ON THE RECORD
Directed by Kirby Dick & Amy Ziering

USA / 2020 / 97 mins

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SYNOPSIS

With their groundbreaking films on sexual assault in the military (*The Invisible War*) and on college campuses (*The Hunting Ground*), directors Kirby Dick and Amy Ziering shook the established view of sexual assault in America, moving it from an isolated “he said-she said” narrative to a sweeping indictment of systemic violence and rape culture. Now, in the #MeToo era that their films helped to usher in, comes *ON THE RECORD*, their third documentary in the trilogy. A searing examination of the costs of coming forward, the film follows Drew Dixon as she wrestles with the decision to go public and share her story with the NYTimes. *ON THE RECORD* takes you into the world of Def Jam Records in the ‘90s, where Dixon was a rising star in an industry rife with misogyny and sexual harassment. As Dixon recounts in the film, from her first day on the job, she managed to deflect and move past ongoing harassment, until she was wholly caught off guard one fateful night and brutally accosted by Simmons. More than two decades later, *ON THE RECORD* documents the devastating toll this recounted act exacted not only on Drew’s life but on the lives of several other women who describe having been assaulted by Simmons. Deeply illuminating and packed with powerful and revelatory insights, *ON THE RECORD*’s narrative tale is punctuated by interviews with prominent black thought leaders, activists, journalists and academics, who speak about the unique binds African-American women face when dealing with sexual violence in a society still plagued by racism.
Lay the foundation for this project. What drew you to Drew Dixon’s story?

Amy Ziering (AZ): Kirby and I had done two films in the sexual assault arena long before the subject was popular or trending: *The Invisible War* and *The Hunting Ground*. These were the first films to do a systematic analysis of these crimes, examine the horrific toll that these acts take, and offer up to audiences the unadulterated voices of survivors. So, sexual assault was a topic we had a great deal of knowledge about, as well as a great deal of experience using cinema as a tool to explore.

When the #MeToo movement happened, our cell phones exploded with people telling us: “You should go back into the space. There are all of these people talking now, and all of these different industries opening up.” We were intrigued and thought, “Yes, if anyone is going to document this significant cultural moment, it should be us.” So we jumped in and started talking to anyone with a story to share.

We started shooting in 2017, pretty much right after the Harvey Weinstein story came out. Thanks to our past films, we had credibility in the space, so it was relatively easy to start doing on-camera interviews. One day I got a text from one of our EP’s saying he wanted to connect us with someone for an off-the-record conversation as she had never shared her story publicly before. We jumped on the phone, and met Drew, and ended up deciding to do an initial exploratory interview with her, and then decided to start following her life in a low-key way, as she wasn’t sure if she wanted to go public or participate in our film. When we returned to Los Angeles, we looked at her interview and said to ourselves, “This really could be a film in itself.” At that time we were in a very investigative, exploratory space and thought: “Let’s just continue and
see where this goes.”

Kirby Dick (KD): When #MeToo happened, there were so many news stories flooding in from all different news outlets with so many courageous survivors speaking up from all walks of life – and Drew presented us with the unique and anomalous opportunity to follow someone through that entire process – from the decision to go public, to living through the emotional intensity of the first few days and weeks after going on the record, to the long-term challenges of being a silence breaker. And once we realized her story could be the lead story in a film, allowing us through her experiences to explore workplace abuse from both a personal and systemic perspective, as well as explore the uniquely difficult position of Black women when coming forward with these stories – we were all in.

Kirby Dick (KD): However, I do want to say that the women and men who spoke out about rape in the military and the young women and men who came forward about sexual assault on college campuses have not received as much credit as they deserve for helping to lay the groundwork for #MeToo. The men and women in the military who shared their stories with us in The Invisible War, led to 35 reforms being passed through Congress. College students, many of whom had seen The Invisible War and were motivated by the courage of these service members, began the next wave of activism, which we chronicled in The Hunting Ground.

