



Production Information

The world is engulfed by the fires of war, and no one has the power to stop the inevitable destruction...until now.

For nearly a century, the Fire Nation has waged its deadly campaign for global domination over its fellow tribal nations of Air, Water and Earth. They offer but one choice to the tribes who fall to their might—complete surrender, or complete annihilation.

As the villagers vainly attempt to defend themselves, they stand behind the chosen few who can command their nation's element and 'bend' it to their will. Backed by enormous armies and weapons of destruction, however, the firebenders have already eliminated every airbender on the planet and now, they turn their attentions to the Water Nation, headquartered in their northern fortress.

One day, young waterbender Katara (NICOLA PELTZ) is out practicing her skills with her brother Sokka (JACKSON RATHBONE) when they discover a young boy named Aang (NOAH RINGER). But as Aang's airbending skills become apparent, Katara and Sokka realize that they have found more than just the last airbender. As the prophesied Avatar—the only one who can control all four of the elements—the young airbender is the lone weapon that can repel the Fire Nation's onslaught and ultimately restore balance to the war-torn world. But can he master his bending skills and become the hero he needs to be before it is too late?

A master storyteller, Oscar®-nominated writer/producer/director M. NIGHT SHYAMALAN ("The Sixth Sense," "Signs," "Unbreakable") brings the hit animated series "The Last Airbender" to the big screen, creating an epic, larger-than-life world that explodes with spectacular special effects, great action and exciting adventure.

The film boasts a talented youthful cast that includes—along with Noah Ringer, Nicola Peltz and Jackson Rathbone—DEV PATEL (“Slumdog Millionaire”) as the Fire Nation’s vengeful Prince Zuko; SHAUN TOUB (“Iron Man”) as Zuko’s dedicated Uncle Iroh, aiding the Prince in his quest; AASIF MANDVI (“Spider-Man 2”) as the Fire Nation’s Commander Zhao, a military man without a conscience; and CLIFF CURTIS (“Live Free or Die Hard”) as Fire Lord Ozai, who will reject anyone—including flesh-and-blood—who stands in his way.

“The Last Airbender” is based on the series “Avatar: The Last Airbender,” created by MICHAEL DANTE DiMARTINO and BRYAN KONIETZKO, who also serve as executive producers. Producing with Shyamalan are SAM MERCER (“The Sixth Sense,” “Unbreakable,” “The Village”) and FRANK MARSHALL (the “Bourne” series, “Indiana Jones” series), with executive producers KATHLEEN KENNEDY (“Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull,” “War of the Worlds”) and SCOTT AVERSANO (“Killers,” “The School of Rock”).

Joining Shyamalan’s creative team are Academy Award®-winning cinematographer ANDREW LESNIE, ACS, ASC (“The Lord of the Rings” trilogy), production designer PHILIP MESSINA (the George Clooney “Ocean’s” series), Academy Award®-winning editor CONRAD BUFF, A.C.E. (“Titanic”) and costume designer JUDIANNA MAKOVSKY (“Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone”). Serving as co-producer is JOSE L. RODRIGUEZ (“The Happening”). Rounding out the production are multi-Oscar®-nominated composer JAMES NEWTON HOWARD (“The Dark Knight”), along with the visual effects & animation magicians at INDUSTRIAL LIGHT & MAGIC (“Avatar”).

About the Production

Starting in 2005, Nickelodeon began airing an original animated series called “Avatar: The Last Airbender” from co-creators Michael Dante DiMartino and Bryan Konietzko. The show struck a chord with a wide range of viewers. Soon, “Avatar” fever had spread to become an international phenomenon (the show now airs in more than 120 countries). It soon came to the attention of one of Hollywood’s best storytellers—M.

Night Shyamalan. The double-Oscar®-nominated filmmaker comments, “‘Avatar: The Last Airbender’ fell into my lap. It hit me like an epiphany.”

Shyamalan’s daughters had fallen in love with the series, particularly the character of the young female waterbender Katara. Intrigued by their unprecedented fan loyalty, Shyamalan decided to watch the television show alongside them, and then he too was hooked.

Clearly, there was cinematic potential in the series. Yet to adapt the 30-some hours of stories into a feature film would not be a task without significant challenge—including the filmmaker’s entry into a genre he had yet to explore in his previous work. “I knew from the moment I put the first words on the page, that to do a movie of this complexity, you have to put work into it. Michael Dante DiMartino and Bryan Konietzko, who created the ‘Avatar’ series, spent six years constructing the mythology.

“It has been a real eye-opener and interesting learning curve for me to do something of this scale, while still wanting to maintain a level of perfection,” continues Shyamalan. “I was scared to death every day of shooting, as it could be so overwhelming, and there were so many unknowns. This movie is two-and-a-half times bigger than anything I have ever done.”

Since the filmmakers of “The Last Airbender” are devoted fans of the original series, they have one ultimate goal that they hope to achieve. “We want to create a film that will not only live up to the fans’ expectations, but also expand it to a worldwide audience in ways that only a full length live-action motion picture can offer,” says Shyamalan.

“Avatar” creators DiMartino and Konietzko were extremely helpful with the development of the screenplay for Shyamalan, helping to scale down the many stories to feature film size. “I can’t tell you how comforting it was to have them only a phone call or email away when I got in a jam. Their ‘Avatar’ mythology is so well thought out that they had an answer and a back story for all my questions.”

Shyamalan had toyed with the idea of doing a franchise type of movie for many years, but never connected with any material. But “The Last Airbender” seemed to have all of the elements that fascinated the filmmaker since he was young, when he first saw “Star Wars”—epic fantasy, fueled by an inherent spirituality, and featuring martial arts at its core.

Says producer Frank Marshall, who collaborated with Shyamalan previously on “The Sixth Sense” and “Signs,” “Night has such a signature filmmaking style and a unique way of telling a story. He has the ability to touch an audience in a way that is very broad. In this film he is expanding his talent and range, which is an incredibly exciting prospect.”

Adds producer Sam Mercer, “Night had been interested in and offered other franchise pictures before in his career, but until ‘The Last Airbender,’ he did not find one that he could make his own—organically, from the first words he put on the page.”

Shyamalan offers that his own comfort zone lies within the thriller genre and admits, “It’s good to change it up and teach myself something new and do something completely different.”

“The Last Airbender” explores Book One of the “Avatar” series that centers around the element of water. The film follows Aang, the Avatar, as he embarks on a quest to master all four elements in order to save the world. As in the television series, “The Last Airbender” journeys from the South Pole to the North.

To begin tackling such a tale, Shyamalan employed longtime collaborator, storyboard artist Brick Mason, and together the two plotted the film on boards for an entire year prior to the start of principal photography. Once cinematographer Andrew Lesnie signed on—who joined for one last pass at the storyboards—the movie was taken to the pre-visualization phase, working with Industrial Light & Magic and VFX supervisor Pablo Helman. At that point, scene-by-scene real-time animatics were rendered, creating a blueprint that enabled the filmmakers to see animated and edited versions of sequences (more than a third of the film was outlined in pre-viz prior to the beginning of filming). Further down the road, getting to watch pre-viz on-set proved invaluable guidance—and viewing them on iPhones was much easier than huddling around a single monitor.

Calling All Benders

Shyamalan was equally forward-thinking when it came time to cast the film. He comments, “I searched for a spectrum of cast members with all different kinds of acting

chops. You can’t just choose one scale of actors.” The filmmakers were also mindful to people the four nations with diverse ethnicities.

The epicenter of that world is Aang, the Avatar, and the search for just the right young performer took six months and covered a lot of territory. When filmmakers received a DVD showcasing a young martial arts champion from Dallas, Texas, serendipity and fate collided.

Noah Ringer had begun practicing Taekwondo, the martial art and national sport of South Korea, at the age of 10, his skills later garnering accolades, including the title of American Taekwondo Association Texas State Champion. Early on, Noah had begun shaving his head to help cool off during training. When his friends and his instructor, all fans of the animated series, noted how much he looked like the television hero, they started calling Noah by the nickname of “Avatar.” Intrigued, he began watching the series on DVD, and he really connected with the non-stop action martial arts sequences.

When it was announced that Paramount was conducting international casting calls for roles in “The Last Airbender,” Noah—urged by his Taekwondo instructor—made a DVD audition tape, even painting the character’s signature blue arrow on his already shaved head.

“Noah is Aang. There is no way around it. From the moment we saw his audition tape, we could see the sincerity in those big brown eyes,” says Shyamalan. “He is dedicated to his craft and he truly cares and wants to work harder every day. His discipline is unprecedented for such a young man.”

Adds producer Frank Marshall, “From the get-go, Noah had a very Zen-like quality to him, and that is exactly what we were searching for in this character.”

Having to combine acting with his martial arts expertise, Noah says, “Night really helped me feel the focus and get that power and energy into my acting, which will help me forever in my life.”

In any compelling story of ‘good versus evil,’ everybody knows you have to have a great villain. So, getting someone to match Ringer in the part of Prince Zuko would be key..

Having just come off of the seemingly out-of-nowhere success of the Oscar®-winning “Slumdog Millionaire,” leading actor Dev Patel was in search of a role as different as possible from his “Slumdog” character, Jamal. While publicizing the indie

hit, Patel submitted himself on tape for the Prince, and later got ‘the call’ from Shyamalan, offering him the part.

Says Shyamalan, “In actuality, vulnerability is Zuko’s strong suit. Dev Patel’s sweet spot is vulnerability. Dev was that man-child when we cast him for the part, the perfect combination of anger and compassion.”

