

## "Muhammad Ali's Greatest Fight" Is Oct. 5 on HBO

Written by The Sweet Science  
Saturday, 07 September 2013 23:43

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CHRISTOPHER PLUMMER, FRANK LANGELLA AND

BENJAMIN WALKER STAR IN THE HBO FILMS PRESENTATION, **MUHAMMAD ALI'S GREATEST FIGHT**  
DIRECTED BY STEPHEN FREARS, DEBUTING OCT. 5

Famous for both his signature shuffle and verbal sparring, boxer Cassius Clay quickly rose to fame in the '60s, becoming the world's best-known athlete – and eventually its most controversial. After joining the Nation of Islam and adopting the name Muhammad Ali, he was widely denounced for refusing to be drafted into the U.S. military, based on his religious opposition to the Vietnam War. Stripped of his title and banned from the sport, the self-proclaimed "Greatest" lost nearly four years of his boxing prime to legal battles. In 1971, his case for being a conscientious objector eventually reached the United States Supreme Court, rooted by tradition and conservative ideals with Nixon-appointed Chief Justice Warren E. Burger at its helm.

HBO Films presents in association with SAF Films West MUHAMMAD ALI'S GREATEST FIGHT, starring Academy Award® winner Christopher Plummer ("Beginners"), Academy Award® nominee Frank Langella ("Frost/Nixon") and Benjamin Walker ("Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter"); directed by Academy Award

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nominee Stephen Frears ("The Queen") from a script by Shawn Slovo ("A World Apart"); and executive produced by Emmy

®  
winner Frank Doelger (HBO's "Game of Thrones" and "The Gathering Storm"), Emmy

®  
winner Tracey Scofield (HBO's "The Gathering Storm"), Jonathan Cameron and Stephen Frears.

Debuting SATURDAY, OCT. 5 (8:00-9:40 p.m. ET/PT), exclusively on HBO, the film goes behind the closed doors of the United States Supreme Court as its nine justices – Chief Justice Warren E. Burger (Frank Langella), Hugo Black (Fritz Weaver), William O. Douglas (Harris Yulin), John Harlan II (Christopher Plummer), William Brennan, Jr. (Peter Gerety), Potter Stewart (Barry Levinson), Byron "Whizzer" White (John Bedford Lloyd), Thurgood Marshall (Danny Glover) and Harry Blackmun (Ed Begley, Jr.) – decide the outcome of Muhammad Ali's landmark appeal. Justice Harlan, a respected jurist with 15 years on the court, finds himself at

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odds with the status quo after his perspective is challenged by the contemporary ideals of his new clerk, Kevin Connolly (Benjamin Walker). The film explores the intricate politics behind these historic decisions in a time of rapid social and cultural transformation in the American landscape.

### ABOUT THE FILM

When executive producer Frank Doelger at Rainmark Films asked writer Shawn Slovo to develop a film version of some of the events portrayed in the book of the same name by Howard Bingham and Max Wallace, she was immediately attracted to the volatile time period in which the film is set.

"The late '60s, early '70s in American history is the most fascinating period," Slovo says. "It wasn't only that you had the cast of great characters and the great story, but also the context of the times. I seized on this opportunity when Frank gave it to me."

To bring the script to life, Slovo was paired with celebrated director Stephen Frears, whom she credits for attracting such top actors as Christopher Plummer and Frank Langella to the film. She notes, "People want to work with Stephen and for the obvious reasons. And that's a huge asset to this."

Slovo's script called for archival footage to portray Ali. Frears and the other filmmakers agreed with the decision not to cast an actor for the scenes showing the inimitable boxer, who was as bold and outspoken outside the ring as he was inside.

Slovo explains, "Any chance he got, Ali was talking about why he believed in what he believed, why he refused to fight. So we have this brilliant archive footage, and once you see it, you think, 'There is absolutely no point in trying to find an actor to play this man.'"

Despite the extensive amount of information gathered on the justices, the actors were also encouraged by Frears to trust the script and shape their parts from their insights. "The production sent me four books, and out of the four books, I got a paragraph of information on

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Warren Burger as a person," says Frank Langella. "There is very little personal information about these guys, and I think that's probably something the justices develop, which is not to have them be shining examples of personality, but to be men who stand for justice."

The clerks, as an ensemble, provide an emotional and youthful perspective to the justices, who strive to practice strictly by the law. Justice Harlan's fledgling clerk, Kevin Connolly (Benjamin Walker), struggles not only with his tradition-minded employers, but also with the established clerk system that favors Ivy League students. In the historical appeal of Ali's case, the clerks played an integral role in influencing the reversal of the justices' decision.

