

ACTS OF WORSHIP

A film by ROSEMARY RODRIGUEZ

WINNER
BEST FILM • BEST DIRECTOR • BEST ACTRESS
SANTA BARBARA IFF

OFFICIAL SELECTION
SUNDANCE 2001

WINNER
EMERGING FILMMAKER AWARD
ST. LOUIS IFF

WINNER
BEST DIRECTOR
FILM FEST KANSAS CITY

MAIN PROGRAM
ROTTERDAM IFF

WINNER
BEST FEATURE FILM
CROSSROADS FILM FESTIVAL

“Everything is first-rate: Rodriguez’s script is astute and witty, her direction is assured and illuminating, and her cast is breathtakingly believable (Reeder delivers an astonishing Oscar-caliber performance).”

—Rich Cline, BBC Radio

“‘Acts’ is solid filmmaking...and certainly deserves attention... Reeder’s impressive performance is utterly convincing.”

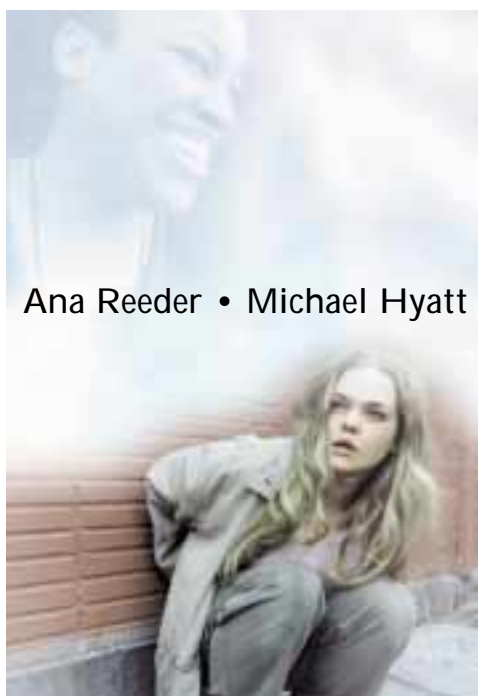
—David Hunter, The Hollywood Reporter

“...one of the most honest depictions of drug addiction to come along in ages...”

—Ernest Hardy, LA Weekly

“‘Acts of Worship’ transforms itself from a film about drugs into an exploration of human relationships and outward appearances that reveals just how destructive self-doubt and alienation can be.”

—Erin Judge, The Boston Phoenix



Ana Reeder • Michael Hyatt

“...an outstanding directorial debut from Rosemary Rodriguez... Ana Reeder delivers a notable standout debut... featuring searing, authentic performances from all cast members...”

—Trevor Groth, Sundance Film Festival

“...damn, I can’t think of another film about addiction with a more accurate view from the inside.”

—Ron Wells, Film Threat

Acts of Worship is a human story of addiction and friendship, loss and redemption, between Alix, a homeless addict, and Digna, a successful photographer, in Manhattan’s Lower Eastside. Success and failure seem to meet, at least on the surface. But are the two women really that different from each other? What they discover, through Alix’s fight to become clean, is that they are, in fact, two sides of the same coin.

