

PROJECT DIGEST | Dep Kirkland

[Current: 03-Feb-2020]

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FEATURE FILMS

MsTRIAL | The Film [Adapted from the Stage Play]

MsTRIAL is the story of an internationally famous trial lawyer accused of raping his beautiful, brilliant young associate after an alcohol-fueled celebration of victory in a major case.

Adapted from the stage play called, by the *Los Angeles Times*: “A Potent Salvo In Détente Between The Sexes.” The STAGE version of MsTRIAL is currently running Off-Broadway at New World Stages. The play closes February 2, 2020. The FILM is to follow, to shoot tentatively in Savannah in the Spring of 2020.

From the *Los Angeles Times* review of the LA production, “A society in cultural flux that looks to its legal system to supply an ethical foundation inevitably falls short in the gray areas of human conduct.”

BREATHING RECOMMENDED

A disaffected young beauty’s life as a South Florida townie and self-diagnosed lost soul is disrupted without warning by two elderly women – a lonely, bitter, older version of herself with a mysterious, aristocratic past – and a wacky, irreverent pest with an unbridled joy for life. In the often soul-wracking clash that follows, young Grace discovers a faith-restoring truth: you can be alive at 75 or dead at 30; it’s all about choice. She also finds a grandmother she never knew she had, and might not want to keep, considering who it is.

Dorothy (77) and Grace (30 yesterday) are as good as dead or, as their new friend Jean calls them, “two wild ponies, all fenced in, not a fence in sight.” Dorothy was once the outrageous young wife of the first-born prince of one of America’s wealthiest families. He died, in Vietnam. Cut off and emotionally brutalized by his family after his death – the family that had never accepted her in the first place – she’s now a bitter old woman living in a little Boca Raton duplex, surrounded by her antiques, a closet full of useless minks, and tolerating life until it’s mercifully over.

Grace is a townie from nearby Deerfield. A true beauty and smart as a whip, she lost her mother early and her father to a bar fight, was raised by her uncle Harry, couldn’t afford college, and manages Harry’s Market, a gourmet market catering to the snow-birds. Grace is lost and confused, about everything. As Grace puts it, “I’m allergic to my life, it can’t possibly be mine, nothing fits.” Dorothy shops at Harry’s though it’s miles from her home. And she always ends up in Grace’s line, for some unexplained reason.

When Dorothy is mugged in the market’s parking lot, Grace runs to her aid and these two wild ponies’ lives collide in ways they never expected. The catalyst: Jean Bovie. A very alive 75 with her own softball team and an irrepressible, irreverent spirit, Jean turns the lives of Dorothy and Grace inside out and, in the process of her own assisted suicide, tears down the fences and forces to the surface the secret of Dorothy’s trips to Harry’s Market and her unusual concern with the path of young Grace’s life.

[Lauren Bacall and Frances Sternhagen previously attached, while looking for “the girl” for Grace. Submitted to Lesli Linka Glatter for interest, through David Kanter (Anonymous Content). Judy Henderson to cast.]

NOC NOC

When a Washington, D.C. attorney goes missing on a trip to meet his accused terrorist clients' families in Peshawar, Pakistan, his formidable, headstrong fiancée decides to find him herself, risking her life in a deadly confrontation, not only with a Taliban cell plotting a terror attack on America, but also with her own country's clandestine intelligence services—those who know her true, deeply classified identity, and choose to use it in ways she never expected.

[NOC NOC introduces a (e.g., example only) “Female Jason Bourne” in the person of ALYSSA MANER (a false identity). A potential franchise (with changing identities – we may never know her real name – or it may be revealed in the final film of a series). Or, a high-concept television series.]

A supposedly naïve young female systems analyst from suburban D.C. takes off to Pakistan to find her lawyer fiancé who's gone missing after traveling to Peshawar to meet with those who have hired him to represent a pair of accused terrorists. Alyssa Maner creates a s*** storm in Pakistan, as well as major ripples within the American intelligence community as a frantic, headstrong, young American. Alyssa is also performing her assigned duties as a deep cover (NOC = No Organizational Cover) intelligence operative, while monitored and tracked in Pakistan not only by the Pakistani ISI, but also by elements of the CIA, the DOD/DIA, and other shadowy operatives of her own government. When she is caught in a triangulated mix of gunfire, laser-guided bombs, and the brutal leaders of a Taliban terror cell in the middle of nowhere, she is left to rely on a young testosterone-driven Britney Spears fan, and her own extensive, and deadly field training. And even then, the risk is not over, what she now knows having become too dangerous, even to her own government.

