



## Press Kit

The feature film *Wesley* is based closely on the actual events of Wesley's life, a story that already reads much like a Hollywood screenplay. Wesley is a compelling and controversial main character that women found intensely attractive; there is adventure on the high seas, a terrible storm and near-shipwreck. In the newly settled Savannah, Georgia, there is an incredibly romantic but star-crossed love affair that ends tragically. Wesley is crushed, and on his return to England we experience his spiritual struggle and finally renewal. We are then swept away with his preaching in the fields and his efforts to help the lowest classes of society. His ministry is controversial, there is mob violence, confrontation, and tension followed by his victorious preaching to thousands in his home town.

In short, this true story has everything that Hollywood loves to put into movies! The movie has the seafaring adventure of *Master & Commander*, the bittersweet romance of *Sense and Sensibility*, but at the same time tells a compelling story of conversion, faith, dynamic social reform and ministry.

### Synopsis

The year is 1732. John Wesley is an irritatingly religious, self-righteous instructor at Oxford who secretly struggles with his lack of true inner peace. He is offered the chance to go to the new colony of Georgia, where he hopes to earn his way to heaven by preaching to the Indians. During the voyage over, the ship encounters a violent storm; John and his brother Charles, terrified of dying, are astonished to see the group of Moravian missionaries on board calmly conducting their evening service as if the storm didn't exist. In Georgia, Wesley falls in love with Sophy Hopkey, the beautiful niece of the local magistrate; but he finds himself conflicted about marriage. When lengthy courtship fails to produce a proposal from the angst-ridden young minister, Sophy attempts to prod him into a proposal by announcing her engagement to one of her uncle's tenants. Wesley, stubborn, refuses to be pressured, and Sophy must follow through with the unintended –and disastrous – marriage. Bitterness explodes between the two until one day Wesley publicly refuses to serve Holy Communion to Sophy. He is arrested for defamation of character – and is to be tried by Sophy's uncle! There will be no fair trial here.



Escaping from Savannah, he returns to England in failure and shame. Back in London, he meets another Moravian missionary, Peter Bohler, who counsels the disturbed and depressed young man. Bohler tells him he needs "heart religion," as opposed to the outward religiosity that Wesley has so avidly practiced. John struggles with his failure and fears and finally experiences the peace he has longed for: "I felt my heart strangely warmed."



Wesley begins to preach about his experience of saving faith, but is turned out of most churches in London. Undaunted, he begins preaching in fields, and discovers a hungry audience in the downtrodden poor of England. Appalled by the terrible needs of families overwhelmed with alcoholism, abuse, and poverty, John and his hymn-writing brother Charles begin revolutionary (and controversial) social ministries to better the lives of the poor while also preaching to them of the transformation of the heart.

He is regarded with hostility by the gentry, who believe that the "Methodies" will undermine the social order on which their wealth depends. Thugs are hired to break up meetings, and even to kill Wesley himself. Riots break out in many Methodist meetings, and several of Wesley's followers are killed. Wesley barely escapes with his life several times; but he confronts mobs with quiet confidence, often winning over the ringleaders. His life comes full circle when he returns to his hometown church and preaches to a huge crowd from his father's tomb.

### *Comments From the Director*

What really grabbed me about the story of John Wesley was both the complexity of the man and the cinematic possibilities of the story. Many religious leaders of history really aren't good movie material because their lives are filled with reading, contemplation, and lots of preaching. Preaching and praying aren't really very interesting in a movie. Wesley's story is filled with conflict and action, though. And the conflict is complex, since a great deal of it is with himself.

The other thing that interested me was that this wasn't the stereotypical story – bad person finds religion, gets converted, becomes good person. Instead, we find a very religious person who outwardly does everything that the world and the church regard as good – he visits prisons, he studies the Bible, he feeds the poor. But he is really driven by fear, and hasn't experienced the grace of God for himself. He's trying to earn his way into heaven. Like a lot of us, it isn't until his life falls apart that he finds what he's really looking for. And that spiritual experience frees him to start some of the most radical ministries to the poor of England that ever happened.

The social action that flows out of his spiritual transformation is the final part of what really fascinated me with Wesley. He didn't just try to have people "get saved," he also worked to change their circumstances and relieve injustice. He worked to raise them out of poverty, they began the first recovery groups for alcoholics, shelters for battered women, the movement to abolish slavery really flows out of early Methodism. So there is action that flows out of spiritual transformation as well in the film.