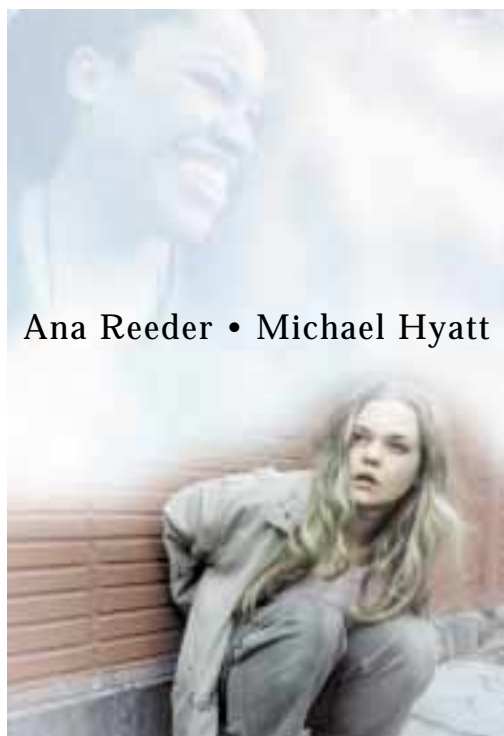
MANIFESTO FILMS

Presents

A Film By

Rosemary Rodriguez

ACTS OF WORSHIP



Ana Reeder • Michael Hyatt

C O N T A C T :

Nadia Leonelli

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ACTS OF WORSHIP

THE FILMMAKERS

Written and Directed by
Rosemary Rodriguez

Produced by
Nadia Leonelli
Fredrik Sundwall
Rosemary Rodriguez

Executive Producer
Nova Media AB

Co-Producers
Annie Flocco
Susan Shopmaker
Nestor Rodriguez

Director of Photography
Luke Geissbühler

Editor
Elizabeth Downer

Production Designer
Johnny Hardesty

Costume Designer
Jan Bohan

Music Composed by
Jim Coleman

Sound Design
Doug Roberts

Casting
Susan Shopmaker

ACTS OF WORSHIP

CAST

Alix Ana Reeder
Digna Michael Hyatt
Mark Christopher Kadish
Anthony Nestor Rodriguez
Dan Brian Burchill
Carl Kelly Cole
Cowboy Robert Gualtieri
Guy at Projects Eddie Sullivan
Pete Caesar Leonardo
Little Louie Simon Gonzalez
Louie James Joseph O'Neil
Maria Heather Robbins
T. Arthur French
Lisa Susan O'Connor
Jack Christopher McCann
Bookseller Kiki Morris
Crazy Woman Jan Bohan
Mike Chris McKinney
Man Buying Book Van Lederer
Lookout Buster
First Man Jimmy Noonan
Second Man Rick Davis
Cuba Alby Guzman
Carla Vickie Tanner
Man on Payphone John Matos
Scalper Dave Lopez
Bustee Cello Ayala
Undercover Cop Mike Kaycheck
Undercover Cop Victor Otero
Bodega Man Vince Verga
Paramedic #1 Thomas Humes
Paramedic #2 Lisa Defuso
Drug Dealer on Street Carter Smith
Steve Matthew Saldivar
Ann Raven Chaney
Mary Jessica Wood
Waiter John Cesare
Philip Johnny Hardesty
Club Patron Shalimar
Crackhead Kimmerie Lynch
Kathy Wren Arthur
Jan Elizabeth Rodriguez
Hairdresser Peter Butler
Fence John Ahearn
Sammy Lee Quinones
Sammy's Mom Ellen Blake
Tiny Woman Dorothy Whyte
Prostitute Shawn Mon'e Richardz
Pregnant Woman Danusia Roberts
Prostitute on Street Bonnie Rose
Frankie Brett Dolisi
Guy #1 Michael Buscemi
Guy #2 Ruperto Van Der Pool
Rick Steve Gevedon

ACTS OF WORSHIP

An Introduction

Seven years ago I sat down to write this story. My story.

Two years previous to that, I was homeless, broke, dirty and in a lot of pain, both emotionally and physically. For several years my life revolved around doing whatever I had to do to pursue my passion — drugs. I lived with shame, guilt and self-hatred for so long because I believed that I just didn't have the willpower to stop. I felt like a loser all the time...

I had bought into the myth that addiction is a matter of willpower. The judgment I felt just isolated me, keeping me further and further away from other people, and from getting help.

ACTS OF WORSHIP is simply my attempt to show that addiction is not so black & white. On the outside, some of us look easier to judge than others, but the truth is that you never really know what someone's been through.

