

# Comic Evangelists

Starring Crawlspace Eviction: Adam Carter, Allison Hendrix, Jennifer K. Moubray, Steve Petersen, Scott Piebenga, Eli Rix, James Sanford, Dann Sytsma, Tara Sytsma and Katherine Walker

Written by Crawlspace Eviction and Daniel Jones

Directed by Daniel Jones and Dann Sytsma

[www.ComicEvangelists.com](http://www.ComicEvangelists.com)

WORLD PREMIERE SELECTION: AFI Fest 2006, *American Directions*  
*Third Place Feature*, Lake Michigan Film Competition, East Lansing Film Festival 2007  
Official Selection, Indianapolis International Film Festival, 2007  
Official Selection, Flint Film Festival, 2007  
Official Selection, Waterfront Film Festival, 2007

SHOOTING FORMAT: DV-NTSC, Color, 4:3

LENGTH: 75 minutes, 40 seconds

COUNTRIES OF PRODUCTION: USA, Canada

PRODUCTION COMPANY: Blanket Statement Productions

FORMS: Narrative Fiction, Feature

GENRES/SUBJECTS: Mockumentary, Comedy, Religion, Improv, Indie, Road Trip, Spoof, Satire

NICHES: Gay/Lesbian

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# Comic Evangelists

## SYNOPSIS

The Comic Evangelists, the world's first Christian improv team, travel to a Toronto comedy festival, but their secrets and lies threaten to destroy them.

In the small mid-western town of Kalamazoo, Michigan, we meet the Comic Evangelists, the world's first improv troupe on a mission from God. In this feature length "mockumentary" we follow the team's rise from obscurity through the eyes of three longtime friends – Rick Stevenson, a control freak with a Messiah complex, Noah Fillobien, his dopey sidekick, and Nigel Karuthers, a theater geek with a secret. When Nigel suggests that Comic Evangelists enter the Toronto International Improv Festival, the group immediately leaps at the chance to spread the word of the Lord to a wider audience.

Joining the trio are a motley but spirited cast of characters including Beth Winters, a nurturing mother figure; Hillary Anderson, the group's naïve, guitar-toting minstrel; Boniva Brown, a newcomer trying to find her place in the group; and the Gautiers, Sabrina and Jerry, a father and daughter with their own set of issues. Along for the ride is the Gautier's neighbor, atheist divorcé Blane Edwards, who has no idea of the team's agenda for him.

Despite Nigel's insistence that the group follow the festival rules and submit a formal application, team leader Rick decides to just "let them know we're coming" and assume they are welcome to perform. Soon the group is on the road to Toronto. On the way, single dad Jerry describes his relationship with daughter, Sabrina, and the other team members get to know each other through praise songs while a mortified Blane observes from the back seat.

The following day during a shopping trip Nigel demonstrates a fashion obsession alluding to the skeletons (and whatever else are hiding) in the closet, and Rick shows a romantic interest in Beth. Later that night, an argument breaks out about Nigel's odd behavior during an evening Bible study. After Nigel storms out, Boniva and an unabashedly amused Blane argue for the group to be tolerant of their friend. Ever the effective leader Rick decides they will let Nigel determine whether he wants to rejoin the group or stay behind in Toronto, leaving a dark cloud of foreboding over team's performance the next night.

The remainder of the film follows Beth and Rick's budding romance; conflicts arising between Sabrina and Jerry; a conspiracy between Rick, Noah, and Hillary to steal another group's spot in the lineup; and a climactic debut on the Toronto stage, accompanied by the jovial perspective of an enlightened Blane.

COMIC EVANGELISTS will leave audiences roaring with laughter and praising the comedic powers that be.

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## ABOUT THE CAST AND CREW

**DANIEL JONES** (Producer/Co-Director/Co-Writer/Concept) makes his narrative feature producing and directing debut with COMIC EVANGELISTS. In 2002, as a Reuters youth reporter, Jones produced and directed a feature length documentary titled "Two Weeks in Johannesburg." The film followed the experience of young people at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa.