LUCIFER'S GAME

A security expert son joins his sketchy former friend and one-time raw-edged, volcanic girlfriend to stage a phony cyber-heist at the Reno casino where his despised ex-FBI dad is now head of security—seeking revenge but, in the madness and mayhem that follows, discovering an uncomfortable truth instead—driving him to risk his own life to save the man he thought he hated.

CIRCLE DANCE [Adapted from the Stage Play, produced in New York and Los Angeles]

CIRCLE DANCE is the story of an All-American family: A legendary NFL Hall of Fame dad (Sonny Cannon); a beautiful former UNC cheerleader mom (Mary); A brilliant, quirky, freakishly perceptive daughter (Emma); and an all-everything son (Steve), a rising senior Notre Dame quarterback, if he doesn't leave early and follow in his dad's footsteps. CIRCLE DANCE is a beautiful family portrait that belies the fault lines barely under its surface, fault lines that don't stay buried for long.

With a title borrowed from a Bonnie Raitt song about heartbreak, CIRCLE DANCE aims, classically, at a portrait of a disintegrating family and a flawed individual who learns his lessons too late. –*LAWeekly*

Whether or not this dance is similar to one in your own family, some aspect of it will resonate with you, as every family has some steps it unconsciously repeats, every family steps on each other's toes, and every family has a time when the members must hold hands and sway to each other's rhythm. –*SoCal.com*

THE LAST PLANTATION

The patriarch of an undiscovered plantation—dismantled in the 1860’s, smuggled out of Louisiana just ahead of the approaching swarm of carpetbaggers, and reassembled in a forgotten plot of land in a corner of New Jersey—fights to save the plantation from discovery, and to protect his sheltered grandchildren and the (supposed) slave family from the outside world, only to discover, in the end... the only slave in sight is himself.

Outrageous, irreverent, and provocative: *Blazing Saddles* meets *South Park* + *Family Guy* on steroids.

PERFECT

Raised in a family of super-achievers, the mother of a special-needs boy—the first male grandchild born into this family dynasty—becomes obsessed with “fixing” him, her single-minded obsession threatening to destroy her marriage and taking a psychological toll on her neglected, brilliant daughter, only to discover the truth about perfection from among the wreckage.

Writer/Director project. Inspired by a true story. Original setting: Pasadena.

THE TOAST

A brilliant but socially-phobic young lawyer, who transforms into a raconteur and writer of raw, erotic poetry when his frightened self is drowned in a sea of vodka or unleashed by a handful of magic pills, becomes involved in a seemingly illogical, mutually destructive, dance of decadence with one of the world’s most desirable super-models, only to face a question in the end—while ensconced in a roadside motel with a teenage vixen and copious supplies of his favorite liberating friends:

“What do you do when you seek refuge in the ether and the ether doesn’t work?”

The Toast is “A European Film Shot in America,” a film an American studio would never make, but a film that might well be the “toast” of Cannes. [A personal Directing project.]

UNGODLY

What would happen if the second-coming actually happened? Do those who preach about the event really believe it could happen—today? What if it did? What if it only seemed like it?

When a prominent Manhattan attorney, in route to a celebration with his stunning wife on the eve of his installation as President of the Bar of the City of New York, encounters a homeless man on the steps of a church and returns later to find the man burned to death, he finds himself suddenly allergic to his life and the wealth and fame that he has accumulated. When he tries to change, to take a different path – with the intervention of an investigative reporter working on a network special about the reported death of God in American culture – he is judged to be either insane or divine, providing a lesson for others in the end, while finding what is left of himself.

We are also left with a surprising twist and a question: What if God had a daughter?

ABSENCE OF COLOR [Stage Play AND Film – not yet produced on stage]

ABSENCE OF COLOR is a stage play and film, based on the life of Beatrice Pastorius Turner, a 19th century young woman with a 20th century mind, and a borderline gothic, bizarre family.

Beatrice was born in 1889 into a family of Philadelphia bluebloods who lived in Philadelphia and their Summer residence in Newport, Rhode Island. She was a precocious painter and observer of the world, though kept securely cloistered by a fastidious, quirky, oddly attentive, obsessively protective father. Forbidden to continue studying at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Beatrice still painted thousands of canvases throughout her life, while leading a personal life of mystery.

