



Based on a True Story

Antetokounmpo: a Nigerian surname which, according to the Yoruba people of West Africa, means “the crown has returned from overseas.”

Disney’s “Rise,” debuting exclusively on Disney+ on June 24, is based on the triumphant real-life story about the remarkable family that produced the first trio of brothers to become NBA champions in the history of the league—Giannis and Thanasis Antetokounmpo of the Milwaukee Bucks and the Los Angeles Lakers’ Kostas Antetokounmpo.

Audiences have never seen a story like that of the Antetokounmpos, which mixes Nigerian heritage, Greek nationality and extraordinary athletic ability. In “Rise,” audiences will witness how one family’s vision, determination and faith lifted them out of obscurity to launch the career of three NBA champions—two-time MVP Giannis and his brothers, Thanasis and Kostas. Last season, Giannis and Thanasis helped bring the Bucks their first championship ring in 50 years, while Kostas played for the previous season champs, the Lakers.

Newcomers Uche Agada and Ral Agada—also real-life brothers—portray young Giannis and Thanasis, with Jaden Osimuwa and Elijah Sholanke as their other two brothers, Kostas and Alexandros (“Alex”), respectively. Dayo Okeniyi (“Emperor,” “Shades of Blue”) and Yetide Badaki (“American Gods,” “This Is Us”) play their parents, Charles and Veronica (“Vera”), with Manish Dayal as Giannis’ tenacious agent, Kevin Stefanides, and Taylor Nichols as John Hammond, general manager of the Milwaukee Bucks.

“Rise” is directed by Akin Omotoso (“Vaya”) and written by Arash Amel (“A Private War”), with Bernie Goldmann (“300”) producing and Giannis Antetokounmpo and Douglas S. Jones as executive producers. Co-producers are Andreas Dimitriou and Michael Foutras.

After immigrating to Greece from Nigeria, Vera and Charles Antetokounmpo struggled to survive and provide for their five children, while living under the daily threat of deportation. With their oldest son still in Nigeria with relatives, the couple were desperate to obtain Greek citizenship but found themselves undermined by a system that blocked them at every turn. When they weren’t selling items to tourists on the streets of Athens with the rest of the family, the brothers would play basketball with a local youth team. Latecomers to the sport, they discovered their great abilities on the basketball court and worked hard to become world-class athletes. With the

help of an agent, Giannis entered the NBA Draft in 2013 in a long-shot prospect that would change not only his life but the lives of his entire family.

Just as Giannis' entering the Draft was a seminal moment for his family, Uche Agada's being cast in "Rise" proved to be a seminal moment for the Agada family. Uche was working at a Wawa drive-through in New Jersey when he saw a screenshot of an Instagram post from Giannis about a casting call for someone new and fresh to portray him in the film. Uche had to ask for time off from his job to do the series of auditions, and eventually won the role of Giannis. After Uche was cast, the filmmakers, thrilled with their good luck, approached the casting director, Michael Morlani, to ask Uche if he happened to have a brother. It turned out that he did, and Uche helped his brother Ral prepare for his audition, which blew the filmmakers away. This is how both Agada brothers ended up portraying two of the Antetokounmpo brothers in the film.

Giannis Antetokounmpo said, "I am thrilled and honored that Disney+ is bringing my family's story to people all over the world. My hope is that it will inspire those in similar circumstances to keep the faith, stay true to their goals and not to give up on striving for a better life."

The genesis of "Rise" began with a meeting between Bernie Goldmann, producer of "300" and its prequel, "300: Rise of an Empire," and Giannis' agent, Giorgos Panou. Goldmann knew about Giannis' tremendous skill as a basketball player but nothing about his backstory. When Panou told him how Charles and Vera Antetokounmpo moved the family from Nigeria to Greece to make a better life for the children, and how they struggled to survive and were able to eventually overcome the odds and triumph, Goldmann thought it had all the elements of a great Disney movie. The heads of the studio agreed.

Goldmann flew to Milwaukee to meet with Giannis, Thanasis and Vera Antetokounmpo. At the meeting, Giannis asked Goldmann, "Why should we make this movie?" Goldmann told them how his sister had had the foresight to videotape their grandmother telling the amazing story of survival and resistance about how she escaped Russia during the Russian Revolution. His sister made copies for all the grandchildren, so that everyone would know the story of who they were and where they came from. Goldmann told Giannis that this was his opportunity to tell his family's story for his kids and their kids, so their story would never be forgotten, and so his family would always know where they came from. Giannis was convinced.

Giannis, who would serve as one of the executive producers, was very clear that he and his family needed to have input in developing the script. He also insisted that the story be about his whole family and their journey and not just about him, and that the movie would end with his getting drafted and go no further. Disney's executives weren't dissuaded, believing that the overarching theme was a classic Disney theme—the strength of the human spirit in being able to overcome any obstacles thrown in your way, and the importance of hard work and, above all, sticking together as a family.

Arash Amel, who had scripted 2018's "A Private War," about war correspondent Marie Colvin, was hired to write the screenplay.

Amel says, “When I first heard of Giannis’ story, and the Antetokounmpos, I saw a very modern story of immigration, crossing cultures, crossing boundaries, and really a generation of children, of my own generation included, who have grown up not of one culture but of many. And having to absorb all of it and define ourselves.

