



(The online version of this handout contains color images and hot URLs)

DIRECTOR Martin McDonagh
WRITER Martin McDonagh
PRODUCERS Daniel Battsek, Graham Broadbent, Peter Czernin, Rose Garnett, Ben Knight, David Kosse, Martin McDonagh, Diarmuid McKeown, Bergen Swanson
MUSIC Carter Burwell
CINEMATOGRAPHY Ben Davis
FILM EDITING Jon Gregory

AWARDS

Academy Awards, USA 2018

Winner

Best Performance by an Actress in a Leading Role, Frances McDormand
 Best Performance by an Actor in a Supporting Role, Sam Rockwell

Nominee

Best Motion Picture of the Year
 Best Performance by an Actor in a Supporting Role, Woody Harrelson
 Best Achievement in Music Written for Motion Pictures (Original Score), Carter Burwell
 Best Original Screenplay, Martin McDonagh
 Best Achievement in Film Editing, Jon Gregory

CAST (in order of appearance)

Frances McDormand...Mildred
 Caleb Landry Jones...Red Welby
 Kerry Condon...Pamela
 Sam Rockwell...Dixon
 Alejandro Barrios...Latino
 Jason Redford...Latino #2
 Darrell Britt-Gibson...Jerome
 Woody Harrelson...Willoughby
 Abbie Cornish...Anne
 Riya May Atwood...Polly

Selah Atwood...Jane
 Lucas Hedges...Robbie
 Zeljko Ivanek...Desk Sergeant
 Amanda Warren...Denise
 Malaya Rivera Drew...Gabriella
 Sandy Martin...Momma Dixon
 Peter Dinklage...James
 Christopher Berry...Tony
 Gregory Nassif St. John...Doctor
 Jerry Winsett...Geoffrey
 Kathryn Newton...Angela
 John Hawkes...Charlie
 Samara Weaving...Penelope
 Clarke Peters...Abercrombie
 Allyssa Barley ...Girl
 William J. Harrison...Boy
 Brendan Sexton III...Crop-Haired Guy
 Eleanor T. Threatt...Nurse
 Michael Aaron Milligan...Pal

MARTIN MCDONAGH (b. March 26, 1970 in Camberwell, London, England) began his writing career by scripting radio plays. None of them was ever produced but they taught him he could write dialogue and storytelling. Only holds 4 directoral credits, all of which he wrote: *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* (2017), *Seven Psychopaths* (2012), *In Bruges* (2008) and *Six Shooter* (Short, 2004). While his cinematic output maybe light, he is one of Ireland's most acclaimed living playwrights.

At the age of 27, he was the first playwright since Shakespeare to have four plays running simultaneously in London's West-End. He has twice been nominated for a Tony Award as author of a Best Play nominee: in 1998 for "The Beauty Queen of Leenane" and in 1999 for "The Lonesome West." Writing runs in the family, as McDonagh's brother John is a well-known screenwriter. Whether it's the Los Angeles of *Seven Psychopaths* or the Bruges of *In Bruges*, British-Irish McDonagh has always had a fascination with place. In *Three Billboards*, he magics the fictional town of Ebbing, Missouri out of thin air, falling back on his memory of traveling across America to create an eerily accurate picture of small-town life. "For me, it was about loving American literature. Flannery O'Connor and J.D. Salinger and all the greats. Traveling and listening. As a kid, as a poor-ish, working-class kid, even visiting America seemed like an impossible dream. Every time I ever went anywhere in America, it always felt cinematic and dreamlike and like a movie from the '70s or something. It's not like you go to small towns and you're sitting there with your screenplay, taking notes. It's just this beautiful dream that you're taking in. Not in a David Lynch kind of way, but there's something cinematic about what they might see as a mundane, small town. Which, technically, Ebbing is. I wanted to show it was beautiful. I like films where it feels like you've been to the place after the fact." When he started writing *Three Billboards* he knew he wanted it to be female helmed.

tonight's film he commented, "I had wanted to write a strong female part for a while, because my plays used to have that quite a lot, but my first two films didn't have that at all. I thought that'd be a good thing to do, but it was also kind of freeing to put those things together, to decide the person who put those things up was a mother. And a raging one at that. A smart one, and someone who wasn't going to take any shit." While McDormand has said that she based Mildred on John Wayne, McDonagh sees her more akin to Marlon Brando. "I didn't want to do anything to make her more likable or lovable. For once we don't have to show the female side or the light side or the nurturing mothering side." Rabbits have been a running theme for McDonagh throughout his film career, and a careful eye will spot many in *Three Billboards*.

CARTER BURWELL (b. November 18, 1954 in New York City, NY) is probably best known for his work with the Coen Brothers composing scores for all the all of their films except *Inside Llewyn Davis* (2013). He also scored all of Spike Jonze's films (save *Her*). Then there is his work on the *Twilight* franchise. However, even for Burwell 2017 was a remarkable year. No one person made a bigger impact on how last year's crop of Oscar contenders *sound* as Carter Burwell. The composer wrote the scores for three awards hopefuls: Todd Haynes' *Wonderstruck*, Martin McDonagh's *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri*, and Simon Curtis' *Goodbye Christopher Robin*. Haynes' drama is the fourth collaboration between the two men, following *Velvet Goldmine*, the HBO

miniseries *Mildred Pierce*, and 2015's *Carol*, which netted Burwell his only Oscar nomination thus far. Burwell has a tendency to work with directors multiple times and that includes McDonagh—the pair previously collaborated on *In Bruges* and *Seven Psychopaths*. "Martin really wanted the film and the music to feel like it's from a specific place, which is somewhere in the middle of the country — the southern-middle of the U.S.," Burwell says of the duo's latest film. "That's why the film has that really long title. It seemed right from the beginning that the music was going to somehow be idiomatic with regard to American folk music or folk instruments. It's based on guitar, mandolins, those are fundamental instruments to the score. In some of the emotional scenes, it has more orchestral." He continued, "The music is there to bring a little compassion to these characters who are often doing almost unforgivable things. That's one of the things that's really special about this film is that Martin uses violence and dark humor to shine a compassionate light on humanity. Those are not the tools you expect to be used in that way."



