



SONGS MY BROTHERS TAUGHT ME

Written and Directed by Chloé Zhao

2016 Independent Spirit Awards,
Nominated for Best First Film, Best Cinematography, Kiehl's Someone to Watch
Winner, Best Director - American Indian Film Festival
Official Selection- 2015 Sundance Film Festival
Official Selection- 2015 Cannes Film Festival (Directors' Fortnight)

USA, 2015, 94 minutes

Official website: www.songsthemovie.com

www.kinolorber.com/press

Kino Lorber, Inc.

333 West 39th Street, Suite 503

New York, NY 10018

(212) 629-6880

Publicity Contact

Adam Walker/Film Forum

209 West Houston Street

New York, NY 10014

(212) 627-2035 x306

adam@filmforum.org

INTRO

SONGS MY BROTHERS TAUGHT ME is a compelling and complex portrait of modern day life on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation that explores the bond between a brother (John Reddy) and his younger sister (Jashaun St. John), who find themselves on separate paths to rediscovering the meaning of home. The film sensitively infiltrates isolated Indian Country to offer a rare, modern gaze keenly felt through the eyes of its magnetic non-professional lead actors, providing a universally resonant tale set amid the magnificent, promising wild of young generation Lakotas.

SYNOPSIS

Johnny, a restless Lakota teen, and his spirited little sister Jashaun, live with their troubled mother on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota. While the Johnny looks for ways to escape his nihilistic life on the reservation by moving to LA with his girlfriend, Jashaun is holding onto her faith in the community and the simple pleasures she finds there. Things start to change after the funeral of their estranged cowboy father and Johnny's reckless behavior begins to catch up with him. After finding out about Johnny's plan to leave, Jashaun wanders away from her ruptured home life, exploring the rodeo world of her late father and forming an unlikely friendship with an ex-con. Jashaun's spirit is put to the test as she witnesses the self-destructive nature of those around her. While Johnny, who finds himself in a fight he can't win, is in danger of losing all those he holds dear.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

"Songs My Brothers Taught Me" is a contemplation of the time I spent on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation during the four years of making this film. One of the most common questions people ask when they hear about some of the difficulties facing Pine Ridge is "Why don't they just leave? If life is hard, why don't they just leave the reservation and go somewhere else?" When considering how frequently I have moved around in my own life, I must confess that at times I have often wondered the same thing. I was born in Beijing and left home when I was fourteen, and have been moving from place to place ever since. As a result, there isn't one particular place in the world from which I cannot just uproot myself and leave behind. 'Home', to me, feels like only a concept, and I find myself often exploring its meaning in my films and writing.

During my time on Pine Ridge, as I became friends with some of the Lakota people living there, I became increasingly intrigued and almost envious of the deep connection they have to their homes, families, communities and their land. This bone-deep attachment also has its consequences, and over time I also became aware of the various struggles and isolation they face because of it. I found this very simple question, has an increasingly complicated answer, one that I find difficult to express in words. So in many ways I made "Songs" to explore this question – "how do you leave the only place you've ever known?"

Set against the backdrop of the Badlands and the Great Plains of South Dakota, "Songs" is also a kind of poem dedicated to my love for this wild, magnificent, yet marginalized piece of the American west. I went into production with a tight budget, only a treatment and without a script, writing every morning for the scenes we were to shoot on that particular day. This approach has many challenges, yet many advantages since unlike in most conventional narrative shoots, my team and I were able to have the flexibility to incorporate real-life events as they occurred. We were completely indebted to our cast and friends on Pine Ridge, most of them were acting for the first time, and were born, raised and residing on the reservation. They trusted us completely, and welcomed us into their homes and their lives. The film would certainly not have been possible without their kindness and support.

This trust touched on every aspect of the shoot. Sadly, during production, the childhood home of one of our leads (thirteen year old Jashaun) was burned down in a snowstorm. After much reflection, and talking with Jashaun and her family, I decided to rewrite the script and reshoot scenes, incorporating this event into her character's story. We filmed Jashaun seeing the ruins for the first time, and what was at first supposed to be a brief pickup, developed into something more as Jashaun decided to keep going, searching in the ashes as she tried to recover her things that were lost in the fire. Everyone present was moved by her strength and resilience, and to me, in that very heartbreaking forty-five minutes, I was only there to document the action, and simply observe as Jashaun and her life presented me with the story it wished to tell.