**The Rev. John Jackman (DIRECTOR)** has combined Christian ministry with film & television production for over thirty years. An award-winning director and producer, he is the author of *Lighting for Digital Video and Television* (2002, CMP Books), *Digital Compositing & Special Effects – A Practical Guide* (CMP Books, 2006), and is a contributing editor to *Digital Video Magazine*. He serves on the Board of Directors of the Piedmont Triad Film Commission.



Jackman's previous films include numerous documentaries including *After the War* and the award-winning miniseries *Zinzendorf*, as well as dramatic films such as *An Uncommon Union*, *Hymns of Praise*, and *Windsor Knot*. Jackman has broadcast credits with ABC, The Hallmark Channel, The History Channel, and numerous public television stations. Over the years, he's received numerous peer-judged industry awards including four Tellies, two Aurora Awards, and several Aegis Awards. He is an ordained pastor in the Moravian Church, and has served parishes in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and North Carolina as well as serving as Chair of the Division of Communications (1986-1990). He is senior pastor of Trinity Moravian Church in Winston-Salem, NC.



**Burgess Jenkins (John Wesley)** has had leading roles in studio films from Warner Bros., Universal, Disney, Lionsgate, New Line as well as television roles on NBC, ABC, CBS, WB, FOX and LIFETIME. Some of his credits include *Remember The Titans* opposite Academy Award winner Denzel Washington; *The Reaping* as Academy Award winner Hilary Swank's Husband, David Winter. Currently Burgess splits time between two hit shows, the WB's *One Tree Hill* where he plays Bobby Irons and Lifetime's *Army Wives* on which he portrays Major Kurt Dandridge. Other roles include the starring role in the true story *Unshackled* with Stacy Keach; the racing legend Bill Blair in *Red Dirt Rising* as well as guest starring roles on *JAG*, *Good Morning Miami*, *Dawson's Creek* and many more. Mr Jenkins' training is the result of years of study at some of the top schools and repertory theaters in the country, including 4 years at the famed Playhouse West with Robert Carnegie and Academy Award nominated actor Jeff Goldblum.

**June Lockhart (Susannah Wesley)**, is a television and film legend. For an entire generation she was the quintessential "TV mom" from her roles in the series *Lassie* and *Lost in Space*. Ms. Lockhart brings her enormous strength of performance to the role of John and Charles' mother. Susannah played a pivotal role in shaping the spiritual lives of both John and Charles Wesley, and is often regarded as an example of strong spiritual motherhood during a period not always friendly to strong women. "We were overjoyed to have June in the movie," said director John Jackman. "She was a delight to work with. Her personality and tremendous acting experience brought depth to the important role of Susannah."



**Kevin McCarthy (Bishop Ryder)** is a Golden Globe winner and Academy Award nominee. A prolific performer whose active career covers nearly seven decades, McCarthy is probably best known for his starring role in the 1956 sci-fi classic, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. McCarthy was recognized by the industry for the role of the disillusioned son Biff in the 1951 screen adaptation of Arthur Miller's classic *Death of a Salesman*, for which he won a Golden Globe and was nominated for a Best Supporting Actor Oscar. McCarthy has appeared in numerous classic television series, including *Twilight Zone* and *Columbo*, as well as starring in *The Survivors*, *Flamingo Road*, and *Poor Little Rich Girl*. The stage-trained actor has also been acclaimed for portrayal of President Harry S Truman in the one-man show *Give 'Em Hell, Harry!*

**R. Keith Harris (Charles Wesley)** has appeared in a diverse range of roles alongside Hollywood's top talent. He had a leading role with Mickey Rooney in *Lost Stallions*, a supporting role with Pat Hingle and Malcolm McDowell in last year's *The List*, a leading role with David Carradine and Dominique Swain in the urban thriller *Fall Down Dead*, a leading role alongside Will Patton in *Dog Days Of Summer*, and appeared in *Big Fish*. He also shared the screen with Oscar nominated actress Amy Adams in the critically acclaimed film *Junebug*, and recently finished *The 5th Quarter* with Aidan Quinn and Andie MacDowell.