Then came another defining moment leading up to #Me Too, when Lady Gaga performed her song from The Hunting Ground at the 2016 Academy Award ceremony, with 50 survivors of college sexual assault joining her onstage. That moment drew enormous attention to the issue of sexual abuse around the country and especially in Hollywood. Hundreds of thousands of female and male actors, and others in Hollywood, watched that performance and those survivors standing on stage - and so many of those watching had experienced assault and abuse, but had never spoken about it publicly. I’m sure that seeing those 50 courageous survivors up on stage, in one of those most public venues in the world, proudly standing up for their truth,
encouraged many in Hollywood to think they too should consider speaking out. That moment, along with many others of course, helped set the stage for #MeToo in Hollywood.

*What made you both decide that you wanted to cover sexual assault in this way, with this level of depth?*

AZ: I've always been incensed by injustice and motivated to unpack things in our culture that are wrong and try and do what I can to help fight those wrongs. My father spent his teenage years in concentration camps, and I guess the takeaway I gleaned from that history was to try and make sure the life I was gifted with was spent helping others.

KD: I share Amy’s passion for exposing injustice. When we were looking for stories in 2009 and 2010, we were really surprised at how sexual assault had been so ignored by society at large. Sexual assault was a huge spotlight issue in the 1970's, and later in the 1990's, but it seemed to us to have significantly receded in the cultural conversation by the 2000’s. I think people assumed that sexual assault had been significantly reduced in prevalence, when in fact, it hadn’t. That was a major reason we decided to make a film about this subject matter – because we could see it was being covered up.

AZ: And not just covered up, but misunderstood. What was shocking to us when making *The Hunting Ground* was how our country's social mores had seemed to have reverted back to a very 1950’s mentality; rape culture just was so pervasive and unquestioned. We've come a long way in the last five years.

*One unique aspect of this third installment is that ON THE RECORD focuses on Black women who have been sexually assaulted and on the unique struggles faced by that community. Talk about undertaking that in this film.*
AZ: That is the core of the movie. We found it revelatory and important for the film to explore in depth and give voice to the quadruple bind Black women find themselves when dealing with these crimes.

KD: When we make our films, we take an incredible amount of guidance, and gain an incredible amount of insights from our subjects. They are the experts, and we all are here to bear witness to their wisdom and learn from them. They have lived these experiences, and know what it is like to be inside the torment, and have meditated on these issues for years.

Without Drew and the other women in our film offering their perspective and insight, this film could not exist in the way that it does. It was crucial to have these survivors and experts explaining the complex social, psychological and political issues that exist, and educating us along the way. We’re facilitating an insight and wisdom that they have long been espousing.

All of the women who appear in the film including Kimberlé Crenshaw, Joan Morgan, Tarana Burke and others are exceedingly insightful. How did you select your subjects?

AZ: We did a lot of research and asked for suggestions and guidance from experts, academics, thought leaders and activists.

KD: Black feminists have been talking and writing about these issues for decades; but they haven’t gotten a lot of attention from the mainstream. It’s just one example of how Black women, and their experiences, are so marginalized in American society. Nearly everyone who has seen the film, especially those who are white, has expressed how revelatory it has been to learn about the complex challenges facing black female survivors. There are so many complex issues around sexual assault, and we hope that this film opens up a conversation so the culture can find a way to address them.
**Over the course of the film, we watch Drew and other women who were assaulted go deeper and deeper into the ways that the assault has affected them. What was it like to witness and capture that?**

AZ: It was very hard and gut wrenching. You really don’t come out the same after making a film like this - but nothing either of us, or our editorial staff, went through in any way compares to their trauma.

KD: We’ve been making films about sexual assault for twenty years and there’s still so much pain and struggle that a survivor goes through – their experiences are demeaned and minimized by our culture. Not only are survivors struggling with these things internally, they’re struggling with a culture that doesn’t accept them.

For us, it’s rewarding to help elevate the voices of survivors through our films. I think the people who come forward with these stories are doing so because they don’t want this to happen to others. Being part of a film is a way to take their pain and trauma, and share it in a way that helps others, and I think a film like this one – where the survivors allowed us to go very in-depth into their thoughts and experiences – will help other survivors to view their own experiences introspectively, and to realize the massive toll and ripple effect these crimes can have on one’s life, and even an industry at large.

AZ: It’s easy to see why these stories don’t get told. It’s not easy to tell them. But where would society be if no one stepped up to take that risk?