Upon graduating from Hunter College in New York with a degree in Environmental Science, he founded Blanket Statement Productions and worked as an independent producer, cinematographer, and editor for several companies and projects including the Global Lives Project, Generation Excel, and the Morris K. Udall Foundation. While COMIC EVANGELISTS was in production in Kalamazoo, Michigan, Jones worked as a supervisor in the Education for the Arts Media Lab, a state-of-the-art media center for high school students.

He is currently an MFA candidate at American University's Film and Video program in Washington, DC. He is in the process of developing several documentary and screenplay concepts.

**DANN SYTSMA** (Rick Stevenson/Co-Director/Co-Writer/Concept) is a native of Grand Rapids, Michigan. Sytsma's acting career started in high-school. His acting credits include "Said and Meant" (multiple roles), "Bug" (Peter Evans), "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" (Billy Bibbitt), "Noises Off" (Tim), "Sight Unseen" (Jonathan Waxman), "Beau Jest" (Robert Schroeder) and "Tony n' Tina's Wedding" (Father Mark).

In college, Sytsma began performing improvisational comedy with the team Spontaneous Combustion. He co-developed and is the director of Crawlspace Eviction in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

Sytsma graduated from Grand Valley State University in 1999 with a degree in biomedical science. As an analytical chemist, he is working for AvTech Laboratories in the method development department.

**ADAM CARTER** (Nigel Karuthers/Co-Writer/Concept) lives in Richland, Michigan, and has performed in many Kalamazoo area theater productions. His credits include "Chicago," "An Empty Table in the Cafe du Grand Boeuf," "Psycho Beach Party," "Hedwig and the Angry Inch," "Kiss of the Spider Woman" and "42nd Street." He recently won an Excellence in Performance Award from the Kalamazoo Civic Theatre for his role as Miss Strict in "Zombie Prom."

**ALLISON HENDRIX** (Hillary Anderson/Co-Writer/Composer) is from Kalamazoo, Michigan, and is finishing her BFA in Musical Theatre Performance from Western Michigan University after attending the Webster University Conservatory of Theatre Arts. From a young age, Hendrix has been active in theatre performing in Michigan, Chicago and St. Louis. Her credits include "Anything Goes" (Bonnie), "The Mousetrap" (Mollie), "Incredible Sex" (Kim/Velichantra), "A Little Night Music" (Desiree) and "Identity Crisis" (Edith Fromage). She has also served as music director for such shows as "Little Shop

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of Horrors," "Cabaret," "The King and I" and "The Music Man." She was also music director for Crawlspace Eviction from 2005-2006.

**JENNIFER K. MOUBRAY** (Boniva Brown/Co-Writer) is a Michigan native whose interest in performance arts started at age eight when she began playing the violin at her elementary school in Lansing, Michigan. In her elementary education, Jennifer was cast as the "Ghost" in "A Ghost in the House." During her four years at Waverly High School in Lansing, Michigan, Jennifer performed in "South Pacific" (ensemble), "Oklahoma" (tech crew) and "My Fair Lady" (Eliza Dolittle). Jennifer took a break from acting while pursuing her Bachelor's Degree in Psychology at Western Michigan University and gaining experience in the social work field. Upon returning, Jennifer has performed in numerous shows in Kalamazoo's theater community including "W;t" (student/intern), "A Woman Called Truth" (Sissy), "A Streetcar Named Desire" (ensemble), "You Can't Take It With You" (Rheba), "Chicago" (Ensemble), "Tony n' Tina's Wedding" (Marina/Wedding Planner), "Stop Kiss" (Calie Pax), "The Eight: Reindeer Monologues" (security guard), "Psycho Beach Party" (stage manager/light board operator/Go-Go Dancer) and "Said and Meant" (multiple roles).

Jennifer works as a case manager at CARES of Southwest Michigan, providing supportive services to individuals with HIV and AIDS.

