

THE LETTER MEN



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Directed by Andy Vallentine

Co-Written by Danny and Andy Vallentine

Produced by Cameron Hutchison & Siddharth Ganji

Starring Garrett Clayton & Matthew Postlethwaite

Running Time: 8:41

LOG LINE

Based on the largest collection of queer love letters from WWII, The Letter Men is a window into the untold true story of two gay men desperately in love but torn apart by war.

SYNOPSIS

The Letter Men is based on the real love letters written by Gordon Bowsher to his sweetheart, Gilbert Bradley. Their love letters were exchanged between the years of 1938 and 1941 and uncovered in 2015. Using the actual text of the letters, The Letter Men transports us directly into the places of the letters and their heart--battlefields, air raid shelters, and lost, golden moments.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

My journey with Gilbert and Gordon began as so many things these days now begin--while scrolling on the internet. Thinking back, the improbability of the whole thing is stunning. A gay love affair interrupted by world war two, complete with detailed love letters that somehow managed to survive decades only to be discovered and shared with the world. I will never forget the thrill I felt learning about this remarkable story. Later, after I reached out to Mark, the historian who discovered and shared the letters, I would learn that I was one of many interested parties who wished to shepherd this special story to a wider audience. But I would not be intimidated by this. When given the chance, I flew to the tiny town of Oswestry, England to meet with Mark personally and plead my case. As you can probably guess, my passion and persuasiveness won me the right to help tell Gilbert and Gordon's story. I cannot adequately express the tremendous privilege it has been to be the caretaker of this beautiful story. Between multiple trips to England to read the actual letters and research the real places mentioned in them and the idle time I have sat with Gordon's words, wondering about what is known and what was lost to the past, I can say that this story has changed my life in profound ways. Adapting a story is challenging under the best circumstances, but I feel a particularly strong sense of duty to ensure that I am representing their story and words with integrity. In the process of finding the most compelling way to tell this story, I have thought about what it means to tell underrepresented stories and to be inclusive in creating art. I've come to realize that telling diverse stories is the reason I do what I do. Storytelling is a powerful tool that can change hearts and minds and I am conscious of my duty to Gilbert and Gordon and all LGBTQ+ people who may recognize something of themselves in this story. Telling this story also had an enormous impact on how I think about representing diversity behind the camera as well. I could not have known when I first came across that BBC article how the trajectory of my life would be altered. But I am beyond grateful that I was able to make this short film and I am tremendously proud of what me and my incredibly talented team were able to bring to life.

THE INSPIRATION

While on military training during World War Two, Gilbert Bradley exchanged hundreds of letters with his sweetheart - who merely signed with the initial "G". But more than 70 years later, a small town museum curator who was collecting historical letters associated with the town of Oswestry discovered that G stood for Gordon, and Gilbert had been in love with a man. These letters now represent the largest known collection of LGBTQ+ love letters from that era. Read the original BBC article that originally inspired the director, Andy, to reach out and obtain the option to tell this film.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-38932955>

Q AND A WITH LETTER MEN TEAM

How was the process working with the director and his team?

Danny Kish | Co-Writer Andy and I had been percolating on this project for a very long time. We first went to England to research the story of Gilbert and Gordon nearly four years ago. Since then, we have never stopped talking about how we could best share their unique story with a wider audience. It was such a thrill to give context to Gordon's words by placing them in scenes and then, when we started filming, see his words and the story of Gilbert and Gordon's love affair come to life. This team was filled with exceptionally talented people and I am still in awe of the work everyone put into making this special story.

Oren Soffer | Director of Photography Working with Andy was an absolute pleasure from beginning to end; for me, most of the film is made in prep, and Andy came on board with a shot list, visual references, locations, and a really strong visual style and ideas already all planned out. It is my absolute favorite thing to work with directors with bold and clearly communicated visions; it gives me as a cinematographer so much to work with and riff off of.

Nikki Reifler | Production Designer Working with Andy Vallentine is always amazing. I've worked with him on a number of music videos and projects this past year, so we've developed our own shorthand and way of communicating about the visual elements. The Letter Men was different because this is his own personal project and idea, so there was a lot of care and concern about the sets and props used. Andy and I talk frequently, texting images/designs/links to props to buy; I feel we genuinely have fun piecing the visual elements together.

