

JUNIOR

A SHARP FILM



‘ AS THE WOMAN FOLDED,
HER HOPES FOR HIM
SANK INTO THE FABRIC
DOWN THEY GO,
SWIRLING DOWN INTO THE MAW
OF A GREATER DARK.
BEHIND EVERY TRIBUTARY
POURED INTO HIM
COMES RUSHING BACKWARD
ALL HE HASN'T BEEN YET. ’

From Two Seconds by Mark Doty

SHARPA PICTURES PRESENTS
A SHARP FILM "JUNIOR" ELIZABETH STEWART JOE LACOLANICHIA AND CHRISTOPHER RITTE
WITH SAMIR KHALIL, PRAM SINGH, OLIVER MOSEBY, AND MARY STICZER DINO TORRE BAURO MUSIC BY PEARL GLUCK COSTUME DESIGNER ELIZABETH STEWART
EDITED BY ELIZABETH STEWART PRODUCTION DESIGNER PEARL GLUCK EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS JENNIFER HASTY PRODUCED BY THOMAS STEWART DIRECTED BY PEARL GLUCK



"I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?"
- Sojourner Truth

JUNIOR

A mother struggles with a new normal after her son is shot by an off-duty police officer.

WHY JUNIOR?

"An artist's duty, as far as I'm concerned, is to reflect the times."
- Nina Simone

In response to the increasing number of unarmed African Americans shot in cold blood by police officers, and inspired by Sojourner Truth, Elizabeth Stewart, a mother herself, penned a one-woman play, *Junior*, to address the voices of loss as expressed by mothers of the victims. She also examines how the media chooses to represent not only the victims but also those who mourn their loss.

After watching the play, filmmaker Pearl Gluck worked with Ms. Stewart on adapting the play for screen.

Here, in her own words, Ms. Stewart talks about why she wrote *Junior*:

I am numb and battling about which tone to take on as I speak. Do I approach this unexplainable rhythm with political jargon, poetic affection, or maternal articulation?

On August 9, 2014, I questioned my American citizenship. Does the law protect me? Am I truly free? On this day, Michael Brown was massacred on the streets of his community by a rookie police officer. His extinguished body laid uncovered in the sweltering heat for four hours, like the local attraction at a zoo. The murderer is unapologetically living freely with his wife and child, able to leave home whenever he feels, able to breath fresh air. I beg the question, is this freedom for all?

The case of Michael Brown deeply saddened me and awakened a voice within me to create. I wrote a one-woman show affectionately titled, *Junior*, because they are killing our children. The title represents the direct connection, the unbroken rhythm to our ancestors. The story follows a mothers journey to a new normal after her teenage son is murdered by an off duty officer. It questions the role of the media and its influences, it questions our humanity, and it questions the freedom or lack thereof for a certain group of people.

My spirit is enraged just as it was on August 9th with the latest influx of unjust murders. The recent deaths of Alton Sterling, Delwan Small, Antwun Shumpert and Philando Castile are repeated portraits of an African American status in America, and the list keeps growing: feared, therefore, killed!

I believe that every performance is an opportunity to change a life, enlighten an individual's intellect, encourage thought, embrace the question of how and why, and gain respect for another's culture and philosophies.

A Note from the Director, Pearl Gluck:

As I entered Ms. Stewart's one-woman show, I was given an ID badge to wear with "Fox News" on it. I noticed that the box had many other tags, and other audience members were already wearing theirs. So, I asked if I could return mine and exchange it for NPR or even *The New York Times*. The usher was sweet but said that we were not given an individual choice of our specific identities as we sit in the audience. My perspective was assigned and this, I realized, was part of the performance. I was instantly viscerally connected to the narrative, even if not from my usual socially conscious and activist perspective. If only I could take my hard earned open-mindedness and impose it on Fox News the way their conservative (and often appalling to me) point of view was imposed on me through this press badge.

Then the show started. From the moment Ms. Stewart walked on stage in the black-box theater to the moment the show was over, I was transfixed. I was moved by how she created from many interviews with mothers of the murdered, one story that explores deeply the voice of one mother as she prepares for the funeral of her son. In a way, I (without the Fox badge) would be a built-in audience, my own work often uses documentary interviews to craft a fictional narrative structure, but it was the creative muscle behind her writing and performance that drew me in the most. Her authenticity and treatment of the material, as a mother, an artist, and an intellect, called out to me.

Ever a fan of Rodrigo Garcia's 2005 work, *Nine Lives*, where he gives women voice through short films shot as one continuous image as if it were one continuous thought, I proposed to Ms. Stewart the possibility of adapting her work into a one-shot short film.

