



Presents

DAYVEON

A Film By **Amman Abbasi**

Starring Devin Blackmon, Kordell "KD" Johnson, Dontrell Bright,
Chastity Moore, Lachion Buckingham, Marquell Manning

United States | 75 min. | In English | 2017

**Opening in New York & Los Angeles September 13th
with Select Cities to Follow**

Sundance Film Festival 2017
International Film Festival Rotterdam 2017
Berlin Film Festival 2017

For downloadable press materials please go to:
<http://filmrise.com/dayveon-press>

Press Contacts:

NY/National Publicity
Susan Norget Film Promotion
Susan Norget
susan@norget.com
212.431.0090

LA/National Publicity
K2 Publicity
Kevin MacLean
Kara MacLean
kevin@k2publicity.com
kara@k2publicity.com
310.955.1364

DAYVEON The Film

Synopsis

Struggling with his older brother's death, 13-year-old Dayveon (newcomer Devin Blackmon) spends the sweltering summer days roaming around his rural Arkansan town. With no parents and few role models, he soon falls in with the local gang. Though his sister's boyfriend tries to provide stability and comfort as a reluctant father figure, Dayveon becomes increasingly drawn into the camaraderie and violence of his new world.

Long Synopsis

DAYVEON begins with a boy riding his bike alone on an open road. His mantra—"Everything stupid"—plays out internally as he passes trees, trash cans, rocks, and concrete. He considers his shirt, his bike, his hands. He dubs it all "stupid, stupid, stupid." The boy, 13-year-old Dayveon (**Devin Blackmon**), is still hurting from the loss of his older brother, Trevor (**Errick Tillar**), who was shot and killed. A commemorative painting of Trevor hangs in Dayveon's home, where he lives with his older sister, Kim (**Chasity Moore**); his young nephew, LJ (**Lachion Buckingham Jr.**); and Kim's boyfriend, Bryan (**Dontrell Bright**).

Kim and Bryan try to care for Dayveon, but their attention isn't enough to make him open up, or keep him from joining the local Bloods gang. After Dayveon is "jumped in"—an initiation process where he is attacked by the gang members to prove his toughness—he tells Bryan, who becomes angry that he's being asked to hide from Kim that her little brother is a new member of the Bloods. "You better be glad I love your sister," Bryan says

Soon after Dayveon's initiation, his friend Brayden (**Kordell "KD" Johnson**) is jumped in by the same group, including Mook (**Lachion Buckingham**), who seems most committed to gang life, and Country (**Marquell Manning**), who still holds out hope of being employed by a local farmer. Dayveon's friendship with Brayden illustrates the new strange space they inhabit, where innocence and gentleness bleed together with corruption and violence. Together, they talk about girls, eat Doritos, play video games, and skip rocks at the lake, where Dayveon reveals that he doesn't "fuck with" his dad and that his mom, plagued by night terrors since his brother's shooting, is "looney

toons." Dayveon talks about his own nightmares—that his brother is texting him, as if they've forgotten to pick him up somewhere—and learns from Brayden how to throw up the sign for Bloods with his fingers.

But also together, Dayveon and Brayden help Mook and Country rob a liquor store—the boys' first "real shit" with the gang. The robbery goes wrong, and Dayveon is hesitant the next day when Mook asks Dayveon to go on a ride with him. Mook tells Dayveon that he likes him, so he's going to take him under his wing and teach him everything he knows. "I'm trying to help you understand," Mook says. "You've got to be a man." Mook reveals his own brother's death, telling Dayveon that he went out and got himself a pistol, found the men responsible, and broke all of their ribs. "They got to feel my pain," Mook says. "And I'm teaching you that shit so those motherfuckers can feel your pain."

The talk is also Mook's priming Dayveon for their second robbery, this time the two of them alone. They hold up a group of men gambling in a warehouse, and Dayveon is surprised to find his sister's boyfriend there. Afterwards, Dayveon is angry about what he's been recruited to do and demands that Mook take him home, but Mook makes him stay for a forced celebration. "This is your night," Mook says, taking them to a strip joint. Dayveon, clearly the youngest among them, takes shot after shot as colorful lights play across his face.

After vomiting into a toilet, Dayveon returns home in the early-morning darkness. Bryan, who recognized Dayveon during last night's robbery despite his mask, confronts Dayveon just as he's entering their yard. He accuses Dayveon of setting him up to be robbed and demands that he turn over the gun that he used in the robbery. Dayveon says he doesn't have it, Bryan shoves him, and Dayveon swears again that the gun is gone. When Dayveon tries to walk away, Bryan stops him. "Listen," he says. "Look at me, dude. I get it." He says it over and over until it sinks in. He holds Dayveon in their yard.

The next images are in early daylight: a gun abandoned in the lake, Dayveon staring at the painting of his brother, Country working the farm, Mook splashing his face with water. Brayden watches cartoons, Bryan folds clothes at a laundromat, Kim and LJ play in the woods, and Dayveon looks out through the closed screen door as a hive of bees swarms nearby.

