

Interview: Three Party Masters of ‘Project X’ Reveal Their Plans

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CHICAGO – The epic party in the upcoming film “Project X” would not have come off the way did if it wasn’t for the planning committee, portrayed by Thomas Mann, Oliver Cooper and Jonathan Daniel Brown. The three relative unknowns took different routes to secure their roles, and kept the festivities going.

Produced by Todd Phillips (“The Hangover,” “Old School”) and directed by newcomer Nima Nourizadeh, “Project X” is the high school version of the party-oriented hijink films that Phillips has previously directed. Simply involving a 17th birthday party that grows to legendary proportions, “Project X” has a lot of surreal fun expanding the concept of having a good time.



L-R: Oliver Cooper (Costa), Thomas Mann (Thomas) and Jonathan Daniel Brown (J.D.) in ‘Project X’
Photo credit: Beth Dubber for Warner Bros. Pictures

The three lead party hosts with the most – Thomas Mann, Oliver Cooper and Jonathan Daniel Brown – got their parts through different means. Mann is a veteran of a couple of movies, Cooper a stand-up comedian who used his resources to secure an audition and Brown was discovered through the internet. They all gathered last week in Chicago to talk about “Project X.”

HollywoodChicago.com: Which behavior or stunt that any of you did in the film was totally opposite to who you really are, as in “I couldn’t imagine doing that in a million years”?

Oliver Cooper: I guess humping everything, I did a lot of humping in this movie. That is totally against my normal protocol. [laughs]

Thomas Mann: I wish I was the type of a guy who would flip off a news helicopter. But I’ve haven’t had the opportunity.

Jonathan Daniel Brown: I don’t think I did enough in this movie. [laughs]

Mann: We all played versions of ourselves.

Cooper: Jonathan and I are twisted versions of each other in this film.

Brown: Not really, don't bring me down.

Cooper: Yes, god forbid that you would be associated with my most evil character in party movie history. [laughs] People might want to party with Costa, but nobody wants to invite him over.

Mann: It was harder for me to play the darker side of things, like when my parents call, because the environment on the set was so much fun.

Cooper: Thomas had the hardest job on the movie, just because he had to be the glue in the midst of all the craziness.

HollywoodChicago.com: Let's talk weird party guests. If you guys could invite someone as your 'plus-one' who is deceased, who would it be?

Cooper: Do you mean dragging them from the grave? [laughs]

Brown: I would bring Winston Churchill. The man certainly could drink. Add Franklin and Teddy Roosevelt, and we'd have a historical party. [laughs]

Mann: I would add in Thomas Jefferson, because he was a ladies man.

Brown: I was thinking if I brought Marilyn Monroe, there would be a slight chance I could hook up with her. Nah, she would go off with someone else. Probably JFK.

HollywoodChicago.com: Oliver, you have one of the more harsher characters in the film. What do think Costa has in his personality that still makes him likable?

Cooper: He's likable because he's a heightened version of people you know, that 'guy' in high school. It works as a movie character, because you can tolerate him, and just hopefully it's funny. Sometimes it's hard to watch myself because I'm so mean, but he has his moments, especially when he admits he can't fix it at some point.



Everyone's in the Pool in 'Project X'
Photo credit: Beth Dubber for Warner Bros. Pictures

HollywoodChicago.com: What was the line between performing and actually participating in the party?

Mann: It was blurred, because you can't fake fun. The DJ would play between takes, and everybody was just dancing. The extras were great, they were the real party.

Brown: The director, Nima Nourizadeh, hand-picked all 300 of the extras in the movie, he was just looking for interesting people that would surprise him.

Cooper: His genius is attention to detail, and all the party stuff is so detailed and specific, which is why it comes to life. Everyone there is alive.

HollywoodChicago.com: Was there any on-set chaos or bad behavior?

Brown: Well, we weren't drunk. They gave us a choice between apple juice or O'Doul's. There were extras that were fired for bringing in real booze or getting stoned. They would just come back the next day. [laughs]

HollywoodChicago.com: One of the best scenes in the film is the exchange with the Dad at the end. What piece of advice or conversation sticks out for each of you in regards to your parents and being a teen?

Mann: I love that scene because of course the Dad is mad, but there is something else there.

Brown: I'm very close to my Mom and Dad, and I'm very bad at hiding secrets, so I'll just say it. Like I'll just go into their room in the middle of the night and say things like, 'I totally did drugs.' [laughs] It got to the point where they said, 'you really don't have to tell us that.'

Cooper: What I learned from Jonathan, is just to speak your mind.

HollywoodChicago.com: Since you're working with older guys in the production and writing crew, who was providing the party zeitgeist on the set?

Brown: The director Nima is in his early thirties, and he had a cool vibe. Todd Phillips has a keen eye for comedy and Joel Silver is great with action. In a way, we had it all covered, and it blended it into a soup of a delicious, awesome movie.

Cooper: Nima knows what's hip, and happening, and has it nailed. What stuck out for me was how he related to what is going on now.



Men of "Project X" in Chicago, February 23rd, 2012
Photo credit: Patrick McDonald for HollywoodChicago.com

Mann: There were some great moments that I think only Nima could come up with, like the girl peeing in the driveway, which was real. That's the kind of stuff that happens at parties.

HollywoodChicago.com: Thomas, your first major film was last year's 'It's Kind of a Funny Story.' What was the story behind how you got that role and what kind of atmosphere is on the set of a Ryan Fleck/Anna Boden film?

Mann: It was great experience on a huge and crazy movie. I am a big fan of Zach Galifianakis and got to meet him, which was great. Ryan and Anna are the most creative and laid-back people, and make a great team.

HollywoodChicago.com: Do you appreciate the professional party life more, now that you've done this film?

Brown: If you're doing this all the time, you are an a**hole. [laughs]

Mann: We're the underdogs, we're just doing this for one epic night. It's not the Jersey Shore.

HollywoodChicago.com: You mentioned that you auditioned for the roles in different ways, how was that process?

Brown: Thomas was in through an agent, Oliver through connections and I went on the internet. But after we got into the room it was nine auditions over three months. They needed to find the perfect chemistry.

Cooper: They had to be careful with casting. It was kind of risky to even make the film, it was high school kids at a party, with real partying.

HollywoodChicago.com: How do you think this film will influence the party culture in high school?

Mann: It does make you want to go to a party, but I think it discourages you from wanting to throw a party. [laughs]

"Project X" opens everywhere in Chicago on March 2nd. Featuring Thomas Mann, Oliver Cooper, Jonathan Daniel Brown, Dax Flame, Peter Mackenzie and Pete Gardner. Screenplay by Matt Drake and Michael Bacall. Directed by Nima Nourizadeh. Rated "R"



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