

In the Works: Roberto Faenza Returns to NYC, Follow-Up to “My Mom Smokes Weed” & More

iW By Bryce J. Renninger and Nigel M. Smith (October 7, 2010)

This week's in-production column takes a look at a new film from Roberto Faenza, an adaptation of the young adult novel from Peter Cameron, “Someday This Pain Will Be Useful to You,” starring Marcia Gay Harden, Peter Gallagher, Ellen Burstyn, and more. Also on the docket is a look at a Hawaiian film that explores the behind-the-scenes world of stage productions, a doc about one of the world's largest employers of people with developmental disabilities, the follow-up to “My Mom Smokes Weed,” and an adaptation of a play that explores issues of a woman's identity.

EDITORS NOTE: “In the Works” is a weekly column taking a look at upcoming films, in addition to projects in production. It spotlights films in development, as well completed films that are taking creative paths towards distribution and occasionally ventures away from films to look at other types of projects, such as interesting new film distribution, funding, or exhibition mechanisms.



Roberto Faenza directs Peter Gallagher on the set of “Someday This Pain Will Be Useful To You.” [Photo courtesy of the filmmakers]

“Someday This Pain Will Be Useful To You”

Director: Roberto Faenza

Principal Cast: Toby Regbo, Deborah Ann Woll, Lucy Liu, Peter Gallagher, Ellen Burstyn, Stephen Lang and Marcia Gay Harden

Screenplay: Peter Cameron, Roberto Faenza and Dahlia Heyman

Producers: Elda Ferri

Executive Producers: Milena Canonero, Simona Belletini, Rose Ganguzza, Heather Harris, Dahlia Heyman and Ron Stein

Production just wrapped in New York on the film adaptation of Peter Cameron's popular novel “Someday This Pain Will Be Useful To You,” a teen drama in the vein of “The Catcher in the Rye,” that boasts an all star cast, including Peter Gallagher, Ellen Burstyn, Marcia Gay Harden and Lucy Liu.

Relative newcomer Toby Regbo (“Mr. Nobody”) plays James Sveck, a teenager months away from starting college, with a dysfunctional family pulling him in every which way. Italian award-winning filmmaker Roberto Faenza (“Alla luce del sole”) told *indieWIRE* that he came across Cameron's novel back when it was first published in Italy (coincidentally before hitting U.S. shelves).

“I was immediately attracted to this story because it reminded me of ‘Catcher,’” he said. “Basically the two books share a very similar protagonist, who both struggle with society, their families and their fellow students.”

On how he acquired such an impressive lineup of actors for his project, Faenza gave all credit to his casting director Avy Kaufman, who worked on assembling the cast over a three year period. Kaufman's list of clients include Steven Spielberg, Ang Lee and Ridley Scott.

“I have to say that the majority of the actors proposed by Avy were not on my first list,” Faenza said. “But soon I came to realize that she was much more ‘informed’ about the right cast than me. So I began to follow her ideas.”

The film marks a departure from Faenza's past work not only for featuring such a high profile all-American cast, but for being his first film in New York since “Corrupt,” back in 1983. Of the new experience Faenza noted that it took some time for him to adjust to the rules in America pertaining to unions, permits and the like.

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"With all that being said, I am amazed at how this production came together," he said. "We had people who didn't speak English very well working alongside people who did not speak Italian; two very different ways of working and somehow we were all able to communicate. Working on the set sometimes felt similar to a meeting of the UN - so many different backgrounds, nationalities, and languages working together (sometimes through translators).

"I'm very pleased with the film we shot."

More Projects:

"A Whole Lott More"

Logline: "A Whole Lott More" is a documentary film about Lott Industries, a business in Toledo, OH, that employs over 1200 people with developmental disabilities. For decades, Lott assembled car parts - successfully competing with non-disabled facilities - but, with the recent downturn in the auto industry, Lott lost its main contract. Now Lott must reinvent itself in order to survive - if they can, they may establish a new model for disabled workplaces - one that could impact the working lives of millions of Americans with developmental disabilities.

Production team: Director/Producer: Victor Buhler ("Rikers High")

About the film: "I was in a car accident in 2009 and I began this project from a wheelchair. Although I couldn't walk for a year (I have since recovered), I realized how the working world is closed off to many very capable people with disabilities. Employers, for the majority, would rather not be bothered with employing the disabled. For those with developmental disabilities - such as Down's Syndrome, autism, and cerebral palsy - the situation is worse still. They have shockingly few choices about where they can work. A recent survey says that one in four developmentally disabled people and their families live below the Federal Poverty line. As a result of not being able to get a job, many disabled people remain isolated and separated from society. But breakthroughs can happen - and we hope that "A Whole Lott More" can create a new understanding of the situation.