BEN DAVIS (b. date unknown, 1961 in London, England) best known for his work with producer-director Matthew Vaughn. His major works include *Kick-Ass* (2010), *Hannibal Rising* (2007) and the Marvel films *Guardians of the Galaxy* (2014), *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015), *Doctor Strange* (2016) and the upcoming

Captain Marvel set for 2019. He also helmed the *Masters of Sex* pilot in 2013. Davis began his career as a cinematographer shooting spots. His first major feature film as a cinematographer was the 2002 British film *Miranda*. *Three Billboards* is Davis' second film with McDonagh, aimed at capturing the insular environment of small-town America that renders seemingly quotidian settings as scarred landscape of pain and anger. "As far as locations go: as a cinematographer, I think you need to know your shooting locations quite intimately," Davis relays. "Martin found the location, not me; it was a town called Silver in North Carolina. When I read the script, I had a very kind of Paris, Texas flat plain—drier, more arid landscape." "What comes to your mind when you read the script is, "What does the road look like with the three billboards?" You kind of know what small-town America is, but it was the landscape, so I was very surprised when he showed me, because it was a very lush, green environment. You've got the Smoky Mountains around; there are no flat plains. So that surprised me. I don't like to spend time in an office pushing around bits of paper in endless meetings, which can happen in pre-production. I spend my time on the location, so, every day, I would go to the road; I'd go to the town of Silver, which was just around the corner. I'd spend the day there and getting to know the locations intimately — getting to know how they worked, how things are interlinked, what times of day look best. So that's my process for doing that." When asked how an Englishman could fully understand and capture small-town America, the cinematographer replied, "Sometimes, coming at something from a very neutral background, from a foreign

environment, and observing it where you're able to remove yourself from it, observing it from an emotional distance because you're not part of that world — sometimes you capture things, you see things, that are unobvious to people who are immersed in that environment every day." In describing the iconic billboards in the film, Davis said: "We [McDonagh and himself] went to red and he started playing with fonts and letter sizes, and he arrived at red with black — which took me by surprise, but it was interesting when we put it out there, because the environment is so green and you have this red." "I remember reading about something Gordon Willis did ages ago, and he said his camera placement would often be about, 'If I wanted to observe this scene, where would I sit?' And that's where I put the camera. A lot of it was about what we want the audience to see. How much of what she's feeling do we want her to see? Is it here or is it here? So there was a discussion in every scene about where you want to put the audience. I felt the audience in the scene needed to be present, particularly with Mildred. A lot of that was about Mildred. She's our central character, and I felt the audience needed to take the journey with her; the other characters are sort of satellites around her, in a way, but you need to anchor the film with her. She's who you hook onto as an audience." Davis's 30 cinematographer credits include *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* (2017), *Genius* (2016), *Before I Go to Sleep* (2014), *A Long Way Down* (2014), *I Give It a Year* (2013), *Seven Psychopaths* (2012), *Wrath of the Titans* (2012), *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* (2011), *The Rite* (2011), *The Debt* (2010), *Tamara Drewe* (2010), *Franklyn* (2008), *Incendiary* (2008), *Virgin Territory* (2007), *Stardust* (2007), *Hannibal Rising* (2007), *Imagine Me & You* (2005), *Miranda* (2002) and *A Little Faith* (1998, Short).

JON GREGORY (b. unknown) is a self-taught editor who learned on the job. In an online interview about tonight's film, the Oscar-winning actor relayed, "Martin is incredibly relaxed about the whole thing. Sometimes directors are really insecure. I don't just mean new directors. Obviously everything can be put back again, but if you remove a scene it will really throw them. But because Martin was so secure in his own self as a director, and in the performance of the characters, he'd let me do anything! Some producers have said to me that the only way you can really do your best work on a film is if you're really wound up like a watch spring, and you're working all the hours, and that's where you get the best performances. That's all such rubbish. Our working together was so relaxed. Obviously intense, but relaxed. You couldn't get him some nights because he was playing five-a-side football in Regent's Park. And with Graham Broadbent, his producer — I'm not being sycophantic here, but he made everything possible for us. I'm really pleased that it's really working for Martin, because it's only his third film and he's really getting all these nominations for it. And that was our general working relationship. About the arc of tonight's film Gregory commented, "It's not clean-cut. Life's not clean-cut. When you see films where everything kind of ties itself up at the end, well, that's fine. There's a place for all kinds of films. But you can't keep doing that all the time. Life's not like that at all." Gregory's next project will be the Mike Leigh film *Peterloo*. His credits include *Peterloo* (2018, post-production), *A United Kingdom* (2016), *Slow West* (2015), *Mr. Turner* (2014), *The Road* (2009), *In Bruges* (2008), *Penelope* (2006), *The*

Proposition (2005), *Chasing Liberty* (2004), *Ned Kelly* (2003), *Beautiful Creatures* (2000), *Pushing Tin* (1999), *Living Out Loud* (1998), *Donnie Brasco* (1997), *Secrets & Lies* (1996), *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (1994), *Naked* (1993), *Life Is Sweet* (1990) and *Traffik* (TV Mini-Series, 1989).



