

True Love Never Did Run Smooth

Contributed by GREG STACY
Wednesday, 20 April 2005

Stefan Marc on the horror-show filming of his romantic comedy, *Dating Games People Play*
Stefan Marc has an unusual résumé for a first-time director, considering that he's the co-founder of the Entertainment Channel, a successful, closed-circuit TV series that promoted Knott's, Disneyland and other local spots to OC's hotel guests. In recent years, he's worked raising capital for various start-up companies, and when he decided to film his first feature, *Dating Games People Play*, which is set in Newport Beach, he unsurprisingly took a methodical, businesslike approach to the film's production. Unfortunately, as Marc explains here, he learned the hard way that there's no business like show business.

OC Weekly: You got a lot of press a while back for auctioning off your film's executive producer credit (and a walk-on role) on eBay. Who was the high bidder?

Stefan Marc: Well, unfortunately, nobody hit our reserve price, so we just let it run out. We were the first film to try that, and it was an interesting experiment. Our film ended up being executive produced by a guy named Jeff Colvin.

You've clearly been very entrepreneurial about getting your film funded. What were some of the other things you tried?

I approached individual investors with a business plan, with specific locations where I wanted to film, storyboards and things like that.

If you search for the phrase "Dating Games People Play" on Google, you get a zillion responses from some very weird sites. It looks like your press release and story synopsis have been picked up by lots of porn sites and dating sites and, I dunno, plumbing sites or whatever. Did you deliberately choose a title with highly Google-able keywords or something?

No, no. I know what you're talking about, and I'm not sure how that happened. I think they just sent out a bunch of those web spiders, and they automatically sought out our title. It's not related to us at all; it's very bothersome. I'm not sure what we can do about that, actually.

Well, it's free advertising. First features are notoriously tough. How did this one go?

It was an extremely rough shoot. We had our cast and our equipment set up for a certain window of time, everything was locked in, and when we started to shoot we were still short half our planned budget. So while we were shooting, I was frantically trying to raise money.

Would you shoot all day and then go talk to potential investors at night?

No, I would do it on breaks. Whenever I had like a five-minute break from filming, I'd walk away and go make calls to try and raise money. There was one guy who said he'd invest, but every time I'd talk to him, he'd say, "Sure, I'm still good for it. I just haven't gotten around to it." Finally we were shooting at a restaurant called Dolce on PCH, and I ran into the guy there. I told one of the guys on the crew to follow this guy home and camp outside his place if he had to, and he could come back to the set after he got a check. It worked.

Was there any time in all this when you thought, "That's it, I'll never get this thing done?"

Sure. Two days before the shoot was ending, our leading man, Austin Peck, was bitten on the face by a dog. It sent him to the emergency room, and he had to have 12 stitches. We were all in a big panic, because there was just no way to shoot around this. Austin was willing to try, but it was hopeless. So we had to shut down production for a month while he healed up, and that cost us severely. We'd already rented all the equipment and everything was locked in. Plus, his wife was pregnant and due to deliver any day, so when he came back for three or four days of pickup shots there was the constant threat that she was going to go into labor. Thankfully, she didn't; she had the baby about a week later.

One time the cops showed up and they thought we were making a porn movie. Our leading lady, Leslie Bega from *The Sopranos*, was out by the craft services table and she was wearing a blue robe for a scene we were shooting. Some neighbor saw her, thought it was a porn movie and called the cops. We had to show them all of our permits and convince them this was a legitimate production. Our gaffer backed into a water main at a hotel where we were shooting, and it caused thousands of dollars' worth of damage.

Oh, no! Did you fire him?

No. I knew it was an accident. Our production RV backed into an awning; that was another disaster.

That's more than enough drama for any production.

I always said we had more car crashes than an action movie.

NEWPORT BEACH FILM FESTIVAL PRESENTS DATING GAMES PEOPLE PLAY AT REGENCY LIDO. TUES., 7:30 P.M. \$10.