

SXSW '07 Interview: "Forfeit" Director Andrew Shea



by Erik Childress

The "Forfeit" Pitch: Revenge story masquerading as a heist flick.

Is this your first trip to SXSW? Got any other film festival experience? If you're a festival veteran, let us know your favorite and least-favorite parts of the ride.

ANDREW: I was at Sundance with my first two features and at Cannes with a short I made at USC film school. It's more fun to fly a bit under the radar at big festivals.

Back when you were a little kid, and you were asked that inevitable question, your answer would always be "When I grow up I want to be a what?"

ANDREW: Quarterback.

Not including your backyard and your Dad's Handycam, how did you get your real "start" in filmmaking?

ANDREW: In my first year at USC film school I made a short about a prison inmate who sells the rights to film his execution in the California gas chamber as a MTV music video. The film was invited to screen in the Cannes Film Festival Semaine de la Critique.

Do you feel any differently about your film now that you know it's on "the festival circuit?"

ANDREW: Not really, although it's clearly gotten a lot better in the eyes of a lot of other festival programmers.

Of all the Muppets, which one do you most relate to?

ANDREW: Gonzo.

During production did you ever find yourself thinking ahead to film festivals, paying customers, good & bad reviews, etc?

ANDREW: Not really. There wasn't time to think about a whole lot other than whether we would make the day.

How did this film get rolling at the beginning? Give us a brief history from writing to production to post to just last night.

ANDREW: John Rafter Lee and I began discussing a heist picture in the spring of 2003. John delivered a first draft a couple of months after the first conversation and it had the makings of a great story. We did a table read and discovered the things we needed to work on. John did a massive rewrite, we pulled that apart, put it back together, cut and shaped endlessly and were ready for another table read. That reading led to some immediate offers to a couple of key actors, Gregory Itzin and John Aylward in particular. Through our various contacts and friends we assembled the crew and persuaded them to work for laughable money, we sweated through a summer shoot in L.A. without getting arrested or killed and headed for the editing room. We screened for test audiences, we produced many rough cuts, we mixed late at night, we almost lost our minds. As for last night, I dreamt my daughter woke me up and asked me if I thought it would play in Peoria.

If you could share one massive lesson that you learned while making this movie, what would it be?

ANDREW: Don't rent the location manager's house as a location.

What films and filmmakers have acted as your inspirations, be they a lifelong love or a very specific scene composition?

ANDREW: Polanski, Kubrick, Altman, Iñárritu, Charlie Kaufman

Did you watch any movies in pre-production and yell "This! I want something JUST like this only different."?

There's a great heist movie called "Bellman and True" that has a difficult and beautiful relationship at its core. It's not a model, really, it just has a tone that sticks with you.

What actor would you cast as a live-action Homer Simpson?

ANDREW: Jack.

Say you landed a big studio contract tomorrow, and they offered you a semi-huge budget to remake, adapt, or sequelize something. What projects would you tackle?

ANDREW: Bernard Shaw's MAN AND SUPERMAN.

Name an actor in your film that's absolutely destined for the big-time. And why, of course.

ANDREW: Gregory Itzin. Because he is one of the most skilled actors I have ever known.

Finish this sentence: If I weren't a filmmaker, I'd almost definitely be...

ANDREW: Running a theatre in New Mexico.

Who's an actor you'd kill a small dog to work with? (Don't worry; nobody would know.)

ANDREW: Jack.

Have you "made it" yet? If not, what would have to happen for you to be able to say "Yes, wow. I have totally made it!"

ANDREW: My students at the University of Texas would have to say, "Wow, he has totally made it!"

Honestly, how important are film critics nowadays?

ANDREW: Very important.

You're told that your next movie must have one "product placement" on board, but you can pick the product. What would it be?

ANDREW: Anything princess (for my four-year-old daughter).

You're contractually obligated to deliver an R-rated film to your producers. The MPAA says you have to delete a sex scene that's absolutely integral to the film or you're getting an NC-17. How do you handle it?

ANDREW: I'd bookend the sex scenes with scenes of extreme violence and try showing it to the MPAA again.

What's your take on the whole "a film by DIRECTOR" issue? Do you feel it's tacky, because hundreds (or at least dozens) of people collaborate to make a film - or do you think it's cool, because ultimately the director is the final word on pretty much everything?

ANDREW: I think it's tacky. And I take the credit anyway.

In closing, we ask you to convince the average movie-watcher to choose your film instead of the trillion other options they have. How do you do it?

ANDREW: Bribery? Free drinks? Or tell them that "Forfeit" will confound their expectations.

Andrew Shea's **Forfeit** will have its world premiere at SXSW 2007.