“This is a movie about a family,” Amel continues. “And that’s really the number one takeaway, that this is a movie about the togetherness of a family, the love and bond of a family. It can overcome any obstacle.”

Goldmann believed that it was important to find a director for the film who understood the Nigerian experience as well as the hardships of being an immigrant and moving to an entirely new place. After seeing Nigerian-born filmmaker Akin Omotoso’s 2016 effort, “Vaya,” he was struck by Omotoso’s compassion and sensitivity in handling the material, as well as his ability to deliver incredible acting performances. A Zoom call with the director convinced him that Omotoso was the perfect choice.

“Once you meet Akin, it’s impossible not to fall in love with him,” says Goldmann. “He has the best spirit of probably any person I’ve ever met. He’s warmhearted, he’s enthusiastic, he loves basketball, he loves Nigeria, he loves American culture, he’s fascinated by Greek culture and he had all the aspects of a director that we really wanted.”

Omotoso has a career spanning three decades, with more than 15 credits as a film and television director, along with extensive work as a producer, writer and actor.

It turns out that Omotoso—a self-described basketball fanatic with a particular interest in African NBA players—had been a huge fan of Giannis Antetokounmpo for years. Since 2013 Omotoso had harbored a fantasy of turning Giannis’ life story, which he admires as much as Giannis’ skills on the court, into a film. When he read a piece in Sports Illustrated about Disney’s plan to make this film, he asked his agent to set up a meeting with the studio executives. From the day he read the piece to the day the final cut of the film was delivered, he kept the magazine by his bedside.

Omotoso finally had that meeting a year later. At the meeting, he explained that he saw the film as a story of a family navigating a new space, a story of two cultures meeting each other with something new coming out of it, and a story about the perseverance of the spirit. He told them that these themes directly related to his experience as a 17-year-old son of a Nigerian father and a West Indian mother who moved to South Africa, and that he understood exactly what it means to go from a place where you’ve grown up to coming to an adopted country. Omotoso was hired.

What he found most inspiring about the Antetokounmpos’ story is that, even though it seemed like everything was stacked against them, they refused to give up. They stayed strong, held together by their belief in themselves, their faith and also the ability to see that what’s happening now is temporary—that just because they’re selling sunglasses today doesn’t mean they’re always going to be selling sunglasses.

“That’s the triumph of the human spirit,” Omotoso says.

He explains that in the conversations with the family about the script, they stressed that they wanted it to stay true to what they actually went through, and that their openness and willingness to share very intimate experiences helped to make the film deeper, more emotional and ultimately more genuine.

The filmmakers see the film as a love story, as well as the journey of two people who take a leap of faith into the unknown to make a better life for themselves and their children in a foreign land.

When Charles and Vera left Nigeria, they had to leave their baby son Francis with his grandparents. Unable to secure a visa to Greece, they first went to Istanbul, where they were almost arrested in a police raid on their hotel. They managed to avoid detection on a bus to Athens and finally settled in Sepolia, a neighborhood north of central Athens. Vera gave birth to a son, Thanasis, and a few years later another son, Giannis. Soon there were two more sons, Kostas and Alex.

Because of their undocumented status, Charles and Vera couldn’t work in the traditional way, since they didn’t have the necessary work permits and proof of residency. Caught in a Catch-22 situation, Vera says in the film, “No one will give us a payroll job without legal residency, and no one will give us legal residency without a payroll job.” To make ends meet, everyone in the family pitches in—Charles working as a handyman, janitor and day laborer, Vera as a caregiver, and the boys selling trinkets like sunglasses, watches and rosary beads to tourists on the streets.

Charles and Vera raised them to work together and operate as a unit, a team. Charles told them there’s no “I” in “team”; there’s not one person that wins above everyone. So, if one person on the team scores, everybody in the team scores. And that’s the way it is in their family. No decision regarding the family can be made without everyone weighing in. Each of them has a seat at the table.

Each of the brothers understood their duties toward each other. Which is not to say that they all had the same personalities. As the eldest of the brothers, Thanasis was the one who set the pace. He was the leader. He felt the weight of responsibility on his shoulders. Thanasis was sensitive but also spirited, with a sense of fun and rambunctiousness about him.

Giannis was the thinker, the worker, the observer, the gentle giant. Extremely capable but introverted. Says screenwriter Amel, “He is just like a student of life.”

Kostas was the comedian of the bunch, cheeky and quick-witted, who worshipped his two older brothers.

And Alex was the youngest, absorbing everything and strangely mature for his age, which you wouldn't expect from the baby of the family. According to Amel, Alex was "the glue that kept the family together, and often with the brothers he was the one that acted as a pacifier."

Was it a difficult existence? Yes, they all had to sacrifice in order to eat. Plus, on any given day they might be picked up by the police for selling merchandise on the streets without a license, arrested for being in the country illegally and then deported. They needed to keep a low profile at all times. But for the Antetokounmpo brothers, it was also a very joyful time in their lives because, despite the hardships and dangers, it bonded and united them, and it's something they look back at with fond memories.

Basketball entered their lives by accident. Thanasis' and Giannis' first love was actually soccer. In fact, when he was young, their father aspired to a career as a professional soccer player until an injury derailed his dream. One day as Charles and the boys were playing soccer in the park, Thanasis and Giannis saw some local Greek kids playing basketball and were invited to join in. Sensing their enjoyment and potential talent, one of the kids told them about a local club where the youth teams of Filathlitikos regularly play. Intrigued by this new game, the brothers were inspired when they saw on TV that a Nigerian-born basketball player named Hakeem Olajuwon was playing for a professional team in the United States.

