

And now for something completely different:

HEEBONICS

Filmmaker examines a hyper-accelerated, post-modern relationship

By SHERI SHEFA
Staff Reporter

Who knew that the countless sleepless nights Jeffrey Nesker spent in nightclubs in downtown Toronto would be the fodder for his most successful film to date?

Pairing his club culture expertise with his active imagination and talent for storytelling, Nesker wrote and directed *Nightclub Story*, a short film that is garnering attention and awards from film festivals in Canada and abroad.

"*Nightclub Story* to me is first and foremost an examination - I've always been fascinated by the rules of polite society, the fact that if there were no manners, we'd kill each other over a parking spot," said 30-year-old Nesker, a graduate of York University's department of film and video who has been producing low-budget short films and music videos through his production company Ocular Nutrition since 2000.

"I always thought it's ridiculous that people go to nightclubs to meet people, but it's the most loud, abrasive - it's the opposite of what you would want, ideally, to do that sort of thing."

He explained that his 17-minute short film is "about the disconnect between what we want and what we need, between who we are and who we think we are."

The protagonists, James, 26, and Annie, 21, meet while waiting in line to get into a club. James, who seems to have outgrown the club scene, is meeting up with his friends after a rough day at work, and Annie is, as Nesker describes her, a girl with "wide eyes who is just coming into her sexual understanding of herself and using it almost to a fault as a bargaining chip in all of her dealings."

In the short time they spend in line together, "they share a hyper-accelerated, ridiculously post-modern relationship, from stolen glances to looks of disgust."

Nesker said that the concept for this film was born eight years ago, when he was still in film school.

"Then it was called *Subway Story*, and it all took place on a subway... I always loved the gimmick of it and the idea of the hyper-accelerated relationship in an enclosed setting," he said.

"As I got closer and closer to being able to make a short film last year and I started pouring out ideas... I thought to myself, a really good short film is never too big for its breeches. It's got to be a one-trick pony, and it's got to be well executed."

After making some revisions in the script, mainly changing the setting from a subway train to nightclub queue, Nesker said he was thrilled with the final product and is floored by the response the film has gotten from his film festival peers.

Nightclub Story had its premiere in August at the Rhode Island International Film Festival. His film was accepted into the WILDsound Shorts Festival later that month, at which it tied with another short film for best overall performances.

In September, Nesker travelled to Glasgow for the Bootleg Film Festival, at which he was declared best director for a short film. The film was also given an honourable mention at the Accolade Film Awards in Los Angeles.

Nesker guessed that the film resonates with so many people because the element of fantasy depicted in the film is a major part of the club experience, regardless of the generation depicted.

"I think that people go to nightclubs for the expectation of that cinematic rush of romance that will make everything better, or that will change everything in an instant," he said.

"I notice that especially with my own peers that people were going to nightclubs well past their 'sell-by' date because they couldn't give up on the fantasy. If they did, it would mean that they were settling for the mundane existence that defines what we perceive as adulthood and a lot of people - I think I did, too - struggled with that, and I wanted to dramatize it."

Nesker said that while it's important to draw from his experience, he realizes that if a script doesn't measure up in terms of the rules of structure, good drama and balanced portrayals, it'll end up becoming an exercise in self-indulgence.

"It can't just be about you, it has to be universal."

Coming from a suburban Jewish family, raised by his father who is a lawyer and his mother who is a teacher, he found it hard to decide if he was going to take the road less travelled and pursue a film career, or take the safe route by getting a secure desk job.



Saffron Cassaday played "Annie" who is "just coming into her sexual understanding of herself and using it almost to a fault."

"I put enormous pressure on myself, and there isn't a day that goes by when I don't consider quitting it all to drive a bus, or go to law school, to make my parents at least a modicum happier," he said.

"But to be fair, I've always been artistic and I clued in pretty early. I saw *Jaws* and *Poltergeist* when I was five, and that's why I wanted to be filmmaker. Despite it being a nice little story to toss off, there is some truth there.



Nightclub Story director Jeffrey Nesker, and production designer Meredith Woodley on set.

I can remember being terribly affected by film at a very early age, and I knew that it was something I wanted to do."

Although Nesker is working to fulfil his dream of being a successful filmmaker, he knows that it'll never be easy.

"People in my industry are always patting themselves on the back and saying, 'Isn't it great that we escaped that dreary nine-to-five existence?' And they say it with such contempt. You have to look at them and say, 'What did we escape?' We're up at the crack of dawn and in bed like 12 to 18 hours later, just to do it again the next day. We didn't escape much."

And the work doesn't end when the final edits are made. Nesker is currently busy promoting and entering his film into various film festivals.

On Nov 5, *Nightclub Story* will be screened at the Bloor Cinema in Toronto for the opening night gala and best short film showcase of the Moving Image Film Festival.

He said he also plans to enter the film into the Toronto Jewish Film Festival in 2009, four years after another of his films, *Florida: A Snowbird's Paradise?* was accepted into the festival.

He said although there is nothing in *Nightclub Story* that is specifically Jewish, Nesker said that there is a Jewish sensibility to it.

"There is a bratty questioning that I think is very Jewish, like an entitled questioning of society... I think it has Jewish content because I can't escape who I am," he said.

"For me to ignore it or not claim it would be stupid. We are a collection of our experience and I regret nothing."

Nesker is working on his next film, *Apocalypse Story*. "If *Nightclub Story* is about post-modern love, *Apocalypse Story* is about... young love at the end of the world," Nesker said.