Following the death of Beatrice's dotting father, the outside of the Newport house was painted entirely black, and remained black until Beatrice's own death some 40 years later. Continuing to wear Victorian clothing until her death, Beatrice, though an attractive and unusually perceptive young woman who wrote of world events with remarkable insight in her diary, remained a recluse, painting steadily through the years but largely shunned by the residents of Gilded Age Newport. Given little weight as an artist by the locals, all but a rare few of her paintings were taken to a local dump and burned as rubbish after her death. So, too, were all but a few pages of her lifelong diary.

Thus, this film is a dramatic narrative, not a biography. There are clues from which to construct a version of the truth, but it is only that, a likely version of the truth still shrouded in mystery.

As an artist who continued to create despite being locked away by her father, Beatrice might also have been ahead of her time in other ways. She may have been a woman sexually liberated a half-century before the phrase was invented. The question is: if so, by whom. One answer may lie in a place as dark as the black house, high on the bluffs of Newport.

TELEVISION [Completed Pilots]

SKIN [One-Hour Drama]

SKIN is the hottest men's club in America. But "SKIN" doesn't advertise and has no sign outside. It's discreet, expensive, and filled with true beauties. Bouncers wear tuxedos. There's a back door with direct access to VIP rooms stocked with champagne and equipped with a different set of rules. You have to know where SKN is, and you have to be able to afford it – financially. Whether or not you can afford it in other ways is a different question, with different answers for different people.

Sex makes the world go around: real sex, fantasized sex, forbidden sex, or simply a beautiful woman taking off her clothes. The world of exotic dancers is enticing, intoxicating, and addictive. It's a culture all its own, inhabited by buyers, sellers, and the female merchandise, all partners in the SKIN business.

Maybe Americans are prudes to the rest of the world, but it doesn't mean they aren't turned on by the same age-old drug that has been clouding men's minds, bending their judgment, and burning their money since original sin was original. It's only more expensive in America. Sex is bad and so, it's not cheap. We legislate our morals, and make a lot of money for a lot of people.

Behind the expensive veneer, away from the wives, girlfriends, families, and responsibilities, led by the intoxicating lure of bare skin, are doctors, lawyers, clergymen, bankers, politicians, sports stars, rock stars, stock brokers, businessmen, even cops, all leaving the light of day behind, diving into the night. They represent every color and stripe. They can be obsessive, harmless, troubled, fun, old, young, obnoxious, sweet, shy, edgy, or famous. Each of them has a story. Each of them is a story.

Yes, the girls are SEX OBJECTS. They know it, and get paid very well for it. But they are also PEOPLE. They have real hopes, dreams, demons, insecurities, and longings, along with laundry, doctor bills, heartbreak, and joy. They go to movies and eat pizza and want to have a life and love, just like everybody else. But, unlike the rest of us, they live life at a much higher speed and, when they hit a bump in the road, the effect is much more extreme and dramatic. SKIN is about the girls who work there, their customers, and their manager, a former dancer herself, whose employer is a mystery.

[Note 1: This was a previous producing project of Connie Tavel (creator of *Judging Amy*), pitched to Showtime. Passed solely due to prior investment in pilot for *The Ranch*. Note 2: Though sharing a title, this was written before the Leonard/Bruckheimer series of the same name, which was ill-conceived and died quickly.]

ESQ. [One-Hour Drama]

John T. ("Johnny") Giles, a lifelong foster-home kid wrongly convicted and sentenced to prison at 18, earns his college and law degrees online while incarcerated and, after obtaining the reversal of his conviction and release from prison seven years later, confronts the prestigious Beverly Hills law firm whose image-enhancing Pro Bono Project botched his case in the first place. Offered a substantial settlement to disappear, he informs the firm that he is not interested in money. He wants a job. As a lawyer, with the firm responsible for his wrongful imprisonment and one of the highest-profile law firms in California. A firm where he doesn't fit, and isn't welcome.

A bold move, a confident move, but a smart move? That remains to be seen. Mort Segal, firm partner who takes a curious liking to the rough-edged young man, tells Johnny, "You should have taken the cash." Ironically, though

never a real criminal, Johnny discovers that the only edge he has in his fight for survival, both inside and outside the firm, are his knowledge of the criminal world, and the connections he had sworn to disavow. Potentially a *Breaking Bad* for lawyers, depending on producer choice of tone and direction.

LEGAL GRIND [One-Hour Drama]

A group of friends from law school, disillusioned with big-firm practice and jolted by the shocking suicide of a member of their unofficial coffee-lover club, walk out together, to form their own firm: LEGAL GRIND, LLC—a coffee shoppe where filling your punch card entitles you to a free consultation with the legal side, through the French doors and up the stairs. Determined to practice law without the stress, the suits, and the bullshit, this group of friends find it's far from simple, as their personal lives and the unavoidable quest for the "win" drag them closer and closer to the world they left.