FRANCES MCDORMAND (b. June 23, 1957 in Gibson City, IL). For 36 years Frances McDormand has played women who are often the supporting player in a man's story. To this day, she is best known for her role as Marge in the cult classic *Fargo* (1996). A peculiar number of McDormand's early roles were female accessories to men with violent tendencies such as in *Darkman*, *Mississippi Burning* and *Chattahoochee*. Her first starring was in *Blood Simple* (1984), in which she worked with filmmaker Joel Coen, whom she married that year. Frequently collaborating with the Coen brothers, she brought a depth to many of her roles. Yet, within the last ten years McDormand has gone from strong supporting actor to leading star. At a time when many women are finding fewer roles, this sixty-year old turned in an Oscar-winning tour de force in tonight's film. Additionally, in 2009 she adapted Elizabeth Strout's novel *Olive Kitteridge* for HBO. The project was the first work McDormand had ever produced for herself, after a long career working in her husband's films. McDormand as said, "I became interested in educating people in the variety of ways in which women can express their emotion. Which is much easier to do in a large role than in a supporting role to a male protagonist. In general, the women in a supporting role to a male protagonist—cry a lot." For tonight's film the actress said, "I completely based [Mildred] upon John Wayne and John Ford movies, because that's a two-hour arc. Those characters can come out of nowhere, they don't need a lot of background, you don't have to explain why they're like that, they just are the way they are." McDormand has also been a long-time member of the Wooster Group, a pioneer of avant-garde theatre in New York City (Buffalo Film Seminars co-director Bruce Jackson is also a member of the Wooster Group.). McDormand joined the group in 1999 after seeing one of their productions. She has been nominated for an Academy Award five times: *Mississippi Burning* (1988), *Almost Famous* (2000), and *North Country* (2005), and *Fargo* (1996) and *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* (2017), winning the Oscar for the latter two. She has also won a Tony in 2011 for her role in "Good People". Notorious for not doing interviews, McDormand told *The New York Times Magazine*, in a rare interview, that her publicist's job is to "politely tell people to go away." McDormand has said that she modeled her performance in

tonight's film on John Wayne. "I really latched onto John Wayne in a big way as my physical idea because I really had no female physical icons to go off of for Mildred," McDormand explained in an interview. "She is more in the tradition of the Spaghetti Western's mystery man, who comes walking down the center of the street, guns drawn, and blows everybody away — although, I think it's important that the only weapons Mildred ever uses are her wits." [*Sic.* She also uses Molotov cocktails, a dentist's drill her knee and her fist. BJ & DC] Early in preparation for the production, McDormand hit on an idea that soon became a part of her performance: to have Mildred wear a singular outfit all through the film — a kind of unadorned, blue-collar regalia she dutifully puts on each day. "Frances came up with Mildred wearing the same jumpsuit every day as a kind of 'war uniform,' and I thought it was a great cinematic idea," recalls McDonagh. "I liked the idea that Mildred doesn't have time to think about what she's wearing; she's at war." I wrote Mildred for Frances," McDonagh said. "There wasn't any other actress I thought had all the elements that Mildred needed. She had to be very in touch with a kind of working class sensibility, as well as a rural sensibility. She also had to be someone who wouldn't sentimentalize the character. All of Frances' work is fundamentally truthful. I knew she could play the darkness of Mildred yet also have dexterity with the humor, while staying true to who Mildred is throughout." During her ecstatic Best Actress Oscar acceptance speech for *Three Billboards* McDormand mentioned the term "inclusion rider" which is a clause that an actor can insist be included in his/her contract that requires cast and crew on a particular film to meet a certain level of diversity. The concept was discussed in a 2016 "TED" talk by Stacy Smith in which she determined that casting was not representative of the population, suggesting that an "equity clause" or an "inclusion rider" could be part of the solution.

CALEB LANDRY JONES (b. December 7, 1989 in Garland, TX) has been called Hollywood's "go-to oddball". After making his screen debut in 2007 in the Coen brothers' *No Country For Old Men*, he appeared in the TV series *Friday Night Lights*, played Banshee in *X-Men: First Class* and was the lead in Brandon Cronenberg's (son of David) *Antiviral*. In 2017, he appeared in the hit horror comedy *Get Out* as well as *The Florida Project* and *Twin Peaks: The Return*. The young actor also has the distinction of working with both McDonagh brothers: in 2016 he starred in John Michael McDonagh's *War on Everyone*. The actor's resting state is on edge, which is part of the reason Jones appealed to McDonagh. The director has said, "[there's] something a bit wild and dangerous about him." Jones is also lead vocalist and drummer for psychedelic rock band Robert Jones, with friends Robert Hudson and AJ Durham, although the band is on hiatus due to Caleb's flourishing film career. Some of his 30 acting credits are *To the Night* (2018, post-production), *Welcome the Stranger* (2018), *Friday's Child* (2018), *Tyrel* (2018), *Twin Peaks* (TV Series, 2017), *American Made* (2017), *The Florida Project* (2017), *Get Out* (2017), *Stonewall* (2015), *Heaven Knows What* (2014), *Queen & Country* (2014), *Low Down* (2014), *Byzantium* (2012), *Contraband* (2012), *X-Men: First Class* (2011), *Friday Night Lights* (TV Series, 2010), *The Social Network* (2010), *Victorious* (TV Series, 2010), *The Longshots* (2008) and *No Country for Old Men* (2007).

KERRY CONDON (b. January 4, 1983 in Tipperary, Ireland) made her TV debut in a two-episode arc of the BBC series *Ballykissangel* before she'd graduated high school. And at just 19, she became the youngest actress ever to play Ophelia for the Royal Shakespeare Company. She known for *Rome* (2005), *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015), *Better Call Saul* (2015) and her role as Clara in *The Walking Dead*. However, it is her voice that is most well-known. Condon voices F.R.I.D.A.Y in *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, *Captain America: Civil War*, *Spider-Man: Homecoming* and the current *Avengers: Infinity War*. Who can forget the sassy Irish accent who uttered to Tony Stark: "Your targeting system is knackered boss!"