Shot in New York City, with additional locations in New York State, MUHAMMAD ALI'S GREATEST FIGHT went to great lengths to evoke Washington, D.C. in the 1970s.

"We had a difficult time finding neighborhoods in New York City that looked like, felt like, Georgetown, which is a lot older than most of the locations in New York," says production designer Dan Davis. "We stumbled across Schenectady and found this fantastic neighborhood that looked almost identical to Georgetown."

After extensive behind-the-scenes tours of the Supreme Court, the production meticulously built a central courtroom on a stage in Brooklyn, in addition to filming elsewhere in New York City for scenes of the justices' chambers and clerks' offices. Seasoned costume designer Molly Maginnis also came on board to recreate the fashions of the early '70s, working with robe manufacturer Bentley & Simon, which has outfitted many of the Supreme Court justices since 1918.

### ABOUT THE CAST

Christopher Plummer (John Harlan II) is a Best Supporting Actor Oscar® winner for "Beginners" and a Tony Award winner for the musicals "Cyrano" and "Barrymore." His other film credits include "The Man Who Would Be King," "Battle of Britain," "Waterloo," "The Fall of The Roman Empire," "Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country," "Twelve Monkeys," the Oscar

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-winning "The Sound of Music," the Oscar

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-nominated "The Insider," the Oscar

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-winning "A Beautiful Mind," "Man in the Chair," "Must Love Dogs," "National Treasure," "Syriana" and "Inside Man." Plummer's TV appearances include the Emmy

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-winning BBC presentation "Hamlet at Elsinore" and the Emmy

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-winning productions "The Thornbirds," "Nuremberg" and "Little Moon of Alban." Plummer has won two Emmys

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and received six other Emmy

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nominations.

Frank Langella (Chief Justice Warren E. Burger) is a three-time Tony Award-winning, Oscar®-nominated actor for his role as Richard Nixon in the play and film "Frost/Nixon." His impressive list of more than 65 films includes "Good Night, and Good Luck," "Starting Out in the Evening," "Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps," "Dave," "Dracula," and, most recently, the highly acclaimed independent film "Robot and Frank." He will next be seen opposite Nicole Kidman in "Grace of Monaco" and opposite Kevin Costner in "Draft Day." Langella has been nominated for Golden Globes, Emmys

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, SAG Awards and Independent Spirit Awards. In addition to his Tony wins, he has been nominated for Tonys six other times and has won five Drama Desk Awards, three Outer Critics Circle Awards and the distinguished Drama League Award, and has been inducted into the Theatre Hall of Fame.

Benjamin Walker (Kevin Connolly) starred in the title role of Timur Bekmambetov's "Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter," produced by Tim Burton and based on the novel of the same name. His other film credits include the Clint Eastwood-directed "Flags of Our Fathers" and the Bill Condon-directed "Kinsey." He performed in the Broadway revival of "Inherit the Wind" and in Roundabout Theatre's production of "Les Liasons Dangereuses," which was nominated for six Tony Awards. Walker played the title role in the Alex Timbers musical "Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson." Most recently, he appeared on Broadway in "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof," playing Brick.

Harris Yulin (William O. Douglas) has appeared on stage in "King John," "Hedda Gabler," "A Lesson from Aloes," "Finishing the Picture," "Mrs. Warren's Profession" and "Hamlet." His film credits include "Looking for Richard," "The Hurricane," "Cradle Will Rock," "Training Day," "Fur" and "The Place Beyond the Pines." On TV, Yulin has appeared in "The FBI Story: FBI Versus Alvin Karpas, Public Enemy Number One," "Third Watch," "24," "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" and

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"Mister Sterling." His guest appearance on an episode of "Frasier" garnered him an Emmy® nomination.

Ed Begley, Jr. (Harry Blackmun) received six Emmy® nominations for playing Dr. Victor Ehrlich on "St. Elsewhere." His film credits include "Whatever Works," "Pineapple Express," "Batman Forever," "The Accidental Tourist," "The In-Laws" and a number of Christopher Guest films, such as "A Mighty Wind," "Best in Show" and "For Your Consideration." On TV, he has also appeared on HBO's "Family Tree," "Recount" and "Six Feet Under," as well as "Arrested Development" and "Boston Legal."