On TV Keith has had guest starring roles on *Beverly Hills: 90210*, *Dawson's Creek*, *Surface*, and *Army Wives*, as well as a recurring role on the CW's hit show *One Tree Hill*. Keith co-produced the 35mm Romantic Comedy *Chicks 101* in which he also starred. He wrote and directed the award-winning short film *Harvest*.



**Carrie Anne Hunt (Sophy Hopkey)** has extensive stage experience as a repertory and Shakespearean actress (*Richard III*, *Twelfth Night*, *King Lear*) and has appeared in numerous short films, commercials. We are proud to introduce her in a major supporting role in a feature film. Since the filming of *Wesley*, Hunt has appeared in several other feature films, including *The Virgins*, *Dangerous Curves*, *Jury of Our Peers*, and *Sins of the Father*.

**Lovinder S. Gill (Producer)** has overseen a number of projects including feature length screenplays, commercials and short films. In addition to writing, producing and directing the Award-winning 35mm feature film *Chicks 101*, Gill wrote the feature length films *Ball & Chain* and *Lost Stallions*. He's also produced and directed a number of documentaries, commercials and video projects. Gill has a B.F.A. from the North Carolina School of the Arts School of Filmmaking as well as his M.F.A. in Screenwriting from Hollins University. In addition to working as a Producer and Screenwriter, he is an Award winning Professor, winning the Most Inspirational Faculty Award at East Carolina University.

**Geoff Thompson (Producer)** produced the award-winning feature film, *Chicks 101*, while producing numerous other documentaries, industrial films and commercials. He regularly freelances for CSTV and NBA-TV. He has voiced commercials and industrial films, with clients including BMW, Spring PCS, Cox Communications, the University of Florida Athletic Association, Office Furniture USA and Wild Waters. In 2004 and 2005, he was host of the Sports Verdict and co-host of the Taco Bell Tuesday Tailgate, two weekly sports shows that aired on Greenville (NC) television and radio. For the past two summers, he has portrayed the infamous buccaneer Blackbeard in the outdoor drama *Blackbeard: Knight of the Black Flag*. He is currently involved in a project documenting the shipwrecks on the Wilmington, NC, riverfront, a documentary of East Carolina University's maritime studies' project in Hawaii and several commercials for Salem College.

**Arledge Armenaki (Director of Photography)** has had a long and varied experience in feature film and documentary work, and has trained many other cinematographers in the art through his work at Western Carolina University, the North Carolina School of the Arts, and the Brooks Institute of Photography. His work has been recognized at numerous film festivals, including a BEST CINEMATOGRAPHY award at the Marco Island Film Festival for the feature film *Surfacing*. Other films include *South Of Hell*, *Club Fed*, *Howling V*, and *Dennis The Menace*.





**Carolyn Haywood (Screenplay)** is an award-winning screenwriter. She caught the screenwriting bug when she heard an Emmylou Harris song *Red Dirt Girls* on the radio and began envisioning the tragic story as a movie. *Red Dirt Girls* is currently preparing for production later this year. Her next script, *The Angel Gabriel*, won the 20/20 competition and was in the top twenty of the **Screenwriting Expo** and was a finalist in the **Writer's Arc** fellowship program. In 2005 she collaborated with Karen Kallis Cheesman on *Morning Star and Moon*. Conroy Kanter of KK Ranch Productions is producing with Shirley MacLaine attached to play the lead.

*Tears For The Innocent* won Script magazine's **Thrills and Chills** contest resulting in an agency deal with **Guy Walks Into A Bar**, which manages writers & directors for film and television. They also produce films including New Line's Christmas hit, *ELF*. Guy Walks Into A Bar has a first look deal with Paramount and is also developing numerous projects at other studios.

## The Script

The long journey of writing and producing *Wesley* actually traces back to the early 1980s when the late British actor and writer John Wells began working on a script called *A Brand From the Burning*. Working with award-winning BBC director Norman Stone (*Everyman, Shadowlands, Miss Marple, Man Dancin'*) Wells and Stone turned the play into a movie script called *The Burning*. It looked for a while as if *The Burning* would become a BBC movie, but the project never reached production stage. Instead, the script was produced as a live drama by Karl Sabbagh with the Royal Shakespeare company.