**STEVE PETERSEN** (Blane Edwards/Co-Writer) grew up in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He began performing improv in high school with the founders of ComedySportz. He then went to Harvard, where he majored in philosophy and math. He also studied improv and acting with the American Repertory Theater. He has continued performing and learning since, with a focus on the "longform" style of improv. His theater highlights include "Noises Off" (Freddie), "Macbeth" (Macbeth), "The Wizard of Oz" (Scarecrow), "A Midsummer Night's Dream" (Lysander), "Blithe Spirit" (Charles), "Antigone" (Kreon), "The Brady Bunch" (Mike), and "The Tempest" (Trinculo).

Steve earned his PhD in Philosophy at the University of Michigan, and is now a philosophy professor at Niagara University. COMIC EVANGELISTS is his feature-length film debut.

**ELI RIX** (Noah Fillobien/Co-Writer) was born in Knoxville, Tennessee, but has lived most of his life in West Michigan. Rix's first show was "Damn Yankees" when he was fourteen and has appeared in various productions since then. His credits in "Said and Meant" (multiple), "Wild Oats" (John Dory), "Zombie Prom" (Jake), "Psycho Beach Party" (Star Cat), "The White Rose" (Schmorrell) and "Tony n' Tina's Wedding" (Michael) remain some of his favorite roles to date. Eli performs improv comedy with the improv team Crawlspace Eviction as well. In his spare time, Eli finds himself working at the Air Zoo, an aviation museum in Portage, Michigan.

**JAMES SANFORD** (Jerry Gautier/Co-Writer) is a native of Columbus, Ohio who began acting at age seven when he was cast as Christopher Columbus in his elementary school's Columbus Day pageant. He graduated from Western Michigan University, where he taught journalism classes, hosted a retro music radio show and performed in numerous shows. His credits include "Said and Meant" (multiple roles),

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"Bug" (Dr. Sweet), "Dinner with Friends" (Gabe), "A Christmas Carol" (Marley's Ghost), "The Angels of Lemnos" (Mr. Carruthers), "Alice Springs" (Manager), "The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby" (Smike), "Lone Star" (Roy) and the world premiere performances of the interactive comedy-drama "Class Reunion" (Ted Lawton) and the drama "Natural Causes" (Grandfather). His film work includes a stint as an extra in director Alan Pakula's "Presumed Innocent," with Harrison Ford and Bonnie Bedelia, a role as a terrorist in director Dean Wilson's "Free Amerika Broadcasting" and many student films. He is one of the original members of Crawlspace Eviction.

He is a film critic for the Kalamazoo Gazette and Michigan Live and has won multiple awards from the American Association of Sunday and Feature Editors for his film reviews and feature stories. His website is [www.interbridge.com/jamessanford](http://www.interbridge.com/jamessanford).

**TARA SYTSMA** (Beth Winters/Co-Writer) is from Grand Rapids, Michigan, and graduated from Cornerstone University with a Bachelors Degree in Biology. She has performed in several shows in Kalamazoo, including "Tony n' Tina's Wedding" (Sister Albert Maria), "Psycho Beach Party" (Berdine), "On the Verge" (Venticelli), "Bug" (R.C.) and "Said and Meant" (various roles). She was a part of the Studio Project at the Kalamazoo Civic Theater, where she performed as Louise in "An Empty Plate in the Café du Grand Beouf." She is a member of the improv comedy troupe Crawlspace Eviction, which performs twice a month at the Whole Art Theater. She has also taught improv skills to elementary students for three years through the program Crawlspace Cares as well as an improv theater summer camp at the Whole Art Theater. Sytsma supervises an after school program at two elementary schools and works as a member of the Resident Company at the Whole Art Theater, where she is directing her first show – Randy Wyatt's "Swindling Jehovah."

