

Behind the scenes



Glenn Gainor was describing a seminal experience that occurred in 1993 while he was a film student at California State University at Northridge in Los Angeles. It started with a classroom discussion about Joseph Mankiewicz, who won consecutive Oscars for both writing and directing *A Letter to Three Wives* and *All About Eve* in 1949 and 1950.

"No one else had ever won consecutive Oscars in those two categories," he recalls. "Joseph Mankiewicz had died that year, and I wasn't satisfied with our textbook, so I telephoned the talent agency representing his son, Tom Mankiewicz (who is also a writer/director). The person on the line laughed at me, but 25 minutes later Tom Mankiewicz called and invited me to visit him at his home the next morning."

They had a four-hour conversation, which provided Gainor with insights into the art of visual storytelling and inspired him to pursue his own dream. Gainor was also one of the bright new faces at The Improv comedy club in Los Angeles around that time, but filmmaking felt right to him. After graduation, he wrote a script for a TV pilot that he helped produce. Gainor has earned some 20 credits as a production manager and/or producer since 1996, e.g., *The Man From Elysian Fields*, *Starship Troopers 2: Hero of the Federation* and *Deuce Bigalow: European Gigolo*.

Gainor was recently cast in the roles of unit production manager and executive producer for *Grandma's Boy*, *Vacancy*, *Prom Night* and *Strange Wilderness*, and also became a production executive for Screen Gems, a Sony Pictures Entertainment Company.

"We are committed to reviving that tradition of producing films in Los Angeles, where we can draw upon a deep pool of talented people who are happy to be working at home," says Gainor. "We are building a family with many people collaborating with each other on different projects."

He also cites the unique support infrastructure in the city, including stages and the backlot at the studio, equipment rental

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companies, labs and post-production facilities.

Screen Gems produces a great deal of its films in 35mm format coupled with digital intermediate (DI) timing during post-production on the studio lot. However, Gainor stresses that every project is different, and each filmmaker has to define their own path.

"Whatever you do, don't choose your production medium because someone thinks it's cheaper," he cautions. "Do it because it's the right choice for that project. We have had wonderful experiences shooting on film, which has given us the looks our directors wanted. You also have to consider that the market is changing. There are high expectations when people see films at home on a 42-inch plasma LCD screen with a high-end HD Blu-ray DVD player. They see and feel every nuance in colors and contrast."

Screen Gems does all post-production on the studio lot, including editing, post-production for sound and DI timing. Gainor comments that it is a contemporary version of what the movie studios were like in the Golden Age of Hollywood.

"We see the people whom we work with everyday in a collaborative environment," he says. "DI is part of our delivery requirement partially because of the evolution of that technology, and also because our films are released in so many formats. DI is a phenomenal tool. You can turn a sunny sky into night and vice versa, but it isn't a substitute for great cinematography. The images have to be on the negative."

Vacancy was brought to Screen Gems by the Hal Lieberman

with Glenn Gainor



Company. Gainor says the search for a director led them to Nimrod Antal, who was at the helm during the production of a Hungarian film called *Kontroll*, which was produced at locations in the Budapest subway system. The cinematographer chosen for *Vacancy* was Andrzej Sekula.

"It's a compelling story with a wonderfully claustrophobic feeling," Gainor observes. "That's where we wanted to go with this film. The story takes place in a downtrodden motel in the middle of nowhere. We wanted that sense of no escape."

Vacancy was originally slated for production at a motel in the desert for a couple of weeks, and finishing on a stage in a controlled environment. They couldn't find the right location and decided to build a set for the motel and a gas station on stage 15 at the studio. Gainor estimates that they filmed about 80 percent of the story on stages.

Prom Night is an original story by J.S. Cardone, which takes the audience to places that the horror film genre hasn't gone before. The director is Nelson McCormick, who has worked on many hour-long television dramas, which Gainor describes as mini-features produced in eight days. McCormick prepared by studying DVDs produced at proms across the country. He discovered they are like the Academy Awards in local towns.

"The film was produced on our backlog," Gainor says. "I got the script some time in December, and we were up and running in production by late March, while wrapping *Vacancy*. There is nothing campy about the look. The cinematographer was Checco Varese, whose work is phenomenal. The director and cinematographer designed a look that elevates the story, but everyone else had to be onboard. I have worked with the same first AD, Adam Druzman, for five or six movies. When we find good people we try to hang on to them as long as possible, but we are also on the lookout for fresh talent."

McCormick and Gainor recruited Jason Ballantine to edit *Prom Night* after seeing his work on an Australian film called *Wolf Creek*. They felt he was right for their film.

Strange Wilderness was an independent movie directed by Fred Wolf. It's a story about two guys who go to the Andes to hunt for Bigfoot in a desperate attempt to save a failing wilderness themed TV show. The story opens in a city like Los Angeles, and it goes all the way to Brazil. Gainor suggested shooting it entirely in the Los Angeles Hills, including the Bronson Caves, which served as Bigfoot's lair.

"We shot it in around 30 days," he says. "It's a phenomenal looking movie that incorporates footage from a 1970s television show. David Hennings was the cinematographer. It's an incredibly sharp, witty comedy that takes advantage of the rising talents of Jonah Hill and Justin Long. We laughed our asses off making that movie."

Gainor has an optimistic view of the future of the cinema. The evolution of theaters in homes adds a new dimension, but he believes people will also want to experience motion pictures in communal environments. Gainor also feels a genuine passion for the role he plays behind-the-scenes. During a visit to a film school as a guest lecturer, he asked the class, "Who wants to be a film producer?" No one raised their hand. When he asked who wants to be a writer or director, everybody raised their hand.

"I told them, so did I, but I'm having a blast producing movies," Gainor says. "I realized that I could spend years making one movie, or a year helping five of my friends make their films. That really works for me, because I can be just as passionate about films I am producing. Producing films increases your chances of living your dream about making movies that matter."

Gainor concludes with a story about an intern who approached him on a set asking questions. She kept apologizing for wasting his time until Gainor told her he was glad to help her, because he never forgot that four-hour conversation with Tom Mankiewicz at the dawn of his own career. It was his way of repaying that debt.