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Detroit as Seen Through the Eyes of Movie Stars

During the world premiere of Mitch Albom's 'Have A Little Faith' in Royal Oak, the actors reflect on the movie and what the city means to them.

By [Teri Williams](#) | [Email the author](#) | November 17, 2011

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Celebrities attending the premiere of author [Mitch Albom's](#) *Have a Little Faith* on Wednesday night in Royal Oak had great things to say about Detroit.

After moviegoers watched the Hallmark Hall of Fame production, based on Albom's best-selling 2009 book of the same name, they were treated to a bonus panel discussion that included many of the actors and actresses who appeared in the movie. The live discussion took place in one theater at the [Imagine](#) complex and was broadcast into the other nine.

Audience members were given the opportunity to ask questions of actors Laurence Fishburne, Bradley Whitford, Martin Landau, Deanna Dunagan, Anika Noni Rose, Melinda McGraw and others.

The movie was shot in and around Detroit, and many members of the cast reflected on their impressions of the Motor City.

"When I first began my visit to the city, this time around, I was amazed at how quiet, yet graceful the city seemed. It was like being on the moon," said Tony Award-winning actress Deanna Dunagan. Dunagan plays Sarah Lewis, the wife of the late Rabbi Albert "Reb" Lewis.

Dunagan is no stranger to Metro Detroit. "I played at [Meadow Brook](#) several years ago and remember coming to the city. Today it looks so clean, so beautifully maintained," Dunagan said. She said she felt a new pride and caring in Detroit and could feel the energy in its resurgence.

Oscar nominee Fishburne took advantage of the great music Detroit offers while he was in town. "One of my favorite places to visit in the city of Detroit is [Cliff Bell's](#) on Park Avenue in Detroit," he said.

Cliff Bell's is widely known as one of the best jazz clubs in Detroit. In May, [the New York Times wrote](#): "With its Art Deco décor, vaulted ceilings, mahogany bar and mirrored walls, to say nothing of the live jazz ensembles, entering Cliff Bell's is like walking onto the set of a Fred Astaire film."

In *Have a Little Faith*, Fishburne plays the feature role of Henry Covington, the pastor of Pilgrim Church/I Am My Brother's Keeper ministries in Detroit. "When a piece like this that speaks to the good in life, I know I have to be a part of it. It turns loss into good and lifts people up. That is my service in life," Fishburne said.

Fishburne said he "was impressed by the depth of the people in this city."

Fishburne wasn't the only one to love Cliff Bell's. Emmy-award winning actor Bradley Whitford, who plays Mitch Albom in the new movie, said: "It's hard to

say what my favorite place in Motown is. I'd have to say Cliff Bell's is right up there."

Whitford won an Emmy for his role as Josh Lyman in *The West Wing* and is also known for roles in *Miss Evers' Boys*, *Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip* and *The Good Guys*.

In playing her role as Annette Covington, Pastor Covington's wife, Rose said she felt it important to connect with the families, people and city of Detroit.

"This movie reminds me of home and I hope people watching feel the truth of spirit in this movie," Rose said.

Rose has worked on feature films that include *Dream Girls* and *Just Add Water*. She also received a Tony Award for best performance by a featured actress in a musical for *Caroline, or Change*.

"I'll be back for those [Just Baked](#) cupcakes. Wow! Some of the best I've ever had," Rose said to the crowd as she crossed the red carpet.

Landau played the role of Rabbi Lewis, Albom's spiritual leader since his youth. The rabbi died in 2008.

"I was very flattered to be chosen to play the role of such an exceptional man," Landau said. "It was one of the most important roles I've ever played. I wanted to get it exactly right for Mitch because he meant so much to him."

Landau also knows how important Detroit is to Albom. "Being here tonight not only honored Mitch, it shows honor to the city of Detroit. There is an uncanny element of pride and love. I felt responsible to Mitch and the families to live up to the role," Landau said in the "green room" at the Emagine during the VIP fund-raising event.

"The rabbi embraced life, all people and all religions. All of life is a lesson. Being here in the city and playing the role of the rabbi brought that home even more for me," Landau said. "I've played many great roles, including Bella Lugosi and Abraham. This role is right up there with the best of them."

The music for the movie includes the work of local artist Kem, particularly "Beautiful World." Kem said he felt the movie showed a special side of Detroit and its people. Albom said he was proud to have Kem on board.

Annette Covington was pleased with the experience all the way around. "All of the actors played their roles well and made me proud. There were some hilarious moments and some very true moments," she said.

Proceeds from Wednesday's premiere benefited two charities, including [A Hole in The Roof Foundation](#), which received a check for \$30,000.

"Henry would have loved it," Covington said of [her late husband](#).

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