Matthew Postlethwaite | Actor/Producer From the first time Andy reached out to me, it was clear that he was passionate about this project. He seemed to know even smallest details about the letters and spoke of the two men as if he knew them personally. This made it an easy decision for me to come on the project as Gordon. As an actor, there is nothing more exciting than finding a director with a strong vision for his art. As a LGBTQ actor it felt wonderful to work with so many queer people on the set. It really felt like we were all committed to honoring this story in the most authentic way possible. I can't say enough about how positive my experience was making this project, and I am so proud I got to be a part of it as both an actor and a producer.

Why was it important to tell an inclusive LGBTQ+ story?

Oren Soffer | Director of Photography I think as artists, we all have an instinct and an inclination to want to tell our own stories; as a queer person who came out later in life thanks to a lack of role models and media depictions of people who went through what I went through growing up, it is more important than ever for me to tell stories about the LGBTQ community, to help break down those barriers, normalize queer stories and specifically queer romance, and give those young queer folks who haven't found themselves quite yet some refuge and reassurance that their experiences are valid.

Danny Kish | Co-Writer We often see LGBTQ+ stories about trauma. These are certainly compelling stories and represent real experiences of LGBTQ+ people, but when those are the only stories being told, it can misrepresent the huge diversity of experiences LGBTQ+ have and have had throughout history. What I think is so special about Gilbert and Gordon's love story is that Gordon never mentions feeling conflicted or ashamed about being gay. In fact, through the letters we are able to see that there was a really inclusive, thriving gay scene during this time in the UK. I was so surprised to learn this, and that can partially be attributed to the fact that people aren't yet telling stories that represent that experience. The stories we choose to tell matters greatly, and I am so proud that we get to bring this particularly unique story to a wider audience.

Nikki Reifler | Production Designer Not only are there not ample authentic LGBTQ+ stories for the modern age, it is important to me to tell an inclusive LGBTQ+ story of different time periods to show how far we've come even if there's still more work to be done on educating people on inclusivity and acceptance. I've hardly thought about LGBTQ+ individuals during WW2, maybe that's me being young and naive, but this opened my perspective into thinking about queerness all throughout history and how little it is talked about or shown in entertainment. I'm happy I was able to be part of this story.

Andy Vallentine | Director & Co-Writer For so long, the LGBTQ+ community has had to make due with the absolute bare minimum in terms of representation of their lives and experiences within film. As a gay director, I feel a strong sense of duty to use whatever platform I have available to me to change this sorry truth and tell stories that have not yet been told. We often see very similar stories about LGBTQ+ people, and I think *The Letter Men* represents a break from the tradition of tragic and tortured LGBTQ+ characters. To me, being inclusive means being more honest and actually reflecting the world that we all live in. That should be a goal of any artist.

Matthew Postlethwaite | Actor/Producer It's important that these stories are told. Many brave LGBTQ+ individuals fought in the war. It's important to remember that gay men and woman have always been around the only thing that was lacking was visibility and acceptance. That's how we change societal ideations. We change the visibility and by doing so instill change that leads to acceptance.

How was this project a producing challenge for you and your team? What was the biggest logistics challenge you had to overcome?

Siddharth Ganji | Producer This was a period piece and we had to make it look like WWII. Outside of the costumes, scene design and look of the film, the locations played a big role. Recreating the London tube station in Los Angeles was a challenge but we found the right underground location with the right texture, and our team pulled it off well with set dressing.

Oren Soffer | Director of Photography For as long as I've been interested in movies I've loved period films, and have longed for the opportunity to play in that lavish visual sandbox ever since I got interested

in filmmaking. Atonement has been a particular favorite film of mine ever since it came out 14 years ago, and I was overjoyed to be able to try and emulate that film in our short. The biggest challenge with period films on a low budget is always figuring out how to express high production value with limited resources, but Andy and the entire team's meticulous prep made this really easy and possible for us to accomplish.

