

# **CHARM CITY**

a film by  
**Marilyn Ness**

## **LOGLINE**

CHARM CITY delivers a candid portrait of citizens, police, community advocates, and government officials on the frontlines during three years of unparalleled, escalating violence in Baltimore. The film highlights the positive actions undertaken by groups and individuals, optimistically offering humanity as common ground.

## **SYNOPSIS**

Over the course of three years of filming — during a period when the city's nickname "Charm City" has never seemed less apt — we meet community members, local elected officials, and law enforcement personnel in some of the toughest and most economically depressed areas of Baltimore, including the Eastern District, made famous by *The Wire*.

Directed by renowned documentary producer Marilyn Ness, (*Cameraperson*; *Trapped*; *E-Team*) the film is structured around a small constellation of memorable characters living and working in Baltimore during a period of sharp increase in homicides. At times, their circumstances highlight the current crisis of violence and distrust between civilians, officials, and police officers, and at times their actions help point a way forward. As we move between occasionally intersecting and often unpredictable lives, the camera forces intentional shifts in perspective insisting the audience consider new and often conflicting points of view. Challenging intellectual complacency, CHARM CITY combines the intimacy of close-up observational footage in the field with a lyrical score by Todd Griffin (*Life*, *Animated*, *One Of Us*) to effect a sensitive and profoundly humane portrait of those surviving in, and fighting for, the city they call home.

CHARM CITY tackles, head on, the difficult circumstances facing both police and citizens ostensibly working toward the same goals but locked in an exhausting cycle of conflict. The film foregrounds the focused and determined actions taken to improve life on both sides, and is, ultimately, a cautiously optimistic portrait of a city at a pivotal moment.

## **DIRECTORS' STATEMENT**

"Like a lot of verite films, we couldn't have known what was coming as we started filming. What began as a search to better understand the divide between police and citizens landed us in Baltimore during the three most violent years in the city's history. We found ourselves with a constellation of characters — from police officers to community members to politicians — all tasked, in some way, with standing in the maelstrom. Instead of looking at the growing problem of violence in our cities through the castigating lens of the nightly news, we decided to do something radical. We looked at each of our characters and their daily struggles with deep empathy. The result, for me, was profound.

The stark reality is that everyone becomes less safe when police and citizens cannot overcome decades-long pervasive distrust and despair. We are seeing this in cities across

America including Baltimore, Chicago, and St. Louis as homicides and gun violence climb at a shocking pace. Unless we tackle the complexity of these questions — many of which have been neglected in polite conversation for so long, those conversations have only gotten more difficult — we will never get to the heart of what spurs violence and collective trauma in our cities. In this post-2016-election world where the echo chambers drown out productive conversations, CHARM CITY dares to wade into the most challenging questions facing police, citizens, and the leaders tasked with protecting them. Though they are all ostensibly working toward the same goals we untangle why they are seemingly, eternally, at odds with one another. Beginning with film screenings that show the profound humanity of the subjects involved in CHARM CITY, our intention is to build empathy where currently there is opposition, in order to open a long needed national conversation where everyone can feel safe enough to participate.”

## **ABOUT THE FILMMAKER**

Whether she is producing or directing, Marilyn Ness has created a body of work that addresses complex social problems through deeply human stories, artfully told. *Cameraperson*, *Trapped*, *E-Team*, and *1971* were all made with this ethos in mind; each of them were intended to entertain, enrage, energize, and emotionally impact an audience.

Like CHARM CITY, the stories that draw Marilyn as a director, are communal tapestries that explore difficult and contentious moments through the humanity of its subjects. In her first feature, *Bad Blood*, she explored a devastating moment in medical history, through the lenses of all of those who lived it: the patients, the doctors, the drug company executives, and the government regulators. Never before had all of those viewpoints been represented in one film. And yet, when all was said and done, the film was commended by all sides for being an accurate portrayal of the experience they lived through. Marilyn's strength lies in convincing each of the “sides” to share their truth and to honor that truth with a nuanced portrayal that rejects simplification.

