

Angel Films præsenterer

The Peanut Butter Falcon



Premiere: 12. marts

Længde: 97 minutter

Censur: 7 år

Instruktør: Tyler Nilson & Michael Schwartz

Premierebiografer:

Palads, Dagmar, Empire, CinemaxX
KBH og Århus, Øst For Paradis, Big
Bio Nordhavn, Valby Kino, Vig Bio,
Movie House Ringsted (for fuld
liste, se sidste side)

Synopsis:

22-årige Zak er født med Downs syndrom og bor på en institution. Han drømmer om at blive professionel wrestler og har tyndslidt sit gamle VHS-bånd med optagelser af de største kampe. Med hjælp fra en anden beboer (Bruce Dern), stikker Zak en nat af for at forfølge sin store drøm.

Men verden udenfor institutionen er overvældende for en ung mand med Downs syndrom. Held i uheld møder Zak den lurvede Tyler (Shia LaBeouf), som modvilligt tager Zak under sine vinger. Sammen bevæger de to, sig nu ud på en rejse, der slet ikke bliver som forventet, men som kommer til at ændre dem begge for altid.

Trailer og udvidet pressemateriale kan hentes på:
<https://www.angelfilms.dk/the-peanut-butter-falcon>

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ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

The Peanut Butter Falcon's inspirational story begins with its remarkable leading man, Zack Gottsagen, who makes an unforgettable feature film debut in the tale of two dreamers drifting south on a homemade raft. After meeting Gottsagen six years ago at a camp for actors with disabilities, co-director and co-writer Tyler Nilson saw a chance to shine a light on the performer's charisma, determination and self-confidence with a story written expressly for him.

"I could see that he had a unique skill set," says Nilson. "He's a really good actor. About five years ago, my writing and directing partner Mike Schwartz and I decided that this was the right time, and we sat down to create a role that would showcase his abilities."

Schwartz and Nilson decided to create a modern-day fable about two strangers who make their way down isolated waterways and back roads and find an unexpected bond that changes both their lives. "The setting allowed us to explore some great characters for Zack to play off of," Schwartz says.

Pitching a script in which the main character has Down syndrome was a daunting task, the writer-directors admit. To head off doubters, they decided to create a short video demonstrating Gottsagen's talents. The project caught the attention of Tim Zajaros and Christopher Lemole, producers of the gritty post-WWII drama *Mudbound*, which garnered four 2018 Academy Award® nominations, as well as veteran independent filmmakers Albert Berger and Ron Yerxa, 2014 Oscar® nominees for *Nebraska*.

"I had the same feeling when I read this that I did when I read *Mudbound*," says Zajaros. "I finished it and said, all right, let's make this movie. The reason I got into the movie business was to make special movies that you remember for the rest of your life. You don't often get that kind of material so if there's a chance, we have to try to make it. It was risky, but we don't necessarily judge what we do based on an Excel spreadsheet."

"Some projects just grab you," agrees Lemole. "It can take two years or more to make a film, so we try to trust our guts and do things we enjoy. This script was so ambitious. The story has to stand up to some classic films. Our lead actor has Down syndrome. And we are working with two first-time feature directors. It was challenging."

But Schwartz and Nilson's proof-of-concept video featuring Gottsagen convinced them to move forward. "We knew he could act in a two- or three-minute piece of film," says Zajaros. "We decided to take the chance. We went with a lot of faith. My gut said he would great."

The Adventure Begins

With a handful of short films under their belts, Nilson and Schwartz suddenly found themselves at the helm of a feature involving no fewer than seven Academy Award nominees, including actors John Hawkes, Bruce Dern and Thomas Haden Church, and producers Zajaros, Lemole, Yerxa and Berger.

Working with largely untried directors, says Lemole, can be trying for producers, but not in this case. “It’s a director’s job to ask for the moon,” he explains. “The producer’s job is to keep costs under control. With Tyler and Mike, we had a really good dynamic that allowed us to be very straightforward. They appreciated that it wasn’t about cutting costs, it was about what was best for the film. Their passion for the project made it easy for us all to work as a team.”

Once the film was greenlit, Schwartz and Nilson were swept into the whirlwind of their first major production without much opportunity to doubt themselves. “It was like a tornado,” Schwartz recalls. “We had a schedule, but then we’d have to switch it because of weather or people’s availability. We didn’t even have time to be tired.”