DAYVEON

Production Notes

MADE IN ARKANSAS

Amman Abbasi's first feature-length film, *Dayveon*—which he wrote, directed, edited, produced, and composed music for—has been a long time in the making. His career leading up to the movie has been robust enough to prepare him for such a multifaceted role: by his early twenties, Abbasi, now twenty-eight, had already become an internationally acclaimed musician, opened a restaurant, and worked extensively in the film world with such names as David Gordon Green, James Schamus, and Lisa Muskat, with *Filmmaker Magazine* listing him among the 25 New Faces of Independent Film in 2016.

Dayveon made use of all these experiences, but its roots may stretch back even further. Abbasi moved to Little Rock, Arkansas at age nine, just a few years after HBO released the infamous 1994 documentary *Gang War: Bangin' in Little Rock*. Some suggested that the documentary's brutality painted an unnecessarily grim portrait of Arkansas's capital. Abbasi's family, who immigrated from Pakistan, had moved to "a fairly impoverished area," he says, but his personal impression of gang activity at the time was "nothing that sticks with me." This may be because the casualties fell along racial lines; as an *Arkansas Times* article reports, "Most of the dead were young black males." Still, the threat of gang violence weighed heavy in the region's collective consciousness, with suburban elementary schools bringing in police officers to warn kids about how to not get shot at the Little Rock mall—don't wear this color, don't turn your hat that way. According to the *Times* article, "[i]n 1993, the number of homicides in the city spiked to a record high of 76, then the highest per-capita murder rate in the country."

A handful of years later, in high school, Abbasi met the Renaud brothers, Brent and Craig, award-winning documentarians who would later bring Abbasi on for a film project that followed Chicago gangs. During this experience, Abbasi, who was increasingly interested in exploring gang affiliation from the angle of personal narratives, conceived *Dayveon*. "It was in Chicago, when I was talking to kids out there, that I started to kind of assemble the small narrative pieces for a more nuanced gang story, rather than one that focuses in on crime and all this sort of stuff," Abbasi says. "I wanted to focus on affiliation, friendship, and the many layers of the humans within gangs." Chicago also

shaped producer Alexander Uhlmann's interest in the film. "I didn't grow up on the South Side, but it was a very big part of life, the gang activity," says Uhlmann, who is from Chicago. "I was always very separate from it, and I always wanted to be a part of something that kind of addressed it or taught me or others more about it." He saw Abbasi putting together what "felt like a very real, interesting take of a character story that helped embody a subject that was important to explore."

A DOCUMENTARIAN EYE

Dayveon is set in Wrightsville, Arkansas. "Arkansas has a big gang presence, and I'm from Arkansas," Abbasi says, "so it felt like a natural story there." Wrightsville, near Little Rock, has a population of just over two thousand people and, since 1981, has been home to the Wrightsville Unit of the Arkansas Department of Correction.

Despite the fact that *Dayveon* was conceived as fiction, Abbasi was aware of his limitations in being able to depict on intuition alone the realities of the characters he was writing. In order to render a textured, true-to-life portrayal of a rural gang and its members' inner worlds, he knew he would have to approach *Dayveon* as a documentary, digging deep to understand the perspectives of its subjects. Abbasi reached out to a local juvenile-justice-reform activist, Steve Nawojczyk, whose work with gangs had been featured in the HBO documentary *Gang War: Bangin' in Little Rock*. Nawojczyk helped Abbasi gain access to a boot camp for troubled youth, many of whom were already affiliated with gangs and in the pipeline to imprisonment. There Abbasi workshopped script ideas, refining nuances, scrapping what he had gotten wrong. "It was just myself and the group of kids. We had a really good rapport with each other," Abbasi says. He went there daily, and often conversations went on for so long that they had to be picked up the next morning. "It was really easy to and comfort and chemistry with everyone there." He notes that they kept all the names confidential, and that the workshop was not used for casting. "That was really more for a personal inspiration," Abbasi says. "Steven, the co-writer, we kind of pored over a lot of that, went through it and thought, 'What works within our own story?'"

Abbasi had long wanted to work with Steven Reneau, who co-wrote and co-produced *Dayveon*. The two had connected years before through a mutual friend in Arkansas and stayed in touch. When Abbasi and Reneau decided to collaborate on a project, the idea for *Dayveon* had been "gestating" for a while, Abbasi says, so the writing process "was pretty fast and furious." Their method was fluid: sometimes they sent drafts back and

forth, making edits before returning them, and sometimes each of them wrote half of the story before switching off. “It was a lot of just going back and forth,” says Reneau. “Rewriting and rewriting. A lot of emailing back and forth and late phone calls and writing all night.” (Reneau was also working a day job.) In only two or three months, they completed the script, shaped heavily by the workshop that Abbasi held during that same period. Reneau, working from LA and so unable to attend the workshop himself, sent questions for Abbasi to ask the young men, allowing him a depth of understanding that fueled his scriptwriting.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

Bringing character development to completion was, Abbasi says, “a deep collaboration” between him and the cast, some of whom were themselves Bloods, or intimately acquainted with the gang. None of the cast had done film acting, and the majority had never acted before in any capacity. Many of them became involved with the film through Lachion Buckingham, introduced to Abbasi through Nawojczyk. Buckingham had originally come on as a producer for *Dayveon*, but ended up acting in the film as well. (He took on the role of Mook when a friend who’d originally agreed to play the part dropped out.) Abbasi and Buckingham worked out their vision for the film over long drives. “At a certain point,” says Abbasi, “the script was obsolete.”