A scene from Victor Buhler's "A Whole Lott More." [Photo courtesy of the filmmakers]

"If Lott Industries, the focus of the documentary, can work out how to move into the 21st Century, they will be able to build a model that could benefit people developmental disabilities nationally and internationally. This model would be based on some hard decisions but also on good business - including the encouragement of disabled run mini-enterprises and a better ability to take on more flexible and varied contracts. Success could mean that people like TJ Hawker, a 3-time paralympian who has cerebral palsy and is deaf, has a secure and productive job. It could ensure that Wanda Huber, who has Turner's and Down's Syndromes, can continue to work and can stay in her apartment. The right model could create possibilities for teenage kids with autism who are struggling to step into the working world. It could also help bring people with disabilities and the non-disabled closer together."—Victor Buhler

Current status: The film was a part of Silverdocs' Good Pitch event, and has received funding from The Loreen Arbus Foundation and The Channel 4 Britdocs Foundation. The shooting nearly complete, the team is looking to start editing the film so that they can have a rough cut for January. They intend to complete the film by the end of 2011.

For more information and to support the film: Visit the film's [Kickstarter page](#). As with all Kickstarter projects, the filmmakers will only receive donated funds if they reach their target goal of \$15,000 by the end of the campaign on October 31.

"Subjective Expressions"

Synopsis: A 20-some year old girl joins a theater group to focus on forgetting about the exterior and going within. She slowly learns that it is more than just a theater she joined, it is a group of pacifist protesters who are about to participate in their largest campaign against a corporation that is trying to destroy their world of art.

Production team: Director/Cinematographer/Editor: Dominik Walczuk; Producer: Svenofix Zirkmann; Camera/Sound: Caroline Antilla & Megan Politano; Executive Producer: Renata



Walczuk; Producer: Kozmo Mimzi



A scene from Dominik Walczuk's "Subjective Expressions." [Photo courtesy of the filmmakers]

About the film: "This film is my first feature film. When I turned 18 in May, I decided to move to Europe and pursue filmmaking for 7 months. When I return home to Hawaii in January, I'll begin principle photography. The story revolves around a female character who has grown up without much self-expression and without the support of her parents. Now she has come to an environment that focuses purely on forgetting the past and future, as well as forgetting worries and fears. It is the world of the theater. Mostly she works with a mime and magician, but later in the story another character joins the group and challenges her viewpoints of the theater and life. I find the performing world interesting and odd; not many people know much about what goes on behind the mask, the puppet or curtain. I've had a very different childhood than most kids; for example, my memories are making cardboard masks and doing small plays at libraries every weekend... This story is my personal view of a situation where honest creative people face a mega-corporation attempting to destroy all that they work for. Is it possible for an idea to become a movement, to change lives? This story questions our actions, our...expressions. The true skeleton of the film is composed of human compassion, how through non-violence and general kindness issues can be resolved. A main focus for our film is to have beautiful images and ideas. I've already shared many important elements in the film to a select group of people who have all given positive reactions to the visuals and ideas. This film is merely my own collection of Subjective Expressions."—Dominik Walczuk

Current status: The team is finishing up pre-production, getting ready to head into production in the next months.

For more information and to support the film: Visit the film's [Kickstarter page](#). As with all Kickstarter projects, the filmmakers will only receive donated funds if they reach their target goal of \$8,000 by the end of the campaign on December 29.

"WUSS"

Logline: After receiving a severe beating from a group of his own students, a high school English teacher teams up with another teen to hatch an elaborate revenge plot.



A scene from Clay Liford's "WUSS." [Photo courtesy of the filmmakers]

Production Team: Writer/Director: Clay Liford; Producers: Barak Epstein, Adam Donaghey, Eric Steele, Clay Liford; Executive Producer: Bala Shagrithaya; Assistant Director/Co-Producer: Angie Meyer; Cinematographer/Co-Producer: Chris Simpson; Production Design: Yen Tan, Ellen Weaver; Editor: Jay Serra, Clay Liford; Cast: Nate Rubin ("My Mom Smokes Weed"), Alicia Anthony, Alex Karpovsky ("Lovers of Hate"), Tony Hale ("Arrested Development," "The Informant!"), Jenny Sipes ("Earthling"), Chris Gardner, Jonny Mars, Ryan Anderson

About the film: "After the success of 'My Mom Smokes Weed,' I decided I wanted to make another film where I get to comedically torture my favorite actor (Nate Rubin). Nate's little, and I like picking on obvious details, so 'WUSS' was born. I tend to gravitate towards comedies that come from pretty non-comedic origins. Obviously a film centered around a savage beating doesn't automatically scream comedy, which is what made it exactly what I was looking for. Oddly enough, it was only after the rough cut edit that I saw the 80's film, 'Class of 1984,' which pretty much plays as the dramatic version of our film, complete with a somewhat matching nerdy band hall confrontation.

