

RARE

LAND



# SYNOPSIS

On a beautiful summer day, Alexandros and his brother bike along a pier in a remote seaside village in Greece. As he bikes precariously close to the edge, Alexandros feels a strange dizziness and tumbles into the sea.

He has felt this way before but it is becoming more frequent. His parents take him to one doctor after another to find out what is happening to their son. They feel frustrated and helpless. Then one day an American doctor practicing in Greece diagnoses his condition – Alexandros has a rare disease, Alpha Mannosidosis.

The family is devastated. Why him? Maria, his mother sits silently guarding the ancient statues in Delphi but her mind races, feeling upset and angry. His father Antonis, a manual labourer, struggles to maintain some sense of normalcy for the family.

The doctor finds an innovative new medication to help the child but the cost is prohibitive. It seems like an insurmountable obstacle. He pleads with the local hospital to get the rare medication for the first time in Greece.

As Alexandros continues to deteriorate, losing motor functions, the mother hides him away in their garden, unable to cope with her sick child. Will Alexandros ever receive the medication he needs? Is it worth spending the money to save this one child?

A rare disease is like a rare land....

**Rare Land is an emotional journey of discovery from darkness into the light.**

# PRODUCTION NOTES

## EFTHIMIS HATZIS

Director

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### What is the film about for you?

In one word – individuality.  
Our protagonist sees his individuality as a gift. He sees life from a rare, unique point of view – blue sky, golden wheat, sea, breeze, mud, breathe.

### Where is the film shot?

The film is shot in Greece, in the small fishing village of Itea surrounded by sea and sky. The village sits below the eternal city of Delphi where the ancient monuments reside – a sacred sanctuary. The oracle of Delphi was the center of the world where the pained and distressed came to be soothed. Greece has a very special light – it is a land that heals through Light.

### What is the significance of the mother working in the museum and the father being a manual labourer?

The mother is a museum guard in the exhibit of the Sphinx, the symbolic guardian of our land. Her inner world is in turmoil in contrast to the stillness of these statues that have been frozen in time. Inner stillness and timelessness are key themes.

The father excavates the earth that is then shipped around the world. The earth, the first image of the film, is the fundamental element of creation and deterioration – in constant flux like our own bodies.

### Why is the doctor a foreigner?

I am originally from New York like the character of the doctor in the film. He is a foreigner, an enigma to many people here in Greece.  
What is this doctor doing in this small town? As the doctor says in the film, “I came for the Light.” He is a person who trusts not only science but the mystery of Light. I, too, find my inspiration in the light, the life, the colors, and the timeless nature and beauty of Greece.

### How did you do the casting?

The film has a mix of professional actors and non-actors instilling a realism that grounds the poetic imagery.

For example, John Townsend Worth is a local who I met while location scouting in Itea. My first thought was he is the doctor.

After graduating from the University of Pennsylvania with a degree in archeology, John went on a summer trip to Delphi.

When he gazed down to the seaside village of Itea, he decided he wanted to live there for good. That was some 40 years ago and he is still there today and even became mayor of the town !



# PRODUCTION NOTES

## EFTHIMIS HATZIS

Director

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### How do you relate to the characters ?

As a parent I can definitely relate to both the mother and father. The mother feels a loss, going through stages of grief and the father is the shock absorber trying to keep the family together. There are always challenges but love is the key.

I can especially relate to Alexandros because I had a speech impediment as a child. I felt imprisoned, unable to communicate but found freedom in my internal world that flourished through the language of images.

### What is the significance of the Greek Orthodox Church to the story ?

Individuality is a core factor in the Greek Orthodox tradition, like the shepherd who sought out the one lost sheep. We may become overwhelmed with the masses of people and lose sight of the importance of one person. However, the doctor does not, and fights for this one boy.

The nun reminds the boy we are all individuals, singular creations in the land of Love.

### You use very evocative imagery and have some recurring themes like water ?

We cultivated a visual alphabet of iconic elements in nature – sea, mud, wheat, river, sky, and most of all Light.

We developed a visual grammar that is woven into the story and provides a glimpse of how Alexandros sees and experiences the world.

The color palette of the film is cobalt blue, ochre, and rust based upon Greek Byzantine iconography. We used iconic props and images related to rare diseases to give the film a unique identity. Stripes are very symbolic in the film. Alexandros' clothing echoes the campaign, "We wear stripes for rare diseases," and he plays with a toy zebra, a rare striped animal.

Mud is also very important. Alexandros plays in the mud and his father is a labourer digging up the earth

### How did you work with your director of photography ?

I have been working with Panagiotis since film school and we communicate seamlessly. We were both trained on celluloid film, and continue to maintain a film aesthetic though we work in digital for flexibility and speed, and because it gives us the freedom to improvise and move fluidly.

