

Interview: Director Colin Trevorrow Warns ‘Safety Not Guaranteed’

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on June 14, 2012 - 9:54am

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CHICAGO – Colin Trevorrow’s “Safety Not Guaranteed” is a fantastic blend of sci-fi, romance, and comedy. In other words, it’s the kind of movie they don’t make that often any more but they virtually mastered back in the ’80s with the films of Robert Zemeckis and Steven Spielberg (both clear influences on this work). It’s smart, delicate, and one of the best directorial debuts of 2012. Trevorrow sat down with us in downtown Chicago recently and proved to be as interesting an interview as his clever film would suggest that he would be.

HOLLYWOODCHICAGO.COM: How involved were you with the writing process [Derek Connolly is credited with the screenplay]?

COLIN TREVORROW: Derek wrote a draft. We developed together. We’ve been writing partners for sometime. I’m more structural, architectural. Derek is much more inspired. We have a process where those two skill sets meet and you hopefully end up with something that feels inspired but also has momentum. Something like this very slowly draws you in. I went in the middle last night. Sometimes I’ll go in the middle and feel like it’s not working. The first act is very much comedy and if you step in after that tonal shift into something more rich. Is this funny? What’s going on?

HOLLYWOODCHICAGO.COM: Where’s the shift?

TREVORROW: There’s a home video where he says the mission is about regret. From there, we head into a different zone.



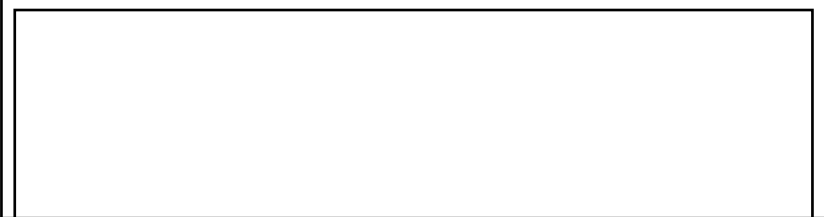
Safety Not Guaranteed
Photo credit: Film District

HOLLYWOODCHICAGO.COM: Do you write directly for any of the actors?

TREVORROW: We wrote the script directly for Aubrey.

HOLLYWOODCHICAGO.COM: Why?

TREVORROW: It was more of an inspiration thing. I feel like she represents a subset of young girls right now who don’t really have a representative in film or television. There’s a large number of them and they feel very disaffected and cynical and left out. They feel like there’s nothing really there for them because everyone ten years older than them is still trying to get a handle on what they’re going to do with their lives and some kind of steady existence. There’s a...apathy is not the right word...the generation that came up in the ’90s — in the ’90s, we were all doing really well. If you were a child during that time, you can get to now and be like, “What the f**k?!?”





Safety Not Guaranteed
Photo credit: Film District

HOLLYWOODCHICAGO.COM: How old is Aubrey?

TREVORROW: 26, I think. Ten years younger than us.

HOLLYWOODCHICAGO.COM: They grew up as the bubble was growing.

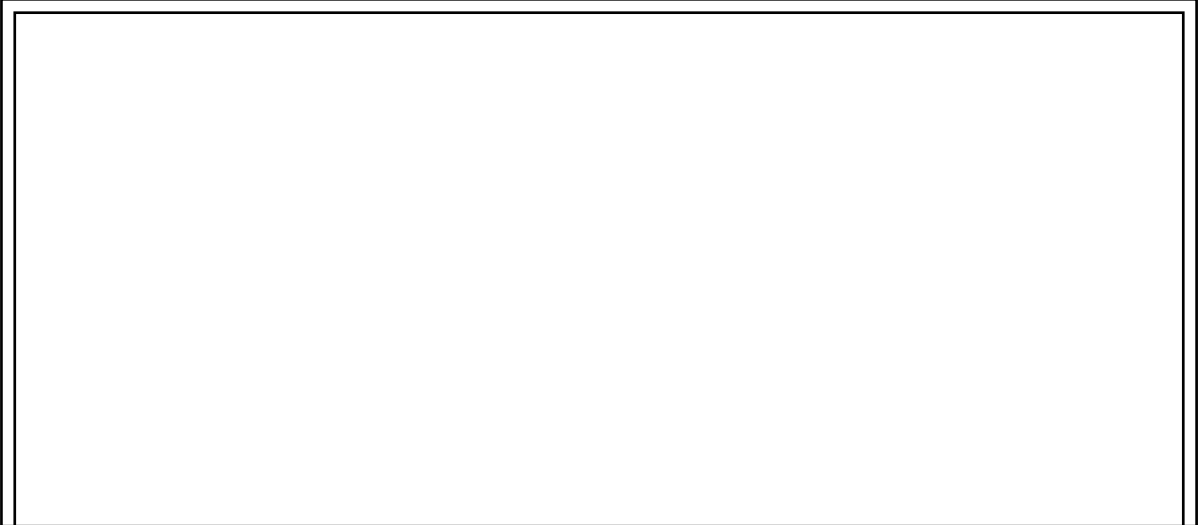
TREVORROW: That’s right. I wouldn’t apply this to Aubrey as a person but as a character there was almost a parenting style that said “Follow your dreams. Do what you want. If you try hard enough, you can make it.” And I think there’s a lot of disappointment out there as a generation realizes there are only a couple of slots in the NBA. There only a couple big movie stars. What’s my life about? I was promised my life could be like this. Which is why we tell our son, “Don’t dream. You’ll only be disappointed.” (*Laughs.*)

HOLLYWOODCHICAGO.COM: I’ve liked Aubrey before but she shows a range here that I wasn’t sure she had. Why were you confident she had that range?