"Songs" is not a generalized representation of Pine Ridge. There simply are not enough films made about this place and these people. As a result, the ones that are made often end up being used to generalize the community – something our mainstream media has done in its

appropriation of Native Americans for a long time. This needs to change. My hope is for the audiences to leave the theater feeling that they have gotten to know a group of very complex characters and to have a glimpse into just how diverse and vivacious the Lakota people of Pine Ridge really are, instead of the two dimensional stereotypes we often see represented in today's dominant culture.

The making of "Songs" was a family affair and it has changed me in many ways. For me, filmmaking will always be driven by my desire to learn about the world I'm not familiar with. Sometimes on that journey, I also get to rediscover who I am. I will always be grateful for my friends on Pine Ridge for giving me that opportunity and for showing me a different way of life.

AWARDS

2016 Independent Spirit Awards

Nominated for Best First Film, Best Cinematography, Kiehl's Someone to Watch

Best First Film by International Federation of Film Critics - Jerusalem Film Festival

Best Director - American Indian Film Festival

Best Cinematography Debut - Camerimage Film Festival

Achievement in Screenwriting - Mumbai Film Festival

Best American Indie - Fort Lauderdale International Film Festival

Best Film, Best Actress, Best Director - Red Nation Film Festival

Best Dakota Feature - South Dakota Film Festival

Best Cinematography - Bend Film Festival

Best Director and Best New Actor - Port Townsend Film Festival

FESTIVALS

2015 Sundance Film Festival

2015 Cannes Film Festival – Directors' Fortnight

2015 AFI FEST

2015 BFI London Film Festival

2015 Mumbai Film Festival

2015 Deauville Film Festival

2015 Vancouver International Film Festival

2015 Toronto International Film Festival - Next Wave

2015 Palm Springs International Film Festival

2015 Sundance HK

2015 American Indian Film Festival

2015 Vienna International Film Festival

2015 California's American Indian & Indigenous Film Festival

2015 Cine City - Brighton Film Festival

2015 Denver Film Festival

2015 Ft Lauderdale Film Festival

2015 Hawaii International Film Festival

2015 Red Nation Film Festival

2015 South Dakota Film Festival

2015 Athens International Film Festival

2015 Filmfest Hamburg

2015 Festival du nouveau cinema

2015 Bend Film Festival

2015 Santa Fe Independent Film Festival

2015 Lakota Film Festival

2015 Guanajuto International Film Festival

2015 Traverse City Film Festival

2015 NatiVision Film Festival

2015 One Nation Film Festival

2015 Port Townsend Film Festival

2015 Free State Film Festival

2015 Singapore International Film Festival

CAST BIOS

JOHN REDDY as Johnny Winters

John Reddy is Lakota, born and raised on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. He was discovered by writer/director, Chloé Zhao, from a photograph in the high school year-book. John enjoys riding horses, working with his hands and spending time with his extensive family whom he shares a strong bond. He is a recent graduate from Pine Ridge High School and an accomplished cross-country runner. John was invited by the Sundance Institute to participate in the Directors Lab with Chloé. After his experience working on *Songs My Brothers Taught Me*, he has discovered a new passion for acting and looks forward to seeing where it might take him.

JASHAUN ST. JOHN as Jashaun Winters

Jashaun is Lakota, born and raised on the Pine Ridge Reservation. She was 11 year old when she acted for the first time in “*Songs My Brothers Taught Me*”. She is now a 8th grader at Red Cloud High School where she plays basketball on the school team. Since the age of three, Jashaun has been traveling each summer competing in ‘Girls jingle’ and ‘fancy shawl’ Native American dancing. She looks forward to pursuing her newfound interest in acting.