SAM ROCKWELL (b. November 5, 1968 in Daly City, CA) has had a lengthy career filling in the shoes of colorful oddballs, intelligent delinquents or loveable outcasts. He's had a lucky career playing some of the most interesting roles of the last few decades, from the one-man sci-fi show of *Moon* (2009) to his paranoid overture in *Confessions of a Dangerous Mind* (2002). Rockwell began his career at the age of 10 and has worked steadily since. In 1994, a Miller Ice beer commercial finally enabled him to quit his other jobs to concentrate on his acting career, which culminated in him having five movies out by 1996: *Basquiat* (1996); *The Search for One-eye Jimmy* (1994); *Glory Daze* (1995); *Mercy* (1995); and *Box of Moon Light* (1996). After a few smaller appearances in films such as Woody Allen's *Celebrity* (1998) and the 1999 version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, he had larger parts in two of the bigger 1999 hit movies: *The Green Mile* (1999) and *Galaxy Quest* (1999). When asked about the impact *Three Billboards* was having socially, Rockwell replied, "A lot of good stuff came out of it—the billboards that have been popping up [activists recreated versions of the billboards in Miami and London]. That's kind of incredible, when a movie can affect social change, that's kind of astounding." When speaking about Frances McDormand's character Mildred, he continued, "she's a really beautiful working-class wonder woman in some ways. It's a kind of antihero slash protagonist thing that I think women really need right now." Rockwell nabbed his first Oscar for his work in tonight's film. On Jan. 18, Pete Rockwell of Culver City left a comment on a *New York Times* article about *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* leading up to the Oscars. "I loved this

movie, and intend to see it again,” Rockwell wrote. But from there, it became apparent that Pete Rockwell of Culver City was no ordinary Rockwell. “My son, Sam, won a Golden Globe for playing Jason Dixon,” he added. “I think I would still love the movie if another actor had played Dixon...But not quite as much.”



WOODY HARRELSON (b. July 23, 1961 in Midland, TX) as a kid growing up in Texas, Woody Harrelson daydreamed about being a cop and, later, some kind of secret agent – like an American James Bond. “I was probably influenced by stuff I’d watched, thinking how glorious it would be,” he says in that unmistakable, slow, Southern drawl. “But, oh my God, that would have been horrible. Can you imagine me protecting President Trump? I’d pin a fucking target on him.” Harrelson was born in Texas, but moved to Ohio with his mother Diane, after his father—a contract killer—was sent to prison for the murder of a grain dealer and later for shooting a federal judge. After receiving degrees in theater arts and English from Hanover College, he had a brief stint in New York theater. He was soon cast as Woody on TV series *Cheers* (1982), which earned Harrelson an Emmy in 1989. While he dabbled in film during his time on *Cheers*, that area of his career didn’t fully take off until towards the end of the show’s run. In 1991, *Doc Hollywood* gave him his first widely-seen movie role, and he followed that up with *White Men Can’t Jump* (1992), *Indecent Proposal* (1993) and *Natural Born Killers* (1994). He has twice he’s been nominated for Oscars, for playing Larry Flynt in *The People vs. Larry Flynt* (he’s still good friends with the Hustler publisher, whom he calls “delightful company”) and for his role as an Army captain who delivers death notifications to families of fallen soldiers in *The Messenger* (2009). In recent years, he’s been on a roll, after appearing in the widely acclaimed first season of HBO’s *True Detective*. In the past two years he was a high school teacher in *The Edge of Seventeen* (2016), starred as a crazy colonel in *War for the Planet of the Apes* (2017) and played Lyndon Johnson in *LBJ* (2016). For a guy who self-describes as “a pretty lazy guy, at heart” he’s awfully busy. Next up, Harrelson will star in the *Star Wars* spin off (*Solo: A Star Wars Story*). “I kept thinking: ‘I’ll do this one and then I’ll take a break.’ And then another one would come along and I’m greedy for a good role. It’s like *Billboards*. I’d be a fool to turn that down.”

AMANDA WARREN (b. --? In New York, NY) is an American actress. She has acted in both film and television. She is perhaps best known for her role as Lucy Warburton on the drama television series *The Leftovers*. Her other acting credits include *The Purge* (TV Series, currently filming), *Law & Order: Special Victims* (2018), *NCIS: New Orleans* (2018), *Power* (2018), *Black Mirror* (2017), *The Brave* (2017), *The Super* (2017), *Roman J. Israel, Esq.* (2017), *Mother!* (2017), *House of Cards* (2017), *Taken* (2017), *This Is Us* (2017), *Jessica Jones* (2015), *The Leftovers* (2014), *Seven Psychopaths* (2012), *The Closer* (2012), *Detroit 1-8-7* (2011), *Gossip Girl* (2010), *The Good Wife* (2009) and *The Office* (2006).

PETER DINKLAGE (b. June 11, 1969 in Morristown, NJ) was born with achondroplasia, the most common form of short-limbed dwarfism, and stands at 4’ 5”. Dinklage spent his early career in New York in an unheated apartment turning down roles that would have made a joke of his height. It wasn’t until he approached the age of 30 that he was able to make a decent living from his craft. His breakthrough finally came in 2003 in the indie darling *The Station Agent*. Dinklage worked steadily after starring in films such as *Elf* (2003), *Find Me Guilty* (2006), the original English *Death at a Funeral* (2007), its American remake *Death at a Funeral* (2010), *Penelope* (2006), *The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian* (2008) and *X-Men: Days of Future Past* (2014). However, since 2011 it is his part as Tyrion Lannister in the HBO series *Game of Thrones* that made him a star. Dinklage had reservations about acting in a fantasy. Dinklage says his prejudice against the genre stems from how it often casts those of his height. “Usually it’s a bit...bearded and pointy-shoed,” Dinklage told NPR’s Audie Cornish. “This character, Tyrion Lannister, isn’t that way at all. What immediately attracted me to this—any actor will tell you the same thing, no matter what part it is—it has to be well-rounded.” Creator Dan Weiss claimed that both Dinklage and his character, Tyrion Lannister, are blessed with “a core of humanity covered by a shell of sardonic wit”. Dinklage is currently starring in *Avengers: Infinity Wars*.