Indeed, “Amman is very much like, ‘Take the script and read it and know it, but also be ready to throw it away,’” says costume designer Tiffany Barry. “And I think in doing that there’s more magic that can happen in the moment.” Barry became good friends with Abbasi when they were working together for David Gordon Green, an executive producer of *Dayveon*. Having grown up in Texarkana, Texas, Barry says she was familiar with the aesthetic that Abbasi wanted her to create for the characters. “He didn’t want it to look like a movie, and he didn’t want it to look like everything was brand new,” she says. “Immediately when we started having those conversations, because I come from such a small town so similar, I was like, ‘I know exactly what you’re talking about.’” She says it was important to him that she get there early to meet all the guys, and he wanted her to pull as much from their own closets as possible, not only for the sake of budget, but to create a sense of realism both for the viewer and the cast members themselves. “We did a lot of pulling from the Goodwill,” she says, “and a lot of it was hand-guiding conversations between me and the actors, and trying to figure that out with them, and having them be a huge part of the process.” Also, Barry says, the costumes could encourage non-actors to deepen their sense of character. “I think it

helps them feel the role a little more, and step into that. I think [Abbasi] knew that it would help them see, like, this is a process, and that we're building a character."

Barry observed firsthand the other ways Abbasi drew out characters in cast members. "Amman is such a passionate person, and has such a vision," Barry says, "and I think also his story, you know, relating to that culture, being someone who's from Pakistan while 9/11 was happening, and also having people look at him and make all these assumptions and judgments about him, even though he's like, 'What? I'm...raised in Little Rock, I don't know what you're talking about.'" Abbasi was good at explaining to the cast why he was making the movie "and giving them a platform to have a voice," she says. "To watch them have conversations with him while he was directing them, about what they were feeling and what they wanted to express—that was a really beautiful, and a really emotional thing for me."

The cast's natural abilities and their chemistry together were also essential. "It was always my dream to be in a movie," says Devin Blackmon, who plays Dayveon, and who, like his character, was 13 during filming. "I had to study the role, like, every night. It was kind of hard to get into character, but Amman told me, 'Just be yourself, and let it come to you.' So I calmed down and started to get in the mode." Casting directors John Williams and Karmen Leech put out searches in Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas for *Dayveon*. They immediately saw something in Blackmon, who is from Little Rock, and Buckingham's cousin. "He was just so subtle and he didn't force and he didn't push," Williams says. "He allowed things to bubble up." For Williams and Leech, casting a film is an always-on affair. "We're driving down the street and I'm flipping around doing, you know, U-turns and jumping out of cars and, 'Hey, hey, let me talk to you real quick,'" says Williams. For example, they found Dontrell Bright, who plays Bryan, at an Olive Garden. "We were just eating," Williams says, "and then he rolled up and Karmen looked over and was like, 'What about this dude?'" Bright says he was picking up his food when he noticed a woman looking at him. "I didn't know what she was looking at—I didn't know what I had done," he says, laughing. "I was just standing in line and waiting." He was uncertain whether it was legitimate, but he called the number on the card they gave him anyway. When he met Abbasi the next day, Bright says he was "nervous as hell." Abbasi worked with him through the nerves, though. "He had me go over a few lines," Bright says. "After that, I really thought that I didn't do a good job, but he believed in me enough to give me another chance, because he felt like I could potentially fit this character." Abbasi was right. Bright's chemistry with Blackmon

worked. For Bright, the confrontation between Bryan and Dayveon at the kitchen table especially resonated. “It’s just like, you’re trying to get through to somebody, you know, it’s coming from a place of love, and they’re not in the position where they can [see] what you’re trying to get them to see,” Bright says. “That took me to another place, to where it was almost me talking to one of my nephews and trying to get them to see the bigger picture... that’s one of my favorite scenes of the movie right there.”