Example: One of the firm's first customers is the lead attorney's husband, who needs a divorce lawyer.

THE ADVOCATE [One-Hour Drama]

To atone for a life-shattering mistake, former superstar District Attorney JACK KELLEHER fights to reform the corrupt establishment that created him.

THE ADVOCATE combines the Machiavellian power struggles of *The Sopranos* with the alabaster-columned courtliness of *The West Wing*, and sets them in the Savannah of *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*. Haunted by the discovery that he sent an innocent man to the electric chair, first-term District Attorney Jack Kelleher decides to atone by doing his job the way it should have always been done—with the scales of justice truly balanced and truly blind. He sets out to reform the criminal justice system from within, to cut out the cancer of privilege and prejudice that—while it anointed him the city's crown prince—also executed MASON BRADLEY for a crime he didn't commit, an execution promised by Jack in the campaign that led to his election.

GROWNUPS [Half-Hour Comedy]

An upside down relationship between an uncle and the nephew who's been living with him since his sister dropped the kid off for a few minutes five years ago, a relationship in which nephew Andrew (15) is the sophisticated, responsible, grownup and uncle Larry, unemployed and living on royalties as a comedy writer, is the head-in-the-clouds jokester who explains that his tub toys are "entertaining flotation devices." The relationship is disrupted when Larry decides to rent Andrew's room to the stunning young Kelli, unleashing a hilarious conflict between mid-life angst and raging puberty.

[Inspired by Herb Gardner's *A Thousand Clowns*.]

URBAN WARFARE [Concept]

A disillusioned soldier who loses his family to urban violence while he is deployed overseas, protecting other families in the streets of a war-torn city, returns home in need of healing, and a job. Hired on by a former Marine Force Recon Colonel who employs only former operators for his small arms manufacturing company, the only thing Cole Hammonds won't do is play for the company softball team, though it's one of the top teams in America. That is, until he is clued in to the team's true purpose: to bring the methods and might of the Special Ops military specialist to the streets of the United States, while playing exhibition games throughout the U.S. in cities chosen for only one reason.

NON-FICTION | Potential Television Adaptation

LAWYER GAMES: After Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil

LAWYER GAMES is the true story of the murder case that spawned a best-seller, a Clint Eastwood film, and a tourist tsunami that continues to flood Savannah, Georgia. In a prior life, I was the young Chief Assistant DA who went to the scene of the killing while the body was still on the floor, made the decision to arrest the defendant, put together the case, and tried the first of four murder trials.

Though *LAWYER GAMES* is based on a single murder case, it is equally compelling as an unmasking of a certain species of defense lawyer, one unrestrained by ethics when lusting for the almighty “W.” In the course of dissecting the “Midnight” murder, *LAWYER GAMES* draws parallels to other high-profile criminal cases, such as O.J. Simpson, Phil Spector, and the Hillside Stranglers.

Kirkus Reviews: “Riveting! This nonfiction book often resembles a torrid TV drama.”

Potential multi-part series *Freeing a Killer* (e.g., *Making a Murderer*)

Ongoing discussions with Aphrodite Jones, host of long-running “True Crime With Aphrodite Jones.”

TELEVISION [Non-Scripted / Professional Process / e.g. Next Top Model, Project Runway, The Voice]

DISCOVERED

The male and female lead roles in a selected motion picture (“The Film”) will be cast through nationwide, open submissions, followed by a grueling multi-week training and acting competition judged by a panel of major film/television Casting Directors, along with a weekly Celebrity Guest who personifies the thrill of “discovery” that has driven motion pictures since their inception. Full creative treatment available. Sizzle Reel may be seen at [DISCOVERED](https://vimeo.com/depkirkland/discovered). [https://vimeo.com/depkirkland/discovered]

The TRIAL OF JOHN PARIS

There is no TRIAL in M_sTRIAL | Play or Film. Audiences must wrestle with the issues raised by this story on a personal level. M_sTRIAL may create a firestorm; but it does not provide the water to put it out.

However... that does NOT mean the trial of John Paris will never take place... it will.

The TRIAL OF JOHN PARIS will take place in high schools, colleges and law schools throughout the United States. Young men and women will examine, debate, and litigate the case themselves, before juries of their peers, using Mock Trial materials produced by the M_sTRIAL post-production education team, led by former prosecutor, defense attorney and actor-writer-director, Dep Kirkland.