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Hoboken filmmaker debuts new short

Blood, sweat, and trees go into film 'Hardwood'

By Diana Schwaeble
Managing Editor

When Hoboken filmmaker Christopher Fascino woke from a bad dream, he reached for inspiration rather than warm milk.

That dream or rather nightmare has finally reached fruition with the release of his new short "Hardwood," which was produced by his company Blood Money Pictures and recently screened at several festivals to good reviews.

The film tells the tale of a man on the run in a forest that has secrets of its own.

Fascino, who is a fan of science fiction, explains that the dream climaxed with the discovery of a long thread of black hair protruding from his forearm. Days later, he found that he still had images of it in his mind.

"It was literally of a hair two to three inches long," said Fascino, who said he thought he needed to remember it. "I started thinking about it – what does this represent?"

Fascino said that it was relatively effortless to write this script, compared to some of the other screenplays he's worked on.

"The writing wasn't labor intensive, which it usually is for me," said Fascino, who wrote and directed the film. "So I was pleased that it was easy to write."

A labor of love

Fascino, who grew up on Long Island, has lived in Hoboken since 2000 shortly after graduating from the School of Visual Arts in Manhattan.

"I went there because they immediately put a camera in your hand," said Fascino about his choice of school.

He added that they also have Academy Award winners on staff, who had very realistic advice to offer students.

Fascino said that while this is his debut, he has been busy working in the industry like his current job as line producer for VH1. Additionally, Fascino was a camera operator for VH1 on the red carpet at the 2007 and 2008 Academy Awards.

"Rather than being star struck," said Fascino, "as a filmmaker it's very inspiring to witness Hollywood in all of its hype and glory. You think to yourself, this could one day be me."

"Hardwood" was filmed over four days in the fall of 2006 at the Newark Watershed and finished in the May of 2007.

The short opens with a shot of a prisoner being transported in a van to another prison, which ultimately never happens as he escapes the guards and goes on the run through the woods. It stars actor Kris Eivers, who plays the escaped prisoner Xavier. One could almost say that Eivers co-stars with the forest since it is such an important part of this tale that only grows stranger by the minute.

Since he knew the film wouldn't be finished, yet still wanted to participate in some way, so he cut a trailer for the website for Spielberg's "On the Lot," a reality show about the industry that was canceled last year. "I actually cut the trailer in a day and spent another six hours doing the music," he said.

It was accepted, and he said that he got many good reviews from the minute trailer and at least 3,500 people viewed it.

"It doesn't compare to the You Tube phenomenon, but it was great," said Fascino.

That interest generated from the website helped him get the actual short seen by people in the industry.

According to Fascino, he has submitted the short to 19 festivals and has gotten into three so far.

"The festival route used to be the major route for film-

makers, but now – not so much," said Fascino. "It's not a route that I would recommend. You get rejected from so many, but then you look at so many and start to realize that it isn't that your film isn't good – it's virtue of the numbers."

Fan of science fiction

Fascino says that he is fan of science fiction, in particular the *Twilight Zone*.

"I love the old ones, particularly the ones with Rod Serling," said Fascino. "I would stay up late to see the show and they would creep me out."

He says that he wanted his movie "Hardwood" to feel the same way.

"You know what it is – it's eerie," said Fascino about his film, "not in that horrific way, but in that emotional gut way. I want the end of that movie to creep them out."

He added, "So far, I've gotten pretty consistent responses from people."

One of things that he was concerned about getting just right – was the special effect makeup. He said that if the effects don't look right – then the movie doesn't work right. Makeup artist Jennifer Suarez was primarily responsible for the two-hour makeup process on the lead character.

He also credits his Director of Photography (DP) Chris Scarafale, who has worked on many productions including the "Gowanus, Brooklyn," which was the prize-winning short at the 2004 Sundance Film Festival.

"Chris's camera work is excellent and his ability to frame things," said Fascino.

Other projects

Yet, sci-fi isn't the only thing that Fascino is interested in – he also plans to direct feature films in different genres.

So far, he has completed two full-length features including the comedy "Lucky Strike," a sci-fi drama "Grounders" and is currently in the midst of writing his latest "The Great Escape of Lona & Rufus."

While that could take some time as he and his company try to get backers and money for the projects, he intends to make a short version of his most recent work "The Great Escape of Lona & Rufus."

He said that screeners in the industry get so bogged down with submissions, a short version would grant him quicker access.

Another thing that he picked up that surprised him was that many festivals will accept films even after they are in distribution. "Hardwood" is currently in distribution with Farnet, which is owned by Sony Pictures and Lions Gate Films.

"I was concerned about distribution before the festivals," he said. "I was shocked to learn that the more exposure you have – the more willing they are to screen it."

While he waits, he keeps busy with his writing and his industry job.

"I hope one day – I actually prefer the process of directing as a storytelling process – rather than the writing process," he said. "It takes a lot of time to write your own personal narrative." □

For more information about the film, visit: www.bloodmoneypictures.com.

Comments on this story can be sent to: current@hudsonreporter.com.



CANNES – Director Christopher Fascino (pictured) has been to many film festivals, including the one at Cannes this year. "Hardwood" participated in the short film corner, a non-competition program at Cannes.



DANGEROUS FOREST – Christopher Fascino's debut film "Hardwood" follows a prisoner who escapes into a forest only to find more danger. For more information, visit: www.bloodmoneypictures.com.