IRENE BEDARD as Lisa Nelson

Irene Bedard was born in Anchorage, Alaska and is of Inupiat, Inuit and Métis ancestry. Her first role was as Mary Crow Dog in the television production *Lakota Woman: Siege at Wounded Knee*. She was also the voice of the eponymous heroine in the Disney animated film *Pocahontas*. Bedard was also the physical model for the character. She appeared in a different take of the story in the 2005 film *The New World* by Terrence Malick, as Pocahontas' mother whose name was Nonoma Winanuske Matatiske. She also starred in Chris Eyre's *Smoke Signals* and TV movie *Crazy Horse*. Irene Bedard is known for bringing a powerful emotional presence to her characters.

TAYSHA FULLER as Aurelia Clifford

Taysha Fuller grew up in Ohsweken, Ontario Canada on the Six Nations Reservation. She is best known for her work on *Degrassi: The Next Generation* as Jessica Martello and she can also be seen in *Prayer for a Good Day* directed by Zoe Hopkins. In addition to acting, Taysha is also a contemporary dancer and Native Fancy Dancer.

TRAVIS LONE HILL as Travis Lone Hill

Travis was born and raised on the Pine Ridge Reservation. A former Gates scholar, Travis is a father, visual artist, tattoo artist, and prolific poet. All manners of art he endeavours upon are marked by honesty, wisdom and voracious courage. The “Rez Life 7” clothing and artwork seen in the film are his original pieces.

ELEONORE HENDRICKS as Angie LaPrelle

Eléonore is an actress, photographer and casting director from New York City. Her performances include work with the new school of New York film such as the Safdie Brothers in their films *Pleasure of Being Robbed*, *Daddy Longlegs*, *The Black Balloon*, and *Heaven Knows What*. She can also be seen in *Nancy*, *Please* by Andrew Semans, *Dustin Guy Defa's*, *Bad Fever* alongside Kentucker Audley and *A Guide to Recognizing Your Saints* and *Boulevard* by Dito Montiel. Her upcoming films are *Come Down Molly* by Gregory Kohn and *Stinking Heaven* by Nathan Silver. As a casting director, she has a reputation for immersive work, delving into the communities surrounding the film, often finding non-actors, again notable is her collaboration again with the Safdie Brothers on the aforementioned films as well as *Stand Clear of the Closing Doors* by Sam Fleischner, *Memphis* by Tim Sutton, *Teenage* by Matt Wolf, *Gimme The Loot* by Adam Leon. She was also the acting coach on *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, working closely with Quvenzhané Wallis and Dwight Henry. She has collaborated on two films this year at Sundance, as Casting Director for *Christmas, Again* by Charles Poekel, and as both an actress and casting director with Chloé Zhao's, *Songs My Brothers Taught Me*.

CREW BIOS

CHLOÉ ZHAO - Writer/Director/Producer/Editor

Chloé is a Beijing-born, US-based filmmaker. Her 2015 feature debut "Songs My Brothers Taught Me" premiered in US Dramatic Competition at Sundance Film Festival and Directors' Fortnight at Cannes Film Festival, and was nominated for Best First Film, Best Cinematography and Someone to Watch Award at the 2016 Independent Spirit Awards. She was supported by organizations such as Sundance Institute, San Francisco Film Society, IFP, Film Independent, Cinereach and Time Warner Foundation and was named one of the 25 New Faces of Independent Film by *Filmmaker Magazine*. Chloé received her BA in Politics from Mt Holyoke College and MFA in Film Production from NYU. She is working on her next film and making more friends in the American heartland.

ANGELA C. LEE – Producer

Angela is an LA based independent film producer. Her first feature film, *Songs My Brothers Taught Me*, premiered in competition at the Sundance Film Festival and in Directors' Fortnight at Cannes. She is a 2015 Sundance Creative Producing Lab Fellow and has received additional fellowships from Film Independent, IFP, PGA Diversity Workshop and the Center for Asian American Media. Angela also is the Artist Development Manager at Film Independent where she oversees the filmmaker lab programs. A native Chicagoan, Angela graduated from the University of Chicago with a degree in Economics and is on the Board of Directors for the University of Chicago National Arts Alumni Network.