Rosemary Rodriguez
New York, 2001

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

After working for so many years in film helping other people make their dreams come true, it was finally time to focus on my own dream. So I began writing Acts of Worship. Over and over and over, for the next six years. All that time, I was trying to raise money, trying to get the project off the ground. I can remember four years ago, sitting in my office breaking down the script and making a shooting schedule, pretending that the film was going into production soon.

I met Nadia Leonelli when I helped cast Hurricane Streets. She had been supportive over the years, showing up at a formal reading of Acts of Worship, always encouraging me to keep going. Eventually she formed Manifesto Films, with partner Fredrik Sundwall, and they came on as producers. That's when things finally began to happen and I knew Acts of Worship was real.

With the help of casting director Susan Shopmaker, I met Michael Hyatt, who came in to audition for the smaller role of a prostitute. After asking her to read for one of the leads, Digna, I saw that she would bring a strength and a caring that was necessary to draw the other character of Alix to her.

I saw about 100 people for the role of Alix. It was clear to me after one audition that Ana Reeder was Alix. It turned out that she and Michael Hyatt had gone to NYU Grad school together and knew each other very well. The fact that they already had this built-in connection cemented my choice — so much so that we had to push back production two months (in spite of the crew and locations that were all in place) to wait for Ana who was committed to a play at MTC.

A wonderful crew — including production designer Johnny Hardesty, DP Luke Geissbühler, and costume designer Jan Bohan — came together, and we began shooting.

Interiors were shot in an empty renovated Harlem building. After we began shooting, the reason the building was unoccupied became apparent. We were interrupted once by a smoking radiator, once by the electricity that was shut off, once by a frog in the bathtub and another time when there was a huge water bubble on a wall that was about to explode onto the set and all of us! We were truly living in oblivion (and sometimes we still are).

Exteriors were shot all around the East Village. The energy of the streets and their amazing characters kept us going in spite of the freezing temperatures. While shooting one of the final scenes of the film, we had a whole block of neighborhood people looking on — one of whom yelled while camera was rolling: “Miss, Miss...they’re making a movie! Get out of the way!” We loved it because he didn’t know that he was shouting at one of the actors playing a crack addict in the scene.

In the seven years spent pulling this film together, I didn’t realize until after we finished shooting that on a personal level, the whole process had really been about me gaining enough courage to express myself honestly. While shooting, for the first time in my life I didn’t feel obligated to tell people what they wanted to hear. Instead, I was empowered to be true to my own heart. I felt like the most humbled and privileged woman in the world.

ABOUT THE STORY

Acts of Worship is a story of addiction, friendship, loss and redemption, focusing on the relationship between Alix, a young, homeless addict and Digna, a successful photographer, in Manhattan's Lower Eastside.

When Digna discovers Alix unconscious on the stairs of her building, she steps in and offers help despite her own fears and her boyfriend Anthony's protests. Digna befriends Alix and attempts to set her on the path to recovery. Both women find their emotional and ethical cores put to the test.

Through Digna's support, Alix gains the courage to face the truth about her own life, while Digna, unnerved by the fear and insecurities which her impending success have stirred, struggles to avoid the temptation to be drawn into the world of addiction that Alix represents.

On the surface the two women seem to represent success and failure. However, when their lives become intertwined, the similarities between them are exposed, revealing them both to be suffering the same fear that manifests itself in loneliness, self-destruction and isolation.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

ROSEMARY RODRIGUEZ — (Writer/Director)

Rosemary has worked for many years in independent film. Some of her freelance projects include: editor of John Jesurun's La Mama five-screen production of *Black Maria*; sound recordist on Holly Hughes' *The Lady Dick*; apprentice sound editor on Mira Nair's *Salaam Bombay*, winner of *Palm D'Or* at Cannes Film Festival, Academy Award Nominee for Best Foreign Film; projectionist for Ela Troyano's Downtown Film Festival and the Latino Film Festival; and camera operator for live shows at the Palladium.

