ELDUOMOTION PICTURES

presents

DAKOTA

a film by Matthew Atkinson

www.DAKOTATHEMOVIE.ca

an EL DUO Motion Picture

elduomp@gmail.com Telephone: 647.237.6649 Canada 2007 HD 16:9 NTSC English Colour, 96 min Stereo

Distributed in Canada by **Mongrel Media** www.mongrelmedia.com

Dakota Synopsis

Brian and Jack were inseparable; now they barely speak. Their formerly close-knit group has all but disbanded in the wake of encroaching adulthood. But when Jack tries to hang himself from a plant hook while house-sitting, he inadvertently triggers an impromptu reunion that brings the old gang back together and could change everything. Forever.

Welcome to **DAKOTA**: friendship, fistfights, concussions, quarter-life crises, blow-ups, breakdowns, toy guns, telemarketing, love, lies, and breakfast – all in someone else's home.

In this dark, offbeat comedy everyone comes together to examine what went wrong. Along the way, they may just remind each other what went right.

Cast

BRENDAN GALL Brian

CHAD E. DONELLA Jack

TRICIA LAHDE Tilly

JAMES CADE Allan Hawk

ROBERT KINGSTON Doug

CARRIE NICOLS Jane

KURT SMEATON Teddy

KATIE CROWN Melanie

JONNY GOLTZ Delivery Guy

TIIU TSAO Restaurant Owner

JOSH INGLEBY Drug Addict

Crew

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: Niv Fichman (The Red Violin, Blindness)

Martin Gero (Young People Fucking)

Robert Kingston

CREATORS: Matthew Atkinson

Shawn Myrick Brendan Gall

WRITER: Brendan Gall

DIRECTOR: Matthew Atkinson

PRODUCER: Shawn Myrick

Robert Scarborough

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY: Ryan Murfitt

COSTUME DESIGNER: Zoe Horn

EDITOR: Matthew Atkinson

FIRST ASSISTANT DIRECTOR: Chris Mathews

ART DIRECTOR: Mandy Forbes

MAKE-UP: Natalie Marks

WARDROBE: Zoe Horn

PRODUCTION MANAGER: Robert Scarborough

RE-RECORDING MIXERS: Rob Hutchins

Geoff Raffan

FINAL SOUND MIX: Dan Turcotte

Pete Hathway

LOCATION SOUND: Chris Marsland

CONTINUITY: Sharon Liu

MATHEW ATKINSON, Director

Director Matthew Atkinson was born and raised in Ottawa, Ontario. Matt moved to Toronto in 2001 to attend Humber College's Film and Television Production Program. In 2004, Matt graduated from Humber's Film program with honours in writing and directing. His thesis film, *THE VACANCY*, was chosen to screen as one of the top ten student films in Canada by the Toronto International Film Festival's 'The Best of the Best Student Film Festival'. Upon graduation from film school, Matt and his childhood friend Shawn Myrick, founded El Duo Motion Pictures, which would become the basis of the creation of **DAKOTA**.

DAKOTA is Matt's debut feature length film. His short films have played around the world, picking up accolades along the way. He is currently writing a new screenplay entitled *The Wild Society* slated for production in the summer of 2009.

Filmography:

PERSONAL EFFECTS – 2007, 5 min comedy

STUBBS – 2006, 30 min comedy - TV Pilot

• The Comedy Network - Dave Ivcavic Productions

THE VACANCY – 2004, 11 min, comedy

- Honorable mention at 'The Best of The Best Student Film Showcase' presented by The Toronto Film Festival Group.
- The William F. White Award of Excellence for Filmmaking
- Official Selection of the New Zealand Film Festival
- Official Selection of the Rhode Island Film Festival

THE FILMMAKER'S WIFE – 2004, 22 min comedy

Official Selection of the Coney Island Short Film Festival

BRENDAN GALL, Writer

In addition to DAKOTA, his first feature film, Brendan has written three stageplays: Panhandled, A Quiet Place, and Alias Godot. Developed through Tarragon Theatre's Playwrights Unit and translated into Italian for Teatro Della Limonaia's Intercity Festival in Florence, Italy (making Brendan the secondyoungest playwright in the festival's twenty-year history), Alias Godot will have its English-Language/North American premiere this spring at Tarragon Theatre, where he is currently a playwright-in-residence. Brendan has also contributed pieces to The Awesome Club Presents..."It's Raining Fun!", AutoShow (for which he wrote a short play featuring Dakota's Alan Hawk living and telemarketing from his car) and The Gladstone Variations, and also co-created I Keep Dropping Sh*t, Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump and Don't Wake Me. Brendan is currently working on an adaptation of Chekhov's The Seagull, a new theatrical collective entitled The well as Red Room. as а number of screenplays.

