From Tragedy Comes Hope: An Uplifting Movie about Death

Producer Mayeux agrees: “We all knew this kid had something special and that he was Lucas.”

Also cast in the film is Tim Meadows, who many may recognize from “Saturday Night Live.” Although Meadows is known for comedy, Shreve had a gut feeling that he would be perfect for the role of Chris Brighton, who befriends Lucas.

“From the very first moment I read the script, I saw him [Meadows] playing the part in my head and I couldn’t stop thinking about it,” Shreve says.

Meadows was sent the script and accepted the part. He told the filmmakers “that he read it [the script] three times and cried every time.”

If you think that “Chasing Ghosts,” which is premiering at the Cleveland International Film Festival, is just about death and dying, you’re dead wrong, say the filmmakers.

“It’s funny, touching, a little bit mysterious and has a lot of heart,” says Shreve.

“If you’re like Lucas and recently lost a loved one, ‘this is a perfect film to watch,’” says Mayeux.

“I’d be really honored if a family coping with grief watches our movie and is uplifted in some way. After all, the film is about learning to live life again to its fullest.”

—Anne M. DiTeodoro

Josh Shreve (left), director, and Molly Mayeux, producer, have both been involved in movies for years. Both are looking forward to their film’s Cleveland screening.

Josh Shreve was shooting a horror movie when producer Molly Mayeux sent him a script to review.

“When I read the script, I really liked the idea of doing something challenging and completely different,” he says.

So he took on “Chasing Ghosts,” a family-friendly drama/comedy. Shreve, a filmmaker based in Nashville, Tennessee, via Sweden and Tulsa, Oklahoma, always knew he wanted to be a filmmaker since childhood.

“I used to get my friends together and make little movies,” he says.

Although Shreve is no longer a kid making movies, 11-year-old Lucas (Toby Nichols), the film’s main character, is. He’s a young filmmaker obsessed with death.

“The character Lucas is starting to go down a dark path,” says Shreve. “He has lost his brother, and the family is broken.”

A challenging role for a child actor, but Shreve said Nichols fit the bill perfectly.

“I wanted someone who could portray this closed-off side, but also show a sense of vulnerability,” he says. “Toby was the right person for the job.”
The Roma Community: Europe’s Forgotten People

Two women filming in freezing temperatures, tight quarters, and feces-filled mud for five weeks in Bulgaria might not be ideal conditions for storytelling, but Kate Ryan was determined to reveal some devastating truths.

Since age 9, Kate Ryan knew she wanted to work in the film industry. In film school, Ryan worked as a videographer with various non-profit organizations.

“‘These experiences helped me realize that my strength was in documentaries and non-fiction,’” Ryan recalls, “‘and that instead of being a famous actress or director, I wanted to give a voice to the voiceless.’”

One of these groups for which she provided her video services worked with the Roma people in Eastern Europe, a path that would inspire her first feature film, “Welcome Nowhere.”

“I traveled for three summers to Bulgaria, Romania, and Turkey, where we visited Roma camps,” Ryan says. “It was here that I was first exposed to the racism and marginalization that this group faces, and was shocked to discover that such outward discrimination still existed in the 21st century.”

Seeing these issues firsthand raised a number of questions, and what initially began as curiosity turned into an intense research project that took over five years to complete.

The Roma people live in squalor. Years of prejudice isolate them from the rest of society. Their homes are dilapidated boxcars where disease runs rampant. Children often do not have access to medical care and are sent to segregated schools. Locals discouraged Ryan from even associating with the Roma community. Above these difficult circumstances was still a greater one.

Their homes were boxcars. Women filming in freezing temperatures. Feces filled mud. Five weeks in Bulgaria to reveal devastating truths.

Kate Ryan, a videographer, found her strength in documentaries and non-fiction. She was determined to give a voice to the voiceless.

Seeing the Roma people firsthand raised many questions, which turned into an intense research project that took five years to complete.

The Roma live in squalor. Years of prejudice isolate them from the rest of society. Their homes are dilapidated boxcars where disease runs rampant. Children do not have access to medical care and are sent to segregated schools. Ryan's efforts to associate with the Roma community were discouraged.

Kate Ryan's first feature film, “Welcome Nowhere,” exposed the Roma's struggles to the world. Ryan's determination to reveal these truths was driven by her own curiosity, which turned into an intense research project that took five years to complete.

Kate Ryan's film, “Welcome Nowhere,” raises awareness about the Roma's plight and challenges the viewer to consider the importance of storytelling in highlighting human rights issues.

The Roma Community: Europe’s Forgotten People

Director Kate Ryan

THE HOME FOR STORIES

Dallas resident Ahmad Shah is in Cleveland on business. While reading the Plain Dealer this morning, he saw that a childhood friend had directed a film at the CIFF. Shah canceled his dinner plans and came to the CIFF in hopes of reconnecting with Babar Ahmed, director of “Amika and the Three Golden Rules.”

“‘The toughest challenge I faced personally was convincing this community that I would fairly tell their side of the story,’” Ryan says.

“They had been so misrepresented by the media that they distrusted anyone who came in, no matter what they claimed. Thankfully, a couple who work with them served as my ambassadors to let them know my intentions to tell their story were sincere. This allowed them to trust me to do justice to their story, which in turn was a whole new challenge and level of responsibility.”

Ethan Hawke narrates the film, and his connection to the story is a personal one. “Ethan’s mom, Leslie, runs an incredible organization in Romania called OvidiuRo that works to provide early education to impoverished children in Romania, many who are Roma,” Ryan comments. “Ethan is acutely aware of the issue and therefore was willing to lend his voice to the film.”

Ryan wants “Welcome Nowhere” to expose audiences to an issue they knew nothing about. “I hope that they can see themselves in the characters, and can see the universality of what this story represents—poverty, human rights, and tolerance.”

—Amy Kersey

THE DAILY ONLINE


TODAY’S ONLINE VERSION INCLUDES:

• Yemenettes (Playing today at 3:15 p.m.)
  An interview with producer and screenwriter Leon Shahabian and production assistant Meryn Almoshaikah.

• Ride With Larry (Playing today at 7:20 p.m.)
  Director Ricardo Villarreal discusses the making of his film about one man’s struggle with Parkinson’s Disease.

• CIFF at the Beachland Ballroom
  An insider’s view of CIFF’s first night at the Beachland Ballroom in Collinwood.

• Film Forum—Transfusión
  Highlights from the panel discussion following the screening of this film about America’s taco trucks.

Thank you for your support.