**Was there a sense that although it is difficult to tell these stories, there was also a feeling of release and relief among the women? Do you feel that this is a step toward easing the trauma?**

AZ: Yes, I do think that what we do in these films has an incredibly empowering effect. I’ve seen this through the letters that we’ve received from survivors, as well as women who have driven hours to meet me and tell me that seeing *The Invisible War* changed their life because for nineteen years
they had blamed themselves. Seeing the movie helped them realize it wasn’t their fault. That’s the joy and the reward. It’s pretty phenomenal on a micro and a macro level to have advanced the cultural conversation on these issues. We’re proud of having played that role.

**What for each of you is the most moving moment in the film?**

AZ: There’s two for me. [Hip-hop journalist] Kierna Mayo kills me every time when she says that it’s okay if you’ve been assaulted and elect not to speak. That defense of silence speaks volumes. The other is when Drew puts on a record, and you hear people talking about what our culture loses when women are either forced out of the labor force or self exile because of these crimes. Those, for me, are very haunting and very powerful moments.

KD: For me, it was really affecting to cut the section of the film where we introduce the stories of Anita Hill and Desiree Washington. When Drew is faced with this crucial decision of whether or not to come forward with her story in the New York Times, and she talks about how the experiences of strong and heroic Black women before her, who so bravely told their stories in the public eye, faced such personal hardship and a lack of acceptance by the general public and their own communities – that really illuminated for me what she felt was at stake for her here – and made her decision to go public with her story all the more inspiring.

AZ: Another line that haunts me is when Drew says, “My body is a living crime scene.”

**Russell Simmons has denied ever forcing himself on anyone and says that he’s passed multiple lie detector tests. What’s your response to that?**

KD: Twenty women have now accused him of sexual misconduct. Most people realize that when twenty women come out and accuse someone, it’s very unlikely women are lying. In fact, it’s very likely that all twenty women are telling the truth.
AZ: The lie detector tests were not administered by law enforcement. Anyone can take and pass a lie detector test if they self-administer it, so that’s ridiculous. After the allegations came out, he stepped down from his executive corporate positions and moved at least part-time to Bali. All of the testimony in our film has been published, and was thoroughly corroborated and vetted. These are not just words; evidence backs up each testimony. It’s out of a predator’s playbook to lie, deny, smear, and claim victimhood.

*What would you like to see the impact of this film be within the overall context of your work in this arena?*

AZ: We hope that it gives solace, comfort and a voice to women who have experienced sexual assault, and haven’t seen their stories represented in this way. And we hope it advances the cultural conversation surrounding these issues in ways that inspire and enlighten.

KD: I do think that it is not a coincidence that we are focusing on the experiences and insights of Black women at a time when politically and culturally they are finally beginning to be more recognized within the political arena, particularly with women like Michelle Obama and Stacey Abrams. The culture as a whole is beginning to listen more to the wisdom and experiences of Black women, which is long overdue.

So often the history and perspective on culture is written by the most powerful, but the most profound insights and understandings come from people who have experienced the most suffering and oppression.
Russell Simmons has been accused of 20 cases of sexual assault or sexual misconduct. Below is a timeline.


**1990:** Simmons allegedly assaults Alexia Norton Jones, who gave a first-person account to Variety in 2018. (July 10, 2018)


**1994:** Simmons and Ratner allegedly harass aspiring model Tanya Reid. Reid told her story in an interview with *The Los Angeles Times.* (Nov. 19, 2017)


**1996:** Simmons allegedly tries to coerce Natasha Williams-Blach into performing oral sex on him; she talked to *The Los Angeles Times.* (Dec. 13, 2017)


**2015:** Luann de Lesseps later told *The Daily Beast* (Apr. 6, 2018) that Simmons groped her in an elevator.

**2016:** Simmons allegedly makes inappropriate comments to Amanda Seales and allegedly rapes Jennifer Jarosik. Seales gave an interview with *The Los Angeles Times* (Dec. 13, 2017), and Jennifer Jarosik later dropped her claim.
2017: Karen Russell tells the *The Los Angeles Times* (Dec. 13, 2017) that Simmons sexually harassed other women at his yoga studio and harassed her.