Brendan first studied acting at Unionville High School's Arts York Drama Program, alongside fellow **DAKOTA** stars James Cade, Chad Donella and Carrie Nicols. He went on to train at George Brown Theatre School's acting conservatory program, where he met other Dakota cast members Robert Kingston, Tricia Lahde, and Kurt Smeaton. Brendan has performed in numerous stage productions, including David Mamet's Romance, the Toronto production of Stephen Adly Guirgis's The Last Days of Judas Iscariot (winner of five 2006 Dora Mavor Moore Awards, including Best Production), and most recently, the world-premiere of Hannah Moscovitch's critically acclaimed East of Berlin at Tarragon Theatre, slated to tour nationally in 2009. Brendan has had a recurring role on Stargate: Atlantis, and is a series regular on Shaftsbury Films' new series, Overruled! He met Dakota director Matthew Atkinson (along with most of Dakota's crew) while performing in a student film being directed by Atkinson for his class at Humber Film School.

MARTIN GERO, Executive Producer

MARTIN GERO is a Writer and Executive Producer on "Stargate: Atlantis" (MGM/FOX). For his work on the show he has won a People's Choice Award and has been nominated for 2 Gemini Award's and a Canadian Screenwriters Award.

Martin's feature film debut "Young People Fucking" (which he also co-wrote) was an opening night selection for the 2007 Toronto International Film Festival and will be released in theaters later this year.

NIV FICHMAN, Executive Producer

Niv Fichman is a Canadian film producer and the co-owner of the acclaimed production company Rhombus Media. He has produced films for some of the highest profile directors in the country. Some of those include Don McKellar, François Girard, and Guy Maddin.

His company has been nominated for two Academy Awards for "The Red Violin", and the short documentary "Making Overtures: The Story of a Community Orchestra." Rhombus has also been nominated for seven Emmys, five International Emmys, two Primetime Emmys and countless Genies and Gemini Awards.

His current work includes producing the screen adaptation of José Saramago's Pulitzer Prize winning novel "Blindness" which is being directed by the Academy Award nominated director Fernando Meirelles (City of God). The film stars Julianne Moore, Mark Ruffalo, Gael García Bernal and Danny Glover.

ROBERT SCARBOROUGH, Co-Producer

Rob grew up in Stratford Ontario. He moved to Toronto in the fall of 2001 where he began his post secondary education at Humber College studying Film Production. Rob graduated in 2004 after working with Director Matthew Atkinson on seven short films. Scarborough's work includes Director of Photography credits on the feature films "Your Beautiful Cul de Sac Home" and the zombie flick "Zombie Night II: Awakenings".

After being introduced to Producer Shawn Myrick during his final year in school by Atkinson, they vowed to make movies together after their post secondary education was complete. Rob, who usually works as a Director of Photography, was approached my Myrick and Atkinson six months after graduation to help produce their first feature film and jumped at the opportunity. And, with little producing experience, both Myrick and Scarborough pulled together the means and man power to producer their first feature film, **DAKOTA**.

SHAWN MYRICK, Co-Producer

Shawn Myrick's connection to the film **DAKOTA** goes back to a long lasting friendship with director Matthew Atkinson. They grew up together in Ottawa and formed a friendship that has lasted for over 15 years. Being huge fans of film, they decided in their late teens to pursue careers in filmmaking.

With Atkinson now in Toronto at film school and Myrick working to save enough money to use as leverage for future film financing, it would only be a matter of time before the pair realized the first stage of their long time goal: to form El Duo Motion Pictures and make their first film. While Atkinson tailored the script for **DAKOTA** with writer/actor Brendan Gall, Myrick was forging yet another friendship with producing partner Robert Scarborough. With Scarborough's unrelenting drive and work ethic and Myrick's overall vision of the production company it was clear that something great could be accomplished.

