

Interview: Director Brian Jun Uncovers ‘Joint Body’ at Midwest Independent Film Festival

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CHICAGO – Director Brian Jun is a veteran filmmaker, having completed his third feature, and this will be the second time his work has been showcased at the Midwest Independent Film Festival. His film “Joint Body” will be at the festival on Tuesday, May 1st, at the Landmark Century Cinema in Chicago.

Continuing his exploration of gritty, working class level narratives, “Joint Body” is about Nick (Mark Pellegrino), a man paroled from jail in exchange for signing over the custody rights to his ex-wife for his daughter. He develops a relationship with Michelle (Alicia Witt of “Friday Night Lights”), a lonely and troubled woman who forces him to re-evaluate his freedom as he faces the demons from his past.



Freedom: Mark Pellegrino (Nick) on the Outside in ‘Joint Body’
Photo credit: Level 33 Entertainment

Brian Jun has two previous films, “Steel City” (2006) and “The Coverup” (2008), and has worked with familiar TV and film actors such as Raymond Barry (“Justified”), Alison Brie (“Community”), Jamie Anne Allman (“The Killing”), America Ferrera (“Ugly Betty”) and John Savage (“The Deer Hunter”). “Steel City” played the Midwest Independent Film Festival in 2007, and the festival continues its tradition of being year ‘round – happening every first Tuesday of the month – and showcasing the best of films originating from the Midwest.

HollywoodChicago.com got the opportunity to speak with Brian Jun via phone, and he related his adventures in filmmaking, and his latest film, “Joint Body.”

HollywoodChicago.com: This is your second film that has played the Midwest Independent Film Festival. What have you learned about

filmmaking from the first film ‘Steel City’ to the current ‘Joint Body’?

Brian Jun: I’ve learned that the business gets progressively harder and harder, and that’s the truth. I fought so hard to get my first movie made, and it was relatively successful. I was very young when I made it and it played at a bunch of film festivals, premiered at Sundance, and I thought my path would be a little bit different than it has been. And although the business is getting progressively more difficult, at the same time I’ve learned how passionate I am about filmmaking. I sleep well at nights because I know I’m following my true path.

HollywoodChicago.com: Your films are about relationships, tested by the circumstances in your stories. What fascinates you about how people react in a crisis, and how do you see that fascination playing out in the film ‘Joint Body’?

Jun: I think a lot of people in a crisis, depending on their backgrounds, tend to isolate themselves. In ‘Joint Body,’ you have a central character who has just spent seven years in jail, he’s become isolated from his brother and separated from his father, who has passed away during his time in jail. And one of the conditions of his parole is that he has to give up parental rights to his teenage daughter. He trades that for freedom. He makes a tremendous sacrifice, and I think the whole film is about that decision he has made.

HollywoodChicago.com: Also, in all three of your features there is a sense of a test between law and criminality. In your opinion, do we as a society demand too much from our legal system, from the cops to the prosecutor/defense system?

Jun: I have very little firsthand experience with the legal system. I’ve never done any hard time in jail like many of my characters have, but at the same time I come from a family dominated by police officers and a few politicians. So I think we demand just the right amount from the system, and the people who give back to society, even if it’s marginally, reap the benefits of the legal system, much more than people who only need it when they need it – they only look to the legal system when they’re in trouble, and forget about it if things are going well. I think we need to appreciate the system in both good and bad times.

HollywoodChicago.com: How does your Midwestern locations become characters in your film. What is it about the landscape of the Midwest that lends itself to the type of films that you write?

Jun: I think there is a sense of forgiveness that Midwesterners have, that people from the big city don’t carry. I really like that sensibility, and even as I’m talking to you from up in Northern Michigan, I feel it.



Alicia Witt (Michelle) in a Scene From ‘Joint Body’
Photo credit: Level 33 Entertainment

HollywoodChicago.com: What kind of relationship will you establish with your lead actor or actors in relationship to communicating what you want from a performance, since you are the writer and have envisioned the final product? How did that process work for the film ‘Joint Body’?

Jun: First and foremost, I want to make sure the lead actor really understands what the story is about – that they understand why I’m making the film and what inspired me to write the story. There are certain plot points and decisions the characters make, and as long as my actors are in mutual agreement as to why they are doing the things they are doing, plus how the relationships play out, I think it takes away the question of ‘are we doing this correctly?’

In the case of ‘Joint Body’ and Mark Pellegrino playing the ex-con, I just wanted him to understand the sense of loss that this character was experiencing and the isolation. Once he grasped that and was able to carry that around with him, he walked around with such confidence and power, I didn’t have to say much to him on the set, to be honest with you.

HollywoodChicago.com: Are you a backstory guy? Do you give your actors extensive backstories on your characters?

Jun: No, I give them very little. I don't know why, and I don't know if that's the right or wrong way, but in my experience I just try to focus on the story we're telling. I don't want to tell an actor how to do their job, you don't need to beat them up with extensive details.

HollywoodChicago.com: You've had the privilege of featuring many up-and-coming actors in your films, including Jamie Anne Allman, America Ferrera, Alison Brie, Mark Pellegrino and Alicia Witt. What do you think draws this type of talent to your screenplays, and whose career have you been most satisfied to see blossom?



Director Brian Jun of 'Joint Body'
Photo credit: 40/West

Jun: In the case of 'Steel City,' I think people were attracted by a real blue collar story. At the time we were casting in the fall of 2004, I think I was lucky, because there weren't many blue collar, salt-of-the-earth scripts around Hollywood. And when 'Steel City' got into Sundance, that immediately gave me a lot of credibility to get the people I've cast since. The actor who has impressed me the most – and this might surprise you – is the veteran Raymond Barry.

HollywoodChicago.com: Independent film can often be about making adjustments on the fly. Can you give me an example of something you wrote in a screenplay that was unworkable once you got to production, and what did you do to adjust for it?

Jun: There was a situation in 'Steel City,' where we were suppose to have a big party scene with background actors, to make our lead character very much out of place because he was outside his environment. Unfortunately, nobody showed up and we couldn't do the scene as written. So I decided to write a very intimate moment between him and his girlfriend in a pickup truck. We just went outside and shot this thing with Tom Guiry and America Ferrera on the fly. That ended up being one of the best scenes in the movie, and it was a quick compromise and a filler.

HollywoodChicago.com: Who are your director influences, and give me an example of an homage you made to one of them in any of your films?

Jun: I love John Schlesinger, who did 'Midnight Cowboy,' and Todd Field of 'In the Bedroom.' But one homage I did was to British director Ken Loach, based on his movie 'Sweet Sixteen' [2002]. There was a scene of a beat-up teenager, sitting in a kitchen by himself. I definitely did a little bit of that in 'Steel City' with the lead character, after getting into a violent fight with his brother. I saw 'Sweet Sixteen' right before I shot my movie, and it had a profound effect on me.

The film "Joint Body" will be shown at the Midwest Independent Film Festival on Tuesday, May 1st at 6pm, at the Landmark Century Cinema, 2828 N. Clark in Chicago. [Click here](#) [17]for information and tickets. Featuring Alicia Witt, Mark Pellegrino, Ryan O'Nan, Bellamy Young and Tom Guiry. Written and directed by Brian Jun. Not rated.



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