"I'm not a slapstick guy. I stay away from banana peels for the most part. I prefer comedies which also play as drama. I love Hal Ashby! To me, good comedy stems from the way funny characters react to realistic (albeit heightened) situations. I think the term sitcom has been bastardized over the years by crap like 'Friends' et al, but if you think about it, comedy induced by the situations the characters find themselves in pretty much forms the cornerstone of most good work. In this case, I wanted a funny guy like Nate up against a REAL threat. We found this real threat in the form of 15 year-old Ryan Anderson. Ryan is a Katrina survivor. He's been a street musician since he was four years old. He was even featured in the Spike Lee Katrina documentary, 'When the Levees Broke.' He'd never acted before. He didn't even know how to audition. Out of either simple inexperience or just over-the-top professionalism, he actually memorized the ENTIRE SCRIPT (not a short one either, mind you) just for the initial audition! The second we saw him, we knew we had our villain. He even raps on the film's soundtrack!"

Current Status: The film is currently in post-production. The first cut is complete, and the film team is working on the fine cut.

For more information and to support the film: Visit the film's [Kickstarter page](#). As with all Kickstarter projects, the filmmakers will only receive donated funds if they reach their target goal of \$8,000 by the end of the campaign on October 28.

"Beauty on the Vine"

http://www.indiewire.com/article/in_the_works_october_7/

Logline: From mixed-race identities to extreme plastic surgery, “Beauty on the Vine” is a modern fable exploring the power of the human face in hothouse America. When a young female star of right-wing radio is brutally murdered, her husband investigates the reasons behind the violence. He discovers a world where young women transform themselves to look like their idols, and mothers lose their daughters to the illusion of popularity and power.

Production Team: Producer: Anne Chaisson; Director: Joan Stein; Writer: Zak Berkman; Cast: Olivia Wilde and David Straithairn



A scene from Joan Stein's "Beauty on the Vine." [Photo courtesy of the filmmakers]

About the film: “As a director, I am drawn to stories that are about identity and how characters see themselves through the eyes of others. How can we really know ourselves and be free unless we are ready to strip away what others think and say about us? Only then can we hold up a mirror to our inner self, to see what’s really there. In another of my films, ‘One Day Crossing,’ I chronicled the struggle a woman faced in maintaining her identity and extending compassion while surviving the brutality of war. She is finally able to see herself through the eyes of another young mother and that changes her life irrevocably. In ‘Beauty on the Vine,’ Lauren Chickering is someone who is willing to help others strip away the unnecessary layers of self-hatred and societal judgment so that the true sense of self can be laid bare. The tragedy and irony of her story is that she is unable to accomplish her goal because she is killed.

“My vision for the film is that when Lauren is present I want the film to have a ghostlike, ephemeral quality. Even when she is not on screen, I want her presence to always be felt. When I saw Zak’s play I felt that it was so unique. He understands what girls go through and he dramatizes the issues with such force. But I also loved the play because it’s about a man fighting for feminism. Zak created such compelling characters and explosive situations that I felt I needed to make a film about the subject matter. This is an important story to tell. It crosses all borders to reach girls in all parts of society, in different parts of the world. I am excited to direct Olivia Wilde in such an important and powerful story. She is a real champion of women’s rights, and her passion for the story can be felt so deeply.” —Joan Stein

Current Status: The team is currently raising financing for the film version of “Beauty on the Vine,” with production slated to start in April 2011.

Also in the works:

Zach Snyder, the director of “300” and “Watchmen” will [take the reins](#) of the new installment of “Superman.” The man in tights has not yet been cast.

According to [The Hollywood Reporter](#), Edward Burns and Genesis Rodriguez have been cast in the new film from Asger Leth, “Man on a Ledge.” Sam Worthington and Elizabeth Banks are already set to star as an ex-cop and a negotiator, with Worthington’s character being the titular “man on the ledge” who Banks’ character must coax down.

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