Once **DAKOTA** was shot, Myrick began and completed an internship at THINKFilm Company gaining a better understanding of the world of distribution as **DAKOTA** neared the sales stage of the production. This proved to be a valuable decision as El Duo Motion Pictures closed their first deal with reputable Canadian distributor, Mongrel Media. Now, with El Duo four strong (Myrick, Atkinson, Scarborough and graduate of Osgoode Hall Law School Scott Gfeller) the foursome continues to advance in the Canadian film industry with several projects in various stages of production.

RYAN MURFITT, Cinematographer

Ryan Murfitt was born in Ottawa, Ontario. He graduated from Humber College's Film and Television Production program with both Rob Scarborough and Mathew Atkinson. At Humber, he focused his studies on cinematography, shooting numerous short films. Among his shorts, two were in contention for CSC Awards: *The Empty Drawer* and *The Vacancy* both directed by Atkinson. *The Vacancy* screened at the TIFF Student Film Festival and The World of Comedy Film Festival. Ryan left Humber with the Edmund Long CSC Memorial Award for having the highest potential in cinematography. Since graduating he has been gaining experience by being a camera technician on independent feature films and music videos and is also shooting documentaries. **DAKOTA** is his first feature film as a cinematographer.

Music of Dakota

The soundtrack of **DAKOTA** features some of Canada's top musical acts including Royal Wood, Do Make Say Think, Reid Jamieson, and Harmony Trowbridge.

Even in the early stages of pre-production, Brendan and Matt began talking about music that they associated with the style of "hang-out movie" they were making. Lawerence Kasdan's *The Big Chill* had been an influence for the story and again proved a great reference for the soundtrack. Like Kasdan's film, Dakota would feature popular songs from some of the filmmakers favorite artists instead of an original score.

This "mix tape" approach to the soundtrack helps reinforce the theme of friendship, nostalgia and reunion; as if the characters themselves have been slipping away in turn to play their favorite song on the house stereo for the others to enjoy.

The Making of Dakota

In the fall of 2004, Matt Atkinson and Brendan Gall were working together at Indigo Books on Bay Street in Toronto. They had met two years before when Matt asked Brendan to play the lead in one of his student films. Brendan was cast as the lead in the film and to star in two of his student films after which, both remained friends.

Matt was now finished school and Shawn, his childhood friend from Ottawa, had recently moved to Toronto to partner up with Matt as filmmakers. The two formed El Duo Motion Pictures and began the process of getting their first project off the ground.

After a day's work, Brendan and Matt were discussing their common desire to step outside the box and figure out a way to go into production for themselves. So, the two decided that the best thing to do would be to just go ahead and make a full length film. Matt would direct, Shawn would produce and Brendan would play the lead.

A week later, Brendan, Shawn and Matt got together at Shawn and Matt's two storey apartment that they shared with their girlfriends. Over wine and pasta, they realized the only way to complete a full length film would be if they wrote something that they could produce within their means. Conclusion, the story would take place almost entirely in Matt and Shawn's apartment. It would star Brendan and co-star Brendan's friends, some of which he had known since childhood, all actors and all of whom had not seen each other in over two years; this would be to catalyst for the story of **DAKOTA**.

The story would be based on what was happening in their own lives, the quarterlife crisis and reuniting with friends. That night they mapped out the plot, the characters and the themes. Brendan, who had been writing for stage for almost ten years, was chosen to write the first draft of the script.

Three months later, Brendan delivered a 172 page script, double the desired length but certainly full of promise. While Matt and Brendan began to edit down the script, Shawn began the process of begging, borrowing and stealing to raise money for the film's budget. Thanks to many generous friends and family members, the working budget was reached. That meant that they had generated enough money to make the film but only if everyone involved worked for free or on a deferral basis. As the project began to grow so did their team with the addition of friend and fellow Humber Graduate, Rob Scarborough as an additional Producer. El Duo now had a solid team, a script and budget. With blind ambition the four set out to make their first feature film.

As the shoot approached, they enlisted the help of film school friends, former teachers, girlfriends and boyfriends of those close to the project, and with this motley crew, formed what was needed to start production. Thankfully everyone agreed to work for free and **DAKOTA**, a title Brendan thought just sounded good but was later found out to mean "friends and allies" in the Sioux language of the Native American, began production.