CLARKE PETERS (b. April 7, 1952 in New York City, NY) is best known for playing detective Lester Freamon in *The Wire* and Albert “Big Chief” Lambreaux in *Treme*. Peters grew up in New Jersey, then moved to London in the 1970s, where he formed soul band the Majestics and worked as a backing singer on Joan Armatrading’s *Love and Affection* and Heatwave’s *Boogie Nights*. In 1990, Peters wrote the Tony-nominated revue *Five Guys Named Moe*. He is currently creative director of new musical *Stormy*, about the American singer, actor and civil rights activist Lena Horne, who was known as Hollywood’s first black sex symbol and whose 70-year career also spanned Broadway musicals, Grammy-winning jazz albums and appearances alongside Martin Luther King at political rallies. When asked by a reporter about what he’s currently working on, the actor said, “I’m working on a piece for Hulu with my old friend Hugh Laurie called *Chance*. It’s a psychological drama in a genre called ‘surf noir’—I kid you not. It’s set in California, and Hugh is the psychiatrist and I’m a gay antiques dealer. No danger of being typecast!”

David Fear: “Signs of the Times: Inside ‘Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri’” (Rolling Stone)

Martin McDonagh can't recall exactly where he was when he first saw the signs. The 47-year-old award-winning playwright and filmmaker thinks it might have been Florida. Maybe it was Georgia. Or possibly Alabama or even Mississippi; the bus he was on hit all of them on its route, so he can't be 100-percent sure. Back in the late Nineties and the mid-aughts, McDonagh always liked to take cars or trains or buses when he had to get from one place to the next in the U.S., if time allowed; having grown up in London, the British-Irish writer was fascinated with America and wanted to get more of a ground's-eye view of the flyover states. And it was during one of those Greyhound rides, he says, that, driving through a rural town down South, he spied the billboards.

"They were in a field ... that I do remember," McDonagh says, taking a Diet Coke from a waiter. He's tucked away in a corner of a boutique Tribeca Hotel, where a gaggle of Hollywood types are performatively discussing potential deals and a famous TV showrunner/stand-up comic is having breakfast with a friend. McDonagh could care less about any of it – he's lost inside that road trip he took a decade or so ago. "And it was two billboards, not three ... the first one kind of said everything we had on all of ours: 'Why wasn't this case solved?' The second one, there was so much writing on it that you couldn't even make out what the case was about. It wasn't like the bus stopped, either; I just happened to look out the window as we drove past them.

"But what stuck with me," he continues, "was the rage. It was so angry." For several years, McDonagh admits, he kept wondering if he'd simply dreamed the whole thing, if the sighting had really happened at all. When he finally decided he wanted to do something with the idea, his first thought was: Who rents out giant signs to chastise the police about not solving a crime? His second was: What if it was a grieving mom?

Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri, McDonagh's new film that opened in New York and L.A. this weekend and goes wide throughout November, takes that idea one step further. What if that mother was Mildred Hayes, a flinty, take-no-shit fiftysomething woman – played to the hilt by the flinty, take-no-shit fiftysomething Frances McDormand – who decides to "inspire" the lackadaisical local law-enforcement regarding the investigation of her daughter's rape and murder. How, you ask? She posts a trio of signs asking why, six months later, there are "still no arrests?" – a public shaming that quickly escalates into an act of war between her, the sheriff (Woody Harrelson) and his dim-witted racist deputy (Sam Rockwell).

If you know the bulk of McDonagh's work, you know what to expect: a caustic wit, profanity aplenty, offbeat plot twists, often brutal violence and the sort of intricate, eloquent, rapid-fire-delivered dialogue that spins heads – imagine

Tarantino if he wasn't so preoccupied with proving how many movies he's seen. But if you only know the writer-director's movies *In Bruges* (2008) and *Seven Psychopaths* (2012), you might be surprised to see that he's crafted and placed such a strong female character at the center of this particular story. Steel-willed women have anchored his plays (see *The Beauty Queen of Leehane* and *The Cripple of Inishmaan*), but Mildred feels like she occupies a singular space in McDonagh's cast of characters. She's mourning, mad as hell and capable of being



both maternal and rattlesnake-mean. Mildred would likely take one look at the rogue's gallery in *Seven Psychopaths* and kick them all right square in the crotch – something she has no compunction doing to, say, teenagers who throw a drink at her car either.

"Yeah, my movies have had a lot of male energy,"

McDonagh says. "Which may be why some people say the violence in *Psychopaths* is a little too broad. And by 'some people,' I mean 'me.' I'm allowed to say that now." He laughs. "But this wasn't meant to be a corrective to that – it's really how the story presented itself to me. Once I'd decided the character would be this woman consumed by grief, Mildred really sort of wrote herself.

"And" he adds, "I'd really wanted to write something for Frances."

Mildred was one of two Billboards characters that McDonagh claims he wrote with specific actors in mind when he started outlining the story eight years ago, and the idea was always to convince the Fargo actress to play his cracked, cantankerous heroine. After a gala screening at the Toronto Film Festival in September (where the film would walk away with the fest's Audience Award), [McDormand told the crowd](#) about their first meeting after he'd sent her the script: "I was in a production of the 'Scottish Play' [*Macbeth*] that Martin came to see ... afterward, we were talking about his screenplay, and I said, 'You're no Shakespeare, Martin.' And he said, 'No ... not yet.'" ("Shakespeare never did any films," the director replied, "so I win.") Getting the Oscar-winner to sign on, however, still took a bit of persuading.

"Listen, she loved it straight away, to be honest – no matter what she says about it," McDonagh declares, grinning widely. "It was the age question that gave her pause: Frances was dead set on playing her own age [58] and she questioned whether a working-class woman in a town like that ... she didn't quite buy it, that Mildred wouldn't have kids at 20 instead of 30. I think she suggested making her a grandmother, which, no – so then what happened to the girl's mother? I'm not interested in that story. I'll write you a grandmother part, but it ain't gonna be this one!

