

'Landman' exec to speak at Ramay-Macatee Lecture Series

BY JOHN ENGLISH
Contributing Writer

When the Bridge Street History Center holds its annual Ramay-Macatee Lecture Series next month, the guest speaker will be someone whose work is not only familiar to most North Texans, but to people from around the world.

Christian Wallace, the writer/executive producer of the hit television show "Landman," will share stories about the show, his podcast, "Boomtown," and his eclectic life and career, which includes stints as a roughneck, an electrician and a writer for "Texas Monthly."

Wallace also received a master's degree in writing from the National University of Ireland in Galway.

Originally from Andrews, the West Texas native now splits his time between Fort Worth and Austin and said he jumped at the opportunity to speak at the Ramay-Macatee Lecture Series. Named for Virgie Macatee and Georgia Ramay, two Granbury citizens who were instrumental in preserving the history of Hood County by helping to create the Bridge Street History Center, the Ramay-Macatee Lecture Series will begin at 6:30 p.m. Nov. 13 at the Granbury Live Theater.

Wallace sat down for an interview Oct. 7 to discuss the upcoming lecture and how his life has changed since starting "Boomtown" and "Landman."

WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO ACCEPT THE INVITATION TO THE RAMEY-MACATEE EVENT?

I've spent a bit of time in that area, being in Fort Worth and Weatherford and visiting Granbury. I really like the town of Granbury. I have some friends from my hometown that I grew up with who live there. In fact, a lot of people from my hometown

have relocated there within the last couple of decades, so just having that familiarity with the town and looking at who has spoken at this lecture series before was a big part of it. A personal literary hero of mine, Steve Harrison, spoke last year, so it was just kind of a no-brainer when they invited me that I would accept.

HOW SATISFYING IS IT FOR YOU TO SEE "LANDMAN" ENJOY THE KIND OF SUCCESS IT HAS HAD?

It's honestly surpassed my wildest expectations as far as how it has been received and in its popularity abroad. I was just in Europe and I was on the plane from New York to Naples, Italy. This couple was sitting behind me and the man asked the woman, "Hey, have you seen this new show? I think you would really like it." She asked what show and he said, "Landman." My wife and I just kind of looked at each other and shook our heads. It's just been amazing to see how it's traveled around the world. For it to be about West Texas, a place that is very special to me, is meaningful.

IT HAS BEEN SAID THAT "REAL-LIFE EXPERIENCES FROM THE ENERGY FRONTIER CONTINUE TO FUEL" YOUR WRITING AND STORYTELLING. WHAT ARE SOME OF THOSE EXPERIENCES?

I grew up in West Texas, so I grew up not realizing that not everyone in the world has pump jacks surrounding their hometowns. I kind of took a lot of that for granted, with my family working in the oil and gas industry. Being completely immersed, I took from what I now consider to be really interesting stories and details. I took



"Landman" writer/executive producer Christian Wallace will share stories about the show during the upcoming Ramay-Macatee Lecture Series.

a lot of that for granted. I went to Ireland to do my master's degree in 2011 and 2012. While I was abroad for those two years, I spent most of my time there thinking about home and West Texas. I started to really appreciate the place where I grew up and stories I grew up with. So, I decided that when I graduated, I would go and work in oil fields, in the oil patch around my hometown. I got a job in 2013 and spent a year working as a roughneck on a worker rig and doing different jobs for an oil field company that took me all across the Permian basin. It was the culmination of those types of things that made me want to continue with "Boomtown."

COULD YOU SHARE A FEW OF THOSE STORIES?

Well, for instance on the quieter side of things, one day I remember we were going to work and it snowed. The rig was frozen and we had to wait for it to thaw out to work. It was me and the three other guys on the rig crew sitting in the doghouse. We were all sitting around this little propane tank. One guy had a tractor disc and turned it into a wok. We sat around watching our breath in the doghouse, roasting pecans on this disc over this little propane fire. Those quiet moments are ones that people don't often think about. On the other end, we had a lot of, well, I never saw anyone get seriously injured, but we did have some injuries on the rig and a couple of close calls. I was always very aware that what we were doing was dangerous and you have to keep your head on a swivel and be mindful of your fingers and toes at all times when you're on the rig. It's a dangerous,

but very important job, so to get to talk and share some of those insights and stories that I gained from working there has been really rewarding to me as a writer.

HAVE ANY OF YOUR PERSONAL EXPERIENCES WORKING IN THE OIL FIELDS MADE IT INTO "LANDMAN" OR ONTO YOUR PODCAST?

Many have made it into both. One very specific example I can give you is after Billy Bob Thornton's character, Tommy, smashes his finger and the sheriff asks him "Do you want to go to the hospital?" And he (Billy Bob Thornton) says, "No, I want a cigarette and a Dr. Pepper." That's a direct quote from my Uncle Skeet Wallace, who is in the patch, and actually did lose the end of his finger on a rig. That's what he told the guys whenever he got down out of the derrick. I was like, "We have got to use that in the show." So yeah, Taylor (Sheridan) included it.

WHAT IS THE TRANSITION LIKE, GOING FROM THIS VERY PHYSICALLY TAXING AND DANGEROUS JOB TO WRITING FOR HOLLYWOOD?

It's definitely different. I was an electrician before all that, technically when I was too young to get my apprenticeship license when I was 15. I did that for about six or seven years before I left for school, so I kind of always had physically demanding jobs. That's kind of the line of work my family comes from. So to make my living with abstract ideas and a keyboard is definitely a change. There are times when I have missed the camaraderie and physicality of those work places, but what is very interesting and something I'm very fortunate to have found is when I got into film-making after eight years at "Texas Monthly," being on set and being on location filming some of these scenes kind of brings back some of that blue collar work place environment that I had been missing. It's very physical. You're in the elements. You're doing a very demanding job that is long hours and in film-making, I have

kind of found this marriage of those sensibilities — both the abstract and intellectual and creative side, mixed with the technical and physical, intense work environment that comes with actually making that thing into a film or show that you can watch. It's a nice blending of those two sensibilities.

HOW DID YOU COME UP WITH THE IDEA FOR YOUR PODCAST, "BOOMTOWN"?

There was a really massive oil boom happening from 2016 until the bust in 2020. Being at "Texas Monthly" at that time, I felt like it was being under-reported in a lot of ways. People would go out there and write stories about the economic aspects of it — what the price of oil was and how much oil was being produced, but I felt that there was a human side of that missing from the narrative. I finally realized, "Well, maybe I should be the one writing about this." So, I first wrote a feature story for "Texas Monthly" when they were approached by a Houston production company that was mainly working in film and television at that time. They wanted to collaborate with "Texas Monthly" on a podcast series and we were asked to pitch ideas as staff writers. My idea about the oil boom was one of the ones that was chosen, so then I had to go and figure out what the podcast was actually going to be about, because I truthfully had no intention before this of ever doing a podcast. I really wasn't that interested in that medium. I'm very glad that I was basically pushed to do it, but it really wasn't something I set out to do.

WHAT HAS BEEN THE MOST REWARDING ASPECT OF THE "BOOMTOWN" TO "LANDMAN" PHENOMENON?

It's being able to share stories about a place that is very meaningful to me that I feel is somewhat overlooked. It's importance to the world, to our economy, to geopolitics — it is such an important place and yet so few people have ever visited it or know

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