In order to adapt the assigned discomfort brought on by the badges in the one-woman show, I decided to put the audience on alert (viscerally) as we follow Ms. Stewart's character around the house not totally comfortable with taking on the role of voyeur. In the end, the camera swivels around and reveals a camera crew and journalists who have been following her all along. One of the journalists, John Dillon, is a 32-year veteran as a reporter and editor and currently teaches journalism and media ethics at Penn State University.

One of the commitments we made to the material was to question some of the socio-

economic “causes” used to explain away the violence against African Americans by police officers. The specific home that was chosen for the set location, the red dress (reminiscent of Michael Brown’s mother’s dress at his funeral), the level of education Junior was given, all these details served to disarm the distractions. We wanted the focus to remain on the realities of implicit racism that leads to these vicious crimes.

We were fortunate to find Mark Stitzer, a seasoned DP with Steadicam prowess, who managed to keep the 20-some-odd-minutes’ shot flowing without losing the energy and interaction with Ms. Stewart. The set was also a teaching set where we invited students to work with the professional crew.

As a filmmaker, my work is inspired by the concept of Tikkun Olam, leaving the world a better place than how I found it. The moment I saw Ms. Stewart’s work on stage, I knew that collaborating with her on developing this voice on film would be my opportunity to be a vessel for change.

From the Director of the original one-woman show, Andrew Belser:

Sometimes a piece cracks the air and lands on an artist with such clarity and force that it seems to emerge fully formed. *Junior* is one of those rare pieces, and it seems to have found in Elizabeth an artist with the skill, heart, and will to embody its depth and consequence. I have not so much directed Elizabeth as I have borne witness as she listened to this mother’s life split wide into a chaotic grief storm. Witnessing Elizabeth walk into this maelstrom has been a privilege, and learning for me. As I watched Elizabeth’s courageous descent into this woman’s life, I was brought close to many moments in our home where the precious binding of our lives with our two sons through the daily presence of smelly shoes and gangly growing limbs.

In *Junior*, Elizabeth has fashioned a personal memory kaleidoscope; watch and you may see fragments of your own life playing out on one side or another of these lives. For me, the real promise of this piece lies in Elizabeth’s singular capacity to render this woman as a fresh, resonant, and necessary new voice in our painful national conversation about privilege and violence and race being retold through media, protests, and community conversations. I am grateful for this moving voice, and for the opportunity to experience Elizabeth’s grace and skill as she worked.

- Andrew Belser
Professor of Movement, Voice and Acting in MFA Performance
Penn State University

BIOS:

Elizabeth J. Stewart: Writer/Actor



Elizabeth is a craftsman when creating and developing characters with a rich passion to produce authentic, subtle, and omnipresent layers for every woman she performs. She is “more than an actor” but a “creator and performance maker”, says Richard Robichaux. Elizabeth’s passion for acting was birthed in her first role as a Townsperson in a high school production of *Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp*. She began her quest of understanding and deepening her craft by attending Alabama State University, graduating with honors, earning a Bachelor of Arts degree in Theatre. Elizabeth’s concentrated training at ASU revealed to her mentor, critically acclaimed actress, Dr. Tonea Stewart, that her talent is best described as a “being actress”, a term which would cross her path again by the notable, Bill Irwin. Elizabeth’s desire to heighten her talent as an actress, philosopher, director, and writer, led her to attend the prestigious Penn State University, graduating with honors, earning a Master of Fine Arts degree in Acting Elizabeth wrote and acted in her one-woman show, *Junior*. The success of *Junior* spawned its adaptation into a screenplay. She has graced the stage and screen in distinguished roles such as *Phaedra* (Title Role), *Macbeth* (Lady M.), *Julius Caesar* (Portia), *Birdbath* (Velma), *Motherfucker with the Hat*, *Blood at the Root*, *For Colored Girls who have Considered Suicide when the Rainbow is Enuf*, *Drums of Sweetwater*, *The Trial of One Short-Sighted Black Woman vs. Mammy Louise and Safreeta Mae*, *The First Breeze of Summer*, *Carolyn Somebody*, *Denial*, *Solomon of the Rose* and *Love over Coffee*.