However, Charles was concerned that what happened to him, when his dreams of playing for the Nigerian soccer league were crushed, might happen to his children, and he didn't want them to go through the same trauma. He also worried that if they weren't in school they wouldn't be safe.

Says Amel, "For the family, the question became how far are they prepared to go and what are they prepared to sacrifice to achieve a sense of freedom from having to constantly stay hidden?"

Vera convinced Charles to let Thanasis and Giannis play with the local youth club, where they had to share one pair of basketball shoes between them. After a while Thanasis became good at the sport, which motivated Giannis to work hard to become good at it too. He took it so seriously that he even slept on the basketball court to get in as much practice time as possible. An offer to play for a competing youth club came with a much-needed check, but the club withdrew it when they discovered the family's undocumented status. Giannis was heartbroken, but Vera persuaded him to not allow this temporary setback to derail his dreams.

When their team played the team from Corinth, the game began as usual, with Thanasis leading and Giannis content to follow in his shadow. Then Thanasis got injured, and Giannis had to suddenly come out of his shell, step up, and let the world finally see his God-given gifts.

"And that's when we see the birth of a star," says Omotoso.

Realizing that he could do it, Giannis went from being an observer to being a leader. Risking international exposure, Giannis competed at the 2013 FIBA International Tryouts, which

ultimately led to the NBA Draft and, for the family, the road to freedom, to unification with their oldest brother, Francis, the dream realized.

CASTING

Giannis told Omotoso that when the family was living in Greece, their home was still an African home. Because African representation in western films has been problematic, it was very important to the director that the actors playing Nigerians be Nigerian and reflect his discussions with Vera and Giannis.

Goldmann says that finding an actor to play Giannis was the biggest challenge of the movie, because they needed to find a young Nigerian who was over 6' 2" who could play basketball and act. The production hired casting directors in Africa, England and the United States.

They received more than 400 submissions, which Goldmann and Omotoso watched and kept narrowing down. When they came upon a tape from a young man from New Jersey whose father is Nigerian, Uche Agada, they were struck by how much he physically resembled Giannis. They had U.S. casting directors Randi Hiller and Michael Morlani contact him for a video of him playing basketball. They were encouraged when Uche was immediately willing to shovel the newly fallen snow in his driveway in order to film himself. They figured that if he was that eager, he must be able to play. A few days later, they received his tape and it confirmed that he was a good basketball player.

When they started auditioning actors, Omotoso, who had dreamed about making this film for eight years, was particularly interested in whether they demonstrated emotional intelligence. Watching Uche audition, the director was impressed by his approach, how prepared he was, how he was able to answer the questions, and by his own determination and his will to rise above the rest of the actors competing for the role. After having him come back four times, each time demonstrating emotional intelligence along with the ability to do different things—to pivot, to take direction—Omotoso finally texted the casting directors and Goldmann, “I think we’ve found him.”

Uche told them that he had reached this place in his life where he felt he had outgrown his friends and was interested in a different life, to have more.

He says, “I didn’t know where to go to get it, but then I got this part, and I made all these new friends that are so ambitious and have all these dreams, and I saw the place that my life could go.”

The filmmakers were happy to learn that Uche has an older brother, Ral Agada, who they immediately called in to read for the role of Giannis’ older brother Thanasis. Having spent time with Thanasis, Goldmann noticed at once that Ral’s personality was similar—incredibly enthusiastic and even-tempered, never nervous or upset.

Omotoso says that after Raj auditioned, he and Goldman immediately watched the tape and said to each other, “We’ve got the brother. It’s perfect. It’s beautiful. It felt right.”

Charles Antetokounmpo died in 2017, but the filmmakers learned a lot about him from his widow, Vera. To portray him, they spent many months considering actors, but once they saw Dayo Okeniyi’s tape, they had a feeling he was the one to cast. They felt he had all the qualities Vera had described to them, and more.

They appreciated his openness to the audition process, in which there were several callbacks, and they said that each time he auditioned he would bring new aspects to the character and be willing to try various things they suggested. To them, that flexibility, vulnerability, strength and what Omotoso excitedly calls “the wonderful qualities that Dayo brings” made Okeniyi perfect for the role of Charles, a father who must overcome significant challenges to provide for his family.

Goldman says, “To be a man whose life is challenging you, whose life is knocking you down, and to still be able to be a great example for your sons is very difficult, and Charles took on those challenges and never allowed life to knock him down. He stood up, put his kids on his back and moved forward, and I have great admiration for Charles as I do for Dayo.”

He continues, “Dayo and Charles share a great sense of having their feet on the ground and being the foundation upon which everything can lean, and they won’t break.”

Omotoso was already a “big fan” of Yetide Badaki and was happy that “this phenomenal actress” was interested in reading for the role of Vera.

Describing Vera, the director says, “She has this elegance and this strength, but most of all she has this faith, the ability to truly believe that things are going to work out for the best, a real-life ability to see the best in every situation, to believe that God has a plan for me and know that things are going to work out for me and my family if I do the right thing. She never gave up, she never will give up, and she just keeps moving forward, but in a positive way. She doesn’t allow negativity to touch her. It rolls off her back.”

