

# THE PHILOSOPHER KING

PRESS KIT



**BLOCK ZERO**  
PRODUCTIONS



BLOCK ZERO PRODUCTIONS PRESENTS A ROUZBEH NOORI FILM "THE PHILOSOPHER KING" WILL HOWARTH SEUMAS SARGENT  
AMELIA CLAY AND KATHERINE STREETER DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY JOEL FROOME ASSISTANT DIRECTOR ALEXANDER JEFFERY  
ORIGINAL MUSIC BY BENICE KUTRIK EXECUTIVE PRODUCER JOHAN MATTON WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY ROUZBEH NOORI





# THE STORY

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## LOGLINE

Two estranged brothers take a road trip through Sweden and in the process have to face themselves and each other.

## SYNOPSIS

*The Philosopher King* is a story of reconnection and reconciliation between Michael and Jacob. A successful and earnest classical musician, Michael visits Jacob in his adopted country of Sweden. Coerced into yet another artistic co-venture, Michael struggles with Jacob's pattern of drifting between places and his brother's propensity to never see dreams through to completion. In pursuit of Jacob's latest creative plan, the brothers embark on a journey across Sweden; a place that demands their honesty, love and reflection on decisions made along the way.



## ABOUT THE FILM

In September 2013, Writer & Director Rouzbeh Noori collaborated with filmmakers from Sweden, Canada, Hungary, England, Australia, Germany and America to film *The Philosopher King*. Embarking on a journey to create a unique and compelling story of brotherhood, love and the ambiguities of life; this international team travelled through the captivating country of Sweden on trains, boats, and a 1983 Saab, to make an independent drama influenced by European New Wave cinema of the 1960s and American New Hollywood films of the 1970s.

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THE PHILOSOPHER KING

# DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

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The open road, in the North American consciousness, has always represented freedom. Freedom to escape and reinvent oneself. The promise of something different and new, just beyond the horizon. This mythology has been propagated throughout decades of culture and art, from Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, to Dennis Hopper's *Easy Rider*. "Go West, young man, and grow up with the country".

Somehow, the first time I got on the road in my adopted country of Sweden, the road represented something radically different to me. Here, being on the road meant looking inward, seeking to come to terms with what you are, rather than escape from it. The astonishing landscape of Southern & Eastern Sweden, and the irrevocable bond it shares with its inhabitants evoked a soul searching and sparked what eventually became *The Philosopher King*.

The road films I had always admired were the likes of *Two-Lane Blacktop*, *Five Easy Pieces*, or *The Vanishing Point*: tortured anti-heroes on a quest to find themselves, to unravel the threads that connected them to the rest of the world. I set the destination of my road trip as Fårö. For truly, if you can't find God there, at the end of the world, then you can never find him. I had always thought about following the structure of a romance, to chronicle a platonic relationship. One every bit as complex and ambiguous, if not more, than a romantic one. And so, instead of star-crossed lovers, *The Philosopher King* became about the trials, tribulations, and the unshakeable love of two brothers.

Lastly, in *The Philosopher King*, I wanted to chart the tragedy of a man who possesses boundless ambition, not enough talent to realize it, but enough intelligence to know the absurdity of his doomed ambitions.

Is *The Philosopher King* autobiographical? I have a brother who is a celebrated musician. I have had the privilege to call Sweden my home for the past two years. There is not a moment in the film that does not have a shade of 'truth' to it. Yet, to call *The Philosopher King* an autobiographical work implies a singular voice in the film. Whereas it is not one voice, but many, that you hear in the final product. That of the immensely talented, endlessly dedicated team of artists and artisans I had the pleasure of working with in the making of this film. The truth is, *The Philosopher King* is our autobiographical work. 'Truth', that very ambiguous word. "As for you old man, go East and grow young with the country", said Dutton Peabody in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*. And we did.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a series of loops and a final flourish.

Rouzbeh Noori, Malmö, Sweden



# PRODUCTION NOTES

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After reading the script of *The Philosopher King* I immediately realized that the project had great potential. The story elements of brotherhood, loyalty, and facing life and who you are were all beautifully put together, told through an intriguing mood and visual style.

