



VANISHING ANGLE

PRESENTS

BEAST BEAST

A FILM BY DANNY MADDEN

STARRING SHIRLEY CHEN, WILL MADDEN, JOSE ANGELES

EXECUTIVE PRODUCED BY ALEC BALDWIN

85 minutes | U.S.A. | English



SYNOPSIS

Three interwoven stories of youth navigating identity, first love, petty crime, and gun violence in a Southern, American town. Brimming with energy and style, *Beast Beast* captures what it means to come of age in an era marked by technology and social media, where violent clashes awaken dormant passions and teenagers are faced with growing up all too quickly.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I have a tendency to be emotionally affected by local news stories. I'll find myself internalizing events, casting characters and settings from my life, putting myself in it and restaging from the different perspectives involved. How would I handle this? Would I react with grace, or would it break me? Would I keep driving? Fight back? Run? Help? How scared would I be?

This film was born from that tendency. There were enough articles on home defense scenarios, the complex stacking of fears and firearms, and I kept finding myself shocked at the lack of humanity in how people responded. In the words of interviewees and especially in the comments online these situations become so coldly politicized, and human consideration seems entirely left out.

So I built a story around an incident like this and wrote three parts for people I know. I sliced my brain into thirds and gave a piece to each of them—the theater kid, the skateboarder, the filmmaker. And to personalize it further for me, we decided to film in my home town in Georgia. In the streets I know, the school I know, the house I grew up in. That intimacy was extremely important for me. It grounds the film in my mind, and hopefully that detail-driven specificity strengthens the experience for viewers. It comes all the way down to designing the sound of the film, which I did with the same meticulous ear. That school bell, that train horn, those cicadas at night.

This is a three way tragedy, and I wanted to examine what that meant from all sides. To show the fiery exuberance I felt in high school and how it can be snuffed out. Misguided hobbies, misguided friends. Desires to please or to be accepted. And to really ask the question, how do you process this kind of grief? After the shock of an event like this, how do you keep moving through such a confused world? But the idea wasn't to make it drab and joyless. The strongest stories to me are the ones that engage and make you laugh and put you right on board with the characters, then when some mighty turn happens you're right there with them. So we really tried to make sure the movie keeps a certain pulse, an energy that brings involvement and compassion. We should see where Adam is coming from as much as Krista or Nito. We should be with them.

The film is designed to see those crossovers and similarities between the characters, each of them making morally questionable decisions from places of pain. This is what happens when those decisions slam together. We've tried to capture that cause and effect, the complexities behind stories like this, and I'm hoping people will enjoy the film, be moved by what these characters have gone through, and carry it with them.

Q&A WITH DANNY MADDEN

Can you talk about the origin of the film?

The idea came from a combination of characters I'd had in mind for three separate films. And when I was finishing up the short film "Krista" I was wanting to see more of her story in the context of the town she's living in. So with a Steinbeck-inspired approach to saying something about a place by examining the characters within (*Tortilla Flat*, *Cannery Row*), I set off writing.

What is your writing process with this film given the seriousness of the subject matter? How much did you research?

I tried to attack the story as non-judgmentally as possible. These are three characters, each with their own set of interests. It's easy to show something like gun culture in this heavy sort of way, but we tried to steer clear of that. Tried to really approach it from a character-minded place. We did a lot of research in the world of influencers and subscriber-minded video making. Other research brought us to so many stories about home defense and how frequently this scenario plays out in America. And the internet comments and reactions to those articles is something we felt we needed to include in the film, as it's a big part of the conversation.

Actress Shirley Chen is a true discovery, how did you find each of the actors? Can you talk about the casting process?

Shirley came to an open audition for "Krista." We were filming at her high school and she was one of the students who came in to read. In the process of that short we found her to be real creative kin, a dedicated maniac who won't move on till it feels like we've really explored and nailed a moment.

Will Madden is my brother and we came up together making movies, so there is a short hand and no barriers of formality in our collaborating. I wrote the part for Will because I knew he'd be able to bring the dimension and humanistic quality to this complex a character. I knew I could ask that of him and he would deliver.

Jose Angeles I met through our friend—and the film's colorist—Sean Wells. Sean was making a music video and found Jose, a Bay Area native, through the sign-spinning scene. He showed me a reel of Jose's and that moment is recreated in the film, when Krista watches him skateboarding and flipping and frolicking and feels like she's got to know more about this guy. So I met him and put him on camera for some screen tests and his inherent performance tendencies gave me the confidence his could hold his own in a feature.