In 2001, Ken Curtis, the founder of The Christian History Institute, approached John Jackman and asked him to take a look at the script of *The Burning*. The following year, Jackman began to envision the complicated story as a film and undertook extensive historical research to develop the script.

In addition to licensing some of the portions of *The Burning*, a great deal of the current script is actually based directly on the journals and diaries of John and Charles Wesley. John's personal diary had been a mystery for many years, since he kept it in a personal shorthand code. That code was broken by **Dr. Richard Heitzenrater** at Duke Divinity School and translations of the Diaries were published in the late 1980s. Many scenes in the film, though condensed for time and dramatic force, are combinations of actual incidents recorded in Wesley's diary.

One of the challenges of writing a movie script out of this extensive and wide-ranging material was the question of how to make it fit into a two hour movie. "Wesley lived a long time and had huge influence over much of the 18<sup>th</sup> century in Britain and the colonies," said Jackman. "This would have made a great miniseries with eight hours to unpack the many intriguing stories and details." The core of the story, however, seemed to be John Wesley's personal struggle with salvation and grace, leading up to the famous Aldersgate experience where he "felt his heart strangely warmed." Two central storylines emerged from reading between the lines of his diaries as important in this journey – his fascination with the calm faith of the Moravian missionaries he met (and actually lived with for a time) in Georgia, and the disastrous outcome of his "almost" relationship with the beautiful Sophy Hopkey.

Award winning screenwriter **Carolyn Haywood** was then engaged at the final stages to undertake the final rewrite of the script, trimming it down for dramatic value and for time.

**Bruce Kiesling (Composer & Conductor)** is a composer and symphony conductor with a special background in 18th century music. A versatile film composer, Kiesling has a diverse background which encompasses conducting, harpsichord performance, theater and piano work in both classical and popular genres. Originally from Canton, Ohio, Kiesling received his undergraduate degree and Masters in Conducting from the University of Michigan School of Music. Kiesling received the Doctor of Musical Arts degree in orchestral conducting at the University of Miami, Florida. While in Miami, he served as Artistic Director of the Miami Oratorio Society, Associate Conductor of the University of Miami Symphony Orchestra and co-founder and conductor of the Clarke Chamber Players. He also serves as Music Director for the NC Youth Symphony, and has conducted concerts at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. and at Carnegie Hall in New York. He has recently completed his Masters in Film Composition at the North Carolina School of the Arts, studying under veteran film composer David McHugh. He served for several years as resident conductor of the Greensboro Symphony, and has recently been named Artistic Director and Conductor of the Tulare County Symphony in California's Central Valley.



## About the Music



Composer Bruce Kiesling has done a truly remarkable job on the musical score for this film, which has nearly 90 minutes of orchestral score including sections of what Jackman calls “completely new 18<sup>th</sup> century music that no one has ever heard before.” At several points in the score, Kiesling has woven in snippets of some of the popular English folk tunes that the Wesley brothers used with their hymns, often as counterpoint to the movie theme. “It’s an interesting technique,” said Jackman. “There are moments when you think you recognize a tune, but it’s fleeting. The music is fundamentally entirely original.”

Of course, several early Wesley hymns are included, particularly *Where Shall My Wand’ring Soul Begin*, Charles Wesley’s first hymn, and *Jesus Lover of My Soul*. Charles Wesley was the second most prolific hymn writer in history, having written over 6,000 hymns many of which are in common use today.

The score was recorded by the 35 piece **Carolina Film Orchestra**, conducted by Kiesling. The CFO includes many of the area’s top professional musicians, including lead performers from the Greensboro Symphony and the Winston-Salem Symphony. **The Choral Society of Greensboro** and the **Greensboro Youth Chorus** contributed vocals for chorus segments. Sessions were recorded at Ovation Sound in Winston-Salem and at the scoring stage at the University of North Carolina School of the Arts Film School. This was the first time that this excellent scoring stage has ever been used for an outside commercial project. The recording engineer was award-winning composer and engineer **Evan Ritchie**.