Offers Patel (who watched “Avatar” during downtime on the set of “Slumdog”), “Prince Zuko is torn between his passion and his struggle to regain his honor in his father’s eyes. I always loved the story, because it has a lot of lessons to be learned, and I have always been a big Bruce Lee fan, so of course I loved all the martial arts stuff in the animated series.”

When Ringer and Patel met on the first day of shooting, a mutual respect was formed then and there. Per Patel: “I saw this 12-year-old kid come onto the set of this massive film and was surprised to see that he was just unwavering. His martial arts training had really given him this steadiness and determination to go for it, regardless of the challenge.”

Like Ringer, the young actress Nicola Peltz had also decided to submit herself for a part in Shyamalan’s latest film, and was called in to read for the role of waterbender Katara—and later, offered the role. Peltz had become quite familiar with the character, having faithfully watched the series with her younger twin brothers.

Like Shyamalan’s daughters, little girls everywhere look up to Katara and her strength as a young woman. Says Peltz, “She is an amazing role model for girls. Anything she puts her mind to, she’ll do—she is so physically and mentally strong.”

With both parents absent, Katara’s older brother Sokka gladly accepts the role of protector. Even though Sokka isn’t gifted with bending skills, he still possesses the soul of a true warrior. If Katara is ever threatened, he will spring into action with his boomerang or a spear. Cast in the part was Jackson Rathbone of “Twilight” fame, who brings a brooding physicality to the role.

Says Shyamalan, “In the film I grounded Sokka more, so, while there is humor in the film, he is not the comic relief. That gave Jackson more of a range to play with, and during the course of the film, you can really watch Sokka grow up.”

In addition to the trek he and his sister take, Sokka’s character also undergoes an emotional journey when he meets Princess Yue, played by Seychelle Gabriel, and falls in love with her. Says Rathbone, “In a way, Sokka is a hick from the Southern Water Tribe,

and he goes to the big city of the Northern Water Tribe, where he meets this beautiful and sophisticated princess. Their relationship teaches him so much, and he grows up a great deal.”

Prince Zuko’s journey is fueled by the duties of family. After being shamed in battle, Zuko has been ostracized by his father, Fire Lord Ozai (played by Cliff Curtis). Zuko is determined to win back his father’s love and esteem. Zuko is aided by his Uncle Iroh (played by Shaun Toub), an ex-general and veteran of many wars, who acts as a mentor and confidante to the young prince.

The Fire Nation rules and is ruled by militaristic force—so it is no surprise that, on a personal level, the same philosophy of ‘might makes right’ holds true. It is the duty of the strong to push the weak aside and take rule. Believing himself a more accomplished leader than the Zuko, Commander Zhao (played by Aasif Mandvi) is out to take the place of the shamed prince, and will go to any lengths to earn the Fire Lord’s favor.

To fill out the cast with the tribesmen of the four nations, open casting calls were held all over the East Coast for actors who would be called upon to exhibit a list of skills from many disciplines—martial arts, the military, dancing, gymnastics. Calls were put out for actors of all age groups, including children (ranging from six to fifteen).

Men resembling Middle Eastern, Indian, Mediterranean and Italian peoples were cast as Fire Nation soldiers. A mix of men, women and children resembling those of Korean, Japanese, Mongolian and African descent were cast as the Earth Kingdom citizens living under Fire Nation rule. Likewise, hundreds of men, women and children resembling those of Anglo descent were cast as villagers in the Southern and Northern Water Tribes.

In the final tally, more than 6,000 actors were employed to make up the world of “The Last Airbender.”

Mastering the Art of Bending

Once Noah Ringer was cast as Aang, he only had about one month to train—as an actor, that is. He was surprised at how much the discipline of acting and the practice of martial arts had in common. Observes Ringer, “In Taekwondo, you listen to your instructor, and then respond. You do the same thing in acting with your director.”

Ringer trained with the stunt department for a couple of months prior to filming, incorporating his martial arts moves in complicated, choreographed fight sequences. Says Shyamalan, “Noah has a way of adding poetry to his moves, and at the same time, never losing his ‘Aang sensibility.’ On set, we had to pinch ourselves that this is not only his first movie, but also his first time ever acting. I challenged him everyday on the integrity of his acting, and he would come right back at me with ideas and interpretations of his own. He has a competitive instinct that makes him want to be the best he can be at everything he does.”

Nicola Peltz had played ice hockey for many years, and was thinking about playing professionally before she made the decision to pursue acting. Her athletic skills came in handy when training for the role of Katara, which included a regimen of martial arts training that started five months before filming began.

Says the New York native, “I started training on my own in Brooklyn and learned Kung Fu, which is a style of martial arts that is force against force. Then, a couple of months before we started filming, I went to Philadelphia and began training in Tai chi, then putting the choreography of the fight scenes together with Noah and Jackson.”

Nicola focused the majority of her training on Tai chi chuan, a martial art with a gentler, slower style and flowing movements. Tai chi uses internal energy to promote mental calmness and clarity, and it is the chosen style of bending utilized by the Water Tribe.

Four Cinematic ‘Nations’ Combine Forces: Martial Arts, Stunts, VFX and SFX

In the television series, bending was accomplished through the magic of animation. But for a live-action film, many elements would need to work in harmony in order to cinematically conjure the onscreen control of fire, water, earth and air. These four movie elements were martial arts, stunt work, visual and special effects.

Shyamalan has always been a big fan of martial arts and martial arts films. “I am a huge martial arts freak. I am one of those guys that has a statue of Bruce Lee in my office and has seen ‘Enter the Dragon’ dozens and dozens of times.”

While leads Noah Ringer and Dev Patel both hold black belts in Taekwondo, the style of martial art from Korea, they would need to work on transforming their moves to

fit with those called for in the film. The world of “The Last Airbender” uses the Chinese martial art known as Wushu, which incorporates several fighting styles.

In the original animated series, four styles of Wushu were used to differentiate the four types of bending: Baguazhang for airbending, Tai chi for waterbending, Hung Ga for earthbending, and Northern Shaolin Kung Fu for firebending. The film utilizes the same styles, and the actors and stunt performers spent months training prior to shooting. The director even had Ringer watch Bruce Lee’s “Enter the Dragon” for reference.

There are thousands of different kinds of Wushu, and it is the way the moves are executed that determines the style. A parallel could be drawn to singing. There are many styles (pop, rock, jazz), all considered singing. But it’s the way the song is sung that determines what kind it is.

Patel remembers, “When I was younger, I had this crazy amount of energy in school, and I was always getting into trouble. So my parents put me in drama classes, and also gave me lessons at a Taekwondo school. I trained for eight years in martial arts and eventually became a black belt in Karate. Who knew I would ever get to put my skills to use?” The young actor recalls a sign on the wall of the martial arts studio where he trained—*Martial arts is not just about fighting, it is a way of life.*

If it hadn’t been already, it certainly became a way of life for many in the cast and crew of “The Last Airbender”...for a few months, anyway.

And no matter how accomplished at martial arts the cast members were, they would still have to call on the stunt department. When the action proved too heavy for principal actors, they came to rely on the 61 members of the stunt crew, as well as a large team of stunt riggers, performers, and a Wushu trainer. Also, more than 90 of the hired extras arrived with prior martial arts experience, who were then further trained by the stunt team.

Habberstad and his team rehearsed the action sequences for four months prior to shooting. The staged fights were more like dances—choreographed to the last move, they would need to be performed with exact timing and precision. Says Jeff Habberstad, “We were onstage doing some ground work, and then we graduated to using wires. We’ve never done anything like this before, and we gathered up the best stunt riggers in the business. We couldn’t compromise on the quality or the look of it. Everything needed to be perfect, and perfectly safe.”

Even with all key cast undergoing martial arts training, the more challenging and complicated sequences warranted the use of stunt doubles. Every actor had a double, except for Noah Ringer...who had two.

Experienced stuntwomen Karine Mauffrey and Jade Quon worked tirelessly to create the effortless look of Aang’s airbending and waterbending fight sequences. Each woman brought a unique aspect to the role: Karine, a four-year Cirque du Soleil acrobat, brought style and grace to Aang’s difficult airbending moves; Jade, trained in martial arts and gymnastics, handled Aang’s big moves and wire work with might (a special harness allowed Jade to flip and spin on the wire simultaneously).

The stunt team employed a computer program called Navigator, which pre-programmed wirework measuring details on a grid, and displayed the speed of the movement on a graph. Helmed by two technicians, this exacting precision was operated with the touch of a button, giving them the power to perfectly replicate the stunt ad infinitum. Should adjustments be needed, the computer could handle that as well. This amazing combination of technologies gave the stunt performers the ability to ‘fly’ while suspended from a steel wire no more than one-quarter of an inch thick.

Says Shyamalan, “There are several big moments in the film where Aang surprises his enemies, and fights them so effortlessly. Even though we know his inner struggle is strong, he is still able to fend off attackers using his peripheral vision—it comes off almost like a ballet move. There are key beats in the film where I hope every adult and kid in the audience will be saying to themselves, ‘I wish I could do that!’”

It was truly one for all and all for one to pull off the complex fight sequences—every department head needed to work in tandem with the others to accomplish some of the more daring tasks. “It was serendipity during filming the hard core action,” says Shyamalan. “Everyone fed off one another until we got the result we are all happy with.”

Another department of equal importance in the onscreen magic was the visual effects corps, headed by VFX supervisor Pablo Helman. His Industrial Light & Magic team would prove to be instrumental in building the fantasy world of “The Last Airbender,” beginning with the pre-visualization animation created months before filming.

And months later, when the cameras stopped rolling, ILM’s work started up again. The post-production schedule included six months to put all of the VFX shots in

place, and another four to five months to perfect all of the details in Shyamalan’s sweeping canvas.