Simmons steps down from his businesses after Lumet goes public with her alleged assault in *The Hollywood Reporter* (Nov. 30, 2017) saying:

“This is a time of great transition. The voices of the voiceless, those who have been hurt or shamed, deserve and need to be heard. As the corridors of power inevitably make way for a new generation, I don’t want to be a distraction, so I am removing myself from the businesses that I founded.”

HBO also severed all ties with Simmons and removed his name from all *Def Comedy Jam* content.

Directors Dick and Ziering offered opportunities for Simmons and Reid to appear in the film. Each declined.

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**INTERVIEW SUBJECTS**

In alphabetical order:

- Sil Lai Abrams
- Bim Adewunmi
- Tina Baker
- Tarana Burke
- Keri Claussen Khalighi
- Kimberlé Crenshaw
- Kelly Cutrone
- Daddy-O
- Drew Dixon
- Shanita Hubbard
- Jenny Lumet
- Kierna Mayo
- Miguel Mojica
- Dr. Joan Morgan
- Alexia Norton Jones
- Sheri Sher
- Dr. Michele Wallace
- Gary A. Watson, Esq.
Statement from the filmmakers regarding Ms. Winfrey

We had a really great working relationship with Ms. Winfrey, Harpo, and Apple throughout the many stages of crafting the film. We addressed their notes with great thought and care and they were, up through picture lock and past the Sundance announcement, extremely enthusiastic and supportive partners. It was only after the Sundance announcement on December 4, when Russell Simmons began threatening Ms. Winfrey, that she first expressed to us any doubts about the film.

The facts in the film are backed up by more than 100 sources, and thousands of pages of documents, as well as by the reporting of the New York Times, Los Angeles Times and The Hollywood Reporter, which broke these stories first. We are exceptionally proud of the film, and look forward to the Sundance premiere of a film that makes an important contribution to the conversation we all are finally having about assault and harassment in the workplace.

We will miss our former partners, and wish them well.

CREW BIOS
**KIRBY DICK, Co-Director, Writer, Producer**

Kirby Dick is a two-time Emmy-award winning and two-time Academy award-nominated documentary film director. His most recent film, THE BLEDING EDGE — a Netflix original investigative feature on the medical industry — premiered at the 2018 Tribeca Film Festival to critical acclaim and was the recipient of 2019’s George Polk Award for Special Achievement in Investigative Journalism, an Alfred I. duPont-Columbia Award, and a Peabody and Grierson Trust (Best Science Documentary) nominations. His previous film, THE HUNTING GROUND, a monumental exposé of rape culture on college campuses—premiered at the 2015 Sundance Film Festival, was released by Radius and CNN, is the 2016 recipient of the Producer’s Guild of America’s Stanley Kramer Award, shortlisted for the Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature, and was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Original Song. His earlier film, THE INVISIBLE WAR, a groundbreaking investigation into the epidemic of rape within the US military, won two Emmy Awards for Best Documentary and Outstanding Investigative Journalism, the 2012 Independent Spirit Award 2012 for Best Documentary, a Peabody Award, and was nominated for an Academy Award. Dick also directed TWIST OF FAITH, the story of a man confronting the trauma of his past sexual abuse by a Catholic priest, which was also nominated for an Academy Award. Other films include OUTRAGE, nominated for an Emmy Award for Outstanding Investigative Journalism; THIS FILM IS NOT YET RATED, a breakthrough investigation of the MPAA’s secretive film ratings system; and DERRIDA, a complex portrait of the world-renowned French philosopher Jacques Derrida. He is the recipient of the Nestor Almendros Prize for Courage and Filmmaking, the Upton Sinclair Award, and the Ridenhour Documentary Film Prize. Dick currently has a narrative feature in development based on The Invisible War with Tobey Maguire’s Material Pictures; and his company Jane Doe Films has a first look deal with Entertainment One for scripted and unscripted TV programming.