DAKOTA went into production, with a 91 page script finished only two weeks before the first day of shooting. The film was shot over an intense 17 days in May of 2005 in Matt and Shawn's apartment in Toronto. Two of the lead cast members flew in for the 17 day shoot, leaving no room for re-shoots or an extended production schedule.

Matt and Shawn took two weeks to recuperate before beginning the arduous task of logging and digitizing all of the 35 hours of footage. Working from a suite in the penthouse offices of Rhombus media, which was generously donated by Niv Fichman, they began to edit the film. It was initially thought that this would take two months but Matt soon realized that that was not a realistic goal. So, they took their editing equipment home and Matt labored on the film for the next year and a half.

DAKOTA was finished the summer of 2006. Only after returning to the editing suite after a four month hiatus did the filmmakers realize that they wanted to recut film and re-mix the film. The only thing stopping them was money. The budget had reached its climax and they had already exhausted most of their resources. So, Rob and Shawn set out to find more money only to find the generous hand of actor Robert Kingston whom had now seen a rough cut of the film and wanted to see the film finished properly.

DAKOTA was finally finished, almost three years after the principal photography and has just recently found representation in Canada through the reputable distribution company Mongrel Media.

Brendan on Brian

Brian's basically a dramatized version of me, except that I can't draw or paint. He seems to swing between loneliness and a sharp need to be alone. He's concerned about what other people think, and so has trouble following his heart. Although more uptight than he'd like to admit and probably also more self-centered, he cares deeply about his friends, even if he doesn't always know how to show it. His secret fear is that he will end up leading an unremarkable life. I've said too much.

Brendan on Jack

Jack is an exaggerated version of Chad Donella. With emotions that swing from one extreme to another, he's the guy that makes things happen whether you want them to or not, which can be incredibly frustrating, but also makes life infinitely more interesting. Not overly concerned with consequences, he prefers to follow his impulses where they take him. A creature of the present, he has an enormous heart, which sometimes eclipses his brain.

Brendan on Alan Hawk

All of the characters in the film were written with these specific actors in mind, and Alan Hawk especially could really only be played by James Cade. In some ways they are terrifyingly similar. Terrifyingly. Not that James lives in his car and is a telemarketer or anything, but they are both very secretive and very monastic in their peculiar way. James seems to get uncomfortable if he owns more than 15 things. For a while he was sleeping on an air mattress, and then he upgraded to an army cot. I think he may still be using it. He's also infamously difficult to get a hold of; he doesn't have a land-line and he lives in some strange blacked-out part of town where his cell phone barely gets service, so his phone will ring but if he picks it up he can't hear anything, so he has to wait for the person to leave a message and then run down to the street and check the messages on a payphone, or else stick his head out the window when he answers - then he can hear you a little bit. And he checks his email about once every two weeks. So every once in a while I do these sort of proof-of-life checks just to make sure that he's still around. And also like Alan Hawk, when James becomes interested in something, he attacks that interest with his whole being, and then gets bored of it and attacks something else. He was like that growing up, too; one month it was model trains, then it was the saxophone, then it was art lessons, then it was Kenpo Karate, then it was church. James actually came up with the name Alan Hawk himself - he knew a guy at the National Theatre School when he was there with a very similar name, and I think James always thought it kind of sounded like a superhero or something. I know for a while, he really liked the name Joe Highway, too. Not for the character or anything. He just really liked the name.

Brendan on Doug

Doug sort of represents that thing of growing up and becoming an adult. And it seems like there are people who resist that, and there are people who can't wait to do that, and then there are some people who do it just because they think they have to. And I think Doug falls into that last category. I liked the idea of him having this history of being the really wild guy when we were all in high school, and having taken that too far when school ended and he didn't know what to do with himself, and then the pendulum swung hard the other way, as it often does, and he got married really young and had a kid and started a business because he felt like he had to be financially responsible all of a sudden. So he's gone from being Jacks' sort of brother in drunken crime, to being like the dad of the group all of a sudden. I've known Rob since theatre school, and he's always had this quality that makes him sort of immediately likable and also familiar. I remember my dad saying when he helped me move in with Rob in second year, that he was so easy to talk to that he felt like he already knew him, and it's amazing how many people say that, or things similar to it. I think he gets a lot of, "You remind me so much of my best friend's brother." Stuff like that. And I think Rob brings that to Doug in a really great way. He's just a really good guy, and you want to cheer for him. And you can tell that he loves his friends ferociously, even when they make fun of him.