Helman explains, “We had a fairly long period of research and development to pinpoint exactly what ‘bending’ would be, would look like. One thing we knew was that, in order for it to work, it needed to be organic. It had to feel believable, but also, it should have the power to propel you into a fantasy world where anything could happen—it needed to have emotion.”

Shyamalan adds, “We want everyone to believe that bending is real. Bending should be a believable extension of human capabilities, an ability that is controlled with chi, and the chi can manipulate the element.”

But VFX would be called upon to do much more than ‘bend’—it would be required to do the ‘heavy lifting’ in the creation, embellishment and extension of environments. Shyamalan admits, “CGI used to be my nemesis—and now, having used it in this film, I understand it is an emotional storytelling tool.”

“The Last Airbender” also marked a departure in Shyamalan’s usual filmmaking process. On previous films, he didn’t go to the cutting room to edit until filming was complete. But on “The Last Airbender,” he began to cut during production. Then, he could send edited scenes to ILM so that they could begin their CGI work.

When possible, sets were constructed for filming instead of relying on the use of bluescreen. Says Helman, “In VFX we always prefer to have something there for the actor to perform with and react to. Then we take it from there.”

ILM did much more than create and extend environments. It was also called upon to create amazing creatures that could only exist in a universe where a handful of people can bend the elements. Among those creatures are: Appa, a six-legged bison, measuring 16 feet tall and 12 feet wide, that swims through the air in a motion derived from the movements of the manatee and platypus; the Fire Nation’s Kimodo Rhino, an animal ridden into battle, coming in at 32 feet long (including tail) and more than 17 feet tall; the flying lemur bat called Momo, who is especially fond of fruit; and the Dragon Spirit, who appears to advise and guide Aang on his treacherous journey. Without exception, these exceptional creatures began life on the set. Sometimes, they were no more than a point on which actors could focus, establishing an eyeline, or a simple chair rig, in which they could sit and simulate ‘riding’ the animal.

For the work of conjuring effects during actual filming, Shyamalan looked to the Special Effects team, led by Steve Cremin, who has collaborated with Shyamalan on all of his previous films.

One of Cremin’s biggest jobs was to create fire—which sounds simple enough, but as the predominant weapon of the Fire Nation, the fire in Shyamalan’s script is called upon to do many things. Cremin mostly utilized gas pipes (the rigging of which is very complex), but also created burning debris, flaming fireballs, torches and, of course, smoke. Nearly every type of fire made an appearance in the sequence where Aang and Zuko meet face-to-face. Within the circular set, cast and stunt performers were rigged with wires to walk the walls between explosions (provided courtesy of squibbed pots, wired to detonators outside of the camera’s eye).

In fact, whenever Zuko is engaged in hand-to-hand combat, he is encircled by a ring of fire. To achieve the beginning of firebending, a wire was strung across the set and ignited. Says Patel, “It’s an adrenaline rush—this flame ball rushing right past my face. In the fight with Aang, I would do a spinning hook kick, and as soon as my leg came around, one of the SFX guys pressed a button, making it look like a flame is coming out of my leg. Then it would zip down to a pot and smash it to bits. Destruction and fire, quite the combo.”

But, like Aang, Cremin was called upon to bend more than just fire—employing everything from hydraulics and air hoses, to water in all its forms, not to mention stunt rocks!, the SFX team could also provide instant bending of air, water and earth, giving the actors and stunt performers quite a bit to react to!

Designing “The Last Airbender”

The design transformation of “Avatar: The Last Airbender” series into feature film began in November 2007, when executive producers (and series co-creators) DiMartino and Konietzko handed over all of their sketches and designs from the show to production designer Philip Messina. In seeking to blow up this world from the small screen to the big, Messina and his art department began gathering references. Looking at everything from travel and history magazines, to sociology journals, to tomes dedicated to dead languages, they slowly began to compile a bible of their own concept illustrations. From China to North Africa to India, even Medieval times, Messina ruled nothing out to

inspire him during the design process. Later, Messina’s original conceptual art for every set stood as the ultimate reference throughout production.

Messina, who worked with Shyamalan as an art director on “The Sixth Sense,” says, “I had to think of what the communities of each nation were like. From the perished Air Nomads, to the grandeur of the Northern Water Tribe, versus the Earth Villagers who were more organic, to the industrialized Fire Nation. Designing the nations were like four pieces to a puzzle. Every time I changed one of them, it affected the other. I wanted to do them in concert with each other, and make them feel coherent, yet uniquely different.”

A year prior to filming, Messina was ready to build with a full art department and construction department of more than 250 artisans. The production designer collaborated closely with costume designer Judianna Makovsky, hair and makeup designer Ivana Primorac, and cinematographer Andrew Lesnie. Together, they sought to relate all design decisions—from a button, to a wig, to an establishing shot—so that no detail was overlooked.

Four Nations, Many Worlds

Perhaps Messina’s biggest design challenge lay in the fortress of the Northern Water Tribe (NWT). The impressive structure—which needed to appear as if made entirely of ice—is the setting for the last third of the film, which features the siege of the fortress by the soldiers of the Fire Nation (employing more than 400 performers in the battle sequences). Says Messina, “The NWT set was the hardest to design. You essentially have an environment that exists in a polar ice cap. You have to start questioning, ‘How do these people live?’ We took the conceit that they were one with their environment, and that they lived in this extreme climate by choice.”

Messina designed the NWT set with many Islamic, Indian and Turkish influences in mind. Utilizing more than 200 workers, the construction of the massive set took nearly four months to complete, and it slowly rose from the floor of an airplane hangar the size of two football fields laid side-to-side. To reinforce the feeling of being hewn from ice, the set was enrobed in thousands of gallons of blue- and gray-tinted polymer, all topped with Epson salt-based snow.

For the raw and natural sets of the Earth village, a rock quarry provided the perfect environment in which to build the outdoor sets. Designers co-opted the colors in

the soil, rocks and surrounding wilderness into their palette. Primitive tent structures were built free-hand from the logs of the nearby forest, and the town took on the feel of a nomadic Bedouin encampment.

When scouting the quarry for the Earth village prison set, Messina was pleasantly surprised to find pre-existing industrial equipment right in the middle of the space. “Instead of fighting it, I thought we could incorporate it into our set. The huge tower and conveyor belt machinery felt like it could belong to the archaic and industrialized look of the Fire Nation.” A constructed pair of steel doors and catwalk later, the design challenge was transformed into an asset.

The design of the far-reaching Fire Nation—drenched in fiery reds and ominous blacks—stands distinct and alone from the looks of the other worlds...and for a very specific reason. Says Messina, “‘Avatar’ co-creators Mike and Bryan reminded me that the Fire Nation began as a tribal people, just like all the others. It was just so easy to label them as bad guys. But as their empire grew through industrialization, they also grew in power.” Messina’s resulting design is reminiscent of early industrialized America, mixed with elements of ancient Japanese culture.

Perhaps the best example of this is the Fire Nation Dining Hall, where Prince Zuko is humiliated in front of his rank-and-file tribesmen. The hall was constructed in the interior of a former power plant. Shuttered more than 25 years ago, the plant offered Messina a network of exposed pipes and walls with peeling paint. The production designer saw visions of Japan in the age of the shoguns and China under Communist rule, and incorporated them into the look of the dining hall.

When the film begins, the Air Nomads have already fallen to the military campaign of the Fire Nation, so Messina knew that the sets of this formerly great nation would be largely in ruin. He looked to ancient temples in, Cambodia for many of the references that inspired the design of the Northern Air Temple. The Temple is the site of a showdown between Aang, the Blue Spirit and a squad of Fire Nation soldiers. The set was built on a soundstage in northern Philadelphia, and while it looks to be entirely made of stone, rubber is incorporated into the structure to provide the stunt men a softer place to break their falls.

Clearly, four nations, each centered in a different climate, could not all feature the same clothing, so costume designer Judianna Makovsky and her team created unique looks for each nation. In total, more than 1,800 costumes and armor pieces and 50 pairs

of shoes and boots were designed and built for “The Last Airbender.” Makovsky drew color palettes, shapes and designs from the “Avatar” series, and brought them into the real world.

All four of the resulting civilizations emerged as a mixture of ethnicities and diverse cultures—cultural specificity was avoided. Each featured a distinctive design and color palette. The Southern Water Tribe villagers were dressed in muted blues, browns and grays, trimmed with the roughest of fake fur. The more sophisticated Northern Water Tribe is awash in vibrant blues, purples and grays, utilizing richer fabrics trimmed with expensive-looking faux fur. The imprisoned peoples of the Earth Nation sport distressed costumes with colors and design touches from ancient Korean and Chinese dress. And Fire Nation soldiers are outfitted in blacks, reds and golds, with helmets and armor harkening back to warriors from the cultures of Japan, Russia and Mongolia.

In addition to the hundreds of makeup and wig designs generated and executed by the production, two signature “looks” took a special collaboration between Shyamalan, Makovsky and makeup and hair designer Ivana Primorac. For Prince Zuko’s facial scar, the team employed a prosthetic makeup artist to create a healed burn that looks as if flames had licked the Prince’s face; the basic design was further stylized until it almost resembled, according to Makovsky, “the flames on the side of a muscle car.” The signature blue arrow that adorns Aang’s forehead was created by a New York City tattoo artist and is comprised of dots, almost like lace. Mindful that the mark not become distracting or overbearing—and to prevent any recognizable symbols or lettering—Primorac and the artist developed a wholly created alphabet based on a conglomeration of everything from Native American, Thai and Japanese calligraphy, to symbols from the practice of alchemy and Tibetan Mandala. The team came up with the resulting arrow, which was stenciled using blue-green makeup. That color resembles tattoo ink that has weathered the test of time.