"There are a 100 reasons why Mildred would have kids when she was older – she's not your typical woman at all," he

continues. "Eventually, we switched the age of her daughter around and still, she wasn't quite there yet. Then Joel [Coen, McDormand's husband] read it and said something like, 'Just do it, Fran. These characters don't come around that often.' When she did sign on, it was, 'Well, I don't want to do rehearsals, especially with the cops' – Woody and Sam's characters. And it's like, no fucking rehearsals?! I come from the theater: The script is sacrosanct and we rehearse. That's what we do!"

This is the point where those who've seen *Three Billboards* might be tempted to draw a parallel regarding the relationship between Harrelson's harried sheriff and Mildred, and the writer-director and McDormand – a replication of the movie's initial conflict between a decent enough if ego-driven authority figure and a self-assured, my-way-or-the-highway female figure. McDonagh starts to amiably laugh off the comparison, then stops short. "Actually, that's not entirely off the mark," he says. "You know, she was right about the 'no rehearsals' thing: Fran didn't want to get pally with these people because it makes more sense for her character to be a little combative with them. In the end, it's a brilliant decision and makes a lot more sense."

He mentions a scene between Harrelson and McDormand, when the former makes it known that he's dealing with a health issue: "There's a moment of empathy on her part that's completely genuine, where she calls him 'baby' – that was an improv. And it's my favorite scene in the film. It captures what I think the movie really is

about: These two people going to war, but they're both sort of in the right, and they both sort of care about each other.

"In the end," he adds, "it was more about Mildred being at war with the world than Frances being at war with me. She should quibble, she should argue about things, she should ask questions – because at the end of the day, that's why you get the performance you get."

"Yeah, Liberty Valance, man!" Sam Rockwell yells over the phone. The subject of John Wayne has come up – McDormand had mentioned in a recent, rare-for-the-actress cover story for the [New York Times Magazine](#) that she played Mildred like she was the Duke, striding across the plains in some John Ford western. And the 49-year-old actor not only confirms that the screen cowboy was indeed an inspiration, but that it helped set the tone for him as well.

"When you walked in to the makeup trailer, she had all these photos of Wayne up on her mirror," he says. "I mean, you'd see her leave there to go to the set, and she even had the Duke walk down and everything. So I started putting pictures of Lee Marvin in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* on my mirror – I wanted to make my guy seem like the exact opposite, a perfect counterpart for her."

Rockwell pauses for a second. "I mean, I also had pictures of Barney Fife and Travis Bickle up on my mirror as well," he notes. "So there you go."



It's easy to focus on McDormand's portrayal of a mother hellbent on taking on all comers, one who's not afraid to brandish a wine bottle as a weapon or hurl Molotov cocktails at buildings. (Indeed, if she does not walk away with an Oscar for her incredible work here, there may be no justice in the world – which, given the film's thematic bent, would just be one extra layer of irony.) But it's Rockwell's Dixon, a racist deputy with a drinking problem, serious mother issues and even more serious anger-management issues, who gets *Three Billboards*' second major narrative arc, and gives the movie its second major, attention-must-be-paid performance. McDonagh has said that this redneck cop was the other character he wrote with a specific actor in mind for the movie, and once you see where Rockwell takes him, it's easy to see why.

"He's a complicated guy," he says, then amends his statement. "I mean, Dixon is an asshole. He's a complicated asshole. But he also gets to change a bit, which I think is what makes what Martin is trying to do here so ambitious." Rockwell

had played another violent, shoot-first-questions-later McDonagh character onstage, when the playwright's farce *A Behanding in Spokane* opened on Broadway in 2010; the actor then worked with him on *Seven Psychopaths*, playing a killer who's arguably the most unhinged of the film's homicidal septet. He compares the writer-

director to David Mamet and Harold Pinter; McDonagh says he's actively trying to get a production of *The Pillowman*, his 2003 Tony-winning drama about totalitarianism, set up with Rockwell playing the lead "either in New York, or London, or both."

Both say that without those previous collaborations, they couldn't have pulled off the balancing act needed to make Dixon, and by extension *Three Billboards*, work – especially in a crucial scene at the movie's midpoint, in which the lawman, who's grieving for his own loss, goes on a rampage that the filmmaker captures in a single, unbroken shot. "Did he tell you that it was written as one shot in the script?" Rockwell asks.

"That's Martin. Everything from my character walking out of the station to throwing the guy out the window to walking back down the stairs, that's how he envisioned it on the page. And it had to be brutal. Otherwise, I think you risk being disrespectful to the victims of his rage. You couldn't soft-peddle it."

"Yeah, that scene," McDonagh sighs when he's asked about the way the sequence shifts *Three Billboards* into a slightly more intense register. "It had to be mundanely violent, but horrifically so – not hip and clever. The worry was that it'd be just some really cool one-shot thing, but it's actually about the dread of knowing something very, very bad is going to happen and then watching it occur in real time. And it keeps going, which makes it even worse. But it's there for a reason, and that reason is not to do some sort of blood-spurting thing. That's when Dixon starts to go through something similar to Mildred."

Indeed, without giving away where the movie heads after that, it's safe to say that it starts to reveal itself less as a story about righting a wrong and more about reconciliation – one that still blends McDonagh's signature dark humor and sudden swerves into laughs into gasps, yet also taps into an emotional depth that closer to his theater projects than his film work. "You're not the first to say that," McDonagh admits. "I think it's closer to a companion piece to *In Bruges* than anything else, but what I think you and other people are reacting to is that ... the story starts in a very dark place. You never forget what Frances's character has gone through. There was no need to go down a broad comic or comedic route, because the laughs would come naturally from how the actors read the lines. But that thing that happened to Mildred – it's always there.