Fritz Weaver (Hugo Black) won a Tony Award for "Child's Play" and received a Tony nomination and Theatre World Award for "The Chalk Garden." His Broadway credits also include "A Shot in the Dark," "A Tale Told," "Angels Fall," "Protective Custody," "Miss Lonelyhearts," "All American," "Lorenzo," "The White House," "Baker Street," "My Fair Lady," "Absurd Person Singular," "The Price," "The Crucible" and "Ring Round the Moon." He received Emmy® nominations for "The Legend of Lizzie Borden" and the miniseries "Holocaust." His other TV credits include "The Martian Chronicles" and "The Twilight Zone." Weaver's film credits include "Fail-Safe," "Black Sunday," "Marathon Man," "Creep Show," "A Walk in the Spring Rain," "The Day of the Dolphin," "Power," "Demon Seed" and "The Thomas Crown Affair." He has been inducted into the Theater Hall Of Fame and the Players' Hall Of Fame.

Barry Levinson (Potter Stewart) is an Academy Award®-winning director, screenwriter and producer who was awarded the 1988 Best Director Oscar

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for the multiple Academy Award

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-winning "Rain Man," starring Dustin Hoffman and Tom Cruise. In 1991, "Bugsy," directed and produced by Levinson, was nominated for ten Academy Awards

®, including Best Picture and Best Director. As a screenwriter, Levinson has received three Oscar

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nominations, for "...And Justice for All," "Diner" and "Avalon." More recently, he executive produced and directed the HBO Films drama "You Don't Know Jack," which received 15 Emmy

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nominations, including Outstanding Made for Television Movie and Best Director. His other iconic films include "The Natural," "Good Morning, Vietnam," "Wag the Dog" and "Sleepers."

John Bedford Lloyd (Byron "Whizzer" White) has appeared on Broadway in "Some Americans

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Abroad," "The Rainmaker" and "Tartuffe." His other theatre credits include Ethan Coen's "Offices" at the Atlantic Theatre Company, "Williamstown," the world premiere of Arthur Miller's "Resurrection Blues," "The Drawer Boy" and "The Best of Enemies." On TV, he has appeared in HBO's "John Adams," "The Bronx Is Burning" and "Remember WENN," for which he received a SAG Award nomination. His film credits include "Super Troopers," "Crossing Delancey," "Tough Guys Don't Dance," "Nixon," "The Abyss," "The Bourne Supremacy," "Philadelphia," "The Manchurian Candidate," "The Hoax" and "Wall Street : Money Never Sleeps."

Peter Gerety (William Brennan, Jr.) has appeared on film in "Get the Gringo," "How I Spent My Summer Vacation," "Paul Blart: Mall Cop," "Public Enemies," "The Changeling," "Leatherheads," "Charlie Wilson's War," "Inside Man," "Things That Hang From Trees," "Syriana," "War of the Worlds," "K-Pax," "People I Know," "Magic Hour," "Montana," "The Legend of Bagger Vance," "Mrs. Winterborne," "Surviving Picasso," "Hollywood Ending" and "The Curse of the Jade Scorpion." On TV, he has appeared in "Brothers and Sisters," "The Bedford Diaries," HBO's "The Wire," "Conviction," "Homicide," "Law & Order," "Ed," "Central Park West," "Third Watch" and "The Return to Lonesome Dove." He is currently appearing in the late Nora Ephron's play "Lucky Guy" on Broadway opposite Tom Hanks.

Danny Glover (Thurgood Marshall) debuted on Broadway in "Master Harold...and the Boys" and starred in the blockbuster "Lethal Weapon" franchise. His other film credits include the Academy Award® winners "Places in the Heart" and "Witness." He also starred in Steven Spielberg's "The Color Purple," "The Royal Tenenbaums," "Saw," "Shooter," "Dreamgirls," "Death at a Funeral" and "2012." On TV, Glover won an Image Award and a CableACE Award, and also earned an Emmy® nomination, for the title role of the HBO original movie "Mandela." He has also received Emmy® nominations for the acclaimed miniseries "Lonesome Dove" and the TV movie "Freedom Song," and as a director earned a Daytime Emmy® nomination for "Just a Dream."