He says, “Yetide understands how to carry this character, this woman who with her husband has made these choices. And has unbelievable faith. There’s just a force and a strength in Yetide that she brings to Vera that is mirrored by the real Vera. Having met Vera and having spoken to Vera, I can say that Yetide really carried her excellence.”

Omotoso and Goldman both refer to Badaki as “the Babe Ruth of this movie” because “she hits it out of the park every time.”

“I can’t say enough incredible things about her,” says Okeniyi. “She is so amazing, so incredibly detailed, so giving and generous as an actress. We were in the audition process together, we

tested together, and there was just an instant chemistry there. She's extremely prepared and keeps me on my toes. I'm on my 'A game' around her."

Says Badaki, "This film has been absolutely transformative, everything from the culture of the set, which starts from the top and trickles down, and there's just been such love. From the beginning Akin said 'lead with love.' And the experience of working with so many incredibly talented collaborators who all deeply and truly believe in the story, have only built me. I've become more by being a part of this film."

BELOW THE LINE

To bring "Rise" to the screen, the filmmakers assembled a team of top-notch professionals, including director of photography Kabelo Thathe and editor Vuyani Sondlo, frequent collaborators with Omotoso who worked on his films "Vaya," "The Ghost and the House of Truth" and "Tell Me Sweet Something"; production designer Ina Mayhew ("Respect," "Christmas on the Square," "Queen Sugar"); costume designer Mobalaji Dawodu ("Guava Island," "Queen of Katwe," "Mother of George"); composer Ré Olunuga ("Shuga," "Ajoche," "Forbidden"); and casting associates Randi Hiller, CSA ("The Avengers," "Captain America: The First Avenger," "Iron Man 2"), and Michael Morlani, CSA ("Monsoon," "A Different Sun," "Nerve").

The filmmakers wanted the basketball-game sequences in "Rise" to look different than how they've looked in past films. Since so many young people see sports through video games, they wanted to bring that "NBA 2K" approach to the film. To coordinate them, the filmmakers enlisted basketball supervisor Aimee McDaniel, who had worked on the films "Coach Carter" and "The Way Back," saying she presented the most unique and collaborative vision about how to bring something different, something visceral, to a sports movie.

One of the first people they hired, McDaniel went through the script with them, and they broke it down. Each game in the film is meant to convey something about where the characters are in the film. McDaniel came back to the filmmakers with a ton of proposals for the "basketball choreography." They discussed them at length, bringing in DP Thathe to discuss camera angles and every available cinematic tool to bring the film not the game itself but the feeling of the game and the feeling that the viewer is actually coming down the court. They ended up with five cameras on the court all the time capturing this "basketball poetry."

Omotoso says, "Basketball is a team game. That's what I love about it, and that's the ethos I bring to the set and approach directing with. As a team we're trying to win—to make the best possible film."

FILMED EXACTLY WHERE IT TOOK PLACE

The filmmakers were adamant that "Rise" had to be made in Athens. They believed that it had to be done where the story actually took place, where they could draw from the spiritual

connections present in the neighborhood where the Antetokounmpo family lived, in the places where they sold goods, and in the language they listened to. This extended to the basketball court at the Filathlitikou Club that Giannis actually started playing on and where he slept.

Omotoso says, “Obviously we didn’t go through what they went through, but the mere fact that they had walked there, the mere fact that this was the court in which he started playing and this is the court in which we’re filming them—we’re recreating a moment. So, I think all those things are really important to us as basketball fans and as fans of Giannis and me personally in this total belief of instinct, faith and all these things of coming together to tell the story. I wanted us to draw from that spirit and that energy and be in those spaces that allowed us all to be here to be making this story.”

FILM INCLUDES SONGS CO-WRITTEN AND PERFORMED BY OLDEST ANTETOKOUNMPO BROTHER

In addition to Ré Olunuga’s score, which mixes his interpretation of classic orchestral Disney film music with traditional African phraseology, rhythms and instruments, the film features two songs—“Rise” and “Obago”—that were co-written and performed by the eldest Antetokounmpo brother, Francis Adetokunbo, who goes by the stage name “Ofili.” Francis chose Ofili because it was the name of his grandfather who raised him in Nigeria after his parents moved to Greece, and it means peace and happiness in the native Yoruba language.

ABOUT THE CAST

DAYO OKENIYI (Charles) is a Nigerian American actor. Okeniyi grew up in Lagos, Nigeria, the youngest of five siblings born to a Kenyan mother and Nigerian father. His father, now a retired customs officer, and mother, a British literature teacher, were adamant that their children receive an education in the United States. Okeniyi received a bachelor’s degree in visual communications design from Anderson University in Anderson, Indiana. He later moved to Los Angeles to pursue his true passions as an artist in the entertainment industry.

Okeniyi has an upcoming supporting role opposite Ben Affleck and Alice Braga in “Hypnotic,” directed by Robert Rodriguez. Okeniyi can currently be seen in Mimi Cave’s Legendary Entertainment film “Fresh,” from Adam McKay, opposite Daisy Edgar-Jones and Sebastian Stan, which premiered at the 2022 Sundance Film Festival and was acquired by Searchlight for distribution on Hulu. He is also in “Run Sweetheart Run,” directed by Shana Feste, opposite Ella Balinska and Pilou Asbek for Amazon. Previously, Okeniyi starred as Shields Green in Mark Amin’s “Emperor,” for which he was nominated for breakthrough actor at the 2021 NAACP Awards.

