

Published: 2011-09-17

Filmmaker Parker ready to Dance at film fest Sunday

Latest short already a winning film

By ANDREA NEMETZ Entertainment Reporter

As a filmmaker, you have to be ready for anything.

When Pardis Parker was making his short film *The Dance* in April at the CBC Studios on Bell Road in Halifax, the two-day shoot was derailed by a sweeping power outage.

"It was going so well, there was great spirit on the set, and the lights went out. At first we thought it was just at CBC, and then we found out it was the entire south end. We tried to keep going but we were really limited. We ended up coming in for a couple of hours on a third day.

"I guess that's why they say don't count your chickens before they're hatched."

Parker, a Charles P. Allen High School grad who grew up in Lower Sackville, wrote, directed, edited and produced *The Dance*, which chronicles a charming office courtship between himself and Picnicface's Evany Rosen.

The short, silent film gets its Halifax debut (Sunday) at the Atlantic Film Festival at 7 p.m. at Park Lane as part of the Atlantic Shorts 4 program.

And it has already claimed awards in two countries. It was named best Maritime film at the P.E.I. International Film Festival earlier this month, and JamFest Indie Film Festival in Louisiana announced *The Dance* will win gold when it screens in October.

The Carmel Art and Film Festival in California has added the eight-minute film to its Best of Shorts program, from which Hollywood icon Clint Eastwood selects the festival's best film each year.

The Dance is following in the award-winning footsteps of Parker's previous shorts — *Afghan* and *Two Men, Two Cows, Two Guns* — which have claimed around 20 awards each since debuting at the Atlantic Film Festival in 2008 and 2009, respectively.

Afghan stars Picnicface's Mark Little and Parker in a tale in which a hate crime forces two friends to turn lemons into lemonade. It screened as part of Film Nova Scotia's spotlight on emerging Nova Scotia filmmakers at the Toronto International Film Festival earlier this week.

Two Men, Two Cows, Two Guns stars John Dunsworth (*Trailer Park Boys*) and Levi MacDougall (*Important Things with Demetri Martin*) and Halifax actors Sherry Smith, Murlane Carew and Christopher Bearn in what imdb.com calls "a tightly woven comedy about an unexpected visitor with odd news and an odder story who interrupts a family's quiet day at the farmhouse."

"Afghan explores how we choose to react to the cards we're dealt," says Parker, by phone from Toronto.

"Two Men is just something I've thought of as funny. Two Men has screened at more festivals and online has a better following in terms of visitors, but Afghan has made more of an impact.

"There was a teacher in Lower Sackville who said a kid at her school, a black student, had found the n-word spray painted on his locker. She found Afghan on YouTube and the class watched the video and had a discussion."

Parker said *The Dance* is intentionally broader than his previous efforts — "At its heart, it's a simple romantic comedy that everyone from toddlers to seniors can watch and enjoy together." — and is inspired by things he grew up watching like *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*, *The Cosby Show* and *Mr. Bean*.

"With each short, I try to tackle a different genre and different style," he said, firmly stating that *The Dance* is not autobiographical.

"Evany and I have known each other through the standup comedy scene in Halifax. She did an amazing job. Her timing instincts on camera are amazing. She looks so adorable. She is so adorable."

Music is composed, produced, arranged and sung by Asif and Shehab Ilyas, who also composed the music for *Two Men*, *Two Cows*, *Two Guns*.

"Asif sent me an MP3 and I played it as I was rushing out the door and it was one of those things you listen to and a smile comes over your face. It was exactly what I was looking for."

Meghan Smith is also heard on the soundtrack, while Christopher Porter, who has worked on *Brokeback Mountain*, *Riding in Cars with Boys* and *Roller Town*, the Atlantic Film Festival's opening gala, was director of photography.

The response to *The Dance* from the general public has been "the most positive response of anything I've been involved with," says Parker, an actor, writer, director and comedian.

As an actor, he's recently guest-starred in the Toronto-shot ABC series *Combat Hospital* and the Showcase comedy series *Single White Spenny* and has an upcoming arc on CBC's *Little Mosque on the Prairie*.

He was a cast member on Halifax-shot web series *Moderation Town* and he can be seen in *Snow*, directed by Halifax's Rohan Fernando, which screens Monday at 7 p.m. at Park Lane.

As a comedian, he received four nominations including best standup newcomer at the 2010 Canadian Comedy Awards, was the only Atlantic Canadian finalist for Canada's Next Top Comic in 2010, was one of 13 performers chosen out of 3,000 for CBS's annual industry diversity showcase in Los Angeles, and this year was a finalist in the Stand Up & Bite Me comedy contest.

But, he says, his first love is directing.

"I love that process. I hope to get to the point with my writing where I can write with the best. Acting and standup are fun. With standup, it's just you, on stage, with a microphone and an audience full of people waiting for you to make them laugh and it's so satisfying."

While he still has family in Nova Scotia, he's based in Toronto and Los Angeles and is

considering a more permanent move to L.A.

CLOSE WINDOW

© 2011 The Halifax Herald Limited