**KATHERINE WALKER** (Sabrina Gautier/Co-Writer) is a Kalamazoo, Michigan, native who began performing at age three when she was enrolled in Patti Herm's School of Dance to provide an outlet for her energy. In the following years, she was cast in several high school musicals including: "The Wizard of Oz" (Scarecrow), "Hello Dolly" (Minnie Fay), and "Seven Brides for Seven Brothers" (Dorcas Bixby). During her college career at Western Michigan University, she performed in numerous Kalamazoo Civic Theater productions including "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat" (Wife Number 1) and "Guys and Dolls" (Agatha). Walker has also performed in the Whole Art Theater productions of "The Eight: Reindeer Monologues" (Dancer), "Psycho Beach Party" (Marvel Ann). It was during her role as "Dancer" in January 2004 that she was asked to join Crawlspace Eviction.

**SCOTT PIEBENGA** (Dave Dovary), from Grand Rapids, Michigan, performed comedy throughout West Michigan with improv teams Spontaneous Combustion and Crawlspace Eviction. After graduating from Western Michigan University, Scott went on the national comedy tour "We Can Make You Laugh." He has performed stand-up and improv comedy in 24 states, to be exact. Scott has performed in the two runs of the show "Psycho Beach Party" (YoYo) and "Said & Meant" (various roles). He also has experience teaching improv comedy.

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## PRODUCTION NOTES

Most people who see COMIC EVANGELISTS are surprised to find out what a low-budget, do-it-yourself collaboration it is. Who knew that for the same price as six skim caramel lattes and three blueberry muffins, you can produce a feature-length comedy?

In August 2005, Kalamazoo, Michigan based improv comedy group Crawlspace Eviction was invited to perform at the Toronto International Improv Festival, an annual event held by Toronto's Impatient Theater Company. Crawlspace invited filmmaker and friend Daniel Jones along to film a road documentary. Over a long dinner, Crawlspace founder and director, Dann Sytsma, convinced Jones that instead of merely recording the events of the group's trip to Toronto, they should create a "mockumentary" about a fictional evangelical improv team. Sytsma and team member, Adam Carter, had been developing the idea for several months. "We thought it would be a funny premise for 15 minute sketch that we could play at a show or post online," Sytsma recalled. "We never thought it would get this far."

"When we first had the idea of filming a movie, Sytsma and myself were talking about interesting scenarios we could throw ourselves into," Carter remembered. "We decided since well over half of the team were raised in very strict Christian homes, the idea of a youth group in a big city sounded very promising. We first thought of shooting a 'Road Trip'-style film on the way to New York City. However, logistically, that would have been a nightmare. Plus, what would we do once we arrived? So, the idea was kind of put on the back burner until the Toronto Improv fest told us we were accepted to the 2005 festival. The rest... well, you'll see it on the screen."

Each Crawlspace member created his or her own character. "I was getting the feeling from Dan that he wanted us to come up with some material," said Sytsma, "and I felt like a feature would be more fun than self-glorification. We had way too many great ideas going through our heads to just be on camera as ourselves. When we came up with the premise Dan and I just fell in love with it and when we started piecing together the characters that would be in the movie, there was no way we couldn't do it."

The Crawlspace team gathered at their home base, Kalamazoo, Michigan's Whole Art Theater, for a four-hour-long rehearsal, during which they finalized characters and their relationships. The cast worked through two improv scenarios. "The first scenario was that we were meeting as a group to plan our trip to Toronto and how we would raise money for it," Sytsma says. "I think the (Comic Evangelists) leadership was shaking out during that rehearsal, like what the hierarchy was in the group." In the second scenario, the team took their places inside the van on the way to Toronto and explored the various conversations and conflicts that would develop when these personalities collided.

Rick, Noah, and Nigel were established as the team's core, three longtime friends who had previously worked together on various church-oriented projects, such as a mammoth summer camp production of "Noah's Ark" and an outreach program called "Stayin' Cool with Jesus."