Similarly, the people in CHARM CITY — and the multi-layered issues facing the citizens of cities plagued by violence — deserve to be heard in all of their complexity. Because when audiences can empathize with subjects, and see their own reality reflected back at them without judgement, there is a willingness to engage in complex conversation from which we all have much to learn. That, to Marilyn, is the unique power of film.

## **PRODUCTION NOTES**

During the difficult weeks and months following the death of Freddie Gray, and subsequent unrest, filming in Baltimore required a delicate approach. Once the nightly news cameras departed and the images of Baltimore on fire receded from the national news, our crews remained, much to the surprise of our subjects. But filming with the ‘policed’ and the police is delicate work. we realized early on that the same crews could not be seen getting out of a police car in the neighborhoods where we were filming with community members; and vice versa, our crews couldn’t be seen hanging out on the

stoop with the citizens the police routinely patrolled. For that reason, we intentionally chose to film in two different districts (Baltimore is divided into nine police districts) when following citizens and police. For the safety of our crew and, more importantly, our subjects, we thus decided to have two separate film teams. Andre Lambertson filmed mostly solo in the Rose Street neighborhood allowed him to develop a tremendous level of trust and intimacy in his footage. John Benam filmed the police with the support of sound recordists, restricting most of his filming to South Baltimore and therefore never crossing paths with the East Baltimore team. Only Marilyn and her local co-producer, Meryam Bouadjemi, would visit subjects on both sides; tremendous care was taken about who was on location when the camera was present. The result of this crew setup can be seen in the delicate interweaving of the two communities, allowing Baltimore to come to life as a character as much as the subjects in the film.

## **THE CHARACTERS**

### **Mr. C, Alex, and the Rose Street Community Center**

In the heart of Baltimore's Eastern District, made famous by *The Wire* for its blighted row houses which were home to the violent drug trade, sits the Rose Street Community Center. **Clayton "Mr. C" Guyton**, its founder and patriarch, has earned the respect of local gang members, drug dealers, and those just trying to survive in the neighborhood known as the "Middle East." The beating heart of Rose Street, Mr. C shows us the power of empathy and humanity in battling years of community-wide trauma. Together, Mr. C and his Rose Street crew kept their four square-blocks free of homicides for 18 months. But when Mr. C is hospitalized, Rose Street sees a sudden uptick in violence, and lays the bare the fragility of the peace Mr. C keeps.

### **Alex Long**

Alex Long is one of Mr. C's many "sons," not by birth but by choosing. Alex has long been a product of the Baltimore streets. His father was in prison by the time Alex was six, and he was shuttled into foster care by the time he was eight. Alex found a home at Rose Street, and helps Mr. C with his homegrown programs including neighborhood trash collection, gang mediation and his own brand of de-escalation training. And though Alex formalizes his role as a neighborhood peacekeeper by joining Safe Streets, the Baltimore equivalent of the better-known Chicago Interrupters, we learn this cannot protect him from the violence engulfing Baltimore.

### **Captain Monique Brown**

This 16-year police veteran knows what it's like to grow up on the hard streets of Baltimore. Dressed in her uniform, she seems an unlikely ally in understanding the lasting effect of trauma in her community; but we learn her empathy runs deep. A rising star in the department, we witness this mother and grandmother attempt to restore the image of police officers in the Southern District both to the citizens she serves and the officers she mentors. All the while, we witness the toll taken on those who have pledged to be police officers in Baltimore.

### **Officer Eric Winston**

Baltimore born and bred—the ideal candidate according to most experts trying to heal a police/citizen relationship that has long been fractured — Officer Eric Winston began patrolling the Southern District in the days after the unrest that followed the death of Freddie Gray in police custody. Watching Winston work, the audience sees the long-term consequences of dealing with trauma day after day and begins to understand that perhaps policing isn't really working for the police either.