Often it was the unexpected aspects of filming that moved *Dayveon* forward, making it what it is. During the time of rehearsals, Kordell “KD” Johnson, who plays new gang initiate Brayden, was shot in the leg. They believed that Johnson might have to drop out of the cast, but Abbasi says the incident ended up making his resolve to play the character even stronger, so they worked that storyline into Brayden’s character. “When Lachion and I visited him in the hospital, from his voice, he seemed to have more conviction to want to do this role and felt that this could be a great outlet,” Abbasi says. “Because he was really terrified, and it really shook him up—personally, I could see that, from the outside, that it really had totally changed a lot of what he was thinking.” Johnson says that he wasn’t afraid so much as he was in pain. (He says he’s different from Brayden in that way. “I don’t have no fear at all,” Johnson says, though he did enjoy depicting a character with fear.) Specifically during the scene when he had to ride on the back of a bike, Johnson says his leg threatened to distract him, but “Amman got me through it.” And for the jump scene, Abbasi persuaded him to let the guys throw a slushie on him by making a deal, Johnson says: “If I let them throw a slushie on me, I could throw a slushie on him.”

But *Dayveon* also relied on structure. Once the film had been cast, Abbasi began engaging the actors in hours-long rehearsals nearly every day for four months, which, he says, “helped inform the script more so than what was on the paper.” By the time they were prepped for shooting, the cast had so perfected the flow of dialogue that they could go for entire blocks of time relaying the script uninterrupted, as if they were acting out a play.

DREAMS, NATURE, & VIOLENCE IN DAYVEON

One of the striking aspects of *Dayveon* is the way it juxtaposes softness—innocence and natural beauty—and hardness—adulthood, poverty, and violence. A poignant example is one of the lake scenes, when Brayden helps Dayveon form the Bloods sign with his fingers, then snaps a photo of him for social media. This was “the delicate part,” Abbasi

says, “balancing a very lighthearted relationship between him and his friend, Brayden, and these darker modes of adulthood, and being thrust into it when you’re a child. And that’s just more on a human level, rather than specifically...the gang aspect.”

Still, using gentleness as a vessel for this particular story was intentional. Reneau points out that when he and Amman were putting the script together, it was “important to have a certain approach and a certain sensitivity, even though the topic is rather brutal. The idea of sort of having a softer approach to describing their world was definitely something we deeply discussed in the early writing process.”

Another striking image from *Dayveon*: bees. The motif occurs throughout the film at pivotal moments, and the shot of a bee stinging Dayveon only to die immediately after feels especially invested with meaning. “This definitely didn’t come to mind while we were writing,” Reneau says, “but bees are sort of endangered, they’re under attack for a variety of reasons, and I think that sort of parallels the characters: they’re in this world where they’re in a trap.”

Despite the richness of various bee metaphors, Abbasi insists there is no fixed symbolism. It’s what he says excites him most about the medium of film, the freedom to explore those things “that you can’t really articulate, and it just moves you internally.” at is, after all, how the bees came to be included in *Dayveon*: they literally appeared to him in a vision. Abbasi suffered from on-again, off-again sickness—“a fever of unknown origin,” as his doctor put it—and it was during one of these high fevers that the image surfaced. “I just kept on seeing these bees,” he says. “As I was falling asleep, I kept on imagining bees everywhere swarming. And I just thought it was such a beautiful image. I couldn’t get it out of my mind.”

BROTHERHOOD IN DAYVEON

One of the concepts that features prominently in *Dayveon* is brotherhood. Dayveon joins the Bloods in large part as an attempt to feel closer to his brother, by taking on the kind of life Dayveon imagines he led. And when Kim’s boyfriend, Bryan, tries to get Dayveon to open up by telling him he can talk to him “like a big brother,” Dayveon storms out. He spends time with Brayden instead. “We’re like brothers,” Dayveon tells him.

Fraternal organizations and what it means to be a man are often inextricable. In *Dayveon*, Mook—the character most invested in the Bloods and whose own brother was also shot—says that he wants to take Dayveon under his wing and teach him everything he knows. In that same conversation, he tells him to “be a man,” to break

ribs. But though looking at the Bloods as a brotherhood might seem obvious, the film doesn't present brotherhood as synonymous with gang affiliation, or manhood. In a sense, brotherhood is positioned as the antidote to manhood—an alternative to that aggressive, solitary process of calcification.

At the center of all this, and also separate from it, is Kim, the only female character in *Dayveon* with a speaking role. "Kim was a real big anchor for the story itself," Abbasi says. "She anchored our main character in a way that none of our other characters did." For this reason, rehearsals with her were very different. "Because it was more about the thoughtfulness, the facial expressions, the body language," Abbasi says. "Without her this story can't really work. She's placed in there to symbolize something larger." "I kind of saw myself as the connector," says Chasity Moore, who plays Kim. "I was the quiet space."

That brotherhood is a force moving *Dayveon* forward makes sense: it's true also behind the scenes. Devin Blackmon credits his older brother with his ability to play Dayveon the way he did. He says he felt "one hundred percent" close to his character, "because my brother, he's been doing things like that and I just look at [him] and...take it from there." Abbasi, too, has been influenced heavily by his older brother, Yousuf Abbasi. They started making music together over a decade ago under the name The Abbasi Brothers, putting out albums that found international success. Yousuf is not only his longest creative collaborator—Abbasi has said that his brother is also his closest friend.