The roles that Beth and Hillary would fill in the group became clearer as the exercise progressed, as did the slightly uneasy relationship between father and daughter, Jerry and Sabrina. The rehearsal session also revealed Boniva as a newcomer who wants to fit in with her new friends, but finds it difficult to fully accept their beliefs. Blane emerged as the outsider who would resist the Comic Evangelists'

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attempts to win him over. Steve Peterson (*Blane*) remembered that first rehearsal: "We did an improv of the van ride up to Toronto, just using theater seats for the van. It lasted for hours. We were all finding our characters, and it was very exciting. I especially remember swapping religious jokes in character. I told my 'have you heard about the new low-fat communion wafer?' joke (it's called I Can't Believe It's Not Jesus), and of course this was not received well. Then Eli (*Noah*) tried to make up a religious joke on the spot. It was a whole elaborate story about religious figures fishing and pulling up different objects, or something, and the last thing they pull out of the river turned out to be a dead human hand -- that was the big 'punchline.' delivered with typical Noah bravado. I broke character, laughing so hard my stomach hurt."

The shooting began the day Crawlspace left Kalamazoo for Toronto and continued throughout the five-day trip. "It was fun filming at the Toronto Improv Festival because we had so many great improvisers around us, ready and willing to help out with the film," Sytsma said. "We would just come up with the basics of a scene and then ask people if they wanted to be a part of it. I don't think we were turned down once."

The cast and crew were also delighted with the cooperative attitudes of the Toronto merchants and residents. "This is my first film," Kate Walker (*Sabrina*) said, "and it was always amusing to me that we could be walking along the streets of Toronto, with Dan Jones carrying a camera, and no one really gave us a second glance. We went everywhere with that camera, in shops and malls, restaurants, bars, and no one had a problem." But switching in and out of character took a bit of getting used to, Walker added. "The filming was so unexpected that we would be shooting a scene, and if someone else came along, we'd call them by their character names so they'd know we were acting. Look for that in the film, if someone walks up or enters the scene and are greeted with repeated 'Hey (insert character's name)!' That probably means they had no idea we were filming up to that point."

Jones concurred: "We would be asking ourselves on the fly 'Is there anything funny that could happen right now that we should shoot?' We'd already have the mics and the camera ready to go, so we'd just hit record and we wouldn't stop until one of us was exhausted or laughing too hard to keep it going."

"Making the film was a hilarious adventure with very few unhappy moments," Jennifer Moubray (*Boniva*) remembered. "It was difficult to experience all of Toronto when we had so much shooting to do, and snapping in and out of character when an idea surfaced was a challenge."

James Sanford (*Jerry*) agreed. "Several times on the way to Toronto Kate and Steve and I would be talking in the backseat, and suddenly you'd hear someone whisper 'Camera' or 'He's shooting,' and you would suddenly have to snap into character. It was a great acting challenge."

There were also some happy accidents that found their way into the film. "The scene when Rick and Beth's love blossomed amidst the out-of-tune, drippy praise song, came about when we were walking down the street and I heard a song that I hadn't heard since my mega-church days," Sytsma recalled. "We decided to run straight into the horror and see what was producing this noise. It happened to be a very uninspiring, albeit well-intended, vocalist. We just knew that was the moment for Beth and Rick to openly and awkwardly display their affection for each other."

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While the performance was definitely a collaborative effort, the production was largely a one-man show, with co-director Jones handling the camera and doing the sound. "It was a very 'do-it-yourself' atmosphere," Jones says. "We had absolutely no budget so we'd be arranging locations and tracking down extras on our own only days, hours, or even minutes before shooting, and getting the clearances later. We only spent about \$50 on the film altogether, and most of that went to a single location rental for Noah's epilogue scene. If it weren't for my job as a media lab supervisor we would never been able to chisel the piece down from ten hilarious hours of tape to something more audience-friendly."

After returning from Toronto, Jones began sifting through the hours of footage to figure out what kinds of storylines were emerging. It wasn't until then that they got an idea of just how long the full piece might be. "I was so inspired by what the cast, and Sytsma and I had created in Toronto," Jones says. "When we returned to Kalamazoo and looked at the footage I told Dann, 'I think if we shot five or six more scenes we'd have a feature length movie. Do you think the cast would be up for it?' Dann said, 'Why not?' so we gathered together some very gracious extras, secured some locations with the help of good friends, and shot some pre-Toronto scenes, a faux-performance, and an ending."