In our films, we have only ever used natural light - no outside lighting sources and Rare Land in no exception. This gives the feeling of authenticity and "truth" to the images while making natural light a presence that is alive.



# PRODUCTION NOTES

**NANCY SPETSIOTI**

Screenwriter

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## **What was your inspiration for the story ?**

The film is loosely inspired by the true story of a boy with a rare disease and the medicine that is found to improve his condition.

This story provided the framework that allowed for a great deal of creativity. Though based on a rare medical condition, it is a universal story about people confronting and overcoming their fears. I was particularly drawn to the relationship between a mother and her sick child, and their journey to an unknown place – a journey to a rare land.

Everyone has or will make a trip to an unknown place – a rare land – in their life. It is not only a rare disease but also new and difficult circumstances that can upend our lives.

The film is a journey of truth, introspection, acceptance and love. I have a mobility disability and I wanted to explore the story of a mother's journey of acceptance.

Rare Land addresses disease and disability and the film CODA helped to shine a light on disabilities in our society.

Disease can cause harm, but harm does not cause disability. Disability is a social construct. It is the barriers that society puts up against people who stray from the social norm of able-bodiedness.

Our film addresses some of these barriers. CODA talks about the barriers of deafness but it also illuminates acceptance. We want to illuminate acceptance.



# PRODUCTION NOTES

## MANOLIS MANOUSAKIS

Sound Designer & Composer

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### How did you conceive of the acoustic landscape ?

The sound dramaturgy of the film is mainly based on the natural location sounds recorded in the seaside town of Itea.

The sound of the cicadas, the warm and moist weather, the light evening breeze, the waves, people at the beach, and the port create a vast soundscape of different textures creating an immersive musical environment.

We worked on two parallel sound worlds – the one of the child and the one of the surrounding world. The soundscape provides a way for us to enter the deconstructed manner the boy is hearing because of his illness.

It is a beautiful harmony, an acoustic landscape of a rare land.



# PRODUCTION NOTES

## PANAGIOTIS KLEITHARAS

Director of Photography

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Rare Land invites the audience on a journey.

I work intuitively with the director, interpreting and re-interpreting the story of a boy whose senses slowly deteriorate due to a rare illness.

What we see and what we hear are often connected to what the boy sees and hears, shaping the unique cinematic experience. It also provides a roadmap for the audience to experience the film and share this inner world, to transcend the realism with poetic realism.

Many images share the boy's desire to live, to just be in the natural world, to rejoice in that and overcome the darkness of fear.

The color palette of the film is inspired by the visual poetry found in the creation myth – fire, earth, water and sky – it is life affirming.



# CHIESI

pharmaceutical laboratory

## **Please tell us about where the original idea of the film came from ?**

The idea for the film came from Stavros Theodorakis, President and Managing Director Chiesi Hellas S.A who was inspired by the true story of when we came across the first person diagnosed with Alpha Mannosidosis in Greece and the obstacles they confronted regarding access to treatment.

We have lived alongside the fear, anxiety and anticipation of the family and all relevant stakeholders involved.

Our intention was to create a short movie to raise awareness around the difficulties that patients with rare diseases care givers, health care professionals, and state employees are facing and must address not only in Greece but also around the world.

## **Why was the film shot in Greece in the Greek language ?**

The movie was shot in Greece in Greek because we wanted to be faithful to the original story, and because we felt that the unique landscape and light would be a perfect fit to facilitate an important message in the film – the passage from darkness to light.

The monuments of Delphi, the center of ancient Greece, and the surrounding countryside moreover offered the ideal backdrop for the story. Rare Land is not only a Greek story, it's a universal one!

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## **Please talk about this disability and other disabilities that are relevant for Chiesi ?**

The idea of Rare Land is an illustration of Chiesi's vision and dedication to Rare and Ultra Rare Diseases. From research to production we are committed to reducing the impact of rare diseases on patients and families. "The patients are the beginning and the end of our journey," states Giacomo Chiesi, Head of Global Rare Diseases. We strongly believe that not one single person should be left behind.

<https://chiesirarediseases.com/>

"The 'Rare Land' of disease is where people are faced with fear, anxiety and darkness, but they find a way forward towards the light."

-Stavros Theodorakis, President and Managing Director Chiesi Hellas S.A.

Rare Land was supported by the Ministry of Digital Governance, and partially funded by the National Centre of Audiovisual Media and Communication S.A. (EKOME), Greece.



# TEAM

## EFTHIMIS HATSIZ

Director

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Ethimis Hatzis is a Greek-American filmmaker. His first feature film, *Shores of Twilight* was shot in Greece and funded by the Greek Film Center.