TREVORROW: There’s something behind her eyes that is going on. She doesn’t really do much on “Parks and Recreation.” She’s great and they’ve allowed her to branch out a bit. She built up a fan base just by existing to a certain extent. Knowing Aubrey personally, this character needed to be someone that you could buy as having a wall up. Acting a wall is a challenge. We went in with certain [audience] preconceptions about Aubrey that allow us to just show her in a couple of very brief scenes. Using those preconceptions, we could slowly dismantle it piece by piece.

HOLLYWOODCHICAGO.COM: I get the feeling that she wants to believe in the ad more quickly than most people would. Why is Darius so quick to WANT to believe?

TREVORROW: For that character and for me, there’s a moment where the ad goes up in that room. From a plot standpoint, you could say that it’s a character whose life went on a different trajectory on one day [when her mother died]. For people who look back on a series of mistakes, time travel might not be as attractive as it is to someone who looks back on a single mistake, feels responsible for it, and wants to change one thing.





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Photo credit: Film District

HOLLYWOODCHICAGO.COM: Let’s say you’re the intern in that room. Are you excited for that ad? Are you more Jake Johnson or Aubrey Plaza?

TREVORROW: I’m the redhead who doesn’t get chosen for the assignment. (*Laughs.*) I’ve always been obsessed with time travel. It’s something I love both by coincidence and I’ve written a few studio films about time travel — all more complex in their time travel than this one. What attracts me to it most is the emotional needs that time travel addresses in people. She recognizes another person who doesn’t really fit into this world. We always saw her as “Emo Don Quixote.” And yet we never really wanted to hit any of those bits too hard.

HOLLYWOODCHICAGO.COM: I heard that you had multiple endings. I won’t spoil the ending here but I found it essential to the film’s success. I’m surprised there were ever alternatives.

TREVORROW: The one ending is what I wanted. Because I felt like we earned it. It happened right at the end. We got in Sundance with a different ending. We were accepted with a different ending. It was the final major decision. Obviously, it changes the entire context and theme of the film.

[Sadly, some other discussion about the thematic importance of the ending has been redacted due to spoilers. Maybe we’ll update the interview later but it’s a film that you should appreciate without spoilers.]

HOLLYWOODCHICAGO.COM: Star Mark Duplass is a writer (“Cyrus,” “Jeff, Who Lives at Home”). Do you let him offer his screenwriting advice? Does he do so or is he more of just an actor?



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Photo credit: Film District

TREVORROW: He offers it but in the context of his performance. He’s making choices and really directing himself. He comes knowing exactly what his character believes and wants. He found moments by living in that guy’s skin. Aubrey was very prepared. She did a lot of work beforehand. I gave them room to live and breathe but we shot in 32 locations in 22 days. We moved more than once a day. There was only a certain amount of time to get anything. We didn’t have that luxury. But I would be very judicious to find moments to let it breathe. Aubrey and Mark in the car, after the heist, that was all them. The majority of the improv in the movie is in dramatic moments. The comedy was all scripted. The whole video piece that we used in the middle and the end was supposed to be for the EPK. He was just supposed to be Kenneth all day. And we just fished through that footage and built two very crucial moments in the film. Improv. I didn’t want them to improvise jokes for the sake of jokes.

HOLLYWOODCHICAGO.COM: Are there any movies or filmmakers that inspired this one?

TREVORROW: It’s very obvious that I come from the Donner/Spielberg/Zemeckis ’80s. “The Goonies” has a realism and a naturalism to it. The characters are not wealthy and they’re struggling in ways that a lot of movie character don’t nowadays. So there was a naturalism and an honesty to Spielberg’s stuff. Everyone is so scrappy in “Jaws.” “Close Encounters.” “E.T.” I knew it would be obvious where my influences were so I wanted to bring Mumblecore and this Aubrey Plaza thing to it. It’s almost anachronistic. Where I come from is well-represented in the movie and yet you’ve also got this other really cool other stuff.

HOLLYWOODCHICAGO.COM: It’s not blatant. It’s not “Super 8.”

TREVORROW: No. And I didn’t want to do that. I respect that movie. But I wanted to do something like how in Spielberg’s stuff you can see John Ford and David Lean’s stuff. I wanted to create something where it’s very obvious who I grew up watching.

See Colin Trevorrow’s inspirations when “Safety Not Guaranteed” opens in theaters tomorrow, June 15, 2012 and come back tomorrow for a full review.



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