## Facts About John & Charles Wesley

- At the age of five, John Wesley was trapped in a fire at the Epworth parsonage and was heroically rescued from his attic bedroom by local farmworkers. The incident left a powerful impression on him, and for the rest of his life, John Wesley referred to himself “as a brand plucked from the burning,” quoting Zechariah 3:2.
- Susanna Wesley (1669-1742), the Wesleys’ mother, was one of the great strong women of Christian history. Many of the fundamental ideas the Wesley brothers lived out (including their “method”) trace back to Susannah and her rigorous home education of her children.
- Their father, Samuel Wesley (1662-1735), was rector of St Andrew’s church at Epworth who alienated many of his parishioners through his strong Royalist sympathies. He published many articles on poetry, such as his *Essay on Heroic Poetry* (1697) and considered himself to be a great poet. There are those who would argue he was actually one of the worst poets in history; his book *On A Maggot* attempted to show that beautiful poetry could be composed even about disgusting subjects such as maggots and rotting ducks.
- While John and Charles traveled to Georgia on the HMS Simmonds, the ship encountered a terrible storm. The crew thought they were doomed. John Wesley was astonished by the Moravian missionaries on board who calmly held their regular prayer and singing meeting as if the storm did not exist. This incident set him on a quest to find faith that could remain calm in the face of death, and led him to close ties with the Moravians in Georgia and back in London.
- Charles was also profoundly affected by the storm, which he alludes to in several of his hymns, notably *Jesus Lover of My Soul*: “While the nearer waters roll, while the tempest still is nigh.”
- John experienced an awakening at a meeting at Aldersgate Street, while listening to the reading of Martin Luther’s introduction to the Book of Romans. He wrote in his journal, “My heart was strangely warmed.”
- After his awakening to “saving faith,” John was promptly ejected from most of the churches in London for his overly blunt preaching. He followed the lead of his friend, evangelist George Whitefield, and began to preach to poor farmworkers and miners in the fields.
- John and Charles were ordained in the Church of England and indeed always regarded themselves as members of the Anglican Church. As they set up small “societies” and chapels across the countryside, they were derisively referred to as “Methodies” or “Methodists” because John preached a rigorous “method” of living.
- John and Charles began some of the earliest recovery groups for alcoholics, set up the first shelters for battered women, and were instrumental in championing the poor of England. The anti-slavery movement had its roots in Methodism.
- Charles was one of the most prolific hymnwriters of history, penning over 6000 hymns, many of which are in common use today among all denominations. Some of his best-known hymns include *Hark, the Herald Angels Sing*, *O for A Thousand Tongues to Sing*, and *Love Divine, All Loves Excelling*.
- Almost 75 million Christians worldwide trace their spiritual heritage to John & Charles Wesley.

## Fun Facts About the Film

- Many of the buildings used for filming Wesley are authentic 18<sup>th</sup> century buildings at Bethabara Park, Old Salem, Salem College, and Salem Academy in and around Winston-Salem, NC.
- The ship set was built in a disused old gym at the Methodist Children's Home in Winston-Salem, NC. A 50' x 20' blue screen was built behind a 40' section of the "deck" of the HMS Simmonds.
- The horse that John Wesley rides in most of the film is a thoroughbred named "Romeo."
- The film includes over 150 CGI shots, almost as many as an action feature such as *Batman Returns*. However, most of them are "invisible" in that they involve removing telephone poles and wires, light switches, emergency lights, and other anachronistic items that could not be physically removed while filming.
- The biggest challenge in filming Wesley was obtaining clean audio: sound editor Liz May had to spend hundreds of hours doing digital removal of auto exhaust sounds, airplanes, and HVAC noises.
- One of the horses that John Wesley rides in the movie was a gift from the Fernando Henrique Cardoso, President of Brazil to President Bill Clinton. Since US presidents cannot accept personal gifts, the horse was given to the US Park Service, which in turn donated it to the Methodist Children's Home in Winston-Salem, NC
- The other Presidential connection in "Wesley" is the shaving mirror that John Wesley uses in his room at Oxford, which was originally owned by President James K. Polk (1795-1849).

## Links

Wikipedia Article on John Wesley

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Wesley](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Wesley)

Wikipedia Article on Charles Wesley

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles\\_Wesley](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Wesley)

The Hymns of Charles Wesley

<http://gbgm-umc.org/umhistory/wesley/hymns/>

Wesley's Chapel in London

<http://www.wesleyschapel.org.uk/>

How John Wesley Changed America

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ch/news/2003/jun20.html>

IMDB Listing for *Wesley*

<http://pro.imdb.com/title/tt1053946/>

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