

Q & A WITH SIMON DAVIDSON

Do you feel that is better for up and coming directors or filmmakers to make short films first before making full-length feature films?

I think it's probably a good idea to have at least one short under your belt. There are a lot of things going on every day on set, a lot of crew, cast, equipment, not to mention a lot of decisions that have to be made every second of the day. Doing a short can get you somewhat prepared for that. They also let you figure out the types of things you like to do and don't like to do, the kind of performances that you like, camera movements, editing. Some people start with music videos and commercials. That's a good training ground too.

When making *The Odds*, what did you find the biggest difference in making a full-length feature as opposed to making a short film?

There were a lot of similarities, actually. The biggest difference for me was preparing for so many more scenes, sets, locations, characters and action. Another big change is remembering where you are in the script. We shot for 20 days and had something like a hundred scenes, all shot out of order. So we could be shooting a fun scene from the beginning of the movie in the morning and an emotional scene from the end in the afternoon and I'd constantly have to remind myself of where we were emotionally in the story. On a short you shoot the whole thing in a weekend and that kind of story mapping isn't as difficult. Fortunately I worked with the actors, mainly Tyler, to prepare an emotional story map beforehand, which really helped keep us on track.

With all the gambling that is exposed in the media today, do you find that illegal teenage gambling is at an all time high?

I think there are more kids with disposable cash and time these days and if they want to find a game they can do it. To do illegal gambling you simply need a provider and I know that in Vancouver for example, several gangs are big into it. A lot of the gang members themselves are teens so it stands to reason that some of the gamblers are teens too. That said, I did quite a lot of research for the movie, interviewed with youth gambling experts, read a lot, I managed to talk my way into a Gamblers Anonymous meeting where I was able to interview some problem gamblers who started in their teens. I agree that poker is hot on TV and the internet right now and I really don't know the numbers, but from these conversations it became clear that gambling has been pretty big for a long time. I spoke to one guy in his 60's now that started going to the race track when he was seventeen and used fake ID to bet. That was in the 1960's.

After putting together this film, do you feel that today's youth have "nerves of steel" and what are some of your thoughts towards this?

I don't think today's youth are more nervy than any other generation to be honest. Certain kids just want thrills; want to compete, for whatever reason. It seems to me that when you're young you don't think of consequences as much. The future really doesn't come into your thought process; you haven't calibrated your own personal moral compass yet, no matter what parents might think. I don't think it's just this generation. When I was young I used to run around breaking into cars, not for the bounty, but for the thrill. It was a rush, not to mention the fact that my group of friends was doing it and I wanted to be part of the group. I think that's why I understood these characters and wanted to write about them.

Was it difficult to cast for this film...can you briefly tell us your thoughts with this experience for this film?

Casting was something I was quite concerned about when I was writing the movie. I thought it was going to be very difficult to find the lead, Desson, especially, he's in every scene and the movie hangs on him. But when I had an early draft ready, we put together a read through at the Beaumont theatre and the guy who just happened to come in and read for Desson was a kid named Tyler Johnston. He read from the script cold and at the end I turned to my producer, Kirsten, and said, "Wow." He'd managed to breathe a lot of life into the character just by reading the lines like that. So I went away to make changes to the script and he was definitely on my mind. Fast forward to a month before we got the official green light to shoot the movie, Kirsten and I went to a casting workshop that Telefilm Canada put on. As luck would have it

Tyler was one of the actors brought in to do an audition. He blew everyone away, including the people at Telefilm who were making the money decisions. We all knew he was the guy. So in essence the most difficult role in the film was cast for us, he just showed up out of the blue.

For the rest of the roles we relied heavily on our casting director Lynne Carrow who had just cast a couple of films involving young people and knew exactly who to call.

Do you feel the odds are for you or against you with this film showing at TIFF?

The Odds are definitely for us...oh wait, did you say George Clooney and Brad Pitt are coming to TIFF this year? Ok, no problem. Oh and Nicolas Winding Refn and David Cronenberg too? Um, alright...

Just kidding. I would say The Odds are stacked against any low-budget Canadian movie with a new director and no name brand stars, but at TIFF I hope and think that the playing field is slightly more balanced because the festival puts a lot of time and effort into spotlighting the Canadian films they program. I also think that the general public has much bigger appetite for an English Canadian film here than maybe at the regular box office, I'm not sure why but it just seems that way. We also have a great Canadian Distributor behind us, Kinosmith, who is working hard to get The Odds out there.

Can you tell us what's in store for you right after TIFF? Any future projects?

I'm right now working with two writers on a couple of very different scripts. One is an offbeat comedy that is also quite dramatic. The other is a very personal project based on the true story on one of my friends who was murdered in a nothing argument in a restaurant. The police weren't working the case or looking for the killer so one of his friends took it upon himself to seek out the killer, who was just a troubled kid in his early 20's, and found him pretty easily. The story is about what happened next.