

The low-budget movie that could

Maria My Love, the directorial debut of Jasmine McGlade Chazelle, plays the Denver Film Festival, Nov. 8 at 6:45 p.m. and Nov. 9 at 9 p.m., at the Starz Film Center in the Tivoli on the Auraria Campus in downtown Denver. Chazelle and other filmmakers are expected to attend. Tickets are available at the festival box office and at www.denverfilm.org.

Former Littleton resident's debut plays Denver Film Festival

By PETER JONES

Filmmaker Jasmine McGlade Chazelle hadn't seen her friend, actress Lauren Fales, in years when the two reconnected in 2009 at the Tribeca Film Festival in New York City.

"While we were catching up, she told me about her life and how she had lost her mom and how she basically had stopped acting. Her life was a little bit derailed," Chazelle said.

As Fales shared her story, the creative wheels started spinning in Chazelle's head. The young would-be film director from Littleton was sympathetic – but also intrigued by her friend's personal narrative and its cast of supporting characters.

"That very day, she met a hoarder named Maria, who she tried to help," Chazelle said. "I had been looking for a feature that I could do on a very low budget. I was really struck by Lauren's story so I went home and started writing."

The result, *Maria My Love*, a low-budget movie shot in southern California over the course 17 days last May, will see its Colorado premiere on Nov. 8-9 at the Starz Denver Film Festival in the Tivoli on the Auraria Campus in Denver.

Chazelle, 26, and the movie's co-star Brian Rieger, Chazelle's childhood neighbor in Littleton, will attend the screening with local cinematographer Brian Outland. The

filmmakers will introduce the movie and answer questions afterwards.

Chazelle's fictionalized screenplay loosely suggested by Fales's experiences tells the story of Ana, a distraught 20-something loner who tries to pull her life together in the wake of her mother's death and ongoing anger about her stepfather's infidelity.

Ana finds an unlikely companion in Maria, an older, emotionally damaged recluse who serves as an accidental teacher to the younger woman at an emotional crossroads.

Maria's baggage isn't just figurative. She is a compulsive hoarder whose cluttered home is a testament to the alienation she has long encouraged in her family.

Desperate to help someone – anyone, Ana reaches out to Maria, whose life seems to caution about the fate of emotional stagnation.

"She proves to be a warning of what could happen to Ana if she doesn't grow from the experience," Chazelle said. "They come into each other's lives for a reason."

Meanwhile, young Hispanic Ana ventures clumsily into a romance that she may not be ready for and hesitantly re-establishes a bond with her disparate half-sister, a perky blonde dance instructor who reminds Ana of her stepfather's dalliances.

Judy Marte, who earned critical notice for her lead role in 2002's urban teen romance *Raising Victor Vargas*, brings an emotional authenticity to the wayward, but well intentioned Ana.

In Marte's subtle performance,



Jasmine McGlade Chazelle, who grew up in Littleton, has directed her first feature-length film, *Maria My Love*, based loosely on a friend's true story of losing her mother. The movie receives its Colorado debut Nov. 8-9 at the Starz Denver Film Festival.

Photos courtesy of Jasmine McGlade Chazelle

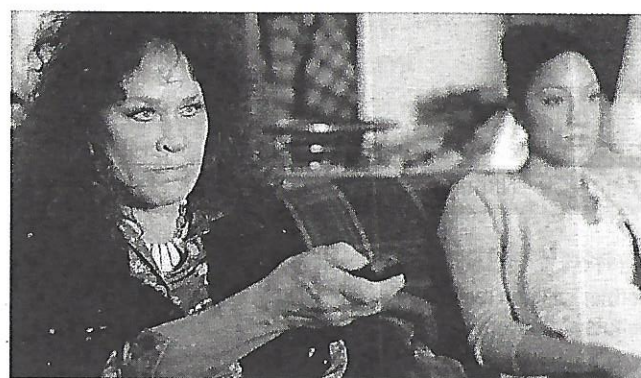
her character begins to see uncomfortable parallels between Ana's damaged human "project" and the ultimate fruits of her own choices.

"She read the script and she cried," Chazelle said of Marte. "She's very, very close to her mother and felt like this was a story she wanted to do. This character is a little colder and closed off and I think Judy captured that perfectly."

Chazelle had first planned to cast Fales, who co-wrote the screenplay, in the role that her own experiences had inspired. In the end, though, the director decided she did not want the film to be limited by its lean five-figure budget.

Fales plays the supporting role of Grace, Ana's eager-to-reconnect half-sister, leaving Ana to the comparatively better-known Marte.

The change in scope also included



Hollywood veteran Karen Black co-stars as a reclusive hoarder with Judy Marte, right, as a troubled young woman who befriends her in the new film *Maria My Love* directed by former Littleton resident Jasmine McGlade Chazelle.

convincing musician Moby, a friend of one of the producers, to contribute music free of charge, and coaxing Hollywood veteran Karen Black into playing the role of Maria during breaks in her busy Los Angeles theater schedule.

"Most of the people on the film worked for practically nothing," Chazelle said of the cast and crew. "The way you make a movie on a low budget is with the generosity of others. Everyone's in it together and believes in the story."

Chazelle called Black's agent after her mother suggested the star on a whim while the two were informally brainstorming the names of talented over-60 actresses.

"I said, 'Absolutely, that's perfect!'" the director said. "When we first talked about the project with Karen, she said she really responded to the character and had a real vision for it. She was wonderful. She didn't wash her hair for two weeks before."

Award-winning Black, whose credits include *Five Easy Pieces*, *Nashville* and Alfred Hitchcock's swan song *Family Plot*, virtually disappears into her role as the disheveled Maria.

Black plays the socially inept character with a range of humanity,

but mixed with abrasiveness that keeps audiences wondering ... how much more of Maria can Ana put up with?

And perhaps, vice versa.

Although *Maria My Love* is Chazelle's feature-length directorial debut, she is no stranger to the world of cinema. The onetime Colorado Academy student was a post-production assistant on the controversial *Boys Don't Cry* and produced the 2009 critically acclaimed musical *Guy and Madeline on a Park Bench*.

In her spare time, Chazelle, who now lives in Venice, Calif., is a national champion fencer, an experience that has inspired her next planned film – a psychological sports drama she describes as a cross between *Black Swan* and *The Wrestler*.

She hopes to work with a bigger budget this time.

"I feel like I'm someone who can do a lot with a little, but I'd love a little more," she said. "It's really, really crazy when you're making a micro-budget movie. You have to believe you're going to pull it off. If you don't believe you're going to make it in this business, I doubt you're going to make it in this business."