Brendan on Jane

Carrie was really good friends with Chad and James and I in high school, and then we sort of saw very little of her after school was over. And I think maybe that wasn't done entirely unintentionally on her part - not that she hated our group of friends, but maybe she just needed to get away from it to figure out herself a little better, which is an impulse I completely understand. Anyway, this was sort of selfishly an excuse to force her to spend two weeks with all of us, and it was really great to do that. I guess Jane's sort of the mom of the group, even though she's the youngest. Jane's Brian's younger sister, so I can imagine that in high school she wasn't really an integral part of the group, but she was always sort of around the outskirts of it. And now all of a sudden she's there and she's an adult studying to become a nurse. Which is very grown up, but at the same time, I think we get the sense that she's not altogether comfortable with this level of responsibility; she keeps qualifying her level of competence when someone mentions that she's a nurse by adding, "In training." I think it's possible that she has no real idea what being a nurse will really entail. I think Jane's got this great duality to her personality, where she's smart and mature and responsible, but also in another way still very young and naive about the world.

Brendan on Tilly

Tilly's the drama-queen of the group. And Trish certainly has that in her, although it's amped up considerably for Tilly. In a way, she's the least responsible, and the least willing to accept growing older gracefully. Which is Trish as well, in a way, although Trish has become sort of cynical and jaded about the whole business of acting, whereas Tilly thinks she can drive down to an open call in New York and become a Broadway star. And I liked the idea of Tilly being concerned about her sister and what her sister will think through the whole film - you get the feeling that she's sort of been in her sister's shadow her whole life - and then when her sister finally shows up, you see she's this diminutive little woman that Tilly's been intimidated by her whole life. Which is funny, but I think that really happens too, where people are so used to feeling a certain way that they aren't able to really see things for what they are.

Brendan on the Field Reporter

One summer during high school when I was visiting my mom and little brother in Saskatchewan, I was watching satellite television and came across this news station's satellite feed. It was the weirdest thing. This reporter was just staring at the camera, holding his microphone, waiting to go live so he could report whatever story he was about to report. Occasionally someone would fix his hair, or he'd answer some question being asked through his ear-piece, but other than that he was just sort of patiently staring into the camera in this eerie sort of way that made me feel like he was prepared to just stand there and wait forever if he had to. I had no idea how long he'd been waiting, and eventually got bored of waiting for him to "go live" and changed channels, so maybe he's still there. Anyway, I thought there was something sort of right about all of these characters who are sort of lost at sea in their own individual ways to be stuck with this existentialist field reporter as the only thing available to watch on television, which helps to explain why they don't spend all weekend watching TV like most people, and also helps create a feeling of them being cut off from the rest of the world. I think Ryan V. Hays has possibly the best newscaster voice ever, and the beard is perfect. Incidentally, they shot a lot of really funny footage of Ryan improvising other scenarios that involved more dialogue, but it didn't work for the film. I'm especially fond of a take where he pops up from behind the lower half of a door in some abandoned building, says something like "Hi there!" and then proceeds to kick the door open, walk toward the camera and catch his microphone, deftly with one hand as it's thrown to him from off camera just in time to plant himself in a close up. Remarkable. There's also a take where his umbrella inexplicably closes on him. Spooky. Maybe we'll include all the unused footage as a special feature on the DVD.

Cinematography in Dakota

When Matt Atkinson asked me to shoot **DAKOTA** I signed on before even reading the script. Matt and I have been working together since film school and working now with Matt has become a telepathic relationship. Over the years we have learned each other's styles and sensibilities. I always know if he is going to like a shot I setup or not before he even looks through the viewfinder.

On **DAKOTA**, we wanted to treat the look of the film with a sense of realism that reflected the story of our film. The script is as honest as can be and I wanted the lighting to reflect that sincerity. Thus, the style of lighting is very natural and unobtrusive with soft colour palettes throughout. A more exaggerated colour palette was only brought in at specific plot and character cues to heighten those emotional moments.