There are thousands of scripts out there that have potential. Either they never get made, or little of their original vision is left intact. During pre-production, the main concern for all of us was the latter, aware that we would probably have to make a lot of artistic compromises. However, as more skilled crew members joined the project and when the casting process attracted some really talented actors, it became clear that the potential of the written material was well within reach.



The cast and crew that ended up joining the project would turn out to be not only a set of individually excellent professionals, but also a group that had fantastic chemistry. The atmosphere during principal photography was incredible. Everyone was so dedicated and clearly loved the project. Nobody hesitated to step up and help out with anything that was needed, even if it fell outside his or her own particular role and responsibility. This kind of fellowship and dedication would turn out to be vital during our daily work, refuelling everyone's mentality when facing setbacks and scheduling issues. In the end it made all the difference and gave us stellar material to work with. On a more personal note, it was really exciting to join the production of a feature that would show off such a range of interesting locations in this beautiful country of Sweden.

Take Nimis, for example (let's pretend it's in Sweden for the moment). In addition to the fact that it is any cinematographer's or set designer's dream, Nimis has taken more than 30 years to build thus far, plank by plank, mirroring perfectly *The Philosopher King's* main themes of perseverance and pursuing ambition. Or the car cemetery, filled with tons of symbolic reference. As well as Gotland, that preserved haven of ancient structures and intriguing nature. And last but by no means least, Fårö. The small island which used to be the creative asylum and home of Ingmar Bergman. For a project with such limited resources it's quite an impressive amount of scenery.

I think we have proved that extremely hard work can get you the high notes, even with a limited budget. And when your own exhaustion makes you smile, you know you're part of a very special project. *The Philosopher King* has been such a project for me, and I'm convinced it will be received with praise.

**Robert Alm, Malmö, Sweden**

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# CAST

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## SEUMAS SARGENT

*Jacob*

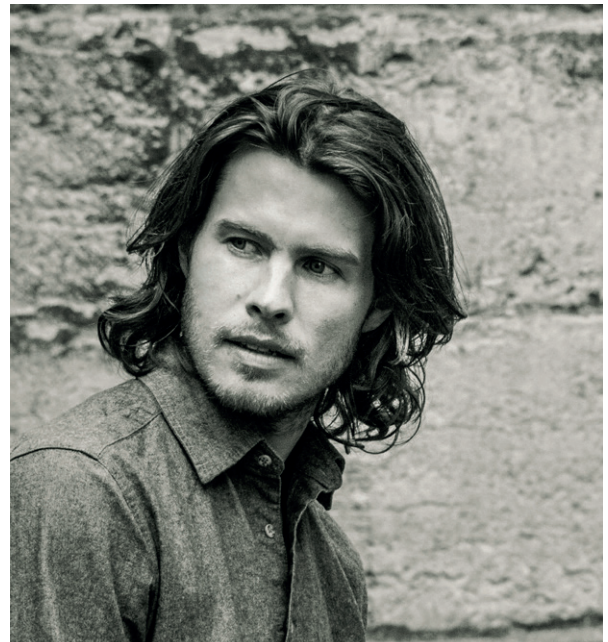
A trilingual, creative sensation, Seumas has been on the road opening shows from Stockholm to Brazil with the acclaimed off-broadway production *Blue Man Group*.

He's made numerous guest appearances on international TV shows, rocked out to stadiums across 3 continents and recently appeared in the world premier of Jack Kerouac's *The Beat Generation*. Previous Film, TV & Theatre credits include: *Summer and Smoke* (Tennessee Williams), *The Way Of Water* (Caridad Svich), *Tatort: Zwischen Den Fronten* (Film ORF), and Olivier Assayas's *Sils Maria*.

