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# Now That's a Wrap

Tim Janis (at left at the bottom of the stairs) directs Charles Shaughnessy and Jane Seymour in a scene at Portland's Victoria Mansion. Millions of viewers will recognize Shaughnessy as Mr. Sheffield from *The Nanny*.

Shhh. A movie with **Kate Winslet** narrating and starring **Jane Seymour**, **Charles Shaughnessy**, and **Dick Van Dyke** has just been shot in Maine. And, yes, the director is *composer* **Tim Janis**.

INTERVIEW BY COLIN W. SARGENT

**V**ictoria Mansion has a secret. *The Button Girl*, a luscious film directed to period perfection by York, Maine-based composer Tim Janis, has finished shooting here and in York and Kennebunkport. With Oscar-winner Kate Winslet and Jane Seymour in the mix, New England really swings in this three-hanky affair set to grab a holiday audi-

ence with its release in December 2015. For all the star clout of Winslet and Seymour, it is the indefatigable Janis—known for his soaring, sweeping musical compositions like “Ocean Rose”: ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=ap8JJXpZPCg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ap8JJXpZPCg))—who seems the heart and soul of this project. With his customary boundless energy, he takes us behind the cameras.



## THE ARTS



### What's the elevator pitch?

**T**he *Button Girl* is a new, uplifting family musical. The film, narrated by Kate Winslet, features Dick Van Dyke, Jane Seymour, and Charles Shaughnessy and introduces 11-year-old Alivia Clark (the Button Girl) and 15-year-old Devlin Stark. The story takes place in a fictional mill town in New England in the early 1900s and follows the story of a child named Annabelle. From a young age, Annabelle's mother teaches her to believe in angels and magic. After the sudden death of her parents, Annabelle is left alone and broken hearted, but the appearance of a mysterious angel leads her story to a triumphant and inspiring ending.

### Can you describe some of the key locations and how they fit into the film?

It was a very nice thing to be able to film locally here in Maine. Some of the film's pivotal scenes were shot at Saint Ann's in Kennebunkport and the Victoria Mansion in Portland. Since the story takes place in the early 1900s, I felt lucky to find locations here in Maine that really speak to the beauty of that era. One of the ending scenes takes place during a Christmas Eve service, which was shot at Saint Ann's. The beautiful stone

construction and Tiffany stained-glass windows added so much authenticity and character to the scene...Local set designer Cindy Hamilton and her team, from Americana Workshop, had the church dressed with Christmas decorations and Christmas trees, snow covering the ground and a horse and carriage outside, as well as about fifty extras filling the church in period costumes. We managed to transform the setting so it felt like you had stepped back in time. Both Jane Seymour and Charles Shaughnessy filmed at Saint Ann's Church and at The Victoria Mansion. The Victoria Mansion became the setting for the home of the affluent family played by Seymour and Shaughnessy. The décor and elegance of the Victoria Mansion has a timeless feel to it with the elaborate interiors of the house. For a filmmaker, the Victoria Mansion was a dream but we had to make sure we stayed focused on the stor-

ylene when it became tempting to grab shots from so many of the gorgeous interiors.

### Did any of the locations inspire acting changes?

When filming one of the song and dance numbers with Dick Van Dyke in Los Angeles at the Disney Golden Oak Ranch, we had planned to film the song with the young girl Alivia Clark and Dick Van Dyke sitting on a park bench; however, upon seeing the brownstone section of the backlot, we decided to have them really move and dance through the street, incorporating more of the setting into the scene. I think this added a lot more energy and excitement to the song.

### Composer as director—is that like stepping through a mirror?

**W**hat probably helped most were two things: As a composer, by default I became a sound engi-



neer; I studied at Peabody Conservatory and went on to produce about 35 CDs to date. I've produced five national PBS specials as well and over 100 individual market PBS specials, in a program I created called *Celebrate America*. This made me very interested in all aspects of filming, including the technical side and working with film equipment and cameras. As a director, it's important to learn everything from technical skills to the creative aspect of storytelling. It translates to how you capture a shot and then how it will be brought to the next stage of editing. So when directing I'm also thinking about what will be needed through the editing process as well. Through this, I've discovered I love trying to tell a story. That's my passion when it comes to film.

**How important is Kate Winslet as narrator, to help the viewers believe in the movie?**

This story is based off a children's Christmas story I wrote a few years ago called "Annabelle," so it originally had a fairytale feel to it, and the voice of the narrator brought this out even more which I feel helps bring viewers into the story.

**Did Maine help create a universal geography that makes the story line more convincing?**

Absolutely. I've been in Maine a long time

Made in Maine: Americana Workshop and Eldridge Lumber built the set in a York warehouse adjacent to Stonewall Kitchen.