Pablo Schreiber (Covert Becker) was nominated for a Tony Award for his Broadway debut in the revival of Clifford Odets' classic "Awake and Sing!," directed by Bartlett Sher. Schreiber's films include "Happythankyoumoreplease," which won the Audience Award at Sundance, "Vicky Cristina Barcelona," "The Lords of Dogtown," "Tell Tale," "Nights in Rodanthe," "The Manchurian Candidate," "Allegiance," "Breaking Upwards," "Into the Fire," "The Mudge Boy," "Invitation to a Suicide," "The Call" and "Fort Bliss." His TV credits include HBO's "The Wire," "Weeds," "A Gifted Man," "Light's Out," "The Good Wife," "White Collar," "The Beast," "Life on Mars," "It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia," "Fear Itself," "Dirt," John Grisham's "A Painted House," "Law & Order," "Law & Order: Criminal Intent," "Law & Order: Special Victims Unit" and "The Black Donnellys." He can currently be seen in the series "Orange Is the New Black."

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Ben Steinfeld (Sam Edelstein) is an actor, director, teacher and musician. He has been seen on Broadway in "Cyrano de Bergerac" and "Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson." Steinfeld has co-directed and acted in all Fiasco Theater productions, including "Cymbeline," which won the 2012 Off Broadway Alliance Award for Best Revival, "Into the Woods" and "Twelfth Night." His regional acting credits include Center Theatre Group, Portland Center Stage, Williamstown Theatre Festival and ten plays with Trinity Repertory Company. Steinfeld's TV credits include "The Good Wife," "Law & Order: Criminal Intent" and "Late Night with Jimmy Fallon."

Kathleen Chalfant (Ethel Harlan) is a Tony-nominated actress for "Angels in America on Broadway." Her feature film credits include "Isn't It Delicious?," "R.I.P.D.," "Duplicity," "A Perfect Stranger," "The Last New Yorker," "Kinsey," "Lackawanna Blues," "Dark Water," "Random Hearts," "A Price Below Rubies," Whit Stillman's "The Last Days of Disco," "Side Streets," "Company Men" and "The Pornographer." She has appeared on TV in "The Book of Daniel," "The Guardian," HBO's "The Laramie Project" and "Lackawanna Blues," the Stephen King miniseries "Storm of the Century," "Voices from the White House" and "A Death in the Family." She had recurring roles on "House of Cards," "Rescue Me," "Prince Street" and "One Life to Live," and guest spots on "Mercy," "Law & Order," "Law & Order: Special Victims Unit," "Law & Order: Criminal Intent," "Spin City" and "New York Undercover."

### ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

Stephen Frears (director, executive producer) made his Hollywood debut with "Dangerous Liaisons" in 1989, which received six Oscar® nominations, followed by "The Grifters," produced by Martin Scorsese, which gained him an Oscar® nomination for Best Director. His other credits include "My Beautiful Laundrette," "High Fidelity," "Dirty Pretty Things," the BAFTA Award-winning "The Deal," "Mrs. Henderson Presents" and "The Queen," which also earned him an Oscar® nomination for Best Director.

Shawn Slovo (writer) wrote her first screenplay, "A World Apart," in 1987. The film won the Jury Prize and the Ecumenical and Best Actress Awards at the 1987 Cannes Film Festival and the 1988 BAFTA Best Original Screenplay Award. Her adaptation of "Captain Corelli's Mandolin" for Working Title/Universal was directed by John Madden in 2000. "Catch a Fire," an original screenplay for Working Title Films, directed by Phillip Noyce, was released by Focus Features in 2007.

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Frank Doelger (executive producer) was a producer on the Emmy®-winning HBO presentations "John Adams" and "Rome." His other HBO credits include the Emmy

® winners "My House in Umbria," "The Gathering Storm," "A Child Betrayed: The Calvin Mire Story," "Dead Drunk" and "Conspiracy," which also won a BAFTA, as well as the Emmy

®-nominated "Dead Ahead: The Exxon Valdez Disaster" and "Public Law 106: The Becky Bell Story." He is currently executive producing the hit HBO series "Game of Thrones" and is a director of Rainmark Films.

Tracey Scofield (executive producer) has produced several features for HBO, including "My Zinc Bed," by David Hare, the Emmy® winner "Into the Storm," by Hugh Whitemore and "The Special Relationship," by Peter Morgan, in which Michael Sheen reprises his role as Tony Blair. Her other credits include "Dirty Pretty Things," "Sylvia," HBO's "The Gathering Storm," "Mrs. Henderson Presents" and "Tristram Shandy: A Cock and Bull Story." She is a director of Rainmark Films.

Jonathan Cameron (executive producer) is principal of Sakura Films, whose core activity is the development of theatrical films and TV series with partners in the UK and U.S. He is also engaged in structuring finance for the production of high-quality, low-budget feature films made for distribution exclusively via the Internet. Previously, Cameron forged a law career as a specialist in media and copyright before producing films beginning in 2009.