How did you prepare them for each of their roles?

With Shirley and Jose, the roles were written to be very close to who they are as people, so the preparation was more in the realm of what it would be like to actually *be in a movie*. Filming a light, fun scene then turning around and doing something heavy. We talked a lot about how to reach those dark emotional places. And with Will, he's been doing theater for years and a big part of his process is heaps of research. He plunges so far into the world of the character, fully examining by reading all he can, watching all he can, and going out and spending time with people in that world. Also, through prep he became a regular at the shooting range and trained hard for that firearm dexterity.

Your real life brother, Will, plays "Adam" in the film. It is such a tough role. What was that conversation like when you first brought him this idea? How did both of you talk about his character's motivation as the character is multifaceted.

Casting Will is like having a co-writer for the character. You can trust he's going to do the work and not only keep everything authentic, but expand what's there.

So when I brought him Adam, I figured he'd be up for the challenge. We talk a lot about the importance of examining characters that don't think exactly like us, to find the crossover in our personalities and experiences and approach it from there.

We want to be respectful about it, and thorough, neither of us interested in putting caricatures on screen. And yes there are controversial aspects of who Adam is but he's a vulnerable person too, like the others. His motivations are human—we talked about loneliness and isolation, computer solace, having a hobby that has a higher potential for destruction than others might.

We drew some from people we knew growing up in Georgia, and we figured the less judgemental we were about it the more space there is for the audience to relate in their own ways.

Can you talk about some of the challenges during production?

Not having too many resources, we put our faith in detailed labor to make it possible. Storyboards, precise scheduling, rehearsals for the tough scenes, etc. We were thorough in our prep, bracing for the lightning quick flurry of many characters in many locations. But it was summertime in Georgia so there were bound to be a couple rains crashing in. The only real time that bumped us, though, was the night we were on top of a department store, schlepping lighting gear and humans up to the slick-wet squishy rooftop. Suddenly everyone's cold and wet, and it's loud up there so sound gets screwed, and we're over schedule with fifteen shots still to get. But you muscle through that stuff and everyone's better for it the next time around.

Also, there are a handful of scenes that have lots of background actors which almost always slows things way down. But the fact that we brought in mostly people we know—neighbors, friends of the family, students at my mom's school—created the right energy, and they were extra attentive and enthusiastic and we were able to roll through those scenes without massive delays.

There is a very particular shooting style, why choose this vérité format?

It was very important for me that this film felt naturalistic, like we're watching *real* people in a *believable* world. The camera technique allows for play in performance and framing, and I was trying to leave as much room as possible for discovery. Especially with two lead actors who have never really been in a movie before. In each scene I wanted to stumble upon moments that were more natural and stronger than what was in the script, and for the most part I think we pulled that off with the help of a relatively freestyle camera.

There are so many shootings in the U.S. in recent years, BEAST BEAST can be seen as a time capsule of this generation. To put the film in more of a context, audiences watching the film today will have a very different reaction to audiences watching the film say 10, 15, or 20 years from now. What do you hope the viewers can take away from after the film ends?

There is a helpless feeling that comes with trauma. Your stomach sinks. Your brain bounces in a million directions trying to grab hold of anything to correct the balance. I remember falling into a spin after escaping getting mugged in my neighborhood. I obsessed over how I would confront the guy if I saw him on the street some time. Would I hit him? Try and talk with him? What would feel like justice for the shock and anxiety he caused? How long would it take before I felt okay walking that street?

With all these shootings happening, I can't help but imagine how profound that helpless feeling must be for so many victims, their families, their friends. And every time I read about a new incident my mind cycles back through it. This story is an exploration of that.

I hope the news will be different in 10 or 20 years. But what we're trying to examine with this film are the different paths and perspectives leading to a tragedy like this. I hope the film leaves questions in the audience that could help them field and analyze and deal with these news stories that keep coming. It doesn't seem productive or enhancing the conversation to think of criminals as just criminals or gun people as just that. If we are able to see the different people involved as human beings, flawed and struggling in their own ways, then perhaps we can move a little closer to solutions.

And as is the case with any form of storytelling, if people walk out and say, *Hm I never thought about it like that before*, then I think the film is contributing something.