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## THE ARTS

and love it. It's very picturesque and full of character, which made a beautiful setting for the film, but what also helped create the film was the support from the Maine community. I worked with Brad Kenney from Ogunquit Playhouse, who co-directed; and our costume designer, Dustin Cross, worked with Paul Bell and Louise Keezer from Lyric Music Theater and the Portland Players who assembled the local extra actors and worked on costume design as well.

Additionally, we found a local Kennebunk border collie, Bobbie. Bobbie's owner/dog trainer George Quinlin helped us tremendously in integrating her into the film as a natural character. We also worked with cinematographer Zack Richard from York and Steve Pulos, who filmed-behind-the-scenes footage... "Made in Maine" really applies to this film, and I'd like to continue working on other productions here...

One key location we needed for the story was a Victorian-looking street with storefronts that included a toy store and a bakery. We looked at a lot of locations, but we weren't finding exactly what we needed for the period, so we ended up building the set right here in Maine. Set designer Cindy Hamilton, with her Americana Workshop in Kennebunk, was an amazing resource. Her can-do ingenuity pulled everything together, bringing in so many antique materials and props—from doors, windows, and floors to an old vintage toy collection, bakery store items, and much more—that kept us authentic to the time. We also worked very closely with Eldredge Lumber in York, Maine, who supplied location and materials for the set. I've been inspired by the sets from the old movie musicals, so the experience of building our own mini soundstage and standing set was a lot

TIM JANIS



Tim Janis, Golden Hat Foundation executive Margret Ericson, and Kate Winslet attend a Golden Hat function.

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## THE ARTS



of work but also very creative and fun.

How do you feel the film fits into the larger goals for Winslet's charity, the Golden Hat Foundation?

I've worked to help fundraise for the Golden Hat Foundation for about four years now through my annual Carnegie Hall Christmas Concerts, *The American Christmas Carol* in New York. The Golden Hat Foundation's mission to change the way people on the autism spectrum are perceived—by shining a light on their abilities and emphasizing their great potential—resonated with me, and I wanted to find ways I could continue to help them. I felt the film in part benefiting the Golden Hat Foundation could be a helpful long-term fundraising idea.

I also work closely with Jane Seymour and her Open Hearts Foundation, whose philosophy of transforming personal adversity into an opportunity to serve others is something very meaningful to me. Her Open Heart philosophy is a universal symbol of giving and receiving love, which is a very similar message to what runs throughout the film.

What 30 seconds are you proudest of in this movie?

It was such an honor to work with Dick Van Dyke...Every moment of filming he amazed me and everyone else on set. We filmed three different song-and-dance numbers with him. One song was filmed at the Disney back lot in Los Angeles, the other two at Heritage Square Museum in Pasadena. We had a lot of fun incorporating different ideas into each song...In one song, "Proper Attitude," Van Dyke dances with a penguin marionette created by Scott Land and then finishes the song with the young girl Alivia Clark in a 1903 Packard car, singing about having a proper attitude in life. Watching Dick Van Dyke sing and dance just brings a smile to your face and makes you happy—these are the moments I feel proudest of in the film.

What are your favorite haunts in York, where you

FROM LEFT: COURTESY PHOTOS; AMERICANA WORKSHOP

can reconnect with your original self?

When I first moved to York, I spent many years at the ViewPoint. I actually wrote seven of my CDs there—these were sold on QVC for many years. For me, the connection to the ocean and the view of the Nubble Light is incredible and has provided such a peaceful and tranquil spot for me to write and create music. It's a wonderful source of inspiration and I still return there for that.

How did your keyboard background help you relate to Sir Paul McCartney and Billy Joel?

When I created my CD *Music of Hope*, which was a fundraising CD for the American Cancer Society, Billy Joel sent me his piano recording of his song "Elegy: The Great Peconic," the goal being to record it with the London Symphony Orchestra. So it was my job to perfectly transcribe the song for the next phase, the orchestration. I went back and forth on the phone a few times with him to get the song just right, so in this case my piano background was very useful. I also spent two days at Abbey Road with Sir Paul McCartney recording his classical piece *Nova*, which I really loved.

Since when did The Admiral Farragut Academy become a springboard for entertainers (viz. you and Lorenzo Lamas).

I have good memories of AFA. I thought I wanted to go into the Navy, but while I was at AFA I started writing music, and from that moment I knew music was what I wanted to do. When I went to AFA I left in August and did not come home till Thanksgiving, then Christmas to the summer, and the regiment did not give me much free time, so I think the discipline and focus helped me a lot as a musician, where you have to be the driving force both creatively and in the business. ■



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