“We had written *The Peanut Butter Falcon* primarily for Zack to have the experience of making a feature film,” adds Nilson. “I hadn’t put a lot of thought into what it meant for my future as a director or what it could be like for *me* to have that experience. So there was no fear. It was more excitement.”

Although the six-week shoot was arduous, says Nilson, the producers, actors and crew members quickly became family. “Most importantly, I learned to trust my gut, but be open to new ideas. There’s a line in the film: ‘Hold on and let go.’ That’s what we had to do. For example, you have an idea what a scene is and you try to hold on to it, but sometimes you have to let your assumptions go. Who knows? You could end up with something even better.”

“We flow together,” adds Schwartz. “We’re yin and yang. If we were exactly the same, it’d be really hard to be partners. But we want the same things. And we care about the same things. We each do what we do best, but we talk to each other about it first.”

According to Lemole, although the bar for success was set high from the beginning, the finished product exceeded everyone’s expectations. “If we had gotten to 75 percent, I would have been very happy,” he says. “But we broke through the ceiling in terms of what I expected. I can’t wait to show this movie to the world. There were times we all lost sleep. Three weeks before shooting, we still didn’t have our Salt Water Redneck or our Eleanor, but in the end we couldn’t have put together a better cast.”

Three for the Road

Gottsagen plays Zak, a young man who has been warehoused in a facility for seniors because of a lack of better alternatives. Passionate about professional wrestling, he watches decades-old matches over and over on VHS. His all-time hero is the Salt Water Redneck, whose North Carolina wrestling school is advertised endlessly on the tapes. With the help of his elderly roommate, Zak makes a midnight run to freedom. His plan is to track down his idol and attend the Salt Water Redneck's wrestling school.

It took all of Nilson and Schwartz's determination and vision to get the movie made, Gottsagen says. "I love Tyler and Mike for pulling this off. They pushed us hard every single day. They are great directors and I hope we can work together again. I feel so much love with these two and I'm so happy to be a part of this movie."

Gottsagen's relentless optimism is backed up by the kind of fierce ambition that makes stars out of actors, says Nilson. "Zack has always believed in himself. He has unwavering faith. We were shooting a scene where everyone was jumping off a 35-foot-high platform into the water and we had to use a stunt double for Zack and he got kind of mad. He wanted to jump, but at first the stunt coordinator wouldn't give his approval. So at lunch we snuck out and started jumping him at low heights. He was fine, so we bumped him up higher. In the end, he did his own stunt. It felt great. The whole movie is about someone like Zack being able to do what other people do."

The actor also worked through a painful condition that might have sidelined another performer. About three weeks into shooting, with his most critical scenes coming up fast, Gottsagen developed a hernia. He refused to step aside. "Zack came through for us even though he was often in an enormous amount of pain," says Schwartz. "We thought it might be all over — there was no replacing Zack — but he kept showing up to work."

Casting the role of Tyler, the troubled and troublesome fisherman who becomes Zak's traveling companion, was a delicate proposition, according to the filmmakers. Initially the character, who is on the run from adversaries who mean to do him some serious harm, has no interest in helping Zak. So the actor playing him needed the sensitivity and patience to work opposite a newcomer, but also the depth to understand and convey Tyler's own demons. Enter Shia LaBeouf.

"We got blessed with a lightning bolt with Shia," says Nilson. "He is one of the most dedicated actors I have worked with. The whole heartbeat of the film is Tyler and Zak and the way they get along. Shia came in and built a real relationship with Zack that could not be faked. He's as much a filmmaker as he is an actor and he cares about the movie as much as we do. He isn't willing to just move on after a certain number of takes. Every scene has to be great."

LaBeouf says he was on board after reading just the first 30 pages of the script. “I talked with Tyler and Mike on Skype and we hit it off pretty good. Working with them felt like a constant conversation. Even when we got off set, it kept going, sometimes all night. What any actor wants from a director is somebody to lean on, to hire the right people and to trust those people. And these dudes did that. I’m really happy with how the movie has turned out. I can be pretty hard on my work, but this one is a beautiful movie.”

