

Interview: Director Robert Lorenz Pitches ‘Trouble with the Curve’

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CHICAGO – Baseball gets the metaphor-for-life treatment once again in “Trouble with the Curve,” starring Clint Eastwood and Amy Adams. Eastwood plays an aging baseball scout estranged from his daughter (Adams) and seeks redemption in both arenas of his life. Making his directorial debut is Robert Lorenz, who has worked with Eastwood since “Bridges of Madison County.”

Lorenz is from the Chicagoland area, and made the big move to Los Angeles in the late 1980s, with no connections or job opportunities. A fluke answer to a job ad led to his first feature “Femme Fatale” (1991), and a string of assistant director jobs until “Bridges of Madison County” (1995). From there, he became one of the right hand men in Eastwood’s production company, either fulfilling the capacity of first assistant director (“Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil”) or producer (“Flags of Our Fathers/”Letters from Iwo Jima”). “Trouble with the Curve” is a new experience in his connection to Eastwood, by actually directing his friend and mentor.



Clint Eastwood (Gus) and Justin Timberlake (Johnny) Bond in ‘Trouble with the Curve’
Photo credit: Warner Bros. Pictures

HollywoodChicago.com interviewed Robert Lorenz during his promotional swing through the Windy City. He talked about composing a baseball movie, his life in the Clint Eastwood business and yes, the infamous chair.

HollywoodChicago.com: ‘Trouble with the Curve’ is an unabashedly old-fashion story about baseball and redemption. What appealed to you most in Randy Brown’s script that you wanted to make sure was emphasized on the screen?

Robert Lorenz For me it was the powerful relationship between Gus [Eastwood] and Mickey [Amy Adams], with all the different layers that went along with