Pearl Gluck: Director/Writer/Producer



Pearl Gluck was awarded a 2000 Sundance Producer's Lab fellowship and a 2001 Sundance Festival mentorship for *Divan* (2004), her first documentary film. *Divan* (2004) was broadcast on the Sundance Channel, theatrically premiered at the Film Forum in New York and played at festivals around the world. Her short film, *Where Is Joel Baum* (2012), starring Lynn Cohen won various awards at festivals including Best Film at The Female Eye film festival and Best Actor for Luzer Twersky at the Starz Denver Film Festival. She is currently in post-production on her first fiction feature, *The Turn Out*, exploring domestic sex trafficking at truckstops. In July 2011, she was a contributing producer for WTIU, the Indiana PBS affiliate and reviewed the Midwest Best Biker Fest. She released *Soundwalk: Williamsburg* in 2007 on Paris Premiere, and won an Audie Award for the project. Her first short film that she co-wrote, *Goyta* (2007) premiered at Cannes, and she co-directed and co-produced the award-winning short, *Great Balls of Fire* (2001) which screened at Transmediale,

Oberhausen, European Media Arts Festival, Ocularis, the New York Video Festival at the Film Society of Lincoln Center, and the DIG.IT Festival at the Walker Center for the Arts. In 1996 she received a Fulbright grant to Hungary to collect Hasidic stories. Gluck has been interviewed about her work on NPR with Melissa Block, WBUR's The Connection with Chris Leiden in Boston and produced for WBAI. She has appeared in *A Life Apart: Hasidism in America* (1998; Directed and Produced by Oren Rudavsky and Menachem Daum). In addition to being in post-production on *The Turn Out* and *Junior*, Pearl teaches screenwriting and directing at Penn State University.

Mark Stitzer: Director of Photography

Mark Stitzer is an Emmy Award winning Director of Photography and Steadicam operator. In 2016 he was nominated for two Emmy awards. In 2014 he earned an Emmy award for his work as the Director of Photography on the nationally aired



PBS documentary "Water Blues Green Solutions". A graduate of Penn State's Film program in 2002, Mark has been working in TV and film production in just about every major crew role from grip, to audio, to Steadicam and directing. Because of this diverse experience range and skill set, he has been called the "Swiss Army Knife of filmmaking". His work ranges from commercials and shorts to feature length independent films and documentaries. In 2007 Mark began working with a Steadicam and has been trained at the Steadicam Operators Workshop in Pennsylvania with some of the best operators in the world. When approached about shooting a continuous long

take for the film *Junior*, he jumped at the chance to put his Steadicam skills to work. In addition to shooting and production, Mark is also an award winning editor.

Thomas H. Stewart: Co-Producer and AC

Thomas H. Stewart is an Emmy Awarded Film Producer, for his powerful short,



Protect and Serve. Stewart is a graduate of The Penn State University Film & Video Department and recipient of the Donald P. Bellisario Scholarship. He also received a B.A. from Alabama State University in Visual and Performing Arts. His independent films earned him an internship at Tyler Perry Studios, followed by a position as a camera operator on the hit series *Deserving Design* with Vern Yip. Stewart was the Assistant Director on three Civil Rights Museums: The Greensboro Four in Greensboro, NC, The Rosa Parks Museum in Montgomery, AL, and The African American Museum of Philadelphia in Philadelphia, PA. Stewart is currently a film

producer for The Los Angeles Unified School District in the Art Education Branch, developing original programs to promote the arts in education.

Lincoln Richie: Sound Design and Sound Edit

Lincoln Richie is the founder and creative engine behind Skyfall Studios, a multi-media production and post-production craft studio based in Southern California. Link was born in Kalamazoo, Michigan and was raised in Memphis, Tennessee



during the '90s when the video game industry came into prominence. An avid gamer, Link competed in and won many tournaments, and ultimately made his way to SoCal to enroll at the Art Institute of California - Orange County to pursue a degree in Game Art and Animation. While continuing to work toward his degree and compete around the country, Link found that he also had a particular affinity and passion for the sonic arts. After moving from Orange County into Los Angeles, he enrolled at the world renowned Musicians Institute in Hollywood, where he earned degrees in Audio Engineering and Post Production Audio respectively. Upon graduation with high honors, he quickly found himself in the film & music recording industries, where he continues to work under the Skyfall banner. Recent Skyfall projects include the feature films *Earnest & Lauren*, *The American I Didn't Kill*, and *Junior*, as well as the documentary *The History of Reggae in Cleveland* which was filmed entirely on-location in Cleveland, Ohio.

STUDENT CREW:

Jennifer Hasty: Producer

Jennifer Hasty is a film student studying at The Pennsylvania State University. She has produced a variety student films, such as "Murder in the Stacks" and "Unfound." She also helped produce "Junior." She has worked on many other student films, such as "FDA," "50 Inches," and "Danny Wants to Dance." Currently, Jennifer works as a videographer and editor for Penn State. She intends to graduate in May of 2017.

JUNIOR (2017, USA)
A short film by Pearl Gluck
TRT: 28 minutes
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