No matter how many benders they had on the front lines, soldiers from the Earth Nation would still require weaponry. For that, Messina worked with the prop master. They came up with designs for various swords, spears and halberds (ancient battle axes) based on weaponry and armor from the Dark Ages and Medieval times.

On Location: Going Greenland

Despite its pastoral name, most of the continent of Greenland is an icy landscape. With the commencement of principal photography, production traveled to the tiny, already scouted coastal town of Ilulissat, Greenland (the town’s literal name means “iceberg”). There, all scenes of Katara, Sokka and the village of the Southern Water Tribe would be filmed.

Going all the way to Greenland for filming definitely shows the filmmakers’ commitment to authenticity. The site is accessible only by a small plane, and the temperatures during shooting sometimes dipped well below zero. Yet, to capture the stunning views of snow-covered hills against clear blue skies and a sea riddled with icebergs, all of the effort was certainly worth it.

Says producer Sam Mercer, “We felt strongly that the beginning of the movie should feel like a very real beginning to a journey. We came to Greenland because there is nowhere in the world like it; it is a one-of-a-kind landscape with icebergs, water and glaciers, all in the same place.”

Producer Frank Marshall (who had previously shot there) says, “One of the great things about this location for the actors is that they are among the real elements, so their performances are genuine. They are able to respond to being in the record cold temperatures in a natural and normal way. When we needed a location that called for ice, icebergs and no trees, we knew exactly where to go.”

As nothing could be left to chance, all details were gone over repeatedly. Continues Mercer, “After the challenge of transporting our equipment by ship in enormous containers from the U.S., we then had a huge checklist for every department, covering everything, from how you keep people warm while they are working, to how you keep the cameras from freezing.”

So the filmmakers, cast and crew—who were asked to “pack a little patience” in their suitcases—ventured to Ilulissat for the first nine days of filming “The Last Airbender.” All cast, crew and gear were then transported to remote locations just outside of Ilulissat via helicopter. To use the location to its fullest, scenes were filmed in multiple locations, from atop a frozen lake, to teetering on the edge of an ice cap. The main location while shooting in western Greenland was the Southern Water Tribe Village, constructed against the stark backdrop of icebergs floating in Disco Bay. Building began two months prior to principal photography, and production designer

Messina remembers, “None of us had ever built anything like this in an extreme environment before. We had paintbrushes freezing over before the first paint stroke was applied.” In all, the crew numbered some 150, and was comprised of workers from the U.S., Greenland and Denmark.

The village featured 11 full-sized igloo structures, which had been molded out of fiberglass in Philadelphia, transported piecemeal and reassembled on location. The set was dressed with animal hides, pottery, handmade drums, fish and netting borrowed from the locals. Antique wooden canoes were provided, courtesy of the local Ilulissat museum. Ironically, in between takes, the snow-covered igloos served as warming rooms for the cast, thanks to the presence of portable heaters inside.

The set was constructed upon government land protected by UNESCO World Heritage, which dictated that certain rules and regulations had to be obeyed. For one, the art department was not allowed to touch the ground with any of their building materials—so, all structures were bolted to the thick icy surface that rested on top of the soil.

In addition to the village where Katara and Sokka live, filming also took place in front of the strange frozen orb where the pair discover Aang. That set was built using mostly snow reinforced with Styrofoam.

One might expect a lag in technology in such a remote place, but that is not the case. Just prior to the arrival of the film company in Ilulissat, Tele-Post Greenland installed a high-speed Internet cable that ran thousands of miles under the sea. This technology was able to transport shot footage (that was then processed in Copenhagen) back through the Internet cable to the filmmakers’ computers. Dailies could then be viewed in the comfort of the production office rooms at the Hotel Arctic.

Necessity is the mother of invention, and all departments had to adapt their customary work habits to fit in the extreme climate. Ivana Primorac adopted the local practice of drying in the out of doors, despite temperatures well below zero—wet wigs soon froze, and when the ice was chipped away, a dry wig was revealed underneath. Extra care had to be taken when applying hair pieces (which would often go damp from contact with the skin)—all had to be completely dry before attaching, to prevent the piece from freezing to the performer’s head. Molds of the performers’ hands were taken, and latex castings were worn as gloves for added warmth. A skin-colored cap was created and stenciled for Noah Ringer, to protect his shaved head during wide shots. Actors were underdressed with extra layers of silk underwear, and costumes were reinforced with high

performance polar material. Shoes were built on padded and insulated platforms, to keep actors’ feet from coming in close contact with the ice.

Despite the challenges of filming in such a foreboding place, Pablo Helman’s VFX team also discovered opportunities for adventure. The courageous crew spent several days on a large fishing boat, filming background plates of the towering icebergs. Per Helman: “The icebergs can tip over with no warning. The VFX department loved every minute of the adventure.” There was also an aerial unit that filmed the endless vistas from a helicopter’s overhead point-of-view.

Concludes Shyamalan, “The Greenland landscape won’t ever be the same. It is constantly moving and changing. Hopefully, we captured some of that uniqueness on film.”

It is precisely that landscape—along with the countless man hours of labor spent in building the world of “The Last Airbender”—that will prove magical to the audiences. Explains Dev Patel, “This film has that real aspect of escapism, where you can just go to the movies and be escorted into a different world for a couple of hours. We’ve created this fairy tale land with all these different nations, with all these fantastical creatures, and people manipulating these elements. To me, that’s a great thrill ride.”

* * *

In creating the journey of Aang, Shyamalan not only provided an odyssey for the prospective audience member, but also a trek of a more personal nature. Says the filmmaker, “‘The Last Airbender’ is intended to be a fun and action-packed entertaining summer movie, but underneath, it does address some serious topics, like the domination of one race over another, and balance, and connection to the planet—and all those things that interest me that you have seen in my other films. This whole process has been such a great growing experience for me, not just as a director, but as a human being—because I am a complete control freak, and when you have as many layers on a movie as we did with this one, you have to surrender controlling every aspect of a scene. Doing that made me go back a little bit and become a student again. And anytime you can become a student again, that is the way to do it.”

Concludes Shyamalan, “This film is just the beginning, as this is really one long-form story. Aang has to master all four elements and, in the end, acquire serenity. He

was born into one, Air, but he still has to master Water, Earth, and then Fire, and that will conclude our trilogy. All in all, I deeply felt this was an important movie to be made.”

Paramount Pictures and Nickelodeon Movies Present A Blinding Edge Pictures / Kennedy/Marshall Company Production of An M. Night Shyamalan Film: “The Last Airbender,” starring Noah Ringer, Dev Patel, Nicola Peltz, Jackson Rathbone, Shaun Toub, Aasif Mandvi, and Cliff Curtis. The visual effects & animation are by Industrial Light & Magic. The music is by James Newton Howard. The co-producer is Jose L. Rodriguez. The costume designer is Judianna Makovsky. It is edited by Conrad Buff, A.C.E. The production designer is Philip Messina; the director of photography is Andrew Lesnie, ACS, ASC. The executive producers are Kathleen Kennedy, Scott Aversano, Michael Dante DiMartino and Bryan Konietzko. “The Last Airbender” is produced by Sam Mercer and Frank Marshall, and is based on the series “Avatar: The Last Airbender,” created by Michael Dante DiMartino and Bryan Konietzko. The film is written, produced and directed by M. Night Shyamalan. ***TheLastAirbenderMovie.com***

About the Cast

Just two years after **NOAH RINGER (Aang)** began studying Taekwondo at the age of 10, he earned his coveted 1st Degree Black Belt in the American Taekwondo Association (ATA). Noah currently holds the title of Texas State Champion in his age group in four different categories: Traditional Forms, Traditional Weapons, ATA-Extreme Forms, and ATA-Extreme Weapons. Noah produces his own ATA-Extreme routines, choreographing his moves, and choosing his own music.

At the urging of his Taekwondo instructor, Eric Pechacek of the Carrollton ATA Black Belt Academy, Noah answered the casting call by putting together an audition DVD for “The Last Airbender” filmmakers and mailed it to Paramount. Though he had never acted before, Noah’s natural talent for martial arts and charming personality landed him the leading role of Aang. Fortunately, Noah is no stranger to performing, as he has competed in more than 23 Taekwondo tournaments across the United States. In February 2008, Noah was awarded “The Competitor of the Year” award by the ATA in the Texas region, confirming even more his commitment to excellence in his craft.

Noah had never seen the animated Nickelodeon television series, “Avatar,” until his Taekwondo instructor lent him the first season on DVD. Noah and his mom got hooked on the series, and one by one, borrowed and watched each DVD of the entire trilogy. When Noah was cast, his instructor bought Noah a present, his own complete set of all the “Avatar” seasons, to take with him on location in Philadelphia and Greenland.

Besides his love for martial arts and teaching Taekwondo, Noah also enjoys tennis, ping-pong, golf, basketball and snow skiing. In his free time, Noah likes to have fun with his friends, and is an avid reader. Thirteen-year-old Noah was born and raised in Dallas, Texas where he currently lives with his parents, two Australian Shepherds, and two pet rats.

Up next for Ringer is a role in the sci-fi action western “Cowboys & Aliens.”

DEV PATEL (Prince Zuko) delighted audiences as the underdog leading man, Jamal, in the runaway hit “Slumdog Millionaire,” which won eight Academy Awards®, including Best Picture. “Slumdog Millionaire” was only Patel’s second acting role—British audiences know him from the Channel 4 cult series “Skins,” where he was selected from an open casting call of hundreds to play the role of Anwar.