For producer Lachion Buckingham, his brother was "all the way" why he wanted to get involved with *Dayveon*—and it's this story that provided much of the inspiration for the film. In 2011, Buckingham's brother was shot, twice in the back of the neck and once in the back of the head, leaving him paralyzed from the neck down. "It was him and his friend in the car," Buckingham says. "My brother was in the passenger's seat and his friend was driving. I guess they went to meet somebody for the dude that was driving, and the guy got into the back seat and shot my brother." (The friend was shot three times in the arm. "He was okay," but "couldn't leave that life alone" and is now in jail.) "I was locked up when that happened," says Buckingham. In fact, he was at the boot camp program where Abbasi later workshopped the script.

Buckingham had been sent to boot camp about a month before his brother's shooting, where, at age 17, he would spend nine weeks for being "in the wrong place at the wrong time, hanging around the hood, hanging around the same guys that my brother had got

shot in the car with.” (The charges were for a nonviolent drug offense—”they found some on the ground when they locked me and my brother’s friend up”—and the judge told Buckingham if he completed his time and “did everything right,” the charges would be dropped. When he went back to court, though, “they tried to up me to 10 or 40 years.” Buckingham says they waited until he was 18 to put those drug charges on him, but the police never showed up to court. “That’s why I’m here now, so that’s a blessing.”) For much of his time at boot camp, Buckingham had no idea that his brother had been shot and paralyzed. “My mom wasn’t going to tell me till I got out,” he says, “so I guess I could keep my head up and go on and do what I needed to do to get out of there.” When a guard told him what had happened on the outside, he didn’t believe him at first.

But Buckingham had received a premonition of sorts, weeks earlier. “I had had this dream that something had happened to one of my family members.” In the dream he saw himself on the phone, crying. at dream “came true,” he says. When, just a few years after getting out of boot camp, Buckingham was introduced to Abbasi through Steve Nawojczyk, he was working at a hotel. It was “a blessing” to collaborate with Abbasi on *Dayveon*. “Because I’ve lived that life, I’ve seen a lot of stuff,” he says. “You don’t want to live that life all your life. You want to see something different.”

PERSPECTIVE & PLACE

Dayveon conveys a sense of individual and collective isolation. This is enhanced by filming that mimics the main character’s perspective, or POV shooting. As Dayveon waits out in the car during his first crime as a Blood, for example, he’s cut off from the details of what he’s just been an accomplice to, and the audience is kept similarly in the dark. The effect is disorienting. “That was extremely intentional,” Abbasi says. “Those lingering effects—for, one, the character, and the audience—are more important to me than a punctuation mark. And that lingering effect creates so many opportunities for different decisions for a character to make, because you can then understand this character is still processing, like, ‘Holy crap, was someone shot? What happened?’ In that way it sets itself up mirroring life and reality, where you don’t get all the answers in a clean way.”

This sensibility is carried out in other, even subtler, aspects of the film. Abbasi told director of photography Dustin Lane that he wanted *Dayveon* shot in 4:3—an aspect ratio that creates an image that’s more square than rectangle, like watching from an old TV, or a cell phone. “I’m used to shooting everything anamorphic, which is super wide,” Lane says. “When Amman and I started talking he’s like, ‘You know, I don’t know that a

wide thing's right for this.' And I think it started with phone culture, you know, so many people are watching videos on their phone, which is a vertical image." They knew they didn't want to do vertical and they considered a straight square, but ultimately settled on 4:3, blending "a classical element" with a more modern look evocative of a phone screen, or portraiture. "You could almost take stills away from it and they look like photographs more than stills from a movie," Lane says. "I think, too, it made sense for the story because the character is very enclosed in his own world. It's not like an expansive, grandiose place. He lives on one street, his best friend's up the road, there's a couple of streets around the town, and that's it. It's a very closed-off confined environment, and I think the aspect ratio felt—you know, you were literally boxing someone in—which was, I think, a subconscious way to get that idea across."

Dayveon is also defined by its distinct sense of place. Much of the setting—Arkansas's natural beauty and "wildness"—required no alteration, says Lane. "We just tried to point the camera at the right stuff." Indoor shooting, however, required more deliberate decisions. Lane recalls how, when they first went to the house where most of the film takes place—which is where Marquell Manning, who plays Country, actually lives—"it was really dark inside, there was no lights on during the day, it was just what was coming in through these tiny windows that either had the heavy dark curtains, or it was like the window with the air conditioner, so there was only like a slit at the top...Amman's like, 'I don't want to change this.' He's like, 'This is what it should look like. This is what it is.'" It became a rule: never have a light on inside the house. Lane says Abbasi didn't want the cast to see it any other way.