The actor calls Gottsagen one of the purest, most intensely good people he has ever met. “He’s really elevated in terms of feelings,” LaBeouf explains. “It’s not a logical thing. He’s just expressive. Zack can’t lie. He wears his heart on his sleeve. We got to a place where we were so connected we really just didn’t even need to talk. It’s just a knowing silence.”

The connection was essential for the characters the two actors play, according to Lemole. “When they team up, they become fellow outlaws in a way. They are both running from something. And now they’re friends. I can’t imagine having anyone else in these roles. The brotherhood between those two is undeniable and then when you add in Dakota Johnson, you’ve got a family. The chemistry between all the actors is unmatched in my experience.”

LaBeouf, who has been acting professionally since he was a preteen, says Johnson brought a level of professionalism to the set that goes beyond anything he has seen before. “Her first day was eight pages and she cut right to the chase,” he says. “Dakota is really powerful in a Jodie Foster kind of way. She has the strength to put you in your place. And her bond with Zack was amazing. They’re so good together. Once she showed up, he didn’t care about me anymore.”

Johnson plays Eleanor, an empathetic volunteer at Zak’s nursing home who has a special connection with the young man. When he disappears one night, she goes on the road to try and rescue him before he gets in over his head. But by the time she locates him, he’s had a taste of freedom, Tyler-style, and there’s no going back. Against her better judgment, Eleanor agrees to escort Zak to Florida on his quest to find his wrestling idol.

“Working with Zack has been one of the best experiences of my career,” Johnson says. “Actually of my life. There are no games, no judgment and no room for anything but honesty. We just love each other. I’ve never had that before. I can be completely open with him.”

“I didn’t really have an idea of what it was going to be like when I came in,” she says. “I came in later than the guys and the first day for me was probably our biggest scene together. It was pretty hardcore and very beautiful. And not like anything I’ve ever imagined could exist on a film set. We had to open our hearts, just like the characters.”

Hot on the Trail

Duncan and Ratboy, a pair of crabbers who are looking for retribution after Tyler destroys their equipment, are close behind as Tyler, Zak and Eleanor continue their journey south. After dealing with Tyler's antics for too long, Duncan is out for blood this time. John Hawkes, who plays Duncan, brings an air of real menace to the character. "I have so much respect for John's work," says LaBeouf. "He's just a smart dude. He makes good choices and he's fun to watch. I was kind of intimidated. I thought John was the kind of guy who takes everything seriously. But he's the best."

Hawkes says he was interested in the project as soon as he heard that producers Ron Yerxa and Albert Berger were involved. "They are producers extraordinaire. And then meeting Tyler and Mike reinforced my interest. It's always really great when the directors have written the script. And the screenplay itself was a little piece of magic."

To prep for their roles as fishermen, both he and LaBeouf trained with crabber Rob Thomas. "He's a legendary fisherman locally and a wonderful man," Hawkes says. "Getting out on the boat with him at five in the morning was really enjoyable. You can see why people love to crab. There's an autonomy and a peacefulness to it. That said, you're laying buoys and coming back to them later and people may have stolen your catch. It happens all the time. That's what sets Duncan after Tyler."

After more than 30 years of acting and over 100 film and television roles, Hawkes knows the mood on a set always comes from the top. "When the producers and the directors are great people who care about what they're doing and want to make things as good as they can possibly be, it's real joy," he observes. "The people who worked on this were really fantastic. There aren't many actors more dedicated than Shia. He cares more than most people, and that's an exciting prospect. And Dakota Johnson is a delight. She's a lot of fun to be around and a real talent. But my favorite part of the experience was getting to know Zack and seeing his approach to life and to work."

Duncan's sidekick in the film, a seedy tough guy known as Ratboy, is played by Alabama-born rapper, songwriter and producer Yelawolf, in his professional acting debut. "I knew I was going to be joined at the hip with someone, but you never know what that's going to be like until you meet," says Hawkes, who was already a fan of the musician. "He turned out to be a really terrific actor and a really terrific human being."

Nilson says that he was always impressed with Yelawolf in his music videos and when he saw the video for "Til It's Gone" he said, "That's Ratboy."

The rapper returns the praise, "they have their vision and they stick to it," he adds. "They work super good as a team and it seems like a well-oiled machine, you know? I just had to step in and rock. They made it super easy for me. The vibe was good, and the character wasn't a huge stretch. I'd work with them anytime."