### **Officer John Gregorio**

Officer John Gregorio has served in the Southern District with distinction winning multiple commendations, including the Officer of the Year Award for his six years of service. Wanting to be a police officer since he was a young boy, Officer Gregorio left his life in the suburbs and confronts the entrenched hardships in Baltimore. He is keenly aware that his uniform carries a heavy weight; he bears the burden of the actions of all of his brothers and sisters in blue and he is considered the face of government to most people he sees throughout the day. With so many of his calls falling beyond the scope of policing, and reliant on other agencies to provide the support so often needed, Officer Gregorio must live with the consequences of a system that routinely fails the people it is intended to serve.

### **Councilman Brandon Scott**

The youngest City Council member ever elected in Baltimore, Brandon Scott pledged to serve his community through politics since he was a young boy growing up in a violent part of Baltimore. As we follow him through the three most violent years in recent Baltimore history, we watch as Scott uses his position of power to hold the police — and the rest of the city's agencies — accountable. His ethos is a constant drum beat: "Violence is a public health issue and it is not for the police alone to solve." A bridge-builder and innovator, Scott is trying everything he can imagine to change the entrenched positions that drive the incarceration and violence rates that plague Baltimore.

## **THE FILM TEAM**

### **Marilyn Ness, DIRECTOR / PRODUCER**

Marilyn Ness is a two-time Emmy®, Peabody, and DuPont Award winning filmmaker, is a member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, and works as a producer and a director. Her most recent film, *Cameraperson* (dir. Kirsten Johnson) premiered at Sundance 2016, was released by the Criterion Collection, and was shortlisted for the 2017 Academy Awards®. *Trapped* (dir. Dawn Porter), which premiered at the 2016 Sundance Film Festival, received the Jury Prize for Social Impact Filmmaking, broadcast on PBS, and was awarded a Peabody. She also produced Katy Chevigny and Ross Kauffman's feature

documentary *E-Team*, which premiered at Sundance Film Festival in 2014 and was bought by Netflix Original, and later earned two Emmy® nominations. Ness also produced Johanna Hamilton's feature documentary *1971* which premiered at the 2014 Tribeca Film Festival, broadcast on Independent Lens in 2015, and earned an Emmy® nomination. She directed the documentary feature film *Bad Blood: A Cautionary Tale* that broadcast nationally on PBS in 2011.

### **Katy Chevigny, PRODUCER**

Katy Chevigny is an award-winning filmmaker and co-founder of Big Mouth Productions. Most recently, she produced *Dark Money*, which premiered at the 2018 Sundance Film Festival, and she directed one of the storylines in Kartemquin Films' documentary series *Hard Earned*, winner of a 2016 Alfred I. DuPont Award, which explores the lives of five American families struggling to get by in today's economy. She co-directed (with Ross Kauffman) the Emmy®-nominated documentary *E-TEAM*, which premiered at the 2014 Sundance Film Festival. Chevigny has produced and/or directed 12 critically acclaimed feature-length documentary films through Big Mouth, including *Deadline*, *Election Day* and also *1971* with Marilyn Ness. Her work has won multiple awards, been broadcast on networks including PBS, NBC, HBO, Netflix, Arte/ZDF and has played at festivals around the world.