Additional film credits include the Paramount/Skydance tentpole “Terminator Genisys” opposite Jason Clarke, Emilia Clarke and Jai Courtney, Universal’s “Endless Love” and James Ponsoldt’s

“The Spectacular Now” opposite Shailene Woodley, Brie Larson and Miles Teller. He is also known for playing the tribute Thresh in Gary Ross’ “The Hunger Games.”

In television, Okeniyi is set to reprise his role in season three of Steven Knight’s hit Apple TV+ series “See” with Jason Momoa. He was also a series regular on NBC’s crime drama “Shades of Blue” opposite Jennifer Lopez and Ray Liotta.

Okeniyi is also a co-founder of Positive Vibes Only (PVO) Global, an organization that uplifts Black culture with a commitment to social impact.

YETIDE BADAKE (Vera), first name pronounced “Yay-Tee-Day,” is a Nigerian-born American actress, writer, producer and director best known for portraying the goddess Bilquis on the critically acclaimed Starz series “American Gods.” She will star as Queen Meeru in Zack Snyder’s upcoming “Army of the Dead: Lost Vegas.” Badaki is attached to star in the role of African warrior Queen Nzinga in a drama series for Starz/Lionsgate, which she will also executive produce alongside Mo Abudu, Curtis “50 Cent” Jackson and Steven S. DeKnight.

Her credits include a recurring guest-star role on the multiple-award-winning NBC hit show “This Is Us,” and a guest-star role on the Syfy series “The Magicians.” Her film credits include leading roles in the independent features “What We Found” and “Chasing the Rain.” She also wrote and produced the short film “In Hollywoodland,” which played in multiple film festivals in 2020. Badaki is the award-winning narrator of the sci-fi/fantasy novels “Akata Witch” and “Akata Warrior” by Nnedi Okorafor. She holds an MFA in theater from Illinois State University.

A talented actor and burgeoning director, **MANISH DAYAL (Kevin)** continues to engage audiences with dynamic roles on film and television.

Dayal is perhaps best known for his starring role as Hassan Kadam in “The Hundred-Foot Journey” opposite Helen Mirren, directed by Lasse Hallström and produced by Steven Spielberg and Oprah Winfrey for DreamWorks.

He also starred in “Viceroy’s House” for Pathe and IFC Films, directed by Gurinder Chadha, alongside Gillian Anderson, Hugh Bonneville and Michael Gambon.

Currently Dayal can be seen starring as Dr. Devon Pravesh on Fox’s medical drama “The Resident,” opposite Matt Czuchry and Bruce Greenwood. The series follows a group of doctors at Chastain Memorial Hospital as they face personal and professional challenges on a daily basis. Dayal recently directed his first episode of the show, which was considered a powerful and climactic episode for the series.

In features Dayal appeared opposite Emma Roberts and Kristin Chenoweth in Netflix’s romantic comedy “Holidate,” directed by John Whitesell and written by Tiffany Paulsen.

Currently Dayal is developing a limited series, “Stringer,” based on Anjan Sundaram’s memoir, “Stringer: A Reporter’s Journey in the Congo.” The short film “Fifteen Years Later” marked his directorial debut. Dayal also stars in the film, opposite Matt McGorry and Rachel Brosnahan. The film premiered at the Los Angeles Asian Pacific Film Festival, Indian Film Festival of Los Angeles and the New York Indian Film Festival.

On television he has appeared in notable roles in “Halt and Catch Fire” for AMC and Marvel’s “Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.” Additional credits include “90210,” “Law & Order: Special Victims Unit,” “The Good Wife,” “Rubicon,” “Switched at Birth,” “The Sorcerer’s Apprentice” and “The Domino Effect.”

On stage he played the lead in The New Group’s twice-extended off-Broadway comedy hit, “Rafta Rafta” by Ayub Khan Din, named by Entertainment Weekly as one of the 10 best plays of 2008.

TAYLOR NICHOLS (John Hammond) has been working in the entertainment industry for over 30 years. This has afforded him the opportunity to bridge generations by working closely with the likes of Angela Lansbury, Shelley Winters, James Garner and Charlton Heston to currently starring in Hulu’s Emmy®-nominated “Pen15” and HBO’s “Perry Mason” as well as “Roar” for Apple TV. Nichols is an award-winning shorts filmmaker, having directed “Two Heterosexual Men...” and “Last Train,” and is an experienced producer with feature credits including “The Next Step” and “Case 219.” But Nichols is best known as an actor, beginning his career with the Academy Award®-nominated “Metropolitan,” “Barcelona” and “Boiler Room” and continuing through “Godzilla,” “Chappaquiddick” and “1BR.” TV credits include series-regular roles on HBO’s “The Mind of the Married Man,” “Man of the People” and many recurring roles on shows such as “Friday Night Lights,” “Criminal Minds” and “The Last Tycoon.” He has over 100 guest-starring roles and is an experienced theater actor and director, having worked at the Geffen Theater in Los Angeles and Playwrights Horizons in NYC. Nichols is a graduate of the University of Michigan and is a creative consultant at Meteor 17. He is on faculty at UCLA in the School of Theater, Film and Television.