BIOS

Danny Madden (Writer/Director)

Danny Madden is a director and writer, known for BEAST BEAST (2020), David Gilmour's THE GIRL IN THE YELLOW DRESS (2015), and creative directing THE WOLF OF SNOW HOLLOW (2020) and THUNDER ROAD (2018). Madden grew up in the Southeast, making movies with brothers and friends under the moniker ORNANA. His freelance career was built on directing, animation, and sound design. In 2012, he was listed on Filmmaker Magazine's "25 New Faces of Independent Film" after '(Notes on) Biology' won the animation prize at SXSW. He has directed 11 Vimeo staff picks, including 'Krista' which won the first ever Staff Picks Award at SXSW in 2018 and inspired BEAST BEAST. He has also directed video shorts for PBS, HBO's 'Random Acts of Flyness.

Matt Miller (Producer)

Matt Miller is the owner of critically-acclaimed production company Vanishing Angle and is a Spirit Award nominated producer. His films are regular favorites of festivals like Sundance, SXSW, and Cannes. Frequent collaborator of writer/director Patrick Wang, Miller has produced all of his features including A BREAD FACTORY (Spirit Award nominee), GRIEF OF OTHERS (Cannes Film Festival), and IN THE FAMILY (Spirit Award nominee). Other feature producing credits include Jim Cummings' THE WOLF OF SNOW HOLLOW (MGM/Orion), Danny Madden's BEAST BEAST (Sundance Film Festival), Jim Cummings' THUNDER ROAD (Grand Jury Award at SXSW), Hanna Ladoul and Marco La Via's WE THE COYOTES (Cannes Film Festival), Dennis Hauck's TOO LATE (starring John Hawkes and Crystal Reed), David Heinz' AMERICAN FOLK (Best Feature, Cleveland International Film Festival), Sean Mullin's AMIRA & SAM (Jury Award, Napa Valley Film Festival), and Scott Rodgers' THE DRAMATICS. His series and short producing credits include STARGATE ORIGINS (MGM), MATPAT'S GAME LAB (Streamy Award), THE ROBBERY (Sundance Film Festival), and KRISTA (Vimeo Staff Picks Award, SXSW), among numerous others. Miller currently has several projects on the festival circuit including Jim Cummings' THE BETA TEST (Berlinale), Mari Walker's SEE YOU THEN (SXSW). Miller also has several projects in post production including Josh Ruben's WEREWOLVES WITHIN (Ubisoft), and baseball documentary IT AIN'T OVER.

Alec Baldwin (Executive Producer)

Since 1980, Alec Baldwin has appeared in numerous productions on stage, in films and on television. He has received a Tony nomination (A Streetcar Named Desire, 1992) an Oscar nomination (The Cooler, 2004) and has won three Emmy awards, three Golden Globes and seven consecutive Screen Actors Guild Awards as Best Actor in a Comedy Series for his role on NBC-TV's 30 Rock. His films include THE HUNT FOR RED OCTOBER, GLENGARRY GLEN ROSS, MALICE, THE EDGE, IT'S COMPLICATED, BLUE JASMINE, STILL ALICE, MISSION IMPOSSIBLE: ROGUE NATION, and THE BOSS BABY among many others.

Casey Bader (Executive Producer)

Casey Bader is a producer and the director of development at Alec Baldwin's El Dorado Pictures, a NY-based production company collaborating with emerging voices in both the narrative and doc spaces. Bader has executive produced Danny Madden's BEAST BEAST (Sundance 2020), Anthony Baxter's documentary, FLINT and Francisca Alegria's forthcoming feature debut, THE COW THAT SANG A SONG ABOUT THE FUTURE. Producing credits include Adam Meek's short, UNION COUNTY (Berlinale 2020) and Matthew Puccini's short, LAVENDER (Sundance 2019).

Jim Cummings (Executive Producer)

Jim Cummings is the Sundance and South by Southwest winning writer and director of Thunder Road and The Wolf of Snow Hollow. As an independent filmmaker, writer, and director working to find new ways to connect with audiences, Jim has proven to be an action oriented thought leader, mentoring with Sundance Institute's Collab and founding the Short to Feature Lab. He has been giving speeches at places like SXSW since 2014 and doing articles with Filmmaker Magazine and Ted Hope's Hope For Film about the state of independent cinema, and what comes next. His films have received awards and critical acclaim around the world. He is also known for ranting on Twitter and trying to convert filmmakers at film festival happy hours.