Nikki Reifler | Production Designer I am most proud of the trench scene because it was a huge feat of multiple departments working in outdoor conditions to make a really impressive war scene. It was completely made out of scrap wood, as we were working on a budget. An excavation team had dug out the trench dimensions beforehand and my art team and installed the set on the day: creating the wood sides, wood floor, painting/staining the wood, installing the dressing and lighting elements. The shoot also involved pyrotechnics, and my team helped dig holes for the explosives and reset those elements. I'm very proud of how massive the scope of this set was and how we treated it practically to make sure it was achievable and would be a success!

Cameron Hutchison | Producer A tight budget, and some difficult locations were our biggest challenges. The trench scene in particular was difficult, as we created the trench ourselves on location.

Why was it important to stay true and use the real words that Gordon wrote?

Danny Kish | Co-Writer Gordon wrote beautiful letters that are filled with valuable information that really tells their love story in a compelling way. Reading through the letters and seeking out a general narrative arc wasn't difficult to do, so it felt completely natural to yield to Gordon and use his actual words in the film.

Andy Vallentine | Director & Co-Writer The fact that Gordon's letters survived is a gift to all of us. Over the last four years, as I've sought the best way to tell this story, I have gone back and forth with whether I wanted to use his actual words or take more creative liberties in the process of adaptation. But every time I found myself considering what it would look like to take those creative liberties, the end result seemed inferior to the words memorialized on paper. Gordon was a gifted writer and he wrote effusively and thoughtfully about his life and love for Gilbert. The story of his life is represented so completely within the pages of his letters, it ultimately felt impossible not to use his own words. In one of his letters, Gordon said, "wouldn't it be wonderful if all our letters could be published in the future in a more enlightened time. Then all the world could see how in love we are." I can think of no better way to honor his wish than to use his own words for this film.

What is it like working with your husband? Why do you make a good creative team?

Danny Kish | Co-Writer It is an enormous privilege to be able to work with someone that I trust so implicitly and completely. Andy and I make such good collaborators because we complement each other's strengths and weaknesses. Andy has a really strong vision for how to tell a story visually while I tend to do best with words and dialogue. When we finally sat down to put Gilbert and Gordon's story down on paper, the process felt so easy and natural. Andy would describe how he saw the story being told visually, and I would fill in the scenes with pieces of Gordon's letters. I think the end result is something really compelling and entirely unique to mine and Andy's perspectives on Gilbert and Gordon's love story.

Andy Vallentine | Director & Co-Writer Danny and I have been together nearly ten years, so we have a shorthand that makes working together on creative projects incredibly easy and natural. I implicitly trust Danny's opinion on whether something works or doesn't work and I know that he will challenge me in

ways that make me a better, more thoughtful artist. Because we have been working together on Gilbert and Gordon's story for almost four years, I know that this story has had an equally outsized presence in his mind as well. Danny intuitively knew the story of the letters and the specific turns of phrases Gordon used. I knew the overall theme for the short and the visual elements I wanted to bring to life. I couldn't be prouder to say that I created this with my husband and I am excited that we get to go on this journey together as filmmakers.

Why did you want to be a part of this film? What drew you to telling your character's story?

Garrett Clayton | Actor/Producer As an actor, it is a huge honor to represent real people and real events. Along with that honor comes great responsibility. Getting the opportunity to play Gilbert reminded me of how much has changed since Gordon wrote those letters to him and also how much has not changed. Everyday, people around the world must still fight for acceptance and dignity just to be themselves. While we have been fortunate to see significant change in the way LGBTQ+ people are accepted in most western countries, there are still people abroad, and unfortunately, at home, who continue to struggle. Making this film was a labor of love, and my hope is that, by giving life to these two men and their beautiful letters, we can share their story with the people who need to see it the most and make a positive impact.

Matthew Postlethwaite | Actor/Producer Ever since I read about the story in the news, I knew this was something that I wanted to be a part of. Gilbert and Gordon's story is one that needed to be told and, I'm proud to play a part in telling that story. Their love is like all of ours, but at a more complex time of homophobia and war. It was important for me to be a part of this project to shine a spotlight on those brave minority groups that fought in the war.

Why does this specific story need to be told?

Oren Soffer | Director of Photography I think there is a common misconception that queer identity is something new, because of how much visibility of queer people and queer stories in media has only really existed in earnest since the second half of the 20th century. But queer people and queer romance has always existed, dating back to the dawn of civilization, and I think it is more important now than ever to remind people of that fact and to tell and uplift queer stories from history, to show how we have always been here, and always will be.