## WILL HOWARTH

*Michael*

Will Howarth has twice been nominated on Australia's list of talent-to-watch as part of the Heath Ledger Scholarship, and is now the 2013 Runner Up for the award. He has also been shortlisted for the Inside Film Rising Talent Award. As Nick Seller in MTV's *The Sellers*, he won the One80 Project prize in 2010. He has also appeared in the Sydney theatre showcase "OnSTAGE" alongside Jai Courtney and Yael Stone. Past TV and Film credits include: *Home and Away*, *Once Upon A Time In The Playground*, *Living With The Devil*, *Dead Kid Docu*, *No Matter What*, *The Guardians*, *Sweet Marshall*, *The Sellers*, *Skit Box*, *Hinterland* and *Bombay Beach*.



**IMDB LINK:** [PLEASE CLICK HERE](#)



# CAST

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## AMELIA CLAY

*Mia*

Nominated for the prestigious *Spotlight Prize* upon graduating, Amelia has since appeared in numerous foreign language films at distinguished film festivals across America and Europe.

*Elder Jackson*, in which she starred alongside Michel Voïta, premiered at the *Festival Del Film Locarno* in Switzerland. Having performed in theatres across Austria, Italy and London, she is carving out an impactful career in European Cinema and Theatre. Previous Film and TV credits include: *Sold, Scratch* (Breakthru Films), *Elder Jackson*, and BBC's TV series *Fresh*.

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## KATHERINE STREETER

*Sylvia*

Katie Streeter was born and raised in Lincoln, Nebraska and moved to Los Angeles 3 years ago after graduating from the *Johnny Carson School of Theatre & Film* at the University of Nebraska. Since relocating, she has been building a steady and impressive resume, appearing in several independent films, as well as a handful of TV spots.

Previous Film credits include: *Minds of Men*, *Remember Triceratops*, *Proposals*, *One Way*, *Bruno And Earlene Go To Vegas*, and *Trunk'd*.

**IMDB LINK:** [PLEASE CLICK HERE](#)



# CREW

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## ROUZBEH NOORI

*Director, Writer & Producer*

Winner of the *Rising Star Award* at the 2012 *Canada International Film Festival*, Rouzbeh “Ray” Noori is building an impressive reputation within the filmmaking industry. Having studied Mathematics and Film Theory at University of Waterloo, he directed his first short film, *The Lock* in 2006. The acclaimed *Parallels* (2008) and *Memory(n.)* (2009) followed, screening at multiple festivals including *Florence International Film Festival*. His first feature film, *The Incidental* (2012), a paranoid conspiracy thriller, won numerous awards including *Best Feature* at the *Local Focus Film Festival* in Canada. In 2011, Rouzbeh moved to Malmö, Sweden, where he wrote, produced and directed his sophomore feature film, *The Philosopher King*.

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## JOEL FROOME

*Director of Photography*

Joel Froome is an award winning cinematographer from Sydney, Australia who previously worked as a camera technician at Panavision and as a freelance camera assistant on short films and features including Baz Luhrmans’ *Australia*. Since graduating from the renowned *Australian Film Television & Radio School*, he has won numerous cinematography awards from the *Australian Cinematographers Society* as well as international film festivals such as *Blue Whiskey Film Festival*.

Previous Film Credits include: *My Mother Her Daughter*, *The Grand Design*, and *Bombay Beach*.

**IMDB LINK:** PLEASE CLICK HERE





# CREW

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## ALEXANDER JEFFERY

*1<sup>st</sup> Assistant Director*

Alexander is an award winning filmmaker currently residing in Nebraska. Since attending the *Johnny Carson School of Theatre & Film* with a BFA in film production, Alex has worked continuously in the world of International Film. Previous film credits include *Love At Last*, winner of the *Golden Oosik* for “Best Super Short” at the *Anchorage International Film Festival*, and *One Way*, winner of the *Royal Reel Award* at the *Canada International Film Festival*.

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## ANNIE SJÖBERG

*Line Producer*

Annie Sjöberg studied film in Sweden and New York City. She has worked in various capacities on numerous feature films such as *Den Fördömde*, *Familjen Holstein-Gottorp*, *Solsidan*, as well as many highly rated TV shows. *The Philosopher King* is her first feature film as a line producer.