Accomplices and Inspirations

Zak does not make his late escape without help, which comes in the form of Carl, his octogenarian roommate, played by Bruce Dern. “I’m just a geeked-out fan of all the people in the film,” says Nilson. “Especially Bruce Dern! The intensity and gravitas that he brought to set was really awesome.”

Dern’s thespian roots trace back to the famed Actors Studio, but his career received a big boost from famed low-budget auteur Roger Corman. He says that Corman, for whom he made 11 films, is responsible for getting his name and those of fellow actors Jack Nicholson, Peter Fonda and Dennis Hopper above the title in films. He admits to seeing a parallel between himself and his character. “I wrote a memoir called Things I’ve Said but Probably Shouldn’t Have,” Dern says. “That’s Carl. He probably drank a little too much Wild Turkey and people got tired of putting up with him, so he ended up in this home.”

The actor, who was nominated for his supporting role in 1979’s *Coming Home* and won a Best Actor Oscar 35 years later for *Nebraska*, says he took on the role because the film catches “lightning in a bottle.” “Zack on the screen is magic,” says Dern. “He gives everyone his heart every day. He brings it take after take after take. And he’s legitimately funny. He is in on every joke and has an appreciation for them. Audiences will see his charm and fall in love.”

The object of Zak’s odyssey, a washed-up wrestler who goes by the moniker Salt Water Redneck, is played by Thomas Haden Church. “My character had a brief encounter with wrestling stardom back in the ’90s,” Church explains. “He made it to the big leagues for about the amount of time it takes to drink a cup of coffee, but he’s still a local legend. Zak knows him from these ancient videos he watches, but his life has changed and he’s a lot different than what Zak thought he was going to be.”

Church was drawn to the wealth of talent attached to the film as well as the visual and emotional worlds of the film. “They rang true to me,” he says. “I have family from the Deep South and have spent a lot of time on the coast of Texas. This is so authentic to a world I am familiar with.”

The Salt Water Redneck may have retired from the ring, but in Zak’s heart, he is still a champion. And like so many before him, the Salt Water Redneck has a hard time saying no to the young man’s determination to become the Peanut Butter Falcon, the wrestling *nom de guerre* he and Tyler cook up one boozy night.

“As an actor, Zack fully engages and comes up with spontaneous and authentic emotional moments,” says Church. “His innocence is paired with unusual acuity and everybody responds to it. And he’s got charm for days with the ladies.”

Becoming a pro wrestler was never on Church’s own radar, but he says that working with wrestling stars Mick Foley and Jake the Snake was a thrill. “I learned my first wrestling move,” he boasts. “I felt like a master wrestler. It’s been an honor to get to know Mick and Jake. They are the only pro wrestlers I’ve ever met, and both are very entertaining, colorful, good-hearted guys.”

The Hostess City of the South

The Peanut Butter Falcon was shot in and around Savannah, Georgia, in the midst of one of the city's notoriously sultry summers, when weather conditions can be extreme. Temperatures regularly top 90 degrees, with humidity of 90 percent or more. Frequent rainfall can bring thunder and lightning storms, so the company had to be extremely nimble to accommodate last-minute changes. But the city's many charms easily outweighed those concerns, says Nilson. "We love Savannah, I can't count one time I wished we'd shot somewhere else. It was the perfect place."

The film was shot by Nigel Bluck, a native Australian who has been honored around the world for his cinematography. His camera captures a stylized, languid version of the backwaters and byroads of the rural South, from swampy, reed-filled inlets and intimate sandy beaches to wide-open fields and scrubby woodlands, transforming Savannah, Georgia in to North Carolina flawlessly. He finds innate beauty and mysticism in places more often portrayed as hardscrabble. "It is a beautiful part of the world," he notes. "The people are very colorful, vibrant and comfortable with themselves. Even the poorest parts are free and lush and full of possibilities for fantasy and magic."

Bluck says he and the directors talked extensively about keeping the camera "transparent." "It was important that the camera not call attention to itself, but to be silently observing this journey," he explains. "There's a mythical feeling to the script that reminded me of Huckleberry Finn. Visually I was going for a sense of timelessness that you see in all the great road pictures. We wanted to tell the story with a sense of ultra-naturalism that reflects the realities of Tyler's life and some of the surrealism of the fantasy realm of Zak's imagination."