Tara Ansley (Producer)

Tara Ansley is the founder of Wanderwell Entertainment & Co-Owner of the iconic horror & sci-fi brands FANGORIA, STARLOG, and GOREZONE. FANGORIA STUDIOS produces and distributes both fiction and non-fiction content across all platforms. Projects include ; Tragedy Girls (Hulu), St. Agatha (Netflix), Summer Night (Netflix), Rollers, and the upcoming feature My Dead Dad Executive Produced By Declan Baldwin of Big Indie (Manchester By The Sea, Captain Fantastic). Volunteer & philanthropy work includes Sundance Institute, Safety For Sarah Campaign, and other nonprofit activities the majority surrounding female education and equality. Tara has taught film on the Pine Ridge Reservation and is an advocate for indigenous filmmakers. Featured on Forbes.com, Mashable, Bustle, and in various motion picture outlets.

Benjamin Wiessner (Producer)

Benjamin Wiessner is a producer and creative distributor. He was named to Filmmaker Magazine's 25 New Faces of Indie Film in 2012 as part of ornana films, where he began producing and self-distributing shorts and features with broadcast partners across the world. He has produced bunches of short films in both hand-drawn animation and live action, with awards at festivals including SxSw and Sundance. He has also worked on fifteen features, including producing THUNDER ROAD (SxSw 2018 Grand Jury Prize). Raised by educators, he frequently speaks about distribution and producing at film schools, festivals, and conferences such as The Southern Producer's Lab, Sundance Institute's Self-Distribution Workshop, AFM, Cannes as well as many others. In 2018, he co-founded the Short to Feature Lab.

Vanishing Angle (Production Company)

Vanishing Angle is a full-service production studio that nurtures the freshest voices in the independent film community with award-winning films and series. Recent feature film credits include THE WOLF OF SNOW HOLLOW (MGM/Orion), BEAST BEAST (Sundance); GREENER GRASS (Sundance); THUNDER ROAD (Spirit Award nominee and Grand Jury Prize at SXSW); A BREAD FACTORY (Spirit Award nominee); WE THE COYOTES (Cannes Film Festival); TOO LATE (starring Academy Award® Nominee John Hawkes); and THE GRIEF OF OTHERS (SXSW and Cannes Film Festival); among others. Series and short credits include STARGATE ORIGINS (MGM), MATPAT'S GAME LAB (Streamy Award), THE ROBBERY (Sundance Film Festival), HOW DOES IT START (Sundance Film Festival), among numerous others. Vanishing Angle is currently in post-production on Ubisoft's WEREWOLVES WITHIN (directed by Josh Ruben) and Jim Cummings' newest film THE BETA TEST. www.vanishingangle.com

Shirley Chen (Actress)

Shirley Chen is an actress who was awarded "Best Acting in a Narrative Short" at SXSW 2018 for her role in the Vanishing Angle short "Krista." Her television credits include ABC's "Speechless" (2017), Disney XD's "Gamer's Guide" (2016), and NBC's "Parenthood" (2014). When not acting, Shirley moonlights as a Harvard student, double-majoring in History & Literature on the Asian-American Studies track and Theater, Dance, & Media. In 2018, as a freshman at the university, Shirley became one of the first six women cast in the Hasty Pudding Theatricals, America's oldest theatrical group. Most recently, Shirley acted as a lead in Man of God at the Geffen Playhouse in Los Angeles and is currently filming a new independent film, "HOTLINE."

Will Madden (Actor)

After an upbringing admiring and making movies with his brothers in Peachtree City, Georgia, Will got his degree studying acting from the Boston University School of Theatre and the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art before spending several years touring Shakespeare and performing in regional theatres. His most recent film appearance was in Orion Pictures' The Wolf of Snow Hollow.. His projects have premiered at Sundance, Cannes, SXSW, and played dozens of domestic and international festivals.

Jose Angeles (Actor)

Jose Angeles was raised in South San Francisco, CA where he grew up skateboarding and filming stunts with his brother Raphael. Both an actor and stuntman, Angeles has performed numerous times at Universal Studios Orlando and was stunt double for actor "Steven Yuen" in the movie "Sorry to Bother You". Jose won awards for his role as "Junior Mendoza" in the short film "I Hate the Color Red" and became the 2017 World Champion Sign Spinner. Jose made a skateboard parkour video with YouTube celebrity "Devin Supertramp" which has over 3 million views on YouTube.