

Interview: Roma Downey, Mark Burnett Present 'Son of God'

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on February 25, 2014 - 10:43am

- [20th Century Fox Films](#) [2]
- [Are you Smarter Than a Fifth Grader?](#) [3]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [4]
- [Interview](#) [5]
- [Jesus](#) [6]
- [Patrick McDonald](#) [7]
- [Roma Downey Mark Burnett](#) [8]
- [Shark Tank](#) [9]
- [Son of God](#) [10]
- [Survivor](#) [11]
- [The Apprentice](#) [12]
- [The Bible](#) [13]
- [The Voice](#) [14]
- [Touched by an Angel](#) [15]

CHICAGO – Actress Roma Downey and Producer Mark Burnett are on a mission. After producing the huge success of the miniseries “The Bible” last year, the husband-and-wife team now turn to the “greatest story ever told” – the life of Jesus Christ – in the new film “Son of God.”

Roma Downey is no stranger to the ethereal aspects of religious themed programming. For nine seasons, she was the star of “Touched by an Angel,” portraying a heavenly messenger who guided earthbound humans at their crossroads. Mark Burnett is a familiar name in the television universe, having produced several mega-successful reality shows including “Survivor,” “The Voice,” “Shark Tank” and “The Apprentice.” The couple were married in 2007, and last year produced the number one rated cable TV miniseries, “The Bible.” The 10 episodes followed the book from the beginning in the Old Testament (Genesis) to the Letters of Paul in the New Testament.



Diogo Morgado as Jesus Christ in 'Son of God'
Photo credit: 20th Century Fox Film Corporation

In this new film, “Son of God,” Downey and Burnett follow the life of Jesus, from birth to ascension. The film stars Diogo Morgado as Jesus, who performed the same role in “The Bible.” HollywoodChicago.com got the opportunity to talk with Roma Downey and Mark Burnett about their latest biblical production.

HollywoodChicago.com: What do you believe this film version of the Jesus story offers audiences that other versions don't offer?

Mark Burnett: First, it covers 50 years, including the full life of Christ from birth to ascension. It also offers a younger, grittier cast of younger guys who didn't know who he was when they started following him. They were with a charismatic leader, fighting for their rights against Rome and the temple authorities. They after they realized that it was the son of God that they were following, he takes them into Jerusalem. It would be like a small following in Iowa become noticed in Washington, D.C., and coming into the capital. I think the film shows how frightening it was

for the followers, in the sense that only Jesus really knew what was happening.

Roma Downey: The disciples didn't know what was happening, that they eventually would be in the gospels. The story is relatable for a 2014 audience, and is digestible in a visual sense. I can't imagine the Moses story without Charleston Heston and 'The Ten Commandments.'

HollywoodChicago.com: So all the Old Testament visuals in the prologue were from your miniseries, 'The Bible'?

Burnett: Yes, that was important, because it made a statement about who Jesus is, 'in the beginning was the word.' The word was God, and the word is God, and the word became flesh and lived among us. So the statement is that Jesus is God, the God on earth. And you've never seen it portrayed in such a way.

Downey: We're encouraged because the faith leaders across the denominations – Catholics, Protestants, Evangelicals – have all endorsed it. It's bringing Christians together in what we agree upon. It's a message of truth, love and hope.

HollywoodChicago.com: Ms. Downey, what character intuition did you process to portray Mary, Mother of Jesus. Besides being a mother yourself, what did you feel that the character of Mary offered the universe at the time of the death of Jesus?

Downey: Mary offers me, everyday, the inspiration to say 'yes' to God. Mary was just a young girl when she was selected to be the mother of God's son. I can't imagine what her understanding of all that was, but in her faithfulness she said 'yes.'

HollywoodChicago.com: This is done in the traditional of Hollywood Bible films, in which English speaking actors, many of which with complexions lighter than a tribal Middle Eastern pallor. How do you think the movie evolves the notion that Jesus and his followers are of Middle Eastern descent?

Burnett: Our Jesus is Diogo Morgado, a Portugal-born Hispanic, so it is the first Jesus to be Latin. It's great to have a Hispanic Jesus, and we're loving that we're celebrating the growth of the Latin culture.

Downey: We dubbed the film into Spanish for that market.

Burnett: We're showing Simon the Cyrene [who helped Jesus carry his cross on the way to the crucifixion, and was from Libya] portrayed with ebony skin. It is a black man holding Christ's hand and calling him Lord.