Danny Kish | Co-Writer In general, there is a huge need for more LGBTQ+ stories to be told. But even within the sub-genre of LGBTQ+ stories, this one is especially unique and deserving to be told. The fact that these letters were not burned, as was custom at the time, gives us this incredibly rare look into the life of two gay men during exceptional circumstances. While the representation is an important piece of this, it's also a compelling story on its own. I can't think of any story quite like this one.

Nikki Reifler | Production Designer I think this story needs to be told because it depicts secretive queer romance during a point of time when we mainly remember the male/female romance dynamic of war. I don't think queer representation in military stories is always common or done in a sentimental way. This film made me think a lot about how easy it is for me to be gay in 2021, but how I don't usually think about history and how people had to hide their queerness in society.

Andy Vallentine | Director & Co-Writer The Letter Men is an epic WWII romantic drama based on actual people and actual events with two leading characters that happen to be men. Even without that final

detail, this would make a compelling film. But the fact that the main characters are two men is something we have not seen before and adds substantial depth and nuance to a story many people would already be familiar with. Telling stories that represent diverse experiences and perspectives is a goal of mine. It's not only the right thing to do, but I know that there is a captive audience ready to hear and see new perspectives.

Matthew Postlethwaite | Actor/Producer Visibility is so important. I know we keep hearing that, but It's true. It empowers people to live their authentic self, unapologetically, If they see people who are similar to them.

MEET THE TEAM

Andy Vallentine | Director & Co-Writer

Andy is considered one of the premier up-and-coming directors in Los Angeles. He draws his creative inspiration from the forged-in-fire experience of being a dyslexic gay kid in small-town Michigan. What was once his shame he now considers his greatest strengths.

He is currently in pre-production for his film THE MATTACHINE FAMILY, written by creative partner and husband Danny Vallentine. This film is being produced by Zach Braff, Scot Boland, and Mike Diaz and is set to go into production in October 2021.

Andy has developed content with Amy Baer at Gidden Media, Tyra Banks with Bankable, and most recently has been hard at work developing a WWII series based on the newly discovered real love letters sent between two gay British soldiers in the 1940s. He is working to bring this remarkable true story to life with Brian Volk-Weiss at the Nacelle Company.

He has worked with recording artists like Charlie Puth and Tritonal and popular media personalities like Patrick Starr and Joey Graceffa. He has created commercial and branded content for Mercedes-Benz, MAC Cosmetics, Sephora, The Department of Veterans Affairs, The Ad Council, Goodwill, and Major League Baseball. Andy's combined content has been viewed over 1 Billion times.

Daniel Vallentine | Co-Writer

Danny has always been a writer at heart. He started writing his first screenplay when he was just ten years old and has since learned a thing or two about telling a compelling story from some tremendous mentors. Danny worked for Barry Mendel at Apatow Productions where he was involved in the development of screenplays such as Trainwreck, The Big Sick, and Juliet, Naked. He also is currently collaborating on a script with Zach Braff called THE MATTACHINE FAMILY which stars [place when casted]. His passion is telling stories that have not yet been told.

Garrett Clayton | Actor/ Producer

Garrett Clayton recently won the Ovation Award for Best Lead Actor in a Musical for his performance as 'Pennywise' in IT: A MUSICAL PARODY at The Rockwell Table & Stage, and was nominated for Best Actor by Broadwayworld.com. In features, he can currently be seen in BETWEEN WORLDS opposite Nicholas Cage, as well as a lead in the indie PEEL opposite Emile Hirsch. In television, he can soon be seen recurring as "Dustan Lumberlake" in the live-action reboot of FAIRLY ODDPARENTS for Paramount+.

Garrett is well known for playing 'Link' in NBC's HAIRSPRAY LIVE!, and was the lead of the indie feature KING COBRA opposite James Franco and Christian Slater, which premiered at the Tribeca Film

Festival to incredible reviews. It was an edgy turn for Garrett, who was previously known for one of the leads of the Disney TEEN BEACH MOVIE franchise as well as his recurring role on ABC Family's THE FOSTERS. Additionally, his thriller film DON'T HANG UP premiered at the LA Film Festival and he acted opposite Al Pacino and Judith Light at the Pasadena Playhouse production of GOD LOOKED AWAY.