In addition to his acting talents, Dev is a Black Belt in Taekwondo, and was bronze medalist in the 2004 World Championships.

Dev makes his home in London, England.

NICOLA PELTZ’s (Katara) strong acting skills—as well as her natural talent for sports—landed her in M. Night Shyamalan’s ninth film, “The Last Airbender.” Peltz’s experience having played for a female regional hockey team, combined with her love for extreme sports, made her the perfect choice for the intensive martial arts role of the Waterbender Katara.

Nicola made her feature film debut in “Deck the Halls,” with Danny DeVito and Matthew Broderick.

A New York native, Nicola starred onstage opposite Jeff Daniels and Alison Pill in the Olivier Award-winning production of “Blackbird” at the Manhattan Theater Club—the play was directed by multi-Tony winner Joe Mantello (“Wicked,” “Assassins”).

JACKSON RATHBONE (Sokka) was born in Singapore and, because of his father’s job, was lucky enough to be able to live in various countries around the world. Growing up, he lived such places as Medan and Jakarta (Indonesia), London, Connecticut, California, Norway, and Texas, where the family finally settled. Rathbone immediately joined the local community theater and was accepted into the young actors program, The Pickwick Players. In addition to acting, he was very involved in many extracurricular activities, including basketball, track, soccer, baseball and, the pastime of Texas, football. He even started a band and a mobile DJ business (after acting, music is Jackson’s next passion). After trying to juggle so many activities, Jackson decided to stick with what made him the happiest, acting and music.

Rathbone moved to northwest Michigan to attend the prestigious Interlochen Arts Academy as a high school theater major. He grew to appreciate classical theater and flourished in Shakespearean plays. The summer between his junior and senior year, he performed in the Southwest Shakespeare Festival as Ferdinand in “The Tempest.”

Upon graduation from Interlochen, with plans to attend the Royal Scottish Academy as a theater major in the fall, he decided to give Los Angeles and the film industry a try for the summer and signed with manager Patch Mackenzie at Cutler Management, who sent him to study film acting with Jeremiah Comey. In short order, he landed a recurring role on “Disney 411,” interviewing Disney Channel stars, and signed with the Paradigm talent agency.

Opting for a career in film, Jackson decided to stay in L.A. rather than attend the Royal Scottish Academy. He quickly booked several television commercials, along with substantial roles in TV, the Hallmark telefilm “Close to Home” and the series “The O.C.” and “The War at Home” among them. Feature film work followed, in the independent films “Molding Clay” and “Pray for Morning.” He next landed a series regular role in the ABC Family series “Beautiful People”—he was able to keep up his musical pursuits via the internet while filming in Toronto.

Rathbone was chosen by *Girls’ Life* magazine as “The Hottie” of the month, and was featured in *Popstar* and *ELLEgirl*. Usually cast as a leading man, Jackson also enjoys the challenge of character parts, which he had in the features “Big Stan” and “Senior Skip Day.”

After having completed the role of Jasper Hale in the runaway hit features “Twilight” and “New Moon,” along with the lead in the horror film “Dread,” he appeared

in guest-starring roles in the series “The Cleaner” and “Criminal Minds.” He most recently appeared in the third “Twilight” installment, “Eclipse,” again reprising the role of Jasper. He will next appear in the drama “Truckstop.”

Jackson has also started a production company with his manager, PatchMo Entertainment, and their first release is entitled “Girlfriend.”

In his off-time from acting, Jackson writes music. He’s performed at The Gardenia in Hollywood and with his band, 100 Monkeys, at clubs like The Mint and The Viper Room around Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, Vancouver and all over the country. Jackson shares an apartment in L.A. with fellow actor, band member and former Interlochen classmate, Ben Graupner.

SHAUN TOUB (Uncle Iroh) was recently seen starring opposite Robert Downey Jr. in the Paramount Pictures/Marvel Entertainment box office smash “Iron Man,” directed by Jon Favreau, playing the trusted friend and scientist YinSen, who saves Tony Stark’s life.

Toub has had a multi-faceted career. His gripping performance as Farhad in Paul Haggis’ Oscar®-winning film “Crash” earned him a SAG Ensemble Cast Award, Satellite Award – Ensemble Cast Award, Critics Choice Award, Hollywood Film Festival Ensemble Acting of the Year Award, Artistic Freedom Award and Vision Award. More recently, he dazzled audiences playing Rahim Khan in “The Kite Runner,” directed by Marc Forster, which was a Golden Globe® Best Picture nominee, as well as Joaquim, opposite Keisha Castle-Hughes, in the critically acclaimed film, “The Nativity Story.”

Known as a versatile actor, Toub has worked side-by-side with accomplished actors, including Tom Hanks in “Charlie Wilson’s War,” Sandra Bullock in “Crash” and John Travolta in “Broken Arrow.” As a comedic performer, he shined in Michael Bay’s “Bad Boys” with Will Smith and Martin Lawrence.

His other acting credits include “Executive Decision,” “Maryam” and “Hot Shots 2.” Additionally, Toub has made his mark on HBO as well, in both Mick Jackson’s “Live from Baghdad,” starring Michael Keaton and Helena Bonham Carter, and in the controversial “Path to Paradise: The Untold Story of the World Trade Center Bombing,” opposite Marcia Gay Harden. He appears often in television miniseries, most recently in the ABC Emmy®-nominated “The Path to 9/11.” He has received accolades for several of his appearances in more than 100 television episodes, including

“Seinfeld,” “The Sopranos,” “ER,” “Just Shoot Me,” “Nash Bridges,” “JAG” and “Married with Children.”

The actor’s diverse career has spanned 20 years of remarkable performances. Toub was raised in Manchester, England. At the age of 14, he moved to Switzerland and after a two-year stay, he crossed the Atlantic to Nashua, New Hampshire, to finish his last year of high school. After completing his education at USC, he broke into the Hollywood scene with a memorable role on the much loved television series, “Hunter.”

Toub is very proud of his Persian heritage and is active in the community. Through various charity events and public speaking engagements, he inspires the community to embrace the arts, as the arts enhance everyday life.

AASIF MANDVI (Commander Zhao) is the recipient of the 1999 OBIE award for his critically acclaimed one-man show “Sakina’s Restaurant.” Some of his additional New York stage credits include the 2002 Broadway revival of “Oklahoma!,” “Guantanamo: Honor Bound to Defend Freedom,” “Homebody/Kabul,” “subUrbia,” “Trudy Blue” and “Speak Truth to Power.”

Mandvi’s considerable list of film and television credits includes: the worldwide hit “The Proposal,” starring alongside Sandra Bullock and Ryan Reynolds; the DreamWorks comedy, “Ghost Town,” with Ricky Gervais; “The Understudy”; “Music and Lyrics,” with Hugh Grant; the hit sequel “Spider-Man 2”; “Freedomland”; “The Siege”; “Analyze This”; the HBO series “Sex and the City”; “Sleeper Cell”; “The Sopranos”; “The Bedford Diaries”; “Oz”; “CSI: Crime Scene Investigation”; multiple guest-starring roles on all four “Law & Order” series; and “Tanner on Tanner,” directed by Robert Altman. Aasif was also seen in recurring roles on the series “Jericho” and “ER.” Mandvi co-wrote and starred in the feature film comedy “Today’s Special.” He continues his stint as a favorite correspondent for Comedy Central’s “The Daily Show with Jon Stewart.”

Upcoming for Mandvi are the Focus Feature motion-picture adaptation of the popular novel “It’s Kind of a Funny Story,” and an “Untitled Comedy” comprised of a collection of short films starring such performers as Naomi Watts, Gerard Butler, Sam Rockwell, Anna Faris, Kate Winslet and Hugh Jackman.

CLIFF CURTIS (Fire Lord Ozai) is one of New Zealand’s most successful acting talents, having worked with such acclaimed directors as Martin Scorsese, Michael Mann, David O. Russell, Danny Boyle, Frank Darabont, Jane Campion, Antoine Fuqua, Darren Aronofsky, Wayne Kramer, Roland Emmerich and Niki Caro.

Curtis is perhaps most recognizable from his role opposite Academy Award®-nominated Keisha Castle-Hughes in “Whale Rider,” and his leading series regular role in the hit NBC series “Trauma.” Among his credits are roles in such diverse projects as the Weinstein Company’s “Crossing Over,” opposite Harrison Ford and Sean Penn; Warner Bros. Pictures’ “10,000 B.C.”; “Live Free or Die Hard,” opposite Bruce Willis; the Academy Award®-winning “Training Day,” with Denzel Washington and Ethan Hawke; Oscar® winner “The Insider,” with Al Pacino and Russell Crowe; and his first film, the Academy Award®-winning “The Piano,” with Holly Hunter, Anna Paquin and Harvey Keitel.

Among Curtis’ other films are “Blow,” with Johnny Depp, directed by Ted Demme; “Three Kings,” directed by David O. Russell, with George Clooney, Mark Wahlberg and Ice Cube; “Runaway Jury,” with John Cusack, Dustin Hoffman and Gene Hackman; “Bringing out the Dead,” directed by Martin Scorsese with Nicolas Cage; “Virus,” with Jamie Lee Curtis and Donald Sutherland; Ivan Reitman’s “Six Days Seven Nights,” with Harrison Ford; “River Queen,” with Samantha Morton and Kiefer Sutherland; “The Fountain,” directed by Darren Aronofsky with Hugh Jackman and Rachel Weisz; “Sunshine,” directed by Danny Boyle with Cillian Murphy and Chris Evans; “Fracture,” directed by Gregory Hoblit with Anthony Hopkins and Ryan Gosling; and “PUSH,” opposite Dakota Fanning and Chris Evans.