"So maybe that's where the gravitas you mention comes in," he continues, before wrapping things up. "But you know, this was written eight years ago, long before what happened in Missouri and in the country at large. We filmed this before the country had a new president. And it happens to be coming out in a moment where the rage that Mildred feels, the rage that Dixon feels – that's the rage that seems to be part of daily life in America now. So I can say it feels good to put something out that ends up in a place of hope without being kind of hippy-dippy everybody-love-each-other Hollywood version of the idea. The notion of humanity and empathy, which is where we leave our characters ... that resonates at this moment in time. I'm happy the film got made. I'm even happier it's coming out right now."



Brian Talerrico: “Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri” (Roger Ebert.com)

Anger is an energy in [Martin McDonagh](#)'s brilliant “Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri,” one of the best films of the year. In this “Southern American with an Irish attitude” story from the “[In Bruges](#)” writer/director that, like a lot of his work, recalls Flannery O'Connor in tone (the [O'Connor](#) quote “The truth does not change according to our ability to stomach it” could be this movie's tagline), anger is not treated like something to be cured. Hollywood likes to teach us that anger is a sin, and that only through acceptance and understanding can we find true happiness. Easier said than done, right? How can you not be angry at an unfair world? Life will take children before parents. Life will give cancer to relatively young people. Life will be racist, sexist, and cruel. And you *should* throw a few back and yell at something that unfair. You should fight. It is only through

that fighting and that rage that other emotions like empathy and understanding can surface. Anger is not a disease to be cured but a path on the road to comprehending the world.

No one does angry better than [Frances McDormand](#), who does her best film work here since “ [Fargo](#)” as Mildred Hayes, a recently divorced mother who lost her daughter Angela less than a year ago. Angela was raped and murdered, but the case has gone cold. There was no matching DNA, so the spotlight has dimmed and Mildred is getting no updates. She's angry. She should be. One day, she sees three barren billboards on a rarely-traveled road, and she rents the space to ask the local chief of police, played by [Woody Harrelson](#), why there are no answers. Local media becomes interested in the billboards, and the attention sparks a series of events involving not only the chief but one of his more loathsome officers, played by [Sam Rockwell](#). [Peter Dinklage](#), [Caleb Landry Jones](#), [Abbie Cornish](#), [Lucas Hedges](#), [Clarke Peters](#), and [John Hawkes](#) fill out a ridiculously perfect supporting cast.

You might think you have your finger on what this will be like from that description, but McDonagh's simply perfect script is never quite what you expect it to be. The mystery of what happened to Angela would have dominated other versions of this story, but this is not really that movie. On one level, it is more about cause and effect than crime and resolution. Mildred rents the billboards, which leads to pressure on the chief, which leads to anger from his loyal officer, and so on and so on down the line. McDonagh spares no one, allowing almost all of his characters to be deeply flawed, especially McDormand's Mildred and Rockwell's Dixon. Life has screwed over both of these people, and it has made them both angry. Mildred is channeling her anger to solve her daughter's murder. Dixon has less of an idea of what to do with his, but one senses early on that it's probably going to eventually cost him his job.

Rockwell often plays nice guys, but he's more effective here as a racist, violent cop than you might expect. He looks older and pudgier, like he drinks himself to sleep every night and doesn't really trust that life has much in store for him. Rockwell has a big arc in this film and he takes no false steps, as usual. Harrelson is great too, but the film belongs to McDormand, who can do more with a withering glare than most actresses can do with a monologue. She is simply stunning when it comes to internal language, so often revealing the pain underneath the rage. Her Mildred takes no prisoners, but also feels like someone literally torn apart inside by grief. McDormand can destroy a monologue, too—a scene with a priest offering counsel is an all-timer, earning applause at my screening—but she's even more impressive in the minor beats. It's the curl of a lip to fight back tears or the downward glance to stop herself from punching someone. This character is so completely, fully realized in ways that other actresses couldn't have come anywhere close to capturing. It's stunning to watch.

Of course, McDonagh deserves a ton of credit for not only directing her but giving her such a great part in such a smart script. Empathy and peace with the too-common injustice of our world is a common theme in cinema, but it's usually handled with kid gloves or pat resolutions. There are no easy answers in McDonagh's world—no clear-cut heroes and villains. You will start to question Mildred and you will start to defend Dixon. In a sense, that's one of McDonagh's most stunning tricks with this film. The world is more complex than most movies would have

you think, and it takes a writer of his remarkable ability to convey that. He's also operating at a more technically accomplished level than ever before, particularly in the way the film uses a great score from Coen regular [Carter Burwell](#) and well-balanced cinematography from [Ben Davis](#).

Not every speedbump given us by life teaches us tolerance. A daughter shouldn't die at all, much less brutally. But what do we do with that knowledge? How do we channel our anger at an unjust world? "Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri" is one of those truly rare films that feels both profound and grounded; inspirational without ever manipulatively trying to be so. Very few recent movies have made me laugh and cry in equal measure as much as this one. Very few films recently are this good.



Graham Fuller: "Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri is a bitterly poignant comedy" (BFI Film Forever)

Halfway through [Martin McDonagh's](#) stylish, bitter black comedy [Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri](#), a fawn appears before Mildred Hayes ([Frances McDormand](#)) as she's planting flowers beneath one of her three billboards. These signs ostensibly protest the failure of local sheriff Bill Willoughby ([Woody Harrelson](#)) to find the killer and rapist of Mildred's teenage daughter Angela, but they have taken on the quality of a lurid memorial. For the first time in the film, and only because she's alone, Mildred drops her hard-as-nails act when she sees the fawn. She tenderly addresses the visitor, speculating whether it's Angela reincarnated. "Well, you're pretty, but you ain't her," she says. After the fawn has wandered off, Mildred bows her head and almost sobs.

