



MAGNOLIA PICTURES presents  
an AMERICANO BRUTTO production

# LOUSY CARTER

A film by Bob Byington

Starring David Krumholtz, Martin Starr, Olivia Thirlby, Jocelyn DeBoer, Luxy Banner  
and Stephen Root

2024 | US | 80 minutes

## FINAL PRESS NOTES

**Distributor Contact:**

George Nicholis  
Rebecca Fisher  
Magnolia Pictures  
(212) 924-6701 phone  
[publicity@magpictures.com](mailto:publicity@magpictures.com)

**Press Contact Digital/Austin:**

Ryan Fons  
Christine Lemchi  
Fons PR  
[ryan@fonspr.com](mailto:ryan@fonspr.com)  
[christine@fonspr.com](mailto:christine@fonspr.com)

**Press Contact NY/LA:**

Steve Beeman  
Danielle Villanella  
Falco Ink  
[stevenmbeeman@falcoink.com](mailto:stevenmbeeman@falcoink.com)  
[daniellevillanella@falcoink.com](mailto:daniellevillanella@falcoink.com)

## **SYNOPSIS**

In **LOUSY CARTER**, David Krumholtz (OPPENHEIMER) stars as a ne'er-do-well literature professor adrift on a soulless college campus who learns he only has six months to live. With the clock ticking, will he change his ways? Probably not. Auteur writer/director Bob Byington's slyly subversive film also features comedy all-stars Martin Starr, Olivia Thirlby, Jocelyn DeBoer, Macon Blair, and Stephen Root.

## INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR

### **The script –where’d it come from?**

When the pandemic hit and it was clear it was here for a while, the script was sort of my response –death draws nearer. It was written over the course of six weeks in Milwaukee in April/May 2020, then honed till we shot it in Austin in Dec. 2021. We had a table read with Jay Duplass playing the lead, but we’d all sort of agreed Jay wasn’t going to do it, he was playing a role too similar to it in a Netflix series.

### **Did you have anyone in mind for the lead?**

Some of the parts were written with specific people in mind –Olivia Thirlby for Candela, for example. And one gratifying thing was that it also felt like Martin Starr specifically wanted to support his pal, to prop him up by playing Lousy Carter’s best friend. A few “bigger” actors read the script with an eye for the lead, but it always felt like we were on a collision course with David Krumholtz. It certainly feels like he is the only one who could have played the part.

### **There are your cast mainstays (like David) who really “get” the rhythm of your language, and then there are also newcomers —Luxy Banner, whom you’re introducing here, among others. How do they always seem to nail that rhythm too?**

I don’t know. Shelby Surdham, who plays the receptionist, is a good actor, she was helping me cast people in rehearsals. She’s just really smart when the camera is on. Some actors will give you unfocused improv, not her. Andrew Bujalski and Macon Blair are both filmmakers, I think there’s a common understanding they’ll bring to the process. Olivia and Jocelyn are both intimidating actors and were a bit puzzled by what I was after, frankly. Luxy was actually an intern initially, but we definitely had our eye on her (she’s obv an extremely talented actor), and we did a ton of rehearsal with her, which ultimately I think made her sort of hate me.

### **Any influences? Inspirations?**

I think the biggest was Soderbergh’s *Schizopolis* –the tone of that film, like he was trying to return to an earlier/naive frame of mind –he seemed to be telling himself to stop trying to write a movie and write down something simpler and more unconscious. This had also happened when I wrote *Harmony and Me* in 2008 –I was trying to get back to something more basic. A lot of the themes were things in films I’d made, but it didn’t feel like I was repeating myself –more like I was just trying to get it right. It’s hard because with the onslaught of content, and the Rise of TV, Cinema can almost feel anachronistic, but I do know that the team that came together to make this got it right.

### **The caustic humor really bites at decisive moments; there’s an emotional burden latched to some of the strongest jokes. Is that a byproduct of harkening back to a more instinctual frame of mind?**

This would probably be at the funeral, when he’s giving the eulogy, or when his mother calls him a “failing animator” –but the answer is yes. But I mostly see the humor in the movie as a series of missed opportunities, and frankly wonder why it’s not funnier. I know David feels the same way. Fortunately he has very high standards.

**Do we want to talk about *Gatsby*? Or *Laughter in the Dark*?**

I wanted to pay some kind of homage to these books, but I think it was supposed to feel slightly incidental —our original plan was to have more lively discussions about *The Great Gatsby*, but that didn't materialize, mostly because I had Covid when we were prepping those scenes. I love *The Great Gatsby* and I think *Laughter in the Dark* is eerily underrated.

**There's a crystal clarity to the way you shot LOUSY CARTER —how did you plan it?**

Again, I mostly see the movie's aesthetic within the context of the idea of having failed. I do think Carmen and Lauren, who tag-teamed for the look of the film, did a good job. Carmen is tricky-good at lighting, I think, and Lauren is really dependable and relentlessly chipper in the face of me not being easy to get along with.

**The music?**

We worked with a composer (Leafcuts) I found on Instagram. So, in that sense I embrace the contemporary. And we listened to hundreds of songs and found two that work for the movie.