Curtis received a New Zealand Film Award for Best Supporting Actor for his work in “Desperate Remedies” the same year that he received a New Zealand Film Award nomination for Best Supporting Actor in “Once Were Warriors,” directed by Lee Tamahori. He also starred in South Pacific Pictures’ feature film “Jubilee,” which earned him an additional Best Actor Award. His performance in “Overnight” also garnered him a New Zealand Television Award nomination for Best Actor. His U.S. television work includes director Stephen Hopkins’ Emmy®-nominated USA Network miniseries “Traffic.”

In addition to his many film credits, Curtis has worked extensively in New Zealand theater. Curtis trained at the New Zealand Drama School before attending the

prestigious Teatro Dmitri Scoula in Switzerland. His stage credits include “Macbeth,” “The Cherry Orchard,” “The Merry Wives of Windsor,” “Happy End,” “Fiddler on the Roof,” “Man of La Mancha” and “Porgy and Bess.”

More recently, Cliff has also wrapped principal photography on DreamWorks’ “A Thousand Words,” starring opposite Eddie Murphy and directed by Brian Robbins.

About the Filmmakers

M. NIGHT SHYAMALAN (Writer / Producer / Director) directs his ninth feature film with “The Last Airbender,” following “Praying with Anger,” “Wide Awake,” “The Sixth Sense,” “Unbreakable,” “Signs,” “The Village,” “Lady in the Water,” and “The Happening.”

The astronomical success of his chilling psychological thriller “The Sixth Sense” catapulted Shyamalan into the stratosphere of being one of the most sought after young filmmakers in Hollywood. “The Sixth Sense” has become one of the highest grossing films of all time and continues to break records in home entertainment. The film received a total of six Academy Award® nominations, including one for Best Picture, and two for Shyamalan for Best Director and Best Original Screenplay. Additionally, the film was awarded three People’s Choice Awards for Favorite Motion Picture, Favorite Dramatic Motion Picture and Best Actor for the film’s star, Bruce Willis. Shyamalan re-teamed with Willis for “Unbreakable,” which also starred Samuel Jackson.

Following “Unbreakable” Shyamalan also had tremendous worldwide success with the supernatural thriller “Signs,” starring Mel Gibson and Joaquin Phoenix. He followed with the critically acclaimed “The Village,” “Lady in the Water” and “The Happening.”

Shyamalan began making films at the age of 10 in his hometown of Philadelphia. At 16, he had completed his 45th short film. At age 17, he stood before his parents, both doctors, surrounded by pictures of the other 12 doctors in the family, and informed them that, although he had graduated *cum laude* and received academic scholarships to several prestigious medical programs, he had instead decided to attend the New York University Tisch School of the Arts to study filmmaking. During his final year at NYU, he wrote an emotional screenplay made up of personal moments entitled “Praying with Anger,” about a young exchange student from the U.S. who goes back to India and finds himself a stranger in his own homeland. In 1992, with the funding to make his first low-budget feature, Shyamalan shot the story on location in India and served as the film’s writer, director, producer and star. The film was selected to be screened by the New York Foundation of the Arts’ prestigious First Look Series, and in July 1993, was named Debut Film of the Year by the American Film Institute of Los Angeles.

The following year, Shyamalan wrote another spiritual screenplay, “Labor of Love,” which he sold to 20th Century Fox. In June 1995, he was asked by Columbia Pictures to write the fantasy screen adaptation of “Stuart Little,” based on E.B. White’s beloved children’s classic of the same name.

His second feature film, “Wide Awake,” starred Rosie O’Donnell, Denis Leary, Dana Delaney and Robert Loggia and was released in 1997. Shot entirely on location in Philadelphia, the film tells the story of the close relationship between a boy in Catholic school and his grandfather.

Shyamalan formed his own production company, Blinding Edge Pictures, which is based in a suburb outside of Philadelphia, where he also currently resides with his wife and three daughters.

Award-winning filmmaker **MICHAEL DANTE DiMARTINO (Series Creator / Executive Producer)** began his training at the Rhode Island School of Design, where he graduated in 1996 with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in the film and animation department. His directing credits include the prime-time animated series “King of the Hill,” “Family Guy” and “Mission Hill.” DiMartino wrote, animated and directed the short animated film “Atomic Love,” which screened at the 2003 Sundance and Los Angeles Film Festivals. The film also aired as part of the Nicktoons Film Festival on Nicktoons.

In 2002, DiMartino teamed with friend and co-worker, Bryan Konietzko, to create the animated Nickelodeon series, “Avatar: The Last Airbender.” DiMartino served as executive producer and story editor on the series, which ran for three seasons on Nickelodeon, from 2004 - 2008. “Avatar” has won many accolades, including a Genesis Award, several Annie Awards and a 2008 Peabody Award.

DiMartino resides in Los Angeles, California, with his dog, Truman.

BRYAN KONIETZKO (Series Creator / Executive Producer) is a multidisciplinary artist, writer and musician. He graduated with honors from the illustration department of the Rhode Island School of Design. His friend and fellow RISD alum, Michael Dante DiMartino, helped him get his foot in the door in the TV animation industry. Konietzko worked alongside DiMartino at Film Roman Studios on the series “Family Guy,” “Mission Hill” and “King of the Hill.” In 2000 he joined

Nickelodeon to work on the series “Invader Zim” as a storyboard artist. He became the art director on the second season of the show and spent time in South Korea training the overseas animation crews.

After “Zim,” Bryan was recruited by Nickelodeon’s head of development to create an original series. He once again teamed with his friend Michael DiMartino, and together they created “Avatar: The Last Airbender,” pitching the idea a mere two weeks after its conception. On top of sharing executive producer duties with Michael, Bryan worked as the art director of the award-winning series, designing the main characters and drawing from his experience as a landscape painter for their fantasy world’s epic scope.

During the six-year production of “Avatar,” Bryan released three albums of instrumental electronic music under the recording name Ginormous. His fourth album, the score for a contemporary dance piece by Los Angeles’ Oni Dance, was released in the spring of 2010. Bryan is an avid landscape photographer, displaying his photos of Canada, Iceland, France and Japan on **bryankonietzko.com**. He lives in Los Angeles with his fiancée, Lisa, and his dog, Gunther.

“The Last Airbender” is **SAM MERCER’s (Producer)** seventh collaboration with M. Night Shyamalan, having previously worked together on “The Sixth Sense,” “Unbreakable,” “Signs,” “The Village,” “Lady in the Water” and The Happening. Other recent producing credits for Mercer include Sam Mendes’ “Jarhead,” Stephen Sommers’ “Van Helsing” and Susanne Bier’s “Things We Lost in the Fire,” starring Halle Berry and Benicio Del Toro.

Mercer planted his roots in the film business as a freelance location and unit production manager on such films as “The Witches of Eastwick,” “Peggy Sue Got Married,” “Stripes,” “Swing Shift” and “The Escape Artist.” He also served as the associate producer/unit manager for PBS’ affiliate KCET-TV in Los Angeles, where he received a Daytime Emmy® for the live presentation of the San Francisco Opera’s production of “La Gioconda.”

He then joined the Walt Disney Company as a production executive, supervising such films as “Good Morning, Vietnam,” “Three Fugitives” and “Dead Poets Society.” Within a few years Mercer was upped to vice president of motion picture production for Hollywood Pictures, and responsible for such releases as “Quiz Show,” “The Joy Luck

Club,” “Born Yesterday,” “Swing Kids,” “The Hand That Rocks the Cradle” and “Arachnophobia.”

Mercer’s first venture into independent producing was the box office hit “Congo” (directed by Frank Marshall), that he produced alongside Kathleen Kennedy, with whom he again collaborates on “The Last Airbender.” His other credits include Peter Hyams’ “The Relic,” which he produced with Gale Anne Hurd. He was also the executive producer of Brian De Palma’s “Mission to Mars.”

Mercer is a graduate of The Groton School and Occidental College. He currently resides in Venice, California.

“Raiders of the Lost Ark” marked the beginning of **FRANK MARSHALL’s (Producer)** epochal collaboration with Steven Spielberg, George Lucas and Kathleen Kennedy, a partnership that encompasses “Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom,” “Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade” and “Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull.”

With more than 50 films to his credit as a visionary producer who has helped shape American film, Marshall is also an acclaimed director and active participant in public service and sports. Marshall’s credits as a producer include some of the most successful and enduring films of all time, including “Poltergeist,” “Gremlins,” “The Goonies,” “The Color Purple,” “An American Tail,” “Empire of the Sun,” “Who Framed Roger Rabbit?,” “The Land Before Time,” the “Back to the Future” trilogy, “The Sixth Sense,” “Seabiscuit” and the “Bourne” trilogy.

His films have been nominated for a multitude of Academy Awards®, including Best Picture nominees “Raiders of the Lost Ark” (1982), “The Color Purple” (1985), “The Sixth Sense” (1999), “Seabiscuit” (2003) and, in 2008, the critically acclaimed “The Curious Case of Benjamin Button,” which was nominated for thirteen Academy Awards®, (winning three) and nominated for five Golden Globes®, including Best Picture.

As a director, Marshall helmed the critically acclaimed box office smash “Eight Below,” as well as the thriller “Arachnophobia”; the compelling true-life drama “Alive”; the 1995 hit adventure “Congo”; and an episode of the Emmy® Award-winning HBO miniseries, “From the Earth to the Moon.”

Marshall began his motion picture career as assistant to Peter Bogdanovich on the director’s cult classic “Targets.” He was then asked by Bogdanovich to serve as location manager for “The Last Picture Show” and “What’s Up, Doc?” before graduating to associate producer on the filmmaker’s next five movies, including “Paper Moon” and “Nickelodeon.”