Providing an authentic sense of place also meant bringing in details unique to this milieu: items like the airbrushed R.I.P. painting of Dayveon's brother. Abbasi had seen many like it during his time filming the documentary in Chicago. "I had that painting done by a local artist in North Little Rock," says Abbasi. "That took some searching, really. We looked through the community, we kind of just asked people who were well-respected as artists." Finally, he says, they heard of someone "through the grapevine" known for producing family memorabilia—large portraits, or t-shirts decorated with iron-on transfers and airbrushed images. The image in the painting is of Errick Tillar, the brother of producer Lachion Buckingham who was shot and paralyzed in 2011. "That painting is in dedication to him," says Abbasi. Though Tillar is still alive, Trevor, the fictionalized character, is loosely based on him.

STORY & SOUND

Dayveon rejects conformity. According to editor Dominic LaPerriere, the film allowed him to try some of the most “playful editing” of his career. “There’s a scene where the two boys are riding their bikes and playing. The footage was pretty cool but Amman was wanting it to be something more. I started scrolling back and forth, and he started filming the television with his iPhone,” LaPerriere says. The result was an “almost animated effect” that they decided to use in the film. “I ended up loving that scene and that moment,” says LaPerriere. “It felt kind of free and childlike.”

“What the film does best is capturing the emotions of the moment, while feeling realistic with the characters.” But, LaPerriere says, “[i]t was challenging in a unique way to have everything feel relevant without having the conventions of narrative films to fall back on always.” They had to be sure to drop enough narrative bread crumbs to draw viewers along, while remaining true to the film’s “intimate and lyrical” character-driven story. “To do that, we rewrote a bunch of voiceover lines and we put them over scenes that had just one or two lines of dialogue.” The scene when Dayveon and Brayden are talking about nightmares is a result of this process; the bulk of the dialogue was added soon before they locked the cut, to provide necessary breadth to Dayveon’s backstory. They layered it in such a way, though, that “it didn’t feel like just voiceover that was tacked on there,” LaPerriere says. “Instead it felt like it came from the world of the boys.”

The music in *Dayveon* does not adhere to expectations either. Abbasi composed the music for the film as well. “There’s no doubt, the score for this goes out on a limb,” says Amos Cochran, who arranged and performed music for *Dayveon*. One of the most arresting examples comes at the end, when Mook brings Dayveon to the strip club to celebrate the boy’s first up-close robbery. The scene captures “this fragile state” that Dayveon is in after doing “the worst thing you see him do in the movie,” says Cochran. “It’s supposed to be his night...but it’s like, something’s not quite right.” For that piece of music and generally, Cochran says, he and Abbasi “worked for a long time on the actual sound of the music—not even what’s being played, but how you’re hearing what you’re hearing.” He thinks he “recorded and mic-ed up probably five to six different pianos over the course of two years to get the sound of this song right.”

Cochran and Abbasi met in a hallway at the Little Rock Film Festival, which Abbasi used to coordinate. They hit it off, Cochran says, because they were the only people they’d ever met in Arkansas who were “turned on” to a particular brand of music from

Iceland. (Though Abbasi has collaborated with Sigur Rós, Cochran is referring more specifically to bands like those represented by the Icelandic record label Bedroom Community.) Since then, their exchange of ideas has been nearly constant—they talk almost every day. “Our sensibilities are pretty much the exact same thing, so it’s wonderful to work together,” he says. “Amman and I work a lot like we’re in a band together. He’ll have an idea—it usually starts with his ideas, for the most part—there were two cues, I think, in *Dayveon*, that I started—but then once one of us starts it, we’ll just kind of throw it back and forth.”

There’s not much music in *Dayveon*. “We joked that the goal was to not have any music,” Cochran says. Having very little music means that, when it does come, “it really matters.” In a couple of scenes, like the one of Mook and Dayveon in the car with the fast cuts and “that really swirly piece of music,” Cochran says, “what the music started to do is almost create these hypnotic dream states... they kind of turn your sensation into an out-of-body experience, and then when it’s over, it’s like you finally landed.”

Many of the pieces came before the shooting of the film, though they weren’t exactly separate from it. Abbasi remembers sometimes sitting at his piano, imagining a scene from *Dayveon*, and the notes would come. “A lot of times we won’t even talk about music. We’ll end up in these conversations about geometric patterns or something,” Cochran says. “When you can have an abstract conversation with somebody, the result is what neither of you expect.” It’s a result perfectly suited to *Dayveon*—a film that breaks convention not only in music but also in cinematography, editing, and storytelling.

DAYVEON

Amman Abbasi, Director – Biography

Amman Abbasi is a writer, director, editor, producer, and composer. *Filmmaker Magazine* listed him among the 25 New Faces of Independent Film in 2016. Abbasi has released multiple EPs independently and collaborated with his brother under the name The Abbasi Brothers. Their 2008 debut album, "Something Like Nostalgia," topped the charts in Japan. Abbasi has composed music for documentaries *Voices for Justice*, *The Wall*, and *Warrior Champions* and short films *Tragedy*, *Booth*, and *Flowers for Amber Gordon*. In 2013, he wrote, directed, and composed music for the short film *Bad Water*. *Dayveon* is his first feature-length film. Abbasi attended Hendrix College, but left early to pursue music and film. He grew up in Little Rock, Arkansas.