RAL AGADA (Thanasis) was born and raised in Westampton, New Jersey. He is 22 years old, 6’1” and half Nigerian. He enjoys movies, basketball, skateboarding and anime. Ral makes his acting debut in “Rise,” having been offered the opportunity to test for the role of Giannis Antetokounmpo’s brother Thanasis after his brother Uche was cast as Giannis, and the filmmakers asked Uche if he had a brother.

UCHE AGADA (Giannis) was born and raised in Westampton, New Jersey. He is 20 years old, 6’5” and half Nigerian. He played basketball in high school. Uche makes his acting debut in “Rise,” having seen a screenshot on Instagram of Giannis Antetokounmpo’s tweet announcing an open casting call for someone to play him in a film about his family. Uche sent in his audition tape—

this was his first audition ever—and after two callbacks, while working his shift at the local Wawa fast food restaurant, he got a call offering him the role.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

AKIN OMOTOSO (Director) studied drama at the University of Cape Town. His debut feature film was “God Is African” in 2003. He followed that up in 2011 with the award-winning “Man on Ground” (official selection to Toronto and Berlin International Film Festivals, and an Africa Magic Viewers Choice Award for best director). His box-office-hit romantic comedy “Tell Me Sweet Something” won him a second best director award at the 2016 Africa Magic Viewers Choice Awards and best narrative feature film at the BlackStar Film Festival in Philadelphia.

His film “Vaya” premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival on September 9, 2016, and won the special jury prize for outstanding film at the Africa International Film Festival. “Vaya” has since played at the Berlin International Film Festival and was the opening-night film at the New York African Film Festival. In 2017 he won best director for “Vaya” at the Africa Movie Academy Awards. “Vaya” was picked up for distribution by Ava DuVernay’s company ARRAY and is available on Netflix.

His 2017 film “A Hotel Called Memory” won the audience prize for favorite experimental film at the BlackStar Film Festival. His 2019 film “The Ghost and the House of Truth” won best world narrative feature at the Urbanworld Film Festival in New York and best actress, best Nigerian film and best director at the Africa International Film Festival in Lagos. In 2019 he directed the romantic drama “Courting Anathi.” In 2020 “The Untitled Akin Omotoso Project” was named as one of Netflix’s first African Original Series.

Acclaimed screenwriter and producer **ARASH AMEL (Writer)** is known for writing the critically lauded motion picture “A Private War” (2018), directed by Matthew Heineman and starring Rosamund Pike as celebrated war correspondent Marie Colvin. He recently served as executive producer on the Netflix sci-fi action movie “Outside the Wire” (2021), starring Anthony Mackie, which was viewed by 66 million households in its first 28 days. Amel wrote Paramount Pictures’ feature film “The Ministry of Ungentlemanly Warfare,” a World War II action-adventure directed by Guy Ritchie and produced by Jerry Bruckheimer that is slated to start production later this year. He also wrote the screenplay for “Snafu,” an upcoming action-comedy starring Jackie Chan and John Cena. Currently, Amel is in pre-production as producer on the Amazon Studios feature film “Fred & Ginger,” which is based on his screenplay, directed by Jonathan Entwistle and starring Jamie Bell and Margaret Qualley as the iconic screen pair Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers.

BERNIE GOLDMANN (Producer) has worked in the film industry as both an executive and a producer. As an executive at both Disney and Village Roadshow Pictures, Goldmann has been responsible for over \$2 billion of box office. Some of the movies he oversaw include "Training Day," "Ocean's Eleven," "Three Kings," "The Matrix," "Space Cowboys," "Practical Magic," "Analyze This," "Miss Congeniality," "The Deep Blue Sea," "Saving Silverman" and "Cats and Dogs."

Among many producing credits, Goldmann produced Zack Snyder's ferocious retelling of the ancient battle of Thermopylae, "300," as well as its sequel, "300: Rise of an Empire." Goldmann also produced "Mirror, Mirror," "Fool's Gold," "Taking Lives" and "Land of the Dead." Goldmann recently produced "Ronaldinho: The Happiest Man in the World" for FIFA+.

GIANNIS ANTETOKOUNMPO (Executive Producer) was born on December 6, 1994, in Athens, Greece, where his parents, Charles and Veronica, settled after emigrating from Nigeria. He has four brothers, two older (Francis and Thanasis) and two younger (Kostas and Alex). As undocumented citizens in Greece, to help meet their family's financial needs, he and his brothers sold bags, watches and sunglasses on the streets, while his father worked as a handyman and janitor and his mother as a babysitter.

Antetokounmpo began playing basketball when he was 11. In a few years he was playing for the Filathlitikos youth league team and moved up to play with the senior men's team of Filathlitikos in the semi-pro Greek B Basketball League a few years later. During the 2012-2013 season, he joined the Greek A2 League, Greece's second-tier basketball league.

At the age of 18, in December 2012, Antetokounmpo signed a four-year contract with Spanish team CAI Zaragoza. For the remainder of the season, Antetokounmpo played for Greek team Filathlitikos, where he recorded an average of 9.5 points, 5.0 rebounds and 1.4 assists in 26 games. Although he was not part of the all-star team, he was picked to participate in the 2013 Greek League All-Star games.

On April 28, 2013, Antetokounmpo officially became eligible for the 2013 NBA Draft. The Milwaukee Bucks selected him with the 15th overall pick, and on July 30, 2013, he signed his rookie contract.