His lengthy and fruitful collaboration with Steven Spielberg and Kennedy began in 1981 with “Raiders of the Lost Ark.” Following the productions of “E.T.: the Extra-Terrestrial” (for which he served as production supervisor) and “Poltergeist” (which he produced) in 1981, the trio formed industry powerhouse Amblin Entertainment. During his tenure at Amblin, Marshall produced such films as Kevin Reynolds’ “Fandango”; Barry Levinson’s “Young Sherlock Holmes”; Joe Dante’s “Gremlins”; Robert Zemeckis’ “Back to the Future” trilogy and “Who Framed Roger Rabbit?”; and Spielberg’s “Always,” “Hook” and “Empire of the Sun,” as well as his directorial debut, “Arachnophobia.”

Marshall left Amblin in the fall of 1991 to pursue his directing career, and formed the Kennedy/Marshall Company with Kathleen Kennedy. The company’s productions include such diverse films as “The Indian in the Cupboard,” directed by Frank Oz; “Snow Falling on Cedars,” directed by Scott Hicks; “A Map of the World,” starring Sigourney Weaver and Julianne Moore; “The Sixth Sense,” starring Bruce Willis and Haley Joel Osment; “Olympic Glory,” the first official large-format film of the Olympic Games; M. Night Shyamalan’s “Signs;” “Seabiscuit,” the dramatic true story based on Laura Hillenbrand’s best-selling book, directed by Gary Ross; and the three blockbuster films in the “Bourne” franchise starring Matt Damon in the title role (“The Bourne Identity,” directed by Doug Liman; “The Bourne Supremacy” and “The Bourne Ultimatum,” both directed by Paul Greengrass).

An L.A. native and son of composer Jack Marshall, Marshall ran cross-country and track while a student at UCLA, and was a three-year Varsity letterman in soccer. Combining his passion for music and sports, Marshall and America’s premiere miler Steve Scott founded the Rock ‘N’ Roll Marathon, which debuted in 1998 in San Diego as the largest first-time marathon in history. For over a decade, Marshall was a member of the United States Olympic Committee. In 2005, he was awarded the Olympic Shield, and later, Marshall was inducted into the U.S. Olympic Hall of Fame. Currently, he is on the board of Athletes for Hope, USA Gymnastics and The Governor’s Council

on Physical Fitness, as well as a founding member of MLA Partner Schools and a member of the UCLA Foundation Board of Governors. He is a recipient of the acclaimed American Academy of Achievement Award, the UCLA Alumni Professional Achievement Award and the California Mentor Initiative’s Leadership Award. He and Kennedy are the recipients of the 2008 Producers Guild of America’s David O. Selznick Award for Career Achievement.

Six-time Academy Award® nominee **KATHLEEN KENNEDY (Executive Producer)** is one of the most successful and respected producers and executives in the film industry today. As testament to her standing in the film community, she was recently elected Vice President of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (A.M.P.A.S.®). Among her credits are three of the highest-grossing films in motion picture history: “E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial,” “Jurassic Park” and “The Sixth Sense.”

Kennedy heads The Kennedy/Marshall Company, which she founded in 1992 with director/producer Frank Marshall. The Company recently released “The Curious Case of Benjamin Button,” an epic tale of love, the joys of life and the sadness of death and the things that last beyond time, directed by David Fincher, written by Oscar®-winner Eric Roth and starring Brad Pitt and Cate Blanchett. The film was nominated for five Golden Globes® and 13 Academy Awards®, including Best Motion Picture. The same year, The Kennedy/Marshall Company produced “The Spiderwick Chronicles,” based on the popular series of children’s books about the unseen world of fairies.

Most recently, Kennedy executive-produced (with George Lucas) “Indiana Jones the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull,” the fourth installment in the Indiana Jones series, directed by Steven Spielberg and produced by Frank Marshall.

Kennedy is currently in production on “The Adventures of Tintin,” based on the iconic character created by Georges Remi, better known to the world by his pen name, Herge. Oscar®-winning directors Steven Spielberg and Peter Jackson will use state-of-the-art performance capture technology to bring the world of Tintin to the big screen.

Under The Kennedy/Marshall banner, the Company has produced such films as “The Sixth Sense” (six Academy Award® nominations, including Best Picture), “Seabiscuit” (seven Academy Award® nominations, including Best Picture), “Snow Falling on Cedars” and “The Bourne Identity,” “The Bourne Supremacy” and “The Bourne Ultimatum” series of films, which collectively reinvented the spy thriller. With

the 2007 release of “The Bourne Ultimatum,” the series became the only motion picture trilogy to demonstrate a consistent and impressive upward trend in both box office and DVD sales. Also in 2007, The Kennedy/Marshall Company produced the indie hits “Persepolis” (Oscar®-nominated for Best Animated Feature) and “The Diving Bell and the Butterfly.”

Kennedy launched her producing career via a successful association with Steven Spielberg, which began when she served as his production assistant on “1941.” She went on to become his associate on “Raiders of the Lost Ark,” associate producer of “Poltergeist” and producer of “E.T.” While “E.T.” was becoming an international phenomenon, Spielberg, Kennedy and Marshall were already in production on “Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom,” which she and Marshall produced with Lucas.

In 1982, Kennedy co-founded Amblin Entertainment with Spielberg and Marshall. While at Amblin, she produced and guided two of the most successful franchises in film history: the “Jurassic Park” films and the “Back to the Future” trilogy. In addition, Kennedy produced or executive-produced a slew of critical and box office hits, including: “Twister,” “Balto,” “The Bridges of Madison County,” “The Flintstones,” “Schindler’s List,” “We’re Back!,” “Noises Off,” “Hook,” “An American Tail: Fievel Goes West,” “Cape Fear,” “Gremlins 2: The New Batch,” “Joe Versus the Volcano,” “Always,” “Gremlins,” “The Land Before Time,” “Who Framed Roger Rabbit?,” “*batteries not included,” “Empire of the Sun,” “Innerspace,” “An American Tail,” “The Money Pit,” “The Color Purple,” “Young Sherlock Holmes,” “The Goonies” and Frank Marshall’s 1990 directorial debut, “Arachnophobia.” Other collaborations with Spielberg include “Munich,” “War of the Worlds” and “A.I. Artificial Intelligence.”

Kennedy is on the chair of the Academy of Motion Pictures’ Producers Branch Executive Committee and is a member of the Academy’s Board of Governors. She recently completed her tenure as President of the Producers Guild of America, which bestowed upon her its highest honor, the Charles Fitzsimons Service Award, in 2006. In 2008, she and Marshall received the Producers Guild of America’s David O. Selznick Award for Career Achievement.

Raised in the small Northern California towns of Weaverville and Redding, Kennedy graduated from San Diego State University with a degree in telecommunications and film. While still a student, she began working at a local San Diego television station. Following jobs as a camera operator, video editor, floor director

and news production coordinator, Kennedy produced the station's talk show, "You're On." She then relocated to Los Angeles and worked with director John Milius prior to beginning her association with Spielberg.

Independent producer **SCOTT AVERSANO (Executive Producer)** most recently produced the comedy "Killers," starring Ashton Kutcher and Katherine Heigl, for Lionsgate. His talents as a producer have afforded him the opportunity to work on a wide variety of motion pictures, from large-scale dramas to outside-of-the-mainstream comedies. Aversano produced "Failure to Launch," starring Sarah Jessica Parker and Matthew McConaughey, and the Jack Black comedy "Orange County." As an executive producer, he counts "Angus, Thongs and Perfect Snogging," "Team America: World Police," "The Manchurian Candidate" and "The School of Rock" among his credits.

Aversano also served as co-producer on "Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events" and "Changing Lanes." He also executive-produced the 2010 telefilm "Ghosts/Aliens," which marks his first foray into TV production. Under his own shingle, Aversano Films, his slate of projects in development includes "Big Hole" (with Gore Verbinski as director/producer) and "Untitled Kidrobot Project," in partnership with Nickelodeon Movies.

ANDREW LESNIE, ACS, ASC (Director of Photography) won an Oscar® for Best Cinematography in 2002 for "The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring," and a BAFTA award in 2004 for "The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King," as well as numerous film critics' awards. Along with the "Lord of the Rings" trilogy, Lesnie also collaborated with Peter Jackson on "King Kong" and "The Lovely Bones."

He has received three BAFTA nominations, three American Society of Cinematographers nominations and twice held the Australian Cinematographers Society MILLI Award, making him Australian Cinematographer of the Year two years running.

"Doing Time for Patsy Cline" achieved the Australian Film Institute Award for Best Cinematography, the Film Critics Circle of Australia Award and an A.C.S. Gold Award.

Lesnie also garnered A.C.S. Golden Tripod Awards for "Babe," "Spider and Rise" and "Temptation of a Monk," a Polygram film shot in China starring Joan Chen. His other feature credits include "Babe: Pig in the City," "The Sugar Factory," "Two If

by Sea," "Dark Age," "The Delinquents," "Boys in the Island," "Daydream Believers," "Love's Brother" and "Unfinished Business," as well as the live-action sequences for "Happy Feet." In addition to "The Lovely Bones," his most recent feature credits are the Will Smith starrer "I Am Legend" and the Australian independent film "Bran Nue Dae," starring Geoffrey Rush.

His television credits include the three miniseries "The Rainbow Warrior Conspiracy," "Melba" (A.C.S. Merit Award) and "Cyclone Tracy" (A.C.S. Golden Tripod Award for best photographed miniseries).

