



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media Contact:  
Shawna Brakefield  
The Brakefield Company  
(213) 910-2478  
shawna@thebrakefieldcompany.com

# Beautiful Hills of Brooklyn

**Director Ragnar Freidank Invited to Attend**  
**Cannes for Short Film Corner**  
**following Silver Remi Award for Directing from**  
**World Fest Houston**

New York, N.Y. -- Director Ragnar Freidank and Broadway, TV and film actress Joanna Merlin, who co-wrote and stars in *Beautiful Hills of Brooklyn*, were awarded the 2009 D.C. Independent Film Festival Audience Award for Best Short Film in March, 2009. This honor was followed by the Golden Ace Award at the Las Vegas International Film Festival and Mr. Freidank's Silver Remi Award for Directing from World Fest Houston.

*Beautiful Hills of Brooklyn* is an official selection at the Connecticut Film Festival, was a Semi-Finalist at the 2009 Show Off Your Shorts Festival in Los Angeles and won the Audience Award at the Beverly Hills Hi-Def Film Festival.

In December 2008, the film was awarded Best Short Film at the Big Apple Film Festival at the world famous Tribeca Cinemas. The previous month, it opened the 2nd International Russia Abroad Film Festival to a standing ovation where Ms. Merlin and Nikita Mikhalkov, director of *Burnt By The Sun*, were honored with the *Michael Chekhov Award* for their outstanding artistic accomplishments and contributions to the international film community.

Ms. Merlin stars in the screen adaptation of Ellen Cassedy's award winning one-woman play, in a performance described by Sam Waterston as "an exquisite piece of acting."

*Beautiful Hills Of Brooklyn* is based on a true story, drawn from the diary of Jessie Singer Sylvester, an elderly woman living on a pension, confronting the changes in her life and her beloved Brooklyn neighborhood. The film moves effortlessly from present time to reverie and is told entirely in the words of the diary, interwoven with the Walt Whitman poem "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry." The rhapsodic poetry, which speaks of generations reaching out to one another across the boundaries of time, vibrates against the simple diction of the diary, illuminating a small but important life.

Ms. Merlin created the role of Jessie in the original stage production and also co-wrote and produced the film. Mr. Freidank, an international stage director, makes his feature directorial debut. "What is a diary," he asks, "but a conversation with our invisible selves? I wanted to translate this into the relationship between Jessie and the camera.

"I found the very ordinariness of Jessie compelling," says Ms. Merlin, "I was inspired by her efforts to fill the silences and enrich her life, and by the courage it took to lift herself up and face the future on her own."

"This is a deeply original film and a beautifully realized portrait," says executive producer Bob Balaban, "it is moving, affectionate, and filled with life."

Joanna Merlin made her Broadway debut opposite Laurence Olivier in *Becket*, created the role of Tzeitel in *Fiddler on the Roof* and has appeared extensively on the Broadway stage as well as in off-Broadway and regional productions. Her film credits include *Invasion*, starring Nicole Kidman and co-starring roles in *City of Angels* with Dennis Franz, *Class Action* with Gene Hackman and *Mystic Pizza* with Julia Roberts. She has a recurring role as Judge Lena Petrovsky on *Law and Order, Special Victims Unit*. As casting director for Harold Prince, she cast the original Broadway productions of Sondheim's *Company*, *Follies*, *A Little Night Music*, *Pacific Overtures*, *Sweeney Todd*, and *Merrily We Roll Along*, as well as *Evita* and *On the Twentieth Century*. Ms. Merlin is the recipient of two Casting Society of America Artios Awards. Her book, Auditioning: An Actor Friendly Guide was published by Vintage in May of 2001 and is in its eighth printing.

Ragnar Freidank makes his feature directorial debut with *Beautiful Hills of Brooklyn*. He is an accomplished stage director, having worked in New York, Connecticut and Germany but he began his career as a performer. After receiving a scholarship to study the Michael Chekhov technique in New York, he began a long association with The Actors Ensemble. Mr. Freidank teaches at the Graduate Acting Programs of Columbia University and the New School. He continues to work closely with MICHA, the Michael Chekhov Association and has taught at numerous Teacher Training Workshops and International Conferences in the United States and Europe.

Bob Balaban, who served as executive producer on the film, was a multiple Emmy-nominee in 2008, including Best Director for HBO's *Bernard and Doris* and Best Supporting Actor for HBO's *Recount*. He received a Best Picture Academy Award nomination for his production of Robert Altman's *Gosford Park* in 2001, in which he also co-starred and a Tony nomination in 1979 for his Broadway performance in *The Inspector General*.

Michael Chekhov Association presents *Beautiful Hills Of Brooklyn*, starring Joanna Merlin and directed by Ragnar Freidank. The film was written by Joanna Merlin and Ragnar Freidank, based on the play by Ellen Cassedy. The director of photography was Edward Marritz, with production design by Alexis Weiss and original music by Kazzrie Jaxen. The editor was Bob Jorissen. The film was produced by Joanna Merlin and Jared Goldman and executive produced by Bob Balaban.

###

### **AWARDS**

Big Apple Film Festival | **BEST SHORT FILM**

Beverly Hills Hi-Def Film Festival | **AUDIENCE AWARD**

Washington, D.C. Independent Film Festival | **AUDIENCE AWARD**

Las Vegas international Film Festival | **GOLDEN ACE AWARD**

World Fest Houston | **SILVER REMI AWARD FOR DIRECTING**

### **OFFICIAL SELECTIONS**

Connecticut Film Festival | **IN COMPETITION**

L. A. Show Off Your Shorts Festival | **SEMI-FINALIST**

International Zolotoy Vityaz Film Festival in Russia

### **INVITATIONS**

2<sup>nd</sup> Intl. Russia Abroad Film Festival | **OPENING NIGHT FILM**

Cannes Short Film Corner

CFC Worldwide Short Film Festival Market