Antetokounmpo made his NBA debut on October 13, 2013, at the age of 18, as one of the NBA's all-time youngest players. During his second season with the Bucks, he was named the Eastern Conference Player of the Week for the first time in his career. He later competed in the 2015 NBA Slam Dunk Contest at NBA All-Star Weekend in New York. In the 2015-16 season, Antetokounmpo recorded his first career triple-double: just 21 years old, he became the youngest Buck to do so.

Antetokounmpo's fourth year with the Bucks, 2016-17, was his breakout season, as he led the Milwaukee Bucks in all five major statistical categories and became the first player in NBA history to finish a regular season in the top 20 in all five statistics of total points, rebounds, assists, steals

and blocks. Antetokounmpo was named a starter on the Eastern Conference All-Star team for the 2017 NBA All-Star Game, becoming the youngest player in franchise history to start in an All-Star Game. He also became the first Greek NBA All-Star. Antetokounmpo was named to the All-NBA Second Team, earning his first All-NBA honor. He also received the most improved player award in 2017, the first Bucks player to do so. Antetokounmpo has received six All-Star selections, including being selected as an All-Star captain in 2019 and 2020, as he led the Eastern Conference in voting in these two years.

Antetokounmpo won consecutive NBA Most Valuable Player Awards in 2019 and 2020. Along with his MVP award, he was also named the NBA Defensive Player of the Year in 2020. The following year, Antetokounmpo led the Bucks to their first NBA championship since 1971 and was named Finals MVP. He was named to the NBA 75th Anniversary Team, which designated him as one of the league's greatest players of all-time.

DOUGLAS S. JONES (Executive Producer) was head of physical production at Walden Media for 10 years, from 2006 to 2016, working on films with budgets from \$3 million to \$300 million. Walden Media is known for its dedication to family films, among them “The Chronicles of Narnia” series.

After leaving Walden, Jones moved to line producing and was asked by New Regency to apply his skills to “The Revenant,” a challenging location picture already in production. Since then he has executive produced “Togo,” “Chappaquiddick,” Disney+’s “Safety,” “American Underdog” and, for Apple Original Films and Imagine Entertainment, the upcoming “The Beanie Bubble.”

Jones began his film career in the mail room of New Line, when it was a small company of 15 people. He was interested in the business side of filmmaking and given the opportunity to move into physical production and production accounting. After three years at New Line, he became a freelance production accountant and production manager.

Jones has a degree in business and film from Chapman University in California.

KABELO THATHE (Director of Photography) would prefer more hours in the day to perfect the shot, but otherwise there is not a lot he would change about his job. Despite growing up wanting to become a marine biologist, the strong pull of film eventually lured him to its shores in 2000.

Having finished high school in Minnesota, Thathe soon realized that he was deeply influenced by everything he saw and experienced around him. He sees the world in pictures—particularly beautiful ones. So, he made it his job to become a cinematographer. Finding frames that resonate with people is where he gets his kicks.

No matter the challenges of the day, Thathe loves that he gets to amplify the amazing stories of those around him. Once that kid who pasted movie posters on his bedroom wall, he's now the guy who gets to create those images for the next generation of wide-eyed DOPs.

He previously collaborated with directed Akin Omotoso on his films "Vaya" (2016), "The Ghost and the House of Truth" (2019) and "The Orissa Project" (2020). His other credits include the films "New Material" (2020) and "Seriously Single" (2020) and the TV series "My Kitchen Rules South Africa" (2017), "MTV Shuga: Down South" (2017) and "90 Plein Street" (2016-2017).

INA MAYHEW (Production Designer), a native New Yorker, has designed more than 25 feature films, a dozen television shows, commercials, music videos, stage plays, industrial presentations, a movie musical and a permanent studio backlot. Along the way she has worked with many notable directors and producers such as Spike Lee and Malcolm Lee, Ava DuVernay, Tyler Perry, Debbie Allen, Liesl Tommy, and now, Akin Omotoso. Mayhew has designed for Netflix, Warner Bros., MGM, Lionsgate, New Line, 40 Acres and a Mule, BET, HBO, MTV, Universal, PBS, Island Pictures and, of course, Disney Pictures.

In 2021 Mayhew designed "Respect," the Aretha Franklin biopic starring Jennifer Hudson. Currently she is collaborating again with director Malcolm Lee, for whom she designed the film "Barbershop: In the Cut"; she is now designing the TV series "The Best Man: The Final Chapters," based on Lee's "The Best Man" and "The Best Man Holiday" movies. The series will air on Peacock and has managed to reunite the original cast.

Mayhew designed the Emmy® Award-winning TV movie musical Dolly Parton's "Christmas on the Square," directed by Debbie Allen, for which she built an entire town square on a sound stage. She designed "Dolly Parton's Heartstrings" for Netflix and three seasons of "Queen Sugar" in New Orleans, executive produced by Ava DuVernay. Along the way she designed a DuVernay-directed music video, "Family Feud," with Jay-Z and Beyoncé.

Mayhew designed the highly rated release of Dolly Parton's "Christmas of Many Colors: Circle of Love" for CBS; two BET series, "Second Generation Wayans" and "The Quad"; opera soprano "Renee Fleming's Christmas Special" for PBS; and the dark MTV series "Teen Wolf."