**IMDB LINK:** PLEASE CLICK HERE



## ROBERT ALM

*Producer*

Robert is a freelance producer working in Sweden. Coming from a lifelong passion and love for cinema, he was eventually drawn into the process of making it. Being mostly active in independent short film production, *The Philosopher King* is Robert’s debut feature film. Earlier experience also includes sound design and foley work.

## JONAS KNUTSSON

*Producer*

Jonas Knutsson took on the demanding role of Producer for *The Philosopher King* as his first venture into the film industry. With a background in development, Jonas excels as a Producer. A reliable and devoted film fan, Jonas “gets it done”, such as managing to arrange two professional folk dancers out of the blue, within 24 hours.



# INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR

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***How did you come to assemble a cast and crew from across the world to help a Canadian filmmaker make a feature film in Sweden?***

*The Philosopher King* was my first project outside of North America, so the biggest challenge was navigating my way around the Swedish independent film scene, augmenting the cast and crew members found locally with suitable international talent, and finally, turning a group of talented individuals into an efficient and passionate team. We got very lucky, and despite the vastly different backgrounds and experiences, the *TPK* production team gelled together like a dream.

***What were some of the biggest obstacles you faced during the production?***

We were working with an extremely limited budget for a film of this scope, so we didn't have a lot of money to throw at the many logistical difficulties that we had to face on a daily basis. Over a three week long principal photography period on *TPK*, we shot in 8 different cities spread across Southern and Eastern Sweden, and the islands of Gotland and Fårö. We filmed in many public locations, train stations, restaurants, coffee shops, on the train, on ferries, etc., where our control over the location was at best limited and frequently non-existent. These logistical issues, along with volatile weather, were the challenges we faced on a daily basis. It was only through a humbling dedication and the constant ingenuity of our wonderful cast and crew that we managed to successfully carry out the shoot.



# INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR

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## ***What was the casting process like?***

Due to the nature of the script, we needed an international cast. So we divided our attention between local casting calls in and around Malmö, as well as through the casting agency LetItCast in NYC. The response was overwhelming, and all in all we auditioned close to 250 actors for the four principal characters. Casting the brothers was crucial, not just for their individual skills, but to ensure that they had the right chemistry and byplay, and in Seumas and Will, we got incredibly lucky by finding two immensely talented actors with wildly different styles, who immediately clicked and established an unspoken bond. I was familiar with Katie's work from one of her feature films, *One Way*, and knew that she would bring a soul and vitality to the comparatively smaller role of Sylvia, which I thought was crucial.

## ***What were the main artistic influences on *The Philosopher King*?***

Strangely enough, the films that inspired *TPK* were not the excellent Swedish chamber dramas I love so much, or even European films at all, but a host of American New Hollywood films from the 1960s and 70s, particularly the films of Monte Hellman, Jerry Schatzberg, and Bob Rafelson. Films like *Five Easy Pieces*, *The King of Marvin Gardens*, *Two-Lane Blacktop* and *Scarecrow*, with their character-driven narratives, flawed protagonists, and ambiguous conclusions, were the biggest influences on my film. In terms of visual style as well, the same class of filmmakers were my inspiration for the deliberate pacing of the scenes, measured movement of the camera, and wide, carefully composed vista shots of the characters set against the stark and mesmerizing Swedish landscape.



## ***How do you like to work with your actors, do you use improvisation or are you mindful of your vision and the actors' interpretation?***

I always tell the actors that the words are not sacred, the intention is. When writing a script, I try very hard to give each character a unique voice that genuinely reflects his or her condition and stays consistent throughout the story. However, the old adage is true that you can never fully judge dialogue until you see it on its feet. During table-reads, scene rehearsals, and even on the set, there are times that the exact lines that appear in the script simply don't work and need to change. And frequently it is the actors who guide me towards what does work with their interpretation and suggestions.

# INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR

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***The film centres on the character of Jacob, a man in his mid 30's. Why did you want to tell his particular story and how do you relate to him?***

It's not necessarily Jacob's age that is significant, but rather the crossroads he finds himself at in life. He has spent many years of his life, attempting to create art in various mediums, and has failed. And now that he is getting older and is about to start a family, he feels like he is running out of time chances to fail and recover. The tragedy of Jacob's character is twofold. One is the notion that a domestic life and an artistically fulfilling one are at odds, which I don't believe to be correct. And the other is that he seems to lack either the talent or the perseverance to succeed in the art world, but has enough intelligence and self-awareness to realize it. He knows what he doesn't know. He can see his failings before others do. I think that's a predicament that all artists can relate to.



***The Philosopher King deals with issues of responsibility for your actions, and the difficulty of facing decisions you've made in your life. What did you want to say with this film?***

More than taking responsibility for your actions, it is about facing up to your responsibilities as a husband, a father, a friend, a brother, and even as an artist. But more than anything else, in looking at both brothers and where they are in their respective lives, I'm trying to examine the responsibility that one has for one's own happiness and fulfilment in life too. Both Jacob and Michael have neglected that at some point in life, and through the story need to come to terms with that.



# INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR

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***The landscape of Sweden plays a important role: What was the shooting like? How did you capture the light and atmosphere of Sweden?***

This is a worn-out cliché, but I wanted the unique and beguiling landscape of Southern Sweden and islands of Gotland and Fårö to be characters in this film. I had originally written the script to have an autumnal feeling, but logistics dictated that we shoot the film in September, when the Fall colours and feeling have not really set in yet. But what we ended up capturing instead was something even more ethereal and ephemeral: the end of summer. Capturing that feeling, reflected in stunning sunsets and orange-hued vistas was not easy, thanks to the rapidly changing weather of this region as well as having extremely limited time to capture shots before losing light. Luckily, the visual style of the film called for very little artificial lighting or complex camera movements, and we had a wonderful crew that could move between set-ups incredibly quickly. That, in combination with the incredible eye of our director of photography, Joel Froome, allowed us to capture what I had seen in my first road trip through Sweden two years ago.



***This is the fourth film you've written, directed and produced. Is there something in common in the themes and way of working between The Philosopher King and your previous films?***

I believe common threads and preoccupations tend to reveal themselves in the collective works of a filmmaker, whether he or she is consciously aware of them or not. If there is one theme that I have found recurring in my work, often before I realize it is there, it's one of obsession. Of striving to reach something no matter the cost. I believe it is what propels most artists in their work, and as a theme, it has infinite potential for exploration in any context. The common way of working amongst all my films has been, by necessity, extreme preparation before the shoot and agility during it.

# INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR

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***A lot of the crew are native Swedes, working on a film, set in Sweden. Did this have an influence on the film?***

It was very important to me to work with a predominantly Swedish crew. While the story views Sweden through the eyes of an outsider, I knew that I needed to filter my own vision of what this incredible country is about through the craft of those who have a more permanent connection to this land. The guidance of our wonderful Swedish crew in various stages of production proved vital, and it was extremely reaffirming to hear that the way Sweden was portrayed in the script resonated with them and that some of them had never been to a few of the locations we had slated for filming.



***You've mentioned the camaraderie on set between the cast and crew, what was the experience like for you, as a Director, working with the cast and cinematographer?***

The cast and crew were simply a dream. The biggest compliment I can pay them is to paraphrase one of my idols, Sidney Lumet, and say that at all times it was evident that we were all making the same film. Joel, our cinematographer, worked tirelessly to understand my visual conception of the film during the pre-production period, and that paid dividends when we were on the set. By the 2nd or 3rd day of the shoot, we had already developed a short-hand that was enormously helpful. It is rare for a director to end up with a final product that is visually so close to the way he had first imagined it, but I certainly enjoyed that privilege on this project. The cast, apart from their boundless talent and generosity, were unique and magnetic personalities, and inadvertently created a gravitational centre for the entire team. The camaraderie they developed with me and the crew was hugely instrumental, I believe, since once the camera started rolling there was a palpable feeling in the air that everyone, from 2nd AC to the location manager, was pulling for the actors, willing them and supporting them wordlessly to create the magic that they inevitably did. Every time.





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