Since that time, he has been based in Greece and continues to work in film and television, and teaches at film schools. His films include: *Christmas Anti-fable*, *Trinity*, and *Relics*.

Born in the Bronx, New York, he began studying astrophysics at the University of Pennsylvania. A screening of Andre Tarkovsky's film *Stalker* was so inspiring he decided to pursue visual communications instead and went on to earn a Masters of Fine Arts in film direction from N.Y.U.'s Tisch School of the Arts, where his work garnered awards including a Paramount Pictures Grant.

He lives in Greece with his family.

## NANCY SPETSIOTI

Screenwriter

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Nancy Spetsioti is a screenwriter and award-winning director of short films.

She has written short films, features and television series, and continues to tutor scriptwriting at workshops and seminars. Her films include *A Farewell to Arms...*, *Punishment*, *In a Frontier Station*, *Jafar*, *Ouk An Laveis*, *Antiparochi*, *Leoforos*, and *Fever*.

Nancy also works in the theatre as a playwright and director. She directed the play *Marriage by Nicolai Gogol* for the Theatre of Thessaly, and in 2008, she won the 3rd state prize for the play *Tableau Vivant*.

Her plays have been produced at the National Theatre of Greece, the Municipal & Regional Theatre of Serres, Fournos Theatre, the Sofouli Theatre, and as staged readings.

Originally from Larissa in Greece, she is a graduate of the Film Department of the School of Fine Arts, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.



# TEAM

## MANOLIS MANOUSAKIS

Original music - Sound Designer

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**Manolis Manousakis** is a composer and sound designer. He has composed music and worked as a sound editor for films, interactive installations, plays, documentaries and television series.

His work also includes projects for small musical ensembles, solos, and dance productions.

Since 2009, he has been recording the neighbourhoods of Athens, the countryside, Crete as well as Montreal, Canada, and parts of Lebanon, creating soundscapes and audio interactive documentaries. He is a co-founder of the artistic group Medea Electronique.

Manolis was born in Athens, Greece. He studied music composition and directing for film and television at Columbia College, Chicago, Illinois. In 2007, he earned his Master's degree in Arts & Sound Technology – Department of Music Studies, Ionian University. In 2016 he received a PhD from De Montfort University, Leicester, UK.

## PANAGIOTIS KLEIDARAS

Director of Photography

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**Panagiotis Kleidas** is a talented writer, director, and cinematographer with over 30 years of experience.

His work explores ways to transcend realism with poetic realism. He has worked as a cinematographer with the director, Ethimis Hatzis, on Shores of Twilight, Christmas Anti-fable, and Trinity. Other films include: Pictures Lie, Within, Skipper Straad, The Snail, and Vassillis Arvanitis.

He was born on the island of Lesbos, Greece before immigrating with his family to the United States. He studied English literature at Boston College and then worked as a photojournalist for many years.

A passion for poetry and the visual arts led him to study filmmaking and he received a Master of Fine Arts at UCLA.



# TEAM

## VIEW MASTER FILMS

Production Company

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**View Master Films (VMF)** is one of the leading film and television production companies in Athens, Greece, founded in 2010 by George Kyriakos.

Soon after, the company began its partnership with the independent producer Costas Lambropoulos, who has worked with Theo Angelopoulos, Costa Gavras and Martin Scorsese.

They are members of the European Film Academy and have over 30 years of experience in the audiovisual sector.

Effie Skrobolas and Vassilis Tzanidis are a new generation of highly skilled producers who are working with the company, bridging their experience with the future of filming and evolution of production.

VIEW MASTER FILMS presents THEOLOGOS HATZIS MARIA GEORGIADOU NIKOLAS PAPAGIANNIS JOHN TOWNSEND WORTH KALLISTARTOS HATZIS and OLGA LAZARIDOU director of photography PANAYIOTIS KLIDARAS art director VASSILIKI CHRISTODOULOU costumes IOLI MICHALOPOLOULOU editing LAMBIS HARALAMBIDIS music-sound design MANOLIS MANOUSAKIS screenplay NANCY SPETSIOTI executive producers GEORGE KYRIAKOS COSTAS LAMBROPOULOS produced by EFFIE SKROBOLA VASSILIS TZANIDIS directed by EFTHIMIS HATZIS

Production made possible thanks to the unconditional support by Chiesi Global Rare Diseases and Chiesi Hellas



The background of the image is a close-up photograph of parched, cracked soil. The soil is a dark reddish-brown color, and the cracks are deep and irregular, forming a network across the entire surface. The lighting is somewhat uneven, with brighter areas where the soil is more exposed and darker shadows in the crevices of the cracks.

# RARE LAND