Mayhew's first film was "Sidewalk Stories" with director and SUNY Purchase classmate Charles Lane, a low-budget black-and-white silent film that won the Audience Award at the Cannes Film Festival. She designed the cult classic "Rain Without Thunder"; the basketball movie "Above the Rim," with Tupac Shakur; and "200 Cigarettes," a dark comedy set in the East Village of New York City, another cult favorite that introduced a wave of young film stars we still watch today, much as we continue to see Mayhew's sets.

Mayhew was production designer on several projects for Spike Lee, including "Get on the Bus" and "Girl 6." She designed the historic Lee-directed Michael Jackson music video "They Don't Care About Us," as well as videos for Bruce Hornsby and Chaka Khan.

Mayhew began an association with Tyler Perry on his first movie, “Diary of a Mad Black Woman,” and went on to design 11 of his films, including “For Colored Girls” and “Why Did I Get Married?” I and II. She designed numerous television productions, and the backlot at Tyler Perry’s first studio, as well as the multi-million-dollar studio opening weekend.

Her credits include much more. Mayhew designed PBS’s Emmy® Award winner “A Hymn for Alvin Ailey,” directed by Judith Jamison. She designed the original HBO feature film “Earthly Possessions,” with Susan Sarandon and directed by James Lapine. Mayhew designed three shows on The Food Network in its early days, including “How to Boil Water.”

Mayhew is a graduate of SUNY at Purchase College, where she studied fine art, theater set and costume design. The noted set designer Franco Colavecchia was her professor at Purchase, and she later assisted him in New York and regionally on Grand Opera and off-Broadway sets, and in international theater designs. Along the way in those early years, she designed several theater productions for The Women’s Project, for Woodie King Jr.’s National Black Touring Circuit and his Henry Street Settlement Theatre, most notably the touring production of “I Have a Dream.” Her most recent stage design was for the Delaware Theatre Company’s production of August Wilson’s “The Piano Lesson.”

Mayhew is the daughter of the renowned landscape painter Richard Mayhew. Her mother, Dorothy, was also an artist in many mediums, a watercolor, etchings and ceramics artist designing cups, plates and delicate porcelain flowers.

Mayhew currently teaches a class in production design annually at her alma mater, SUNY Purchase, as her schedule permits.

VUYANI SONDLLO (Editor) first got into the film and TV industries in the early 1990s, in his native country of South Africa. He started with an industry apprenticeship, then became a trainee in the editorial department, then an assistant editor and eventually became an editor. Over the years he honed his skills working on documentaries, television series and ultimately narrative/scripted films.

In the past 20 years plus, he has been for the most part a practicing editor with the appreciation for skills transfer and development in his craft. His experience is varied, from working in South Africa as well as abroad, with collaborations with filmmakers within South Africa, the African continent, Europe, the Middle East and now America.

When not working on a project, he teaches editing at various film institutions and seminars in South Africa. He also takes opportunities for self-improvement, e.g. attending an extensive editing/post-production workshop at the Internationale Filmschule Köln in Germany in conjunction with the London School of Sound.

Sondlo is well respected among his peers and the film community at large. He is the recipient of several nominations and awards, among them the South African Guild of Editors Award. In 2020 he was honored by the Africa Movie Academy for best editing.

Sondlo's feature films include "Vaya," "The Ghost and the House of Truth," "Courting Anathi" and "Tell Me Sweet Something," which were all directed by Akin Omotoso; "Sleeper's Wake" and "The Long Run." His television credits include "Yizo Yizo" (Season 2), "Gaz'lam" (Season 1) and "Noah's Arc" (limited series). His documentary credits include "Jeppe on a Friday," "Story of a Beautiful Country," "Bread and Water," "By All Means Necessary," "Zwelidumile," "Phambili" (which he also directed), "Don't Fuck with Me, I Have 51 Brothers and Sisters," "A Miner's Tale," "Bessie Head" and "Aliens or Broers?"

The work of **MOBOLAJI DAWODU (Costume Designer)** has informed the visual language of cosmopolitan life and style for more than a decade. He is a Nigerian American fashion stylist, best known as the style fashion editor and fashion director at GQ Style, where he has styled Brad Pitt, Jared Leto and Mahershala Ali. He also designed the costumes for the films "Restless City" (2011), "Mother of George" (2013), "Queen of Katwe" (2016), "Where Is Kyra?" (2017), "Monster" (2018), "Guava Island" (2019) and the upcoming "Beauty."

RÉ OLUNUGA (Original Score Composer) is a Nigerian composer of multi-genre orchestral and experimental music. With a unique approach to instrumentation that imbues his music with an unmistakable sense of engagement and tactility, Olunuga has work spanning across film and TV soundtracks to ambitious art pieces and even a dalliance with the mainstream through collaborations with commercial recording artists.

Olunuga's is a varied career to date, but above all he considers himself to be a storyteller, with music being the medium to which he is most strongly drawn. His influences tend to be non-musical, like memories of how it felt to be a child wandering around his grandmother's house in Yaba or the mind-expanding sensation of reading the works of Philip K. Dick and Octavia Butler.

Olunuga completed in Spring 2022 the intimate score to the feature film "Girl" for BBC Films in the U.K.

Despite now spending a large amount of his time between London and Los Angeles, Olunuga still considers Lagos the geographical heart of all his endeavors. He is founder and artistic director of the Lagos Philharmonic and is currently working on the development of the first symphonic concert hall in the city.