Most recent projects include research for the upcoming feature *Amos'n'Andy*, for Robert Altman and Harry Belafonte; associate casting director with Susan Shopmaker Casting on Morgan J. Freeman's *Hurricane Streets*, co-winner of the 1997 Sundance Film Festival *Audience Award*; *Southie*, directed by John Shea; DJ Paul's *Ties to Rachel*; Tom Rooney's *You Are Here*.

Rosemary has written articles for The Village Voice, South Beach Magazine, and other articles excerpted in Newsday and The New Yorker.

Prior to going into production, *Acts of Worship* won Best Dramatic Screenplay at the Brooklyn Film Festival, and was a semi-finalist in several competitions, including Chesterfield Film Company's, Breckenridge Festival of Film, Maui Writers Conference, Writer's Network and New Century Writer Awards.

Acts of Worship premiered at 2001 Sundance and Rotterdam Film Festivals.

ANA REEDER — ("Alix")

Films

Acts of Worship
Diary of a City Priest

Dir: Rosemary Rodriguez
Dir: Eugene Martin

Television

Katie Joplin
Law & Order

Series Regular, Warner Bros. TV
Mario Uberti, NBC TV

New York Theater

Killers & Other Family
The Time of the Cuckoo
An Experiment with an Air Pump
Some Voices
Macbeth
Henry VII
Maid

Elizabeth, Rattlestick Theater Co.
June Yaeger, Lincoln Center Theater
Harriet/Kate, MTC
Laura, The New Group
Witch, NYSF
Ensemble, NYSF
Amanda, Lincoln Center Festival

Theater

Fire Eater
Safari

Mavoureen, NY Stage & Film
Actress, Potomac Theatre Project

MICHAEL HYATT — (“Digna”)

Films

Acts of Worship
Pushing Tin

Dir: Rosemary Rodriguez
Dir: Mike Newell

Television

The Beat
OZ
Dharma & Gregg
Law & Order

Recurring, UPN Productions
HBO
ABC
NBC

Theater

Ragtime
Rats
Henry VII

Broadway
Actor’s Studio, Dir: Al Pacino
Dir: Mary Zimmerman

NESTOR RODRIGUEZ — (“Anthony”)

Films

Acts of Worship
Used Parts
Shampoo Horns
Trance

Dir: Rosemary Rodriguez
Dir: Victor Buhler
Dir: Manuel Toledano
Dir: Jonathan Shwartz

Television

T.V. Guide Television
The Fix (current Electrical Host)
Swift Justice
Anti-Violence Project/Dyke TV
2nd Generation

Theater

Betrayal
CheckMate
My Worst Party
Convertible of Love

MCC Summer Play Party ‘99
The Theater Studio
MCC Summer Play Party ‘97
Theatre for the New City

Comedy

Caroline’s Comedy Club Stand Up NY
New York Comedy Club, The Comic Strip

CHRISTOPHER KADISH — (“Marc”)

Christopher appeared in three feature films at this year’s Sundance Film Festival: “Acts of Worship,” directed by Rosemary Rodriguez; Best Dramatic Feature, “The Believer;” and “Diary of a City Priest,” with David Morse. Other film work includes a lead role in the Hamptons Film Festival grand-prize-winning, “Edge City” and a guest star turn in an Emmy-nominated episode of NBC’s “Homicide.” Christopher recently wrapped a supporting role in “A Gentleman’s Game,” directed by J. Mills Goodloe with Gary Sinese and Brian Doyle Murray.

NADIA LEONELLI — (Producer)

While finishing *Acts of Worship*, Leonelli and partner Fredrik Sundwall just completed producing Michael Rymer's (*Angel Baby*, *Queen of the Damned*) *Perfume*, starring Jeff Goldblum, Paul Sorvino, Omar Epps, Peter Gallagher, Sonia Braga and Jared Harris, which also premiered at Sundance. Manifesto is currently preparing *Black Butterflies*, a story about a neurosurgeon in 1930's London.