MOLLYE ASHER – Producer

Mollye is a two time Spirit Award nominated producer based in NYC. Her most recent film, *Songs My Brothers Taught Me* (writer/director: Chloé Zhao), premiered in competition at the 2015 Sundance Film Festival and had its international premiere at Cannes' Director's Fortnight. She is also the producer of the 2014 SXSW Grand Jury Prize winner, *Fort Tilden* (writer/directors Sarah-Violet Bliss and Charles Rogers), which was distributed in theaters and on VOD in August of 2015 by MGM/ Orion. *She's Lost Control* (writer/director: Anja Marquardt), had its World Premiere at the 2014 Berlinale, US Premiere at SXSW 2014, and NY Premiere at New Directors/ New Films. It was released theatrically by Monument Releasing in March 2015 and is currently available on VOD. Mollye is a FIND Producing Lab and Fast Track alum, IFP Narrative Lab alum, TAP fellow and earned her Masters in film from NYU's Graduate Film Program. She is currently the Operations Manager at Gamechanger Films.

NINA YANG BONGIOVI – Producer

Nina Yang Bongiovi is a seasoned film professional with over 16 years of combined production, finance and management experience in the entertainment industry between Hollywood and Asia. Nina develops and produces feature films, television, documentaries and digital content for Significant Productions based in Los Angeles, California. This year, Nina and her Producing Partner, Academy Award Winner Forest Whitaker, returned to the Sundance Film Festival 2015 with two films: *Dope*, written and directed by Rick Famuyiwa, and *Songs My Brothers Taught Me*, written and directed by Chloé Zhao, in U.S. Dramatic Competition. *Dope* won the Special Grand Jury Award for Excellence in Editing and was released by Open Road Films and Sony Pictures International; Both *Dope* and *Songs My Brothers Taught Me* had its international premiere at 2015's Cannes Film Festival in Directors Fortnight. Nina and Forest also produced the critically acclaimed, *Fruitvale Station*, written and directed by Ryan Coogler, which won The Audience and The Grand Jury Prize at Sundance Film Festival 2013, Cannes Film Festival's L'Avenir Award, alongside 40+ prestigious awards worldwide and was released theatrically by The Weinstein Co. Significant Productions strives to be at the forefront of discovering emerging talent and quality projects, with a focus on diversity in front of and behind the camera. Nina is fluent in Mandarin, Chinese and received her Master's degree in Entertainment Management from the University of Southern California.

FOREST WHITAKER - Producer

Forest is an Academy Award Winner, actor, producer, director and philanthropist. Over three decades of breakthrough work, Forest remains one of the most sought after talent in Hollywood and abroad. As a producer, Forest produced the critically-acclaimed *Fruitvale Station* (2013), *Songs My Brothers Taught Me* (2015) and *Dope* (2015) through Significant Productions with his producing partner, Nina Yang Bongiovi — with all three films premiering at Sundance Film Festival in U.S. Dramatic Competition and Cannes Film Festival. Forest is the UNESCO Special Envoy for Peace & Reconciliation and has built workshops in conflicts zones around the world (South Sudan, Uganda, Mexico and Myanmar) through his foundation, The Whitaker Peace & Development Initiative. Forest is a champion of unique voices, as well as an influencer in world affairs. Significant Productions strives to be at the forefront of discovering emerging

talent and quality projects, with a focus on diversity in front of and behind the camera.

JOSHUA JAMES RICHARDS – Director of Photography

Joshua is an award winning New York based cinematographer hailing from the coast of Cornwall in South West England. He is nominated for Best Cinematography at the 2016 Independent Spirit Award and won Best Cinematography Debut at the 2015 Camerimage Film Festival in Poland for his work on Chloé Zhao's critically acclaimed *Songs My Brothers Taught Me* (Sundance, Cannes Director's Fortnight, AFI). His other work has been screened at festivals worldwide including the Berlin International Film Festival, SXSW, New Directors New Films, Telluride Film Festival and LA Film Festival. After studying fine art, creative writing and photography, Josh received his MFA in Film Production from Tisch School of the Arts at NYU, where he was a finalist of *The Volker Bahnemann Award*. Josh is currently represented by LA based agency *Artistry*.