Part of the post-festival shooting involved creating epilogues to show what happened to the characters after the ill-fated trip to Toronto. Allison Hendrix (*Hillary*) and Tara Sytsma (*Beth*) teamed up to form a musical duo called Pillars of Salt. Their two hits, "Never Date a Liar" and "More than a Housewife", were written only minutes before the camera rolled. "We pretty much had about ten minutes to come up with a concept of the song and a brief outline of the lyrics, because it was becoming apparent that the filmmaker wanted a shot of an actual song," Tara Sytsma said. "This was an incredibly fun ten minutes, and an even more fun hour to follow of different takes of the song."

Toward the end, Jones recalled that "there was a real sense of urgency from Sytsma and myself to finish the film. We and the cast all had day jobs, so our time shooting was very precious. We had test screenings scheduled in April. By this point, we had shot two different potential endings, but Sytsma and I were still unhappy. Bless my girlfriend for coming up with the final twist that caps the film; we shot and pasted it on barely in time for our screening!"

Sections of COMIC EVANGELISTS were tested in front of Kalamazoo audiences three times: in November 2005 and February 2006 as part of Crawlspace Eviction's shows, and in April 2006 sponsored by the Kalamazoo Film Society. The film was still untitled at that point and was known around town as simply "The Crawlspace Movie." Other titles considered included "The Divine Comedy" and "Truth or Prayer." Only a few days before the movie's final cut was finished would the film formally be titled COMIC EVANGELISTS.

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## NOTES, QUOTES AND HIGHLIGHTS

- The film stars and is improvised by Crawlspace Eviction, a real-life improv comedy team from Kalamazoo, Michigan, who have been performing together for three years.
- Most of the second act was shot while Crawlspace Eviction was on an actual trip to perform at the Toronto International Improv Festival in August of 2005.
- The film was shot on a budget of roughly \$50. Six dollars was spent on Christian “paraphernalia” to decorate the church basement for the opening meeting scene and \$44 paid for the location rental for Noah’s gymnasium epilogue scene.
- COMIC EVANGELISTS was originally planned as a 15-20 minute video sketch for a live show and internet audience.
- Cinematographer Daniel Jones shot the film using a Panasonic AG-DVX100a and collected over ten hours of footage from the road and subsequent shoots. Jones was often a one-man crew, running sound and camera.
- Editing took over eight months using Final Cut Pro on an Apple G5 at the facilities of Education for the Arts high school media lab in Kalamazoo, Michigan, where Jones worked.
- The cast and crew attempted to “layer” jokes, allowing for several different levels of humor appealing to both the cognoscenti and the lowbrow, and requiring repeated viewings for full appreciation.
- Over half of the cast and crew are practicing Christians or have some Christian background.
- No one on the cast or crew has ever produced or starred in a feature length narrative.
- Since shooting, the producers have learned that there are several *actual* Christian improv groups in existence. None have been reached for comment on the film.
- Kalamazoo College-based improv troupe Monkapult lent their talent as extras to the epilogue scenes. A number of other extras appear in the film, including friends, supportive members of the Kalamazoo, Michigan, community, and several talented improvisers who were on hand at the Toronto International Improv Festival.
- Relevant web sites:
  - [www.ComicEvangelists.com](http://www.ComicEvangelists.com)
  - [www.CrawlspaceEviction.com](http://www.CrawlspaceEviction.com)
  - [www.TheBlanketStatement.com](http://www.TheBlanketStatement.com)

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## **...on the production style:**

DANIEL JONES: "I believe the rough production style can be legitimized by citing the Danish Dogme 95 movement, along with the Cinéma Vérité narrative style used in "Arrested Development," "The Office," and Christopher Guest films. However, a large part of the motivation for the production itself came from the legion of Do-It-Yourself producers found on the web. To me COMIC EVANGELISTS feels like a testament to the increasing facility of the technical side of film production, but also to the importance of content. Everyone involved in this production labored intensely to make the characters both believable AND funny, and we labored just as hard in post-production to bring together a cohesive sequence of events."