**You were saying the edit took a while, why do you suppose?**

Time is both the biggest advantage and disadvantage to editing. Being able to take time to reflect on the footage and the flow of the film will always produce better results. But there's also the pressure to finish—we kept having breakthroughs about how to structure the film and orchestrate performances, and even when very smart people were telling us the film was finished, we knew we could keep going and keep improving.

**Also, you said you had a lot of test screenings, what do you learn? Why is watching with someone different from watching alone?**

We learn everything from test screenings. It's not even necessarily learning what the audience is able to articulate on a feedback card or in a talkback (though that can be useful) — it's learning how we feel about the movie. Watching the film by ourselves, there's a safety in that, a comfort. So, things that may not be working might feel like they are. But watching it with an audience — even sometimes just one other person — puts us in a very vulnerable position and we feel the film completely differently. It can be brutal, there's no doubt about it, but you can't finish a film without watching it with others.

**How did the film change in the edit, compared to what it was at the script + shooting stage?**

There are always what we might call "surgical" or "intra-scene" changes — removing lines of dialogue, changing character reactions, altering performance, refining pacing. From script to the edit, there are probably thousands of those. And then there are the structural changes — changing the order of scenes, redesigning the cause and effect of the narrative. And we did a lot of that. It's always interesting, because reading the script, it all worked. But when you get the scenes together in the edit, something — the flow, the rhythm, the rising action — just feels wrong. We spent a lot of time finding the structure of the film.

## DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

### **DIRECTOR, Bob Byington**

Indie favorite Bob Byington burst on to the scene in 2008 with his SXSW midnight lo-fi, low culture hit, *RSO* [Registered Sex Offender]. He followed that up at Lincoln Center's New Directors/New Films series with the Sundance Lab project *Harmony and Me*.

In 2012 Byington won the prestigious Special Jury Prize at the Locarno Film Festival with *Somebody Up There Likes Me* starring Nick Offerman, and shortly thereafter he teamed with Jason Schwartzman for cult smash *7 Chinese Brothers*.

In 2017 Byington worked with comedy stalwart Kieran Culkin to make *Infinity Baby* — the film took best feature at the much-lauded Woodstock Film Festival that year. Bob is an Annenberg Fellow and is in the permanent collection at MoMA.

## ABOUT THE CAST & CREW

### **David Krumholz (Lousy Carter)**

David Krumholtz played Charlie Eppes in the CBS drama series *Numb3rs*, and has beloved roles in *Harold & Kumar* and *The Santa Clause* film franchises. He played the grumpy group therapy leader in *Frances Ferguson*, and also stars in Christopher Nolan's *Oppenheimer*.

**Olivia Thirlby (Candela)** is known for her roles as Leah in the film *Juno* as Natalie in *The Darkest Hour*, and as Judge Cassandra Anderson in *Dredd*.

**Martin Starr (Herschel Kaminsky)** is best known for *Freaks and Geeks*, *Party Down*, and *Silicon Valley*. This is his third project with director Bob Byington.

**Luxy Banner (Gail)** — Luxy came in to be a member of the classroom scenes, but as one thing led to another she started helping around the production office. She was instrumental to the process, as we brought people in to meet and sometimes audition, filling out some of the smaller roles in the movie, it was clear Luxy was a very talented actor. I started thinking she was going to replace the actor I had in mind for Gail, even as she was helping with a lot of the different aspects of production. Then we put her through a pretty intensive audition process herself, camera testing, etc. and it was clear she could do it. After takes David would embarrass everyone by yelling this girl's a star.

### **Production + Crew**

Production took place in the (very mild, because Texas) winter of 2021. Tim League, who started beloved theater franchise Alamo Drafthouse, lent us the use of an astonishing space to shoot the movie — an old middle school in Austin that has been repurposed for office space. The offices were empty because of the pandemic, so we had the run of the place and used it for nearly all of our locations.

**Carmen Hilbert and Lauren Pruitt** co-directed the cinematography for this film. Both had worked with Bob in other capacities on his previous films — Lauren as 1st AC on *7 Chinese Brothers*, and Carmen as best boy electric then gaffer then DP on Bob's latest four. When it came time to crew up for this project, Carmen reached out to Lauren about operating, then pitched her the idea of collaborating more in the style of the famed "Team Deakins," sharing a credit and collaborating fully on the look of *Lousy Carter*.

## **CREDITS**

Written and Directed by BOB BYINGTON

Producers BOB BYINGTON CHRIS MCKENNA

Executive Producers STUART BOHART, TIM LEAGUE

Directors of Photography CARMEN HILBERT, LAUREN PRUITT

Production Designer IMAN CORBANI

Editor KRIS BOUSTEDT

Costume Designer OLIVIA MORI

Music by LEAFCUTS

### **Cast:**

DAVID KRUMHOLTZ – Lousy Carter

OLIVIA THIRLBY – Candela

MARTIN STARR – Herschel Kaminsky

STEPHEN ROOT – Analyst

JOCELYN DEBOER – Olivia Kaminsky

TRIESTE KELLY DUNN – Sister

LUXY BANNER - Gail