DAYVEON

Steven Reneau, Writer/Co-Producer – Biography

Steven Reneau is an LA-based writer and filmmaker. Reneau grew up in New York City and attended Yale University where he studied political science and English. After graduating, Reneau moved to London, then New York, where he worked as an assistant in WME's theatre department and as an executive assistant at Scott Rudin Productions. Reneau is currently in post-production on his first feature film, which he co-wrote and produced with director Amman Abbasi. The film, titled *Dayveon*, was a 2016 IFP Narrative Lab selection and is being executive produced by James Schamus and David Gordon Green.

DAYVEON

Alexander Uhlmann, Producer – Biography

Alex Uhlmann studied film at Wesleyan University where he made his first film, *Dearest Fred This Party is All for You*, which played at Slamdance Film Festival in 2008. Since then he has produced *Prince Avalanche* (Paul Rudd), *Joe* (Nicolas Cage), *Manglehorn* (Al Pacino), and the series *Vice Principals* (Danny McBride) on HBO. In addition to his work as a filmmaker, Uhlmann co-founded and co-directs The IFP Marcie Bloom Fellowship in Film, which he started with the Sony Pictures Classics founder in 2008. Uhlmann is originally from Chicago and currently lives in Los Angeles, California.

DAYVEON

David Gordon Green, Executive Producer – Biography

David Gordon Green garnered the Best First Film Award from the New York Film Critics Circle and the Discovery Award at the Toronto International Film Festival with his directorial debut, *George Washington*. The film also landed on the annual top-10 lists of Roger Ebert, the *New York Times*, and *Time* magazine. Since his debut film, *George Washington*, other credits include: *All the Real Girls*, *Undertow*, *Snow Angels*, *Pineapple Express*, *Your Highness*, *Prince Avalanche*, *Joe*, *Our Brand is Crisis* and the HBO series *Eastbound and Down* and *Vice Principals*. He is currently in post-production on his newest film, *Stronger*, starring Jake Gyllenhaal. Green is a graduate of The North Carolina School of the Arts and was born in Arkansas.

DAYVEON

Lisa Muskat, Executive Producer – Biography

A former professor at the North Carolina School of the Arts, Lisa Muskat began her new career with then-recent graduate David Gordon Green, producing his highly acclaimed debut feature *George Washington*. Muskat continued her work with Green on his follow-up features, producing *All the Real Girls*, *Undertow*, and *Snow Angels*. In addition to her work with Green, Muskat has also produced the debut features of Ramin Bahrani (*Man Push Cart*), Jeff Nichols (*Shotgun Stories*), and Arielle Javitch (*Look, Stranger*). Most recently Muskat produced Green's *Prince Avalanche* (with Paul Rudd and Emile Hirsch), *Joe* (with Nicolas Cage and Ty Sheridan), and *Manglehorn* (with Al Pacino). Muskat is the recipient of the Sundance Producing Award and she has been named one of *Variety's* and *Deadline Hollywood's* "Producers to Watch." Prior to producing, Muskat taught at the North Carolina School of the Arts and holds a master's from the UCLA School of Film and Television.

DAYVEON

James Schamus, Executive Producer – Biography

James Schamus is an award-winning screenwriter (*The Ice Storm*), producer (*Brokeback Mountain*), and former CEO of Focus Features, the motion picture production, financing, and worldwide distribution company whose films have included *Moonrise Kingdom*, *Milk*, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, *The Kids are All Right*, *The Pianist*, *Coraline*, and *The Dallas Buyers Club*. His feature directorial debut, an adaptation of Philip Roth's *Indignation*, starring Logan Lerman, Sarah Gadon, and Tracy Letts, premiered at the 2016 Sundance Film Festival and the Berlin Film Festival and was released by Roadside Attractions this past summer. He is also Professor of Professional Practice in Columbia University's School of the Arts, where he teaches film history and theory. Schamus is the author of *Carl Theodor Dreyer's Gertrud: The Moving Word*, published by the University of Washington Press. He earned his BA, MA, and Ph.D. in English from the University of California, Berkeley. He recently directed the short documentary *That Film About Money*.

DAYVEON

Dustin Lane, Director of Photography – Biography

Dustin Lane grew up in the southern city of Chattanooga, Tennessee. Taking an interest in visual art of all kinds since early childhood, he began to focus on photography and cinematography in his late teens. Working his way up in the camera department, Lane began developing his style with like-minded filmmakers. Finding a narrative look within the promo, commercial, and documentary world, he shot his first feature in the summer of 2015 under the direction of Amman Abbasi. Lane is now based in Los Angeles, represented by WPA for commercial and feature film cinematography.