## **...on the topic:**

DANIEL JONES: "A lot of people have asked, 'Were you all worried about offending Christians with COMIC EVANGELISTS? The answer is yes and no. For humorists the Fundamentalist Christian stereotype is an easy target, but it also speaks to a common experience I think most people are familiar with. All of us have had some interaction with Fundamentalism that inspired and informed the satire of the film. Several cast members have their own stories of religious upbringing; Adam Carter came out to his own youth group. I grew up Unitarian and had several brushes with Fundamentalists even within that faith. With COMIC EVANGELISTS we feel we're not targeting Christianity, but fundamentalism by asking what happens when deeply held points of view are challenged by reality. That said we would be flattered to receive any picketers and hate mail!"

## **...on the shooting:**

JAMES SANFORD: "When I mentioned the project to friends before we started shooting, I was warned that I would get tired of the camera constantly intruding on us and switching back and forth between playing Jerry and just being myself. That didn't happen. It was actually a fairly easy film to shoot since you didn't have to worry about learning lines (there weren't any) or blocking (you went wherever you went and the camera followed you or it didn't) and there were no retakes. If the scene worked, it worked; if it didn't, we moved on to something else. That was a relief since there were several times when you would wind up walking into a scene that was in progress and there would not have been a chance to primp yourself out without disrupting the action."

DANIEL JONES: "It was really a blast to shoot COMIC EVANGELISTS. There were no 'per-minute' expenses since we were shooting on video so the cast was free to riff at will, which they did. Every now and then Dann or I would interject with a cue or scenario idea to move the story along. Many times I found myself laughing too hard to hold the camera steady. It felt like I was invited to my own private improv show!"

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## THE ACTORS ON THEIR CHARACTERS:

**ADAM CARTER on “NIGEL”:** Personally, the role of Nigel Karuthers was not too difficult to slip into, once having been a young man struggling to deal with his faith and sexuality. When we started shooting we didn't know exactly how Nigel and his ‘little secret’ were going to be woven into the movie. Once we got going we found the realization of Nigel’s sexuality not only to himself but to the rest of the group was one of the stronger plot points we had stumbled upon. Nigel's sexual orientation served as the springboard that really launches the conflict among the team. This is when true colors are revealed.

**DANN SYTSMA on “RICK”:** Rick Stevenson incorporates bits and pieces of people I grew up with in my strict fundamental Christian upbringing. Unfortunately, one of the people I pulled from was myself: a darker, scared and more annoying self. Rick exudes large doses of hypocrisy and false entitlement in order to accomplish a vague goal that usually disregards everybody else's opinions. I think Rick is someone who needs to get out into the real world and discover a more diverse and human side of life. Rick's relationship with Noah is a typical leader/dopey sidekick setup. Rick loves having Noah around so he can feel powerful and correct. Oddly, I played a character named Rick a number of years ago in a play called "Face of the Earth," and I had to incorporate a lot of the same annoying fundamentalist characteristics in that role. I really tried to pull from my honest experiences in the fundamental Christian sub-culture to portray the person that Rick ended up being. I was surprised how villainous he ended up being when the movie was finished. Someone had to be the bad guy.

**ELI RIX on “NOAH”:** Noah Fillobien is the prototypical Christian who has nothing but sports and the Lord on his mind. His main obsessions are the Lord, A.C. Green, and following Rick around. Noah wants so badly to be the leader that Rick is (or thinks he is) but his words and thoughts get in the way. When he keeps his mouth shut, which is rare, things go much better. Noah means well, but ultimately, his neglect to watch his mouth gets him in trouble. He somehow manages to always say the wrong thing, no matter how well intended.

**JENNIFER MOUBRAY on “BONIVA”:** Boniva really wants to fit in and escape her upbringing in Detroit. She strives to belong to the group, but never quite feels a part of it. While Boniva feels some connection to the Christian values of the group, she’s a little more open-minded, accepting, and realistic in her approach to the world. Boniva really wants to try a new identity and remove herself from the people around her that say they are Christian, but still do drugs, engage in violent acts and take advantage of others. I based Boniva’s character very loosely on people I know who say that they are ‘saved’ after drug addictions, having abortions or making poor life choices that result in legal or physical consequences.