**AMY ZIERING, Co-Director, Writer, Producer**

AMY ZIERING is a two-time Emmy Award-winning and Academy Award-nominated documentary filmmaker. Her most recent film, THE BLEDING EDGE — a Netflix original investigative feature on the medical industry — premiered at the 2018 Tribeca Film Festival to critical acclaim and was the recipient of 2019’s George Polk Award for Special Achievement in Investigative Journalism, an Alfred I. duPont-Columbia Award, and a Peabody and Grierson Trust (Best Science Documentary) nominations. Her previous film, THE HUNTING GROUND — a piercing, monumental exposé of rape culture on college campuses—premiered at the 2015 Sundance Film Festival, was released by Radius and CNN, is the 2016 recipient of the Producer’s Guild of America’s Stanley Kramer Award, shortlisted for the Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature, was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Original Song as well as the 2016 Emmy for Exceptional Merit - Documentary Filmmaking, and won the Emmy for Outstanding Original Music and Lyrics. Her earlier film, THE INVISIBLE WAR, a groundbreaking investigation into the epidemic of rape in the U.S. military, won the Audience Award at the 2012 Sundance Film Festival, won two 2014 Emmy Awards for Best Documentary and Outstanding Investigative Journalism and was nominated for an Oscar. The film spurred Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta to announce significant policy changes and catalyzed the passing of 35 pieces of reform legislation. She is also the Producer of OUTRAGE — an indictment of the hypocrisy of
powerful, closeted politicians and the institutions that protect them, which received an
Emmy nomination for Outstanding Investigative Journalism. Ziering also co-directed and
produced DERRIDA, a documentary about the world-renowned French philosopher.
Ziering also executive produced Kirsten Johnson’s award winning and Oscar shortlisted
CAMERAPERSON, and Josh Fox’s AWAKE - A Dream from Standing Rock. She is the 2012
recipient of the Nestor Almendros Prize for Courage and Filmmaking, the 2013 Ridenhour
Documentary Film Prize, the 2013 Gracie Award for Outstanding Producer - News/Non-
Fiction and the 2013 Peabody Award. She has worked with musical artists such as
Academy Award winning composer, Ryuichi Sakamoto; Grammy award winner, Mary J.
Blige; eight-time Academy Award nominated songwriter, Diane Warren; and global
superstar, Lady Gaga. She is a frequent commentator on CNN and MSNBC, and has
appeared on The Daily Show and Good Morning America. Ziering currently has a narrative
feature in development based on The Invisible War with Tobey Maguire’s Material
Pictures; and her company Jane Doe Films has a first look deal with Entertainment One for
scripted and unscripted TV programming.

AMY HERDY, Producer
AMY HERDY is an Emmy winning and Pulitzer Prize nominated journalist who has
specialized in investigative reporting for more than 20 years. Herdy was the Producer on
the Polk and duPont-Columbia Award-winning film THE BLEEDING EDGE. Prior to that, she
was the Investigative Producer on THE HUNTING GROUND, which was shortlisted for an
Academy Award nomination. She also did investigative work for THE INVISIBLE WAR,
helping to break open the story about sexual assault at Marine Barracks Washington, the
country’s most prestigious Marine base. Herdy co-authored The Denver Post investigative
series, "Betrayal in the Ranks," which broke the story of rape and domestic violence in the
U.S. military. That series spurred Congressional reforms and was a top-ten finalist for the
Pulitzer Prize in 2004. After the Post Ms. Herdy worked as an investigative producer at
KUSA-TV, where her interview with Evangelical leader Ted Haggard created a firestorm
when he unexpectedly confessed to buying meth from a gay male escort.

JAMIE ROGERS, Producer
JAMIE ROGERS is an award winning documentary filmmaker based in Los Angeles. She has
worked most recently as Associate Producer and Production Coordinator for Oscar
nominated and Emmy-winning filmmaking team, Kirby Dick and Amy Ziering (THE
HUNTING GROUND, THE INVISIBLE WAR) on their latest film, THE BLEEDING EDGE
(Tribeca Film Festival 2018), due to be released in 2018 by Netflix. She is the Associate
Producer of SEX AND BROADCASTING (DOC NYC 2014) and BRUK OUT! (Sheffield Doc Fest
2017).