One of the challenges on set was space, or lack there of. We shot four fifths of the movie in one apartment. The hallways were slim and every room was slated to be shot in. Often, especially in the hallways, I would think to myself "Well, I can put the light here and... nope, that's it. I can't put the light anywhere else." Shooting at times with seven actors in one thin hallway can be tough and finding a place for some lights and a place for myself to operate the camera only added to that. Though, the challenge was exciting and often liberating because of the simplicity.

We also chose our camera based on this lack of space. We debated in pre-production about shooting on a full-size HD camera, but I was concerned about that limiting our choice of camera angles. Therefore, we went with Sony's recently released, HVR-Z1U. Being in one location for so long, we needed to be able to mix up the shots. I felt shooting on the HDV format was the best choice for image quality in a small package.

Both Matt and I share a love for inventive camera operating. On **DAKOTA**, we got to mix up traditional cinematic camera movies and lower key handheld camera work. The handheld matched very well with the natural look we were going for. The camera was always the observer. I would always follow the actors, never lead them. This technique allowed the actors to tell the story. Other times, we employed a more cinematic approach, by using a simple dolly.

More about the Cast

Brendan Gall & James Cade met at O.M. MacKillop Public School in Richmond Hill when they were both in Grade 5.

Brendan Gall & James Cade met **Chad Donella** & **Carrie Nicols** at Unionville High School when they were all in Grade 9 Arts York Drama together.

Brendan Gall met **Trish Lahde**, **Rob Kingston** & **Kurt Smeaton** at George Brown Theatre School when they were all in First Year together (except Trish, who was in Second Year and started dating Brendan).

Brendan Gall met **Ryan V. Hays** through Kurt Smeaton when they formed a (now defunct) sketch group called The Awesome Club.

Brendan Gall met **Katie Crown** through Kurt Smeaton & Ryan V. Hays at Catch23 Improv. Katie & Ryan have a comedy duo called The Remainders.

And now they're all best friends.

OTHER INFO:

Brendan lived with James Cade & Chad Donella while he was in First Year at George Brown Theatre School.

Brendan lived with Rob Kingston while they were both in Second Year at George Brown Theatre School.

Brendan moved in with Trish when he was in Third Year at George Brown Theatre School. They still live together today.

The Credits

Directed and Edited By Matthew Atkinson

Produced by Shawn Myrick

Robert Scarborough Screenplay by Brendan Gall

Matthew Atkinson

Brendan Gall Shawn Myrick

Cinematography by Ryan Murfitt Executive Produced by Niv Fichman Martin Gero

Robert Kingston

Jody Hewston Music Consultant

CAST

Story by

Brian Brendan Gall Chad E. Donella Jack Tilly Tricia Lahde Doug Robert Kingston Jane Carrie Nicols Alan Hawk James Cade Field Reporter Ryan V. Hays Katie Crown Melanie Teddy **Kurt Smeaton**

Reporter's Assistant Robert Scarborough

Restaurant Owner Tiiu Tsao **Delivery Guy** Johnny Goltz Josh Ingleby Drug Addict

CREW

Assistant Director **Chris Mathews** Mandy Forbes Art Director Wardrobe Zoe Horn

Set Decorators Amanda Mcniece

> Giselle Acosta Natalie Marks

Make-up Artist Continuity Sharon Liu Meghan Brazil

Katrina Saville

Gaffers Robert Scarborough

Josh Ingleby

Supervising Sound Editor/

Re-recording Mixer Geoff Raffan Re-recording Mixer Rob Hutchins Final Sound Mix Dan Turcotte

Peter Hathway Chris Marsland

Location Sound Chris Marsland
Boom Operators Cathy Hawkins
Derek Oxley

Erin Loveday

Camera Assistant Chris Mierzwinski

Grips and Electrics Bart Tecza

Patrick Kelly Luke Mistruzzi Matthew Jameson

Production Assistants Sarah Benson

Venessa Tilly Adelle Malacas Cheryl Salvas Eric Cator

Still Photographer Eric Cator Craft Services Amy-Jo Bard

Sara Dubeau Melissa Dozois Sarah Stewart

Stunt Coordinator R. Blaze Mcnight

Colour by Technicolor Equipment Provided by William F. White International Inc.

Sound Services Provided by Sound Design International and Dan's Pet Shop

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