Prior to Manifesto, Leonelli was an independent producer. She produced Morgan J. Freeman's second feature *Desert Blue*, starring Christina Ricci, Brendan Sexton III, and Casey Affleck, distributed in the US by Samuel Goldwyn Films. Leonelli also co-produced Freeman's first feature *Hurricane Streets*, which was brought to competition at the 1997 Sundance Film Festival where it won *The Audience Award*, *Best Cinematography Award* and *Best Director Award*, and was bought by MGM/UA for the US as well as distributed all over the world. As Line Producer/Production Manager, Leonelli's projects include Avi Neshet's *Raw Nerve*, starring Mario Van Peebles; Michael Di Giacomo's *Animals*, starring Tim Roth, John Turturro and Mickey Rooney; *Somewhere In the City*, starring Sandra Bernhard and Robert Burke; Tania Wexler's *Finding North*; and the Japanese comedy hit *Sleepy Heads*.

FREDRIK SUNDWALL — (Producer)

As co-founder of Manifesto Films, Sundwall brings the vision and creativity that drives the company's growth. In this role, Sundwall leverages eight years of experience in creative management from the publishing world, where he worked as art director, creative director or graphic designer for companies such as IDG (Mac World, Cap and Design, PC News, Computer Sweden), Pentagram Design, and Rolling Stone Magazine and Rolling Stone Press (where he among other things co-designed the book *The Images of Rock & Roll*).

Sundwall holds a Master in Fine Arts from Columbia University's Graduate Film Division, where he directed several short films, like the award-winning *Monday* and *The Tea Party*, and completed his degree directing and producing the feature film *Hostage*. His experience enables him to quickly assess the development needs of any prospective project, share the creative vision of the directors and writers, while keeping the right balance between 'art' and 'business'.

ANNIE FLOCCO — (Co-Producer)

Annie Flocco has line produced/co-produced ***And She Was***, starring Burt Young, Patti D'Arbanville and Mario Cantone, directed by Frank Rainone; ***Super Troopers*** (which screened at the 2001 Sundance Film Festival), starring Brian Cox, Marisa Coughlan, Linda Carter, directed by Jay Chandrasekhar, and which was acquired by Fox Serchlight for distribution; ***She's so Lame***, starring Andrea Bendewald, Amy Ryan and Michelle Hurd; and ***Follow Me Outside***, directed by John Sullivan; ***Jump***, starring James LeGros, Mike McGlone, Ione Skye and Amanda Peet, directed by Justin McCarthy. Before that Flocco worked as a production manager on several independent New York feature films, music videos and commercials. She was also Management Associate at Columbia Pictures Entertainment for two years, where she had hands-on experience in advertising, publicity, domestic and foreign distribution, exhibition and production for film, television and video.

SUSAN SHOPMAKER — (Casting Director)

Filmography

- 2000 **Ball in the House** - directed by Tanya Wexler
- Young Americans** - directed by Stacy Title
- Double Whammy** - directed by Tom DiCillo
- Hedwig and the Angry Inch** - directed by John Cameron Mitchell
- Series 7** - directed by Dan Minahan
- Acts of Worship** - directed by Rosemary Rodriguez
- 1999 **Crime & Punishment in Suburbia** - directed by Rob Schmidt
- Diary of a City Priest** - directed by Eugene Martin
- 1998 **Saturn** - directed by Rob Schmidt
- Trick** - directed by Jim Fall
- World War III** - directed by Robert Stone
- Desert Blue** - directed by Morgan J. Freeman
- 1997 **Story of a Bad Boy** - directed by Tom Donaghy
- Shadrach** - directed by Susanna Styron
- Tears of a Clown** - directed by Mandel Holland
- 1996 **Hurricane Streets** - directed by Morgan J. Freeman
- Obsession** - directed by Peter Sehr
- Ties to Rachel** - directed by Jon Resnik