He carried that philosophy through to photographing the actors, especially Johnson. "We chose to emphasize a sort of uncurated beauty that fits into these settings," he says. "She looks natural and gorgeous. It makes it easy to understand Tyler's attraction to her singularity."

Music for the Road

The Peanut Butter Falcon soundtrack is a spirited and eclectic collection of American music that evokes the exhilaration of an open-ended road trip. It includes bluegrass, gospel, country, rockabilly, folk and indie rock, from artists as diverse as the Staple Singers, Colter Wall, Ola Belle Reed, and Yo La Tengo, plus original music from a quartet of composers.

The directors specifically sought out music that would feel at home in the film's distinctly American landscape while also reinforcing the unique personalities of its trio of travelers, according to music supervisor and composer Zachary Dawes. "The setting is very much a character in this film," he says. "They wanted to stay true to that and also have something that could pendulum between the edginess of Shia's character and the sweetness of Zack's and Dakota's. So there are elements of dissonance and distortion and heavy percussion at times and then also sweet bits for the story of the new family they become."

As Dawes and fellow composer Jonathan Sadoff began writing original music for the film, they realized it was essential to bring in musicians fluent in the score's musical language. They turned to a pair of virtuosos, multi-instrumentalist Gabe Witcher and banjoist Noam Pikelny, who are also credited as composers on the film. "They are players of the highest caliber and their role ended up being more significant than just playing," says Dawes. "They're so good and so creative that they ended up being a part of the scoring process in the studio."

Executive music producer Charles Barsamian worked with the directors, the producers, Dawes and the other composers to assemble the soundtrack. "Everyone was so passionate about making it the best film it could be," he says. "Zach did an extraordinary job finding source music to supplement the original score."

The original music includes both traditional and nontraditional elements, says Barsamian. "Jon Sadoff is more of a traditional film score composer, whereas Gabe Witcher and Noam Pikelny, who are members of the band Punch Brothers, contributed more of a bluegrass element. But the whole through-line is Americana. Bluegrass fiddler Sara Watkins recorded some original vocals over a song called 'Long Hot Summer Days.' It's more than superficial background music; it all impacts the scenes and the movement of the film."

Besides being intimately involved in selecting songs for the film, the directors also co-wrote the film's end-title song, "Running for So Long (House a Home)."

An Honest Story

The road to completing *The Peanut Butter Falcon*, like the route its protagonists follow, was sometimes difficult, often unpredictable and always gratifying, according to the filmmakers. "Mike and Tyler wrote an amazing script," says producer Zajaros. "They lived with the movie long enough to know exactly what they wanted. They found the perfect locations. The love and enthusiasm they brought to the set every day had a profound effect on all of us."

His hope is that the film will be as special to audiences as it is to everyone who worked on it. "It could potentially start an interesting conversation," he says. "But it's also just incredibly entertaining. It has a ton of heart and a lot of fun. There are elements that everybody can relate to in one way or another. I can keep watching it over and over again. It's a story told honestly, and that's the right way to tell it."

Lemole is hard-pressed to think of another film like *The Peanut Butter Falcon*, and he is excited to share it with a wide audience. "It's a story that breaks your heart and puts it back together again," says the producer. "It addresses real issues without being preachy. One of the most important things it has to say is that everybody is entitled to their hopes and dreams. We all have to try and be realistic in our expectations, but at the same time, there is no reason to leave anyone on the sidelines. I know Zack's not going to become a professional basketball player or an Olympic swimmer. But neither am I. He's such a special guy and I'm proud that we were able to celebrate that."

The co-directors say all they set out to do was tell a good story, one that would open up pathways for people to look at the commonplace in different ways, and to give Zack Gottsagen a chance to do something he dreamed about for a long time. “We really wanted to make something that would be fun for all of us and for the audience,” says Nilson. “And I wanted to give my really good friend Zack an opportunity to be in a movie. And maybe allow people to see him differently.”

Biografer som viser The Peanut Butter Falcon

Øst for Paradis
Palads
Empire Bio
Dagmar
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CinemaxX Århus
Atlas
MovieHouse Hellerup
Kino Roskilde
Holbæk
Big Bio Herlev
Biffen Aalborg
Valby Kino
Nicolai Bio & Cafe

Scala Holstebro
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