For the Middle Eastern feel, we shot in Morocco. We look at the film, and there are many shades of skin – ebony, asian and Latin – it's the diversity that creates the fabric. It's also the expected look of Jesus, with the beard and long hair.

HollywoodChicago.com: Since you both have deep faith, what was your childhood perception of Jesus, and how did that inform your relationship with him as adult followers?

Downey: I was raised in Ireland, and was educated by the Sisters of Mercy, or as we jokingly referred to them, 'the sisters of no mercy.' I have loved Jesus my whole life, and the sisters reminded me that he came for us. In my adult career, I played an angel for a decade on television, and it was my privilege to be the messenger. So I have felt that love my entire life, and it was my advantage to be able to infuse my work with letting other people know that. As gritty and sweeping as the film is, it is ultimately a love story.



Roma Downey and Mark Burnett for 'Son of God'
Photo credit: Patrick McDonald for HollywoodChicago.com

Burnett: I don't remember growing up without the Bible, and had religious education even as part of public schools in Britain. But it is one thing to know the stories, and another to live it every day. I feel like what we produce is like being a pastor, because a pastor is preparing a sermon every week and is rethinking the text. So when we produce a movie or miniseries, we have to visualize a way to make the audience have an emotional connection through the screen. We had 40 advisors on the miniseries and film.

Downey: It came with a huge responsibility, and one we took very seriously. Our job was to emotionally connect as filmmakers, to bring the story to the screen in a way to engage the audience, and open their hearts.

HollywoodChicago.com: Mr. Burnett, of all your popular competition and reality shows, which one amazed you and your team in its simplicity, almost to the point that you knew audiences would be intrigued by it before you even filmed an episode?

Burnett: We don't know that about any of them. We have it in our hearts to produce it, and we believe that people who need to be certain of any outcome are procrastinators who don't do anything, because nothing is certain. We figure all our productions out with great heart and intention, and make it as best we can, but we don't know the outcome. It's all you can do.

HollywoodChicago.com: Ms. Downey, early in your career you portrayed Jackie Kennedy [“A Woman Named Jackie” 1991 miniseries]. We just passed the 50th anniversary of the JFK assassination. What thoughts did you have about the nature of her mourning as you donned both the iconic pink Dallas outfit and black mourning clothes in those episodes?

Downey: I have nothing but the utmost respect and admiration for Jacqueline Kennedy. I never met her, but I wrote her a long letter at the time expressing my admiration for her. She showed such dignity in that tragedy, during the loss of John F. Kennedy. There was a thread of grace in her, a compassion that moved people.

HollywoodChicago.com: Finally, the three of us were born within months of each other in the same year. What do you think our specific generation has contributed to our time here, in the spiritual joy of the world?

Burnett: For myself, I am all about doing. I don't try to predict the impact, I can just do my piece and if you do it well enough, it will have impact.

Downey: When you're in it, all you can do is the best you can do. The power of intention is very important, as in why are you doing something. Regarding this film for us, we wanted to breathe fresh visual life to the gospels.

“Son of God” opens everywhere on February 28th. Featuring Diogo Morgado, Roma Downey, Daniel Percival and Joe Wredden. Produced by Roma Downey and Mark Burnett. Written by Richard Bedser, Christopher Spencer, Colin Swash and Nic Young. Directed by Christopher Spencer. Rated “PG-13”



[16]

By [PATRICK McDONALD](#) [17]
Senior Staff Writer
HollywoodChicago.com
pat@hollywoodchicago.com [16]

© 2014 Patrick McDonald, HollywoodChicago.com

Source URL (retrieved on Apr 24 2024 - 1:03am):

<http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/23607/interview-roma-downey-mark-burnett-present-son-of-god>

Links:

- [1] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/users/hankq>
- [2] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/20th-century-fox-films>
- [3] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/are-you-smarter-than-a-fifth-grader>
- [4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/hollywoodchicagodotcom-content>
- [5] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/labels/interview.html>
- [6] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/jesus>
- [7] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/patrick-mcdonald>
- [8] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/roma-downey-mark-burnett>
- [9] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/shark-tank>
- [10] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/son-of-god>
- [11] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/survivor>
- [12] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/the-apprentice>
- [13] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/the-bible>
- [14] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/the-voice>
- [15] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/touched-by-an-angel>
- [16] <mailto:pat@hollywoodchicago.com>
- [17] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/about#PAT>