### **Julie Goldman, EXECUTIVE PRODUCER**

Julie Goldman founded Motto Pictures in 2009. She is an Oscar®-nominated and Emmy Award-winning producer and executive producer of documentary feature films. Julie is producer of *Life, Animated* and executive producer of *Weiner*, both of which premiered at the 2016 Sundance Film Festival. *Life, Animated* won the U.S. Documentary Directing Award, was released by The Orchard and has been nominated for the 2017 Academy Award. *Weiner* won the U.S. Documentary Grand Jury Prize, was released by IFC Films & Showtime and was shortlisted for the 2017 Academy Award®. In 2016 Julie also produced and executive produced features including: *The Music of Strangers*, *Indian Point*, *Solitary*, *Enlighten Us*, *Southwest of Salem* and *Chicken People*. Previously, she executive produced *Best of Enemies* and several Emmy®-nominated films: *3½ Minutes*, *The Kill Team*, *Art and Craft* and *1971*. Julie produced *Gideon's Army*, *Manhunt*, the Oscar shortlisted *God Loves Uganda*, *The Great Invisible*, the Oscar shortlisted *Ai Weiwei: Never Sorry* and *Buck*, which was Oscar shortlisted and one of 2011's top five grossing documentaries. Julie consulted on the Academy Award-winning *The Cove* and produced the Oscar shortlisted *Sergio*. Julie is on the Board of the Producers Guild of America (PGA) and a member of Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS).

### **Don Bernier, EDITOR**

Don Bernier is an Emmy-nominated documentary film editor. Most recently, he edited *An Inconvenient Sequel*, a follow-up to the award-winning 2006 Al Gore film, which premiered at the 2017 Sundance Film Festival. Bernier's editing credits also include *Audrie & Daisy* (Netflix), which had its world premiere at the 2016 Sundance Film Festival; *The Genius of Marian* (POV/PBS), which premiered at the 2013 Tribeca Film Festival; the Peabody Award-winning bio, *Eames: The Architect and the Painter* (American Masters/PBS); and *The Botany of Desire* (PBS), based on author Michael Pollan's best-selling book. Additionally, he has been a contributing editor on numerous award-winning documentaries, including *The*

*Overnighters*, which premiered at the 2014 Sundance Film Festival. He began his editing career at David Grubin Productions in New York, cutting several episodes of the Emmy®-winning PBS series, "The Mysterious Human Heart" and "The Jewish Americans". During the last decade, Bernier's work has screened internationally on the National Geographic Channel, Netflix, Showtime, HBO, PBS and numerous other venues. Bernier also works regularly as an editorial consultant, and is a Sundance Institute Documentary Edit and Story Lab Fellow.

**Andre Lambertson, CO-PRODUCER and DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY**

Andre Lambertson is a New York-based cinematographer, photojournalist, teacher, and filmmaker committed to documenting stories of hope, healing, and transformation. He creates award-winning photo essays on social issues have been published in Time, US News and World Report, Life, National Geographic, The New York Times Magazine, The Ford Foundation, The George Soros Foundation and The Smithsonian Museum. He has taught at the International Center of Photography, RISD, FIT and Fordham University. He has received five "Picture of the Year" Awards, The World Press Photo Award, The OSF Media Fellowship, and four Pulitzer Center grants for various projects in Haiti, Africa and Jamaica. His most significant body of work, "Ashes", is a study of juvenile violence in America. He has been a Director of Photography for documentaries in Africa, Tibet, Peru, Brazil, Haiti, and the US.

**Todd Griffin, COMPOSER**

T. Griffin has composed scores for over 40 feature length films, and dozens of live and multimedia projects. Notable titles include the Academy Award®-nominated *Life, Animated* and multiple festival award winners *Quest*, *The Overnighters*, and *Welcome to Leith* as well as the recently Oscar® Shortlisted *One of Us*. He has composed and toured live film/music events with filmmakers including Sam Green, Jem Cohen, Brent Green and Esther Robinson. These shows have toured internationally and been presented by The Barbican, BAM Next Wave, The Walker Art Center, The Meltdown Festival, Big Ears Festival, and dozens of other festivals and museums. Besides his work as a film composer and solo artist he has worked as a player and/or producer with luminaries of the independent music world including Patti Smith, Vic Chesnutt, Mary Margaret O'Hara and members of The Ex, Dirty Three, Fugazi, and Godspeed You! Black Emperor. He was a fellow at the Sundance Composers' Lab in 2008, and has twice been nominated for Cinema Eye Honors for Original Music Score. He is based in Brooklyn, New York.

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