With a colorful background in news, documentaries, current affairs and several hundred commercials and music videos, Lesnie has photographed such diverse projects as "The Making of 'The Road Warrior,'" "The Comeback" (starring Arnold Schwarzenegger), "Stages" (Peter Brook and the Paris Theater Company) and "Inside Pine Gap" (Australia/U.S. relations).

PHILIP MESSINA (Production Designer) has designed a run of films with Oscar®-winning filmmaker Steven Soderbergh, including "Che: Part Two," "Ocean's Thirteen," "The Good German," "Ocean's Twelve," "Eros," "Solaris," "Ocean's Eleven," "Traffic" and "Erin Brockovich." He first worked with Soderbergh on "Out of Sight," on which Messina served as art director. Messina's work on "Ocean's Eleven" was honored with a nomination from the Art Directors Guild in the contemporary film category.

Messina also designed Gregory Jacob's directorial debut "Criminal" as well as "8 Mile" for director Curtis Hanson.

Born and raised in Lawrence, Massachusetts, Messina graduated from Cornell University with a degree in architecture. His initial foray into the entertainment business was as a set designer on the films "Mermaids," "School Ties" and "Housesitter," which were filmed in the Boston area.

Following a move to Los Angeles, Messina served as the art director on such films as "Hard Target," "The Neon Bible," "Reckless," "The Associate," "Trial & Error" and "The Sixth Sense."

Messina designed the sets for DreamWorks' popular television series "Freaks and Geeks," which re-teamed him with director Jake Kasdan, for whom he had served as the art director on Kasdan's directorial debut, "Zero Effect."

He is currently designing Marc Forster’s “Machine Gun Preacher,” starring Gerard Butler for Lionsgate.

Messina is married to set decorator Kristen Toscano Messina, with whom he frequently collaborates, and they have a son, Luca.

CONRAD BUFF, A.C.E. (Editor) won an Oscar®, an ACE Eddie Award and was nominated for a BAFTA for his editing talents (along with his co-editors, James Cameron and Richard A. Harris) on the blockbuster “Titanic.” His other film credits include M. Night Shyamalan’s “The Happening,” as well as “Shooter,” “Antwone Fisher,” “Training Day,” “Arlington Road,” “True Lies,” “Terminator 2: Judgment Day,” “The Abyss,” “Jagged Edge” and, most recently, “Terminator Salvation.”

Prior to film editing, Conrad worked in the visual effects editing arena on such films as “2010,” “Ghostbusters,” “Poltergeist,” “E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial,” “Raiders of the Lost Ark,” “Star Wars: Episode V – The Empire Strikes Back.” One of his first feature film editing credits was on “Star Wars: Episode VI – Return of the Jedi” (assistant film editor).

Buff is the son of architect Conrad Buff III, and the grandson of painter Conrad Buff II. Buff attended Pasadena City College for two years before joining the U.S. Navy. He first learned film editing while working for the Navy’s Motion Picture Office in Hollywood.

JUDIANNA MAKOVSKY’s (Costume Designer) more than 20 years of industry experience has garnered her three Academy Award® nominations for her work on “Seabiscuit,” “Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone” and “Pleasantville.”

Makovsky was honored by her peers with Costume Designers Guild Awards for the latter two films, and was also nominated for “Seabiscuit” and “X-Men: The Last Stand.” She also received a British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) Award nomination for “Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone.”

Makovsky’s additional feature film design credits include “National Treasure,” “National Treasure: Book of Secrets,” “Mr. Brooks,” “The Legend of Bagger Vance,” “For the Love of the Game,” “Gloria,” “Practical Magic,” “Great Expectations,” “The Devil’s Advocate,” “Lolita,” “White Squall,” “A Little Princess,” “The Quick and the

Dead," "The Ref," "The Specialist," "Six Degrees of Separation," "Reversal of Fortune," "Big" and "Gardens of Stone."

Her most recent designs could be seen in Paul Weitz's visual feast "Cirque Du Freak: The Vampire's Assistant," starring Salma Hayek, John C. Reilly and Willem Dafoe.

Her telefilm costume design credits include "Wild Palms," "Miss Rose White," "Margaret Bourke-White" and the pilot for Robert De Niro's series, "Tribeca."

JOSE L. RODRIGUEZ (Co-Producer) has collaborated with M. Night Shyamalan since Blinding Edge Pictures started more than a decade ago. Blinding Edge Pictures first began making movies with the thriller "The Sixth Sense," and has since produced "Unbreakable," "Signs," "The Village," "Lady in the Water" and "The Happening" under their banner.

Born in Germany, Rodriguez is from a military family and lived all over the world during his childhood years. After attending Washington, D.C.'s Catholic University as a drama major, Rodriguez acted in theater, commercials and film in Washington, D.C. and New York. He decided to shorten his commute between these two cities and split the difference, relocating himself to Philadelphia.

While attending a karate class, Rodriguez and M. Night Shyamalan first crossed paths. On their lunch breaks, they shared stories of their passion for film and the arts, and eventually started working together at Blinding Edge Pictures.

Rodriguez holds a Black Belt in Kenpo Karate from Dennis Nackord, disciple of Grandmaster Ed Parker, and has garnered Black Belt recognition from the American Karate Association. In addition, Rodriguez has also earned a Black Belt from World Champion and Black Belt Hall of Famer, Joe Lewis, in his American Karate System.

Besides his love for the martial arts, Rodriguez has been a soccer coach for the last decade-and-a-half for the Special Olympics, taking his team to the 1999 World Games and winning a Bronze medal for the USA.

Blessed with a wonderful wife and two children, Rodriguez spends any free time he has doing what he is most proud of, being a husband and father.

JAMES NEWTON HOWARD (Composer) re-teams with writer/director/producer M. Night Shyamalan on "The Last Airbender" after already

scoring "The Happening," "Lady in the Water," "The Sixth Sense," "Unbreakable," "Signs" and "The Village," which garnered an Oscar® nomination.

James Newton Howard is one of the most versatile and in-demand composers currently working in films. To date, Howard has received eight Academy Award® nominations, including six for Best Original Score for "Defiance," "Michael Clayton," M. Night Shyamalan's "The Village," "The Fugitive," "The Prince of Tides" and "My Best Friend's Wedding," and two for Best Original Song, including "Look What Love Has Done" from "Junior" and "For the First Time" from the film "One Fine Day."

Howard, along with Hans Zimmer, won the Grammy Award for their score for "The Dark Knight." He has also received Grammy nominations for Shyamalan's film "Signs," music from the animated Disney film "Dinosaur" and the song from "One Fine Day." His theme for "Dying Young" also brought a Grammy nod to performer Kenny G. In addition, he won an Emmy® for the theme to the Andre Braugher series, "Gideon's Crossing," and two additional Emmy® nominations for the themes to the long-running Warner Bros. series "ER" and the Ving Rhames series, "Men."

Howard has also been nominated four times for Golden Globe® Awards: for his massive orchestral score for the blockbuster "King Kong"; for the songs from "Junior" and "One Fine Day"; and, most recently, for his provocative symphonic score for "Defiance."

Howard, who has been honored with ASCAP's prestigious Henry Mancini Award for Lifetime Achievement, now has more than 100 films to his credit. In addition to all of Shyamalan's films, among them are five films for director Lawrence Kasdan ("Grand Canyon," "Wyatt Earp," "French Kiss," "Mumford" and "Dreamcatcher"); four Julia Roberts comedies ("Pretty Woman," "Runaway Bride," "My Best Friend's Wedding" and "America's Sweethearts"); and three animated films for the Walt Disney Animation Studios ("Dinosaur," "Treasure Planet" and "Atlantis: The Lost Empire."

His other wide-ranging credits include "I Am Legend," "Blood Diamond," "Collateral," "Outbreak," "Batman Begins," "Snow Falling on Cedars," "Hidalgo," "Peter Pan," "Falling Down," "Primal Fear," "Glengarry Glen Ross," "Waterworld," "The Devil's Advocate," "Dave" and "Flatliners," among others.

Howard's success reflects the experiences of a rich musical past. Inspired by his grandmother, a classical violinist who played in the Pittsburgh Symphony in the '30s and '40s, he began his studies on the piano at age four. After studying at Santa Barbara

Musical Academy of the West and at USC School of Music as a piano major, he completed his formal education with orchestration study under legendary arranger Marty Paich.

Though his training was classical, he maintained an interest in rock and pop, and it was his early work in the pop arena that allowed him to hone his talents as a musician, arranger, songwriter and producer. He spent two years doing session work for performers like Carly Simon, Diana Ross, Ringo Starr, Leo Sayer, Harry Nilsson and Melissa Manchester. He also recorded two solo albums. In 1975, he joined pop superstar Elton John’s band on the road and in the studio.

Howard left the band in 1976 to do more record production. He would rejoin the band in 1980 for another tour and again in 1986 to conduct the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra for John’s “Live in Australia” tour, which later became a platinum-selling album.

Having become one of the most sought-after musicians in the industry, he racked up a string of collaborations in the studio with some of pop’s biggest names, including Barbra Streisand, Earth Wind and Fire, Bob Seger, Rod Stewart, Toto, Glen Frey, Olivia Newton-John, Randy Newman, Rickie Lee Jones, Cher and Chaka Khan.

When he was offered his first film in 1985, he never looked back. As a change of pace, Howard reunited with Elton John for a multi-city tour the summer of 2004 that included sold-out concerts at the Royal Albert Hall in London and Radio City Music Hall in New York.

Howard’s more recent films include P.J. Hogan’s “Confessions of a Shopaholic” and Tony Gilroy’s “Duplicity.” His composition will next be heard in the action-thriller “Salt.” In February 2009, Howard had his first concert piece, entitled “I Would Plant a Tree,” performed by the Pacific Symphony as part of their American Composers Festival.