**TARA SYTSMA on “BETH”:** Beth Winters is a very typical, college-age, female youth group participant. She is meek, peacekeeping and non-confrontational, with a heavy dose of naïveté. She believes a true Christian woman should follow a true Christian man, namely Rick, the leader of Comic Evangelists improv team and youth group. Whatever he says goes, and whenever a difficult situation comes up, it is up to Rick to lead the group to a solution. She strives to keep the peace whenever conflict arises, and tries to cast a positive light on most everything. The character of Beth, for me, is based on several years of being part of a youth group myself.

# Comic Evangelists

**KATHERINE WALKER on “SABRINA”:** Sabrina is a soft-spoken girl trying to free herself from her single father’s grip on her individuality while still being faithful to him as a daughter and a good Christian. She joins Comic Evangelists as a safe way to meet new people, particularly a mother figure. I based this character in part on a girl I met once in Sunday school. She was beautiful, genuinely sweet, and happy to be a Christian. She would often ask me what it was like to be becoming a Christian at an age where you have a choice and are aware of yourself. I think she was intrigued by the idea that someone wasn’t just born into a religion. Sabrina is very naïve and somewhat oblivious to what is going on around her, but she gets a glimpse of choices other members of the team are making and I think it offers a little self awareness for her. James and I have been working together for several years now, and often in our long-form scenes we have naturally fallen into a father/daughter relationship, which usually results in wonderful scene work and status reversals.

**JAMES SANFORD on “JERRY”:** Jerry Gautier is a guy who deserves a better life than the one he's got. When he was a teenager he had two great loves: performing, and Sabrina's mother. When Sabrina was born the couple began drifting apart. Having been burned by an independent woman Jerry has spent two decades controlling every aspect of Sabrina's life. He's mortified that Sabrina will end up pregnant or in "the wrong crowd," and he goes to extremes to make sure that doesn't happen. Jerry's sense of fashion was inspired by the film "Stella Dallas," in which Barbara Stanwyck plays a single mom who tries to fit in with her daughter by dressing up in what she considers high style, wearing dowdy, fussy clothes that make her a laughingstock. I thought Jerry would do exactly the same sort of thing, try to blend in with Sabrina's "hipster friends" by decking himself out in really lamentable outfits.

**STEVE PETERSON on “BLANE”:** Blane Edwards is an intellectual, bitter atheist in the middle of a painful divorce. When a neighbor offers him a spot on a group trip to Toronto, he jumps at the chance for a temporary escape without knowing the group is made up of evangelical Christians who use bad comic improv as their propaganda of choice. Eventually, he finds comfort where he least expects it: in the difficulties facing those Comic Evangelists. Partly this comfort is a perverse pleasure in others' failures, but mostly it stems from empathy - seeing people so different from him experience such pain reminds him that it is a normal part of the human condition to make mistakes and to suffer for them. I based Blane largely on a friend Blain from my philosophy PhD program at the University of Michigan. We were all atheists, pretty much, but Blain was particularly bitter about it. He would get so drunk that he couldn't hold his glass upright, and while drinking he would launch into nasty diatribes against religion, often mingled with personal agony over some failed romance. For my wife, I pictured a recent ex-girlfriend for whom the love-hate was particularly strong. This was mixed with memories of my own parents' divorce when I was young. Blane's reactions to the religious fervor around him came naturally to me at the time, since I was fairly new to Kalamazoo, and it was by far the most conservative Christian place I'd ever lived.

**ALLISON HENDRIX on “HILLARY”:** Hillary Anderson is a recent college graduate, having majored in music, with dreams of becoming a successful Christian music artist. She is bright, vibrant, musically smart, but a little low on street smarts. She believes in the good in all people, and tries to stay positive in any situation. Her solution to any conflict is song, whether appropriate or not as much. However, when her world goes through major changes, she begins to question her unflinching belief in certain members of the church, and possibly in the power of music to heal.