DAYVEON

Dominic Laperriere, Editor – Biography

Dominic Laperriere is a film editor known for his work on *Fishing Without Nets*, winner of the Best Director award in the U.S. Dramatic Competition at the 2014 Sundance Film Festival. His recent work includes *Kicks*, which premiered at the 2016 Tribeca Film Festival and was released by Focus Features, and *The Free World*, which premiered in the U.S. Dramatic Competition at the 2016 Sundance Film Festival and was released by IFC Films. Over his career Dominic has edited commercials, music videos, television pilots, and feature films. His work on national commercial campaigns includes clients such as American Express, Mercedes, Verizon, and Microsoft.

Born and raised in Southern California, Dominic graduated from U.C. Berkeley with a degree in Film Studies. He began his career at Lost Planet Editorial in New York, working alongside renowned editors such as Hank Corwin and Saar Klein. He continues to work in both New York and Los Angeles.

DAYVEON

Tiffany Barry, Costume Designer – Biography

Tiffany Barry is a stylist and costume designer based in Los Angeles, California. Her film projects include *Prince Avalanche* (Paul Rudd), *Manglehorn* (Al Pacino), *Hunter Gatherer* (Andre Royo), and *The Good Neighbor* (James Caan). She is currently the key costumer for The Ellen DeGeneres Show.

DAYVEON

Devin Blackmon, Actor – Biography

Devin DeShun Blackmon, age 14, was born and raised in Little Rock, Arkansas, where he lives with his mother, Gwendolyn Johnson. He is the youngest of three children.

Blackmon attends the historic Little Rock Central High School, home of the Tigers. He plays center position on the basketball team for Greater Star Baptist Church. Previously, he attended Dunbar Magnet Middle School, where he was an active member of both the basketball and football teams. He has been taking gifted and talented classes since elementary school. Blackmon recently began acting and drama classes in Arkansas.

Dayveon is his first film.

DAYVEON

Kordell "KD" Johnson, Actor – Biography

Kordell "KD" Johnson is from Little Rock, Arkansas. Johnson was supposed to be in drama class in high school, but he dropped it because he was nervous. *Dayveon* is his first film. He's excited for his next role.

DAYVEON

Dontrell Bright, Actor – Biography

Dontrell Bright is from Little Rock, Arkansas, where he currently lives. *Dayveon* is his first film, and his first experience with acting. Bright works two jobs—as a security guard, and at a factory that makes dog treats. He's also an artist, with a particular interest in fashion. Bright is working on a T-shirt line as part of his ultimate goal of creating his own apparel company.

DAYVEON

Chastity Moore, Actor – Biography

Chasity Moore is making her film debut in Amman Abbasi's *Daveyon*, though theater has been a long-standing part of her life. In addition to majoring in early childhood education at the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, Moore became heavily involved with the John McLinn Ross Players and joined Alpha Psi Omega National Theater Honor Society. The Houston native who now calls North Little Rock home works primarily as a pre-K teacher assistant. Her passion for young people follows her even outside the classroom, and she volunteers as a tutor in her spare time. Moore also enjoys music, spending time outside, reading, and cooking for friends and family.

DAYVEON

Lachion Buckingham, Actor, Producer – Biography

Lachion Buckingham is from Little Rock, Arkansas. He recently produced his first film—*Dayveon*, which was heavily inspired by his brother—with director Amman Abbasi. His son in the film, LJ, is his real son. Lachion Buckingham, Jr. is three.

DAYVEON

Marquell Manning, Actor – Biography

Marquell Manning lives in Wrightsville, Arkansas, where the film was shot. The house where *Dayveon* was filmed is his home. Manning is a first-time actor. *Dayveon* is his first film.

DAYVEON
Selected Credits/Billing Block

SYMBOLIC EXCHANGE SALEM STREET ENTERTAINMENT MAMA BEAR STUDIOS
IN ASSOCIATION WITH MERIDIAN ENTERTAINMENT PRESENT A ROUGH HOUSE
PICTURES MUSKAT FILMED PROPERTIES CXIMPLE PRODUCTION

STARRING DEVIN BLACKMON DONTRELL BRIGHT CHASITY MOORE
COSTUME DESIGNER TIFFANY BARRY
CASTING JOHN WILLIAMS KARMEN LEECH
EDITED BY DOMINIC LAPERRIERE and MICHAEL CARTER DIRECTOR OF
PHOTOGRAPHY DUSTIN LANE

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS DAVID GORDON GREEN DANNY MCBRIDE JODY HILL
BRANDON JAMES LISA MUSKAT JAMES SCHAMUS JOE PIRRO TODD REMIS
ZARA ABBASI ISIAH SMALLMAN BARLOW JACOBS
PRODUCED BY AMMAN ABBASI LACHION BUCKINGHAM ALEXANDER UHLMANN

WRITTEN BY AMMAN ABBASI and STEVEN RENEAU
DIRECTED BY AMMAN ABBASI