Mildred's encounter with the fawn is highly reminiscent of the scene in which Helen Mirren's HRH is fleetingly confronted by a soon-to-be-butchered stag near Balmoral in [The Queen](#) (2006) – a metaphor for the hounding to death of another beautiful young woman. It comes shortly after a revelatory flashback to an argument between mother and daughter: Mildred won't let Angela use her car because she's been smoking pot all day; Angela sneers that her mother is a hypocrite, as she used to drink-drive with Angela and her brother Robbie in the car. It's true, Mildred admits, but she did it only because her husband Charlie had been hitting her. These details convincingly sketch in the family's wretchedly dysfunctional history. The exchange ends with Angela snapping that if she can't have the car then she'll walk, and maybe she'll get raped on the way – to which Mildred passively-aggressively retorts that she hopes she does.

That Angela was indeed raped that night as she was dying, and that her body was burned by the killer, explains

Mildred's attempt to alleviate her crushing feelings of guilt by lashing out at Willoughby's police department. It's a form of therapeutic transference, desperate and unwarranted but understandable. Mildred's refusal to remove the billboard signs – even though Willoughby says he'd do anything to catch the killer, that the law prevents him carrying out widespread DNA testing, and that he is himself dying of cancer – elicits an appalled silence from the sheriff. The conversation evokes Jean Renoir's words from [La Règle du jeu](#) (1939) – "The awful thing about life is this: everybody has their reasons."

Mildred comes closer to expressing guilt when she apologises to Willoughby's wife Anne ([Abbie Cornish](#)) for perhaps contributing to his subsequent suicide, though Anne absolves her of blame – Mildred is transparently innocent, as she well knows. Though taken seriously by police officer Jason Dixon ([Sam Rockwell](#)), the feud between Mildred and Willoughby had in fact become a collusion, as evidenced by Mildred stepping outside their enmity to sympathise – "Oh, baby" – when he coughs blood during one of their confrontations. As usual, McDonagh is alert to how conflicts are codified into games by opponents who share affinities: Colin Farrell and Ralph Fiennes's characters in McDonagh's [In Bruges](#) (2008) and the two opposing 'teams' in [Seven Psychopaths](#) (2012) all set playground rules before embarking on western-style shoot-outs.

McDonagh has proceeded quite cynically as a filmmaker. In [Bruges](#) was beautifully shot and glitteringly written, but what was the point of it? [Seven Psychopaths](#) was an ingenious but heartless postmodern metafiction about screenwriting that became tricky by the end and lacked the richness of Spike Jonze and Charlie Kaufman's like-minded [Adaptation](#) (2002). McDonagh has also shown too many debts to Quentin Tarantino – the cancer-afflicted Myra (Linda Bright Clay) facing down the man about to shoot her (Harrelson) in [Seven Psychopaths](#) closely echoes Dennis Hopper facing down Christopher Walken in the Tarantino-scripted [True Romance](#) (1993).

What places [Three Billboards](#) in a higher emotional register than its two predecessors is the tragic poignancy of Angela's death and the sincerity of the sorrow Mildred expresses to Willoughby and Anne. The late rapprochement between Mildred and Dixon – played to perfection by McDormand and Rockwell – begins when he tells her where they can find the rapist drifter who has menaced Mildred and beaten up Dixon. It turns into something much more hopeful when they confess to each other that they're uncertain whether or not they'll kill him – McDonagh persuasively rejecting the eye-for-an-eye morality jokingly discussed in [Seven Psychopaths](#).

Impact (Wikipedia)

On February 15, 2018, Justice4Grenfell, an advocacy group created in response to the [Grenfell Tower fire](#), hired three vans with electronic screens in a protest against perceived inaction in response to the fire.^[42] The vans were driven around [London](#), and displayed messages in the style of the billboards in the film: '71 Dead', 'And Still No Arrests?', 'How Come?'

In response to the [Stoneman Douglas High School shooting](#) that took place on February 14, 2018, in [Parkland, Florida](#), activist group [Avaaz](#) had three vans circle Florida

senator [Marco Rubio](#)'s offices displaying 'Slaughtered in School', 'And Still No Gun Control?', 'How Come, Marco Rubio?'

On the night of February 15, 2018, the movement #OccupyJustice set up three billboards and a number of banners in [Malta](#), marking the four-month anniversary of the murder of the journalist [Daphne Caruana Galizia](#). The billboards bore the text 'A Journalist Killed. No Justice.', 'A Country Robbed. No Justice.', and 'No Resignations. No Justice. The authorities removed the billboards the following day, stating that they were illegal. The government was criticized for this move, and a day after their removal, activists laid down banners with similar text near [Auberge de Castille](#), the Office of the Prime Minister.¹

Outside the [Bristol city centre](#) on February 3, 2018, a mural was erected depicting three billboards reading 'Our NHS is dying', 'And still no more funding', and 'How come, Mrs May'. It was installed by the groups People's Republic of Stokes Croft and Protect Our NHS in response to the alleged privatization of the [National Health Service](#) (NHS) and the death of a 15-year-old girl attributed by some to a purported lack of resources by the NHS.

On February 22, 2018, the Union of Medical Care and Relief Organizations, protesting the inaction of the UN's role

within the [Syrian Civil War](#), set up three billboards outside the [United Nations](#) building in New York that read '500,000 Dead in Syria', 'And still no action?', and 'How come, Security Council?'

On or around March 1, around the time of the [2018 Oscars](#), three billboards were taken out in Los Angeles, stating "WE ALL KNEW AND STILL NO ARRESTS", "AND THE OSCAR FOR BIGGEST PEDOPHILE GOES TO..." and "NAME NAMES ON STAGE OR SHUT THE HELL UP!", as an attempt to protest both the Oscars and the [#MeToo movement](#).

On March 8, on International Women's Day, three billboards were put in downtown [Pristina](#), Kosovo, to protest the death of two women as a result of domestic violence.¹

Both McDormand and McDonagh have responded positively to the protests, with McDonagh saying "You couldn't ask for anything more than for an angry film to be adopted by protests," and McDormand saying she is "thrilled that activists all over the world have been inspired by the set decoration of the three billboards in Martin's film."

On March 24, 2018, signs inspired by *Three Billboards* appeared at [March for Our Lives](#) gun safety rallies across the US and around the world.

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