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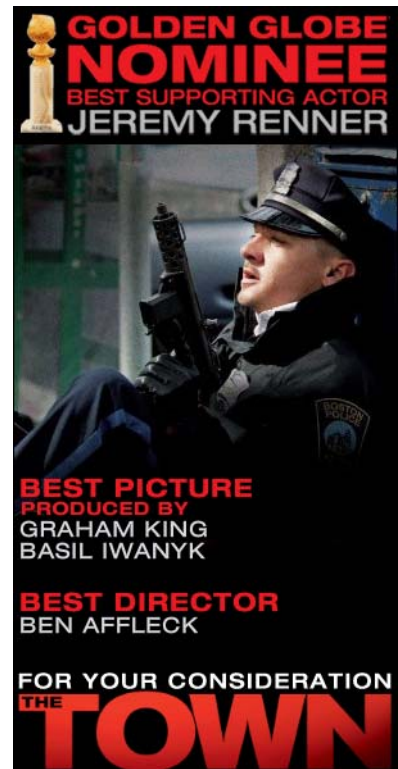
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Features

Meet the 2011 Sundance Filmmakers | "Prairie Love" Director Dusty Bias

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by indieWIRE (Updated 1 hour, 52 minutes ago)

From the frozen plains of North Dakota comes this wonderfully bizarre story about three people searching for love in the oddest ways.

When a mysterious vagrant, wandering the deserted, snow-covered plains, discovers a nearly frozen local man, he stops to lend a hand. However, upon learning the man was en route to collect his pen-pal girlfriend, whom he has never met, from a correctional facility, the vagrant sees an opportunity to change his lonely existence. Blinded by his desire for love, the vagrant decides to take matters into his own hands—forever changing the destinies of all three people.



A scene from Dusty Bias's "Prairie Love." Image courtesy of Sundance Institute.

Director Dusty Bias combines the Midwest's harsh winter landscape with exquisite production design to create a world seemingly frozen in time. The absurdist humor and quirky onscreen oddities make the characters of this grim tale seem strangely lovable. Brazenly idiosyncratic, *Prairie Love* takes the love story into uncharted territory. [Synopsis courtesy of the Sundance Institute]

[indieWIRE invited directors with films in the Sundance U.S. Dramatic & Documentary Competitions as well as the World Dramatic & Documentary Competitions and NEXT section to submit responses in their own words about their films. These profiles are being published through the beginning of the 2011 Sundance Film Festival. To prompt the discussion, iW asked the filmmakers about what inspired their films, the challenges they faced and other general questions. They were also free to add additional comments related to their projects.]

"Prairie Love"

NEXT Section
 Director: Dusty Bias
 Screenwriter: Dusty Bias, Ashley Martin Bias, Holly Lynn Ellis
 Cast: Jeremy Clark, Holly Lynn Ellis, Garth Blomberg
 Executive Producer: Dusty Bias, Ashley Martin Bias
 Producer: Doug Mueller, Holly Lynn Ellis, Ashley Martin Bias, Bryant Mock, Brian Quist
 Composer: Ted Speaker
 Cinematographer: Lawrence Schweich
 Editor: Dusty Bias
 Coproducers: Ted Speaker, Ashley Martin Bias

Responses courtesy of "Prairie Love" director Dusty Bias.

Childhood influences

As a little kid I spent a lot of time watching movies. When other kids were watching cartoons. We had one VHS tape with three movies on it: "Smokey and the Bandit," "Smokey and the Bandit II" and "Caddyshack." I watched all three. Every day. For years. So when I was 19 years old, I was asked the question, "If I could be anything, what would I be?" "A filmmaker!" Not knowing how that would ever happen or where to start, I went to film school at Montana State University. "Smokey and the Bandit" is still my favorite film today.

"Three characters in search of love, forced to survive in a hostile environment."

We had made a series of short films over the years and felt that it was time to make a feature. There were many limitations facing us, number 1 being money. So, it was important to construct a story around our budget. I had to write something with a minimal cast and few locations. Having gone to high school in North Dakota, I had a good understanding of what winter time can be like, especially out in the rural areas. The winters there are their own character; for our film, the winter was the "fourth character." We constructed a story around

three characters in search of love, forced to survive under a hostile environment.

From the page to the whim of Mother Nature

I am also a writer. So, of course it started with the script. I really enjoy the writing process. Writing to me is about discovery and that continued through to the production. The story changed and evolved based on the input from my cast and crew, the restrictions of time and the whim of Mother Nature.

Fighting against the weather: "a constant case of compromise."

There are so many steps from concept to a finished product. Each and every step had its own challenges. For us, the weather stands out. It was our biggest challenge.

It was a very hard shoot. We shot under the worst conditions imaginable. It turned out to be the worst winter North Dakota had seen since 1936. On the prairie it was consistently -55 degrees Fahrenheit with the 30 mph winds. The normal process of shooting a movie had to be thrown out the door on day 1. We shot what we could and when. It was a constant case of compromise.

In North Dakota winters, the snow never melts because the temperature never goes above the freezing point for months. So in the spring, North Dakota has massive flooding and incredible farming. In order to fight the floods, all of the roads have trenches on each side of them, and in the winter, its very challenging to see where the road ends and the trench begins, because everything is white and the wind throws snow everywhere. The result was that we had on average of 5 vehicles stuck in a trench every day. Because we only had 7-8 hours of daylight each day, we didn't have the option to wait for tow trucks and wreckers; the crew had become very efficient at what we called "unfucking" cars. Only twice was the crew unable to accomplish a successful unfuck, and that was when the one-ton grip truck almost flipped, and the RV took a deep nose dive. Once, the Captain of the State Highway Patrol stopped by to say hello (we were old friends by then) and when he was leaving, got his two front tires deep in the trench. He was convinced that there was no possible way we could get it out, and that he would call a tow truck. His face was priceless when our crew proved him wrong.

What's in store for audiences

It's a simple story told just a little differently. It has a feel and look that we don't see on a normal basis. I think audience will enjoy that.

YES! "Once Upon a Time in the West" (Sergio Leone), "Knife in the Water" (Roman Polanski's first feature), and "Gerry" (Gus Van Sant).

What's coming up next for you?

We have a script called "Big Man" that we would like to produce next.

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