lived and worked in Florida and New Orleans. She plans to return home to begin college in 2006.

**ADELINE** Madeleine Saar Reeser is now a feisty four-year-old redhead. She enjoys playing with her dolls, all named "Audrey", and has earned a reputation as a spinner of tall tales. A budding ballet dancer and swimmer, she lives in Baltimore with her family. *Hamilton* was her first acting endeavor.

**KELLY** Jasmine Bazinet-Phillips appeared in *Hamilton* when she was nine years old and entering fourth grade. Now, she's twelve years old and a student at Roland Park Middle School in Baltimore City. Since she started talking (or at least as early as she can remember), she loved to act. This summer she performed in *Tom and the Safety Pin Coat* at the Eubie Blake Cultural Center. "I love meeting new people and thinking about what it is that makes them unique," Jasmine says. "Could I write a screenplay or a play for the stage about them?" In her opinion, her best work is her film adaptation of *The Giver*, by Lois Lowry, which she wrote in fifth grade. Presently, Jasmine plays ice hockey, enjoys math and science, and always does her homework.

**COURTNEY** Tiffany Boone graduated from the Baltimore School for the Arts in 2005 with a concentration in theatre arts. Since finishing her role in *Hamilton*, she has performed in several productions with the BSA, appearing as Emily Webb in *Our Town*, a Red Cross Player in

the fire-safety show *Learn Not to Burn*, and as Joan in *The Sandcastle*. In April, she had the opportunity to perform at the historic Hippodrome Theatre as part of the BSA's 25th anniversary Expressions show. Tiffany has also pursued her interest in working with children by volunteering as an acting teacher, introducing elementary school students to the performing arts. In September 2005, she will begin her first year at the California Institute of the Arts as an undergraduate acting major.

**MARIE** Marie Collins acted as executive producer on *Hamilton*, but on screen she appeared as herself. A retired Baltimore County nurse, she now wears purple and keeps a beautiful garden in northeast Baltimore City.

**JACK** Ellis Kant will begin sixth grade in the fall after finishing his last year of elementary school with all A's. An avid sportsman, he's on the swim team, the wrestling team, and the lacrosse team. Though he began his career playing midfield, these days he's most often found in the goalie box, defending the goal of the Maryland Lacrosse Club, which won LaxSplash this past June.

**DEWAYNE** Nolan Kant, now eight years old, continues to manage his popularity with grace. In addition, he swims, plays lacrosse for Kelly Post, and enjoys arts & crafts immensely. This summer he biked the C&O Canal with his brothers. He also wrestled, but didn't like it.

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