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ADDITIONAL MATERIALS PROVIDED BY
“20/20 With Barbara Walters” ABC News
The 41st Grammy Awards
“A Rose Is Still A Rose” by Aretha Franklin (Music Video)
“Attitude” by The Misfits (Music Video)
Big Daddy Kane
“Big Poppa” The Notorious B.I.G., Live from “The Show”
Billboard Magazine
Black Enterprise Magazine
Bloomberg
“Blurred Lines” by Robin Thicke Feat. T.I., Pharrell (Music Video)
CBS News
CNN
“Cocktails” by Too $hort (Music Video)
C-SPAN
“Danger (Been So Long)” by Mystikal (Music Video)
“Delilah” by Tom Jones Live Performance (1973)
“Def Comedy Jam” HBO
Def Jam Recordings
“Don't Believe The Hype” by Public Enemy (Music Video)
“Ebro In The Morning” Hot 97
“Everyday Thang” by Bone Thugs-N-Harmony, produced by DJ U-Neek, from “The Show” Soundtrack
“Fight the Power” by Public Enemy (Music Video)
“The Frame” KCRW
“Get Your Shine On” by Florida Georgia Line (Music Video)
“Good Morning America” ABC
“Hickeys on Your Chest” by Little Shawn (Music Video)
The Hollywood Reporter

“Hot in Herre” by Nelly (Music Video)


“I Am Your Leader” by Nicki Minaj (Music Video)

“It’s So Easy” by Guns N’ Roses (Music Video)

Jive Records


Jukebox Network

Kwamé

“Larry King Now” Hulu

“Late Night With Jimmy Fallon” NBC

“Making the Video” VH1

Mercedes Ladies Live at The T Connection 1979, Tape 223

Miss Black America Beauty Pageant

“Morning Joe” MSNBC

“My Love Is Your Love” by Whitney Houston (Music Video)

NBC Nightly News with Lester Holt

New York Stock Exchange

The New York Times

“Only If You Want It” by Eazy-E (Music Video)

“Pioneers” The Huffington Post

Polygram Records

“Pop That Pussy” by 2 Live Crew (Music Video)

Rare Essence

Rolling Stone Magazine

“Running Russell Simmons” Oxygen


“Smooth” by Santana, Live Performance at the 42nd Grammy Awards

“Sound of Da Police” by KRS One (Music Video)

SPIN Magazine

“Stacy’s Mom” by Fountains of Wayne (Music Video)

“Straight Outta Compton” by NWA (Music Video)

The Tampa Bay Times

The Till Family

“Walk This Way” by RUN DMC ft. Aerosmith (Music Video)

Warner Brothers Records


WestfestTV

“What’s My Age Again?” by Blink-182 (Music Video)

“What’s Next” Warren G, Live from “The Show”

“Why We Thugs” by Ice Cube (Music Video)

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David Ginyard, Jr. / Electric Bass
Herlin Riley / Drums
Matt Sewell / Electric Guitar
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“DAWNING”
Written by Elijah Baley
Courtesy of APM Music on Behalf of EMI Music Publishing

“WHAT I’M HERE 4”
Written by Christopher Martin and Keith Elam
Performed by Gang Starr
Courtesy of Virgin Records America, Inc. under license from Universal Music Enterprises
Contains a master sample of “R.S.V.P.”
Performed by Nat Adderly
Courtesy of Jazzland Records / Craft Recordings
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“MAKE IT BOUNCE”
Written by Jordan Yaeger and Jason Gleed
Courtesy of Music Box

“BOUNCE”
Written by William J. Fuller
Courtesy of Music Box

“RAW BEATS”
Written by Nick Wiz and Jason Gleed
Courtesy of Music Box

“MONEY UP”
Written by Jason Gleed
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“CRUISING”
Written by William J. Fuller
Courtesy of Music Box

“JUST RIGHT”
Written by Nick Wiz and Jason Gleed
Courtesy of Music Box

“I’LL BE THERE FOR YOU/YOU’RE ALL I NEED TO GET BY (Featuring Mary J. Blige)” (Music Video)
Written by Nickolas Ashford and Valerie Simpson
Performed by Method Man
“DARKNESS”
Written by Jason Gleed
Courtesy of Music Box

“LOCK IT OUT”
Written by Jason Gleed
Courtesy of Music Box

“KING’S REIGN”
Written by Jordan Yaeger and Jason Gleed
Courtesy of Music Box

“FACES”
Written and Performed by Gil Talmi
Courtesy of Konsonant Music and Bulletproof Bear

“MEDICINE”
Written and Performed by Ella Wylde

“DAMNABLE HERESIES”
Written, Produced and Performed by Ms. Lauryn Hill
Courtesy of Sony Music Entertainment

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