ALAN CANANT – Editor

Alan's most recent project is *Songs My Brothers Taught Me*, in competition at Sundance (2015), produced by Forest Whitaker's Significant Productions. Previously he edited *Hellion*, starring Aaron Paul and Juliette Lewis, nominated for a Grand Jury Prize at Sundance (2014). Called "A Raw, Honest, Special Film," it is distributed by IFC Films/Sundance Selects. Among his other work is *Nature Calls* (Magnolia Pictures), and *The Catachism Cataclysm* (IFC Films) starring Steve Little (*Eastbound and Down*) and Robert Longstreet (*Take Shelter*), executive produced by David Gordon Green. Alan's documentary credits include *Girl Model*, "the riveting breakout hit" of the Toronto Film Festival and winner of Best Documentary at the Rome International Film Festival. It is distributed by First Run Features and appeared on POV. Other nonfiction work has aired on PBS, Discovery, MTV and ABC. Alan's short format work includes producing and editing promos and trailers. Some of the networks and shows he has edited for include Sundance Channel (*Top of the Lake*), AMC (*Breaking Bad*), Showtime (*Showtime Championship Boxing*), NBC (*Save Me*), and BBC America (*Luther*, *Dr Who*) where he won a PromaxBDA award. Alan lives in Brooklyn, NY, and is represented by Louiza Vick at WPA.

PETER GOLUB – Composer

Peter Golub is the composer of numerous concert works as well as scores for film, theatre and ballet. His score for "Stolen" was awarded a Best Music Award at the 2005 Avignon Film Festival. Recent film scores include "American Gun" (starring Forrest Whittaker, Donald Sutherland and Marcia Gay Harden); "Wordplay", a documentary about Will Shortz and the New York Times Crossword Puzzle; "The Laramie Project" (an HBO film with Steve Buscemi, Laurey Linney, Christina Ricci); "Sunset Story"; and "Americano" (with Joshua Jackson and Dennis Hopper). His many theatre scores include productions at The New York Shakespeare Festival (most recently "Measure for Measure"), The Mark Taper Forum, Playwrights Horizon, ART (the musical "The Idiots Karamazov" with lyrics by Christopher Durang), Berkeley Rep, La Jolla Playhouse, The Globe, the Huntington, Williamstown Theatre Festival and others. For ten years he was Composer-in-Residence at Charles Ludlam's legendary Ridiculous Theatrical Company in Greenwich Village. His musical, "Amphigorey", based on stories by Edward Gorey, was nominated for a Drama Desk Award. His ballets

include: "The Gilded Bat", also with text and designs by Edward Gorey, performed at the Kennedy Center by Ballet West; "The Lost World", commissioned by Edward Villella for the Miami City Ballet; "Trainon", based on music of Rameau, for the Atlanta Ballet; and "Straight Through the Heart", based on music of Jerome Kern, for the Milwaukee Ballet. He received a Doctorate in Composition from the Yale School of Music where his teachers included Toru Takemitsu, Jacob Druckman and Henry Brant. Golub's concert works have been performed by Peter Serkin and Tashi, The Brooklyn Philharmonia and numerous chamber groups and soloists at Carnegie and Merkin Recital Halls, BAM, the Frankfurt Opera, Wigmore Hall, and other venues. He is the Director of the Sundance Film Music Program.

CREDITS

Directed & Written by Chloé Zhao

Produced by Chloé Zhao, Angela C. Lee, Mollye Asher, Nina Yang Bongiovi, Forest Whitaker

Executive Producers: Mary Regency Boies, Michael Y. Chow, Andrew Fierberg,

Wang Zhao Chun

Co-Executive Producers: Irene Bedard, Carolyn Otte O'Bryan, Todd O'Bryan

Associate Producer: Erica Brady

Director of Photography: Joshua James Richards

Editors: Alan Canant and Chloé Zhao

Composer: Peter Golub

Sound Design: Bob Edwards

CAST

John Reddy as Johnny Winters

Jashaun St. John as Jashaun Winters

Irene Bedard as Lisa Nelson

Taysha Fuller as Aurelia Clifford

Eléonore Hendricks as Angie Laprelle

Travis Lone Hill as Travis Lone Hill