In recent months, Clayton has been busy during the pandemic curating an online audience of 3-million-plus followers on TikTok and 1.5 million followers on Instagram, where he primarily posts dance content. Additionally, he and some of his former TEEN BEACH co-stars also founded PrideHouseLA on TikTok, which is a group of LGBTQ+ individuals who - in addition to dance content - support each other and encourage acceptance and inclusivity across social media and other platforms. Recent collaborations include JoJo Siwa, Todrick Hall, Lance Bass, and Darren Criss. PrideHouse has over 230k TikTok followers so far, with plans in the works for a podcast, a clothing line, a deal with Amazon Live, and much more on the horizon.

Matthew Postlethwaite | Actor/ Producer

Matthew Postlethwaite, Is an award winning actor from England. Matthew began acting from an early age training briefly at LAMDA, Yale, and eventually studying in the Master Class at Beverly Hills Playhouse for five years. Distantly related to Academy nominated actor Pete Postlethwaite, Matthew started his Motion picture career in the award winning Netflix/BBC show PeakyBlinders. The White King & Shooting Clerks. Matthew was once kicked out of Art school because he was told he wasn't talented enough; He later debuted his Art collection in NewYork at the Affordable Art Fair.

Cameron Hutchison | Producer

With over 8 years of experience in production management, Cameron takes pride in being the liaison between creatives and production. Cameron graduated with a BFA in Film Production from Chapman University and has made a career producing music videos, commercials, branded content, and shorts. He is passionate about visual storytelling and loves being the logistics engine behind the scenes. When not on set, you can find him on the golf course, where he boasts a 6.1 index.

Mike Diaz | Producer

Accomplished Manager and Producer representing Actors, Writers, and Directors with 10 years of experience. Demonstrated history in development and talent management with several projects in development across, TV, Film and the Podcast space. Originally from Martha's Vineyard, MA, Mike moved to LA in 2012 and began his career at Principato-Young and then moved to the Coronel Group where he spent six years. At the Coronel Group he established a proven track record working with A List actors, writers and directors with a focus on development. He is now at ATN Entertainment where he is spearheading the Literary Department and focusing on expanding and growing their client list. Mike resides in Woodland Hills, CA with his wife and daughter.

Siddharth Ganji | Producer

Over the last 8+ years, Siddharth Ganji has managed and driven all forms of production with teams around the world, including Los Angeles, Mumbai, London and Doha. Diversity in collaboration has led him to telling compelling stories, and this is a value he holds dearly. He has produced over 80 commercials, music videos and branded shorts as well as short and long form narrative.

Oren Soffer | Director of Photography

Oren grew up between the United States and Israel, nurturing hobbies in painting and photography and avidly watching Coen Brothers and Paul Thomas Anderson movies. These activities laid the groundwork for what would eventually become a passion for cinematography and for crafting bold, cinematic imagery. During his studies at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts, Oren was nominated for the ASC Gordon Willis Student Heritage Award, and was a finalist for the Arri Volker Bahnemann Award for Cinematography. Subsequently, multiple projects he has worked on have won various other awards, including 'Opera of Cruelty,' which won the Alternative category at the Student Academy Awards in 2018, and 'See You Soon,' a short film that Oren lensed, which won the audience award at the Palm Springs International Shortsfest before subsequently premiering on Short of the Week and receiving a Vimeo Staff Pick in 2020. Oren has also shot five feature films and hundreds of commercials and music videos for a variety of clients including Nike, BMW, Viacom, HBO, Foot Locker, Grey Goose Vodka, Doritos, Kohler, Wilson Tennis, Marriott Hotels, ACE Hardware, IBM, Crest, Dashlane, Universal Studios, Paramount Pictures, and MTV; and has worked for and apprenticed with acclaimed Directors of Photography Reed Morano, ASC and Greig Fraser, ASC, ACS.

Nikki Reifler | Production Designer

Nikki Reifler is a Production Designer in Los Angeles. He started his career in art departments in 2020, after graduating from Chapman University the same year. He began his career during the pandemic and is thankful for every opportunity. He grew up in Orlando, Florida; inspired by the art of theme parks and tourist entertainment. Nikki is visually driven and loves all forms of queer expression, especially the art of drag. Every job is a new opportunity for Nikki to learn and flex knowledge of art culture, history, and art department craft.

FILM CREDITS

PRODUCTION

Director, Co-Writer	Andy Vallentine
Co-Writer	Danny Kish
Producer	Cameron Hutchison
Producer	Siddharth Ganji
Producer	Mike Diaz
Producer	Matthew Postlethwaite
Producer	Garrett Clayton
Executive Producer	Mark Hignett
Executive Producer	Harriet Hignett
Director of Photography	Oren Soffer
Editor	Daniel Riser
Production Designer	Nikki Reifler

Visual Effects Supervisor	Kris Sundberg
Costume Designer	Brittany Kay
Hair & Makeup	Monique Paredes
Hair & Makeup	Edder Sandoval
Special Effects Supervisor	Neil Smith
1st Assistant Director	Gina Yull
Production Coordinator	Katie Schmidt
Additional Casting	Cedric Botelho
1st AC	Carolina Rodriguez
1st AC	Tamara Santos
2nd AC	George Arevalo
2nd AC	Eric Honghui Luo
Gaffer	Dessie Coale
Key Grip	Sergio Nava
Best Boy Grip	Spendser Adelstein
Best Boy Electric	James King
Dolly Grip	Jon Taylor
Color Provided by	Kath Raisch & Company 3
Sound Designer	Eric Crepeau
Art Director	Brendan O'Connor
Art Director	Jack Massura
Art Assistant	Mateo Deangelo
Covid Compliance Officer	Stuart Heinlein
Sound Mixer	Alex Goens
Sound Mixer	Nico Pierce
Additional Visual Effects	Ryan Sundberg
FSO	Michael Delgado
Production Assistant	Alyssa Ashby
Production Assistant	Kerstin Kelley

TALENT

Gilbert Bradley	Garrett Clayton
Gordon Bowsher	Matthew Postlethwaite
Nellie MacDonald	Starlene Beran
Geof MacDonald	Corey Olenick
Miriam Mylne	Nami Matsushita
Sarah	Ciara Noel
Oliver	George Todd McLachlan
Hugh	Safi Jafri
Harry	Pierce Allison
Phil	Blyss Ezell
Joseph	Ander Errandonea
John	Nehal Banik
Charlie	Daniel Riser
Ian	Cedric Botelho
Thomas	Arthur Yemchyk
Jack	Danny Vallentine
Francis	Jake Mager
Jake	Callum Macdonald

SPECIAL THANKS

Oswstery Town Museum	Mike Woodward
Rob & Nancy Vallentine	Company 3
Scot Boland	Casey Koster
Raisa Machado	Anna Kelman
Jon Melin	Jessica Hobbs
Brianna Gardner	Scott Cresto
Pasadena Musuem of History	Kim O'Neil
Jonathan Lennard	Peter Roscoe
Lynne Castillo	Heritage Open Days
Bruce Castillo	David Preston

Carson Elder

Corrie Davies

West Coast Water Tenders

Shropshire Council

Jacob Carpenter

MUSIC

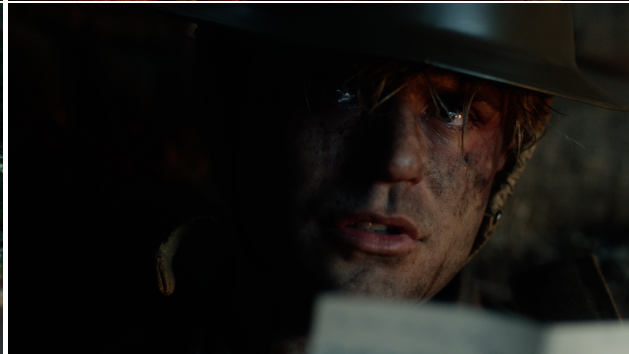
“Saturn” by Sleeping at Last

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“New Beginnings” by Arend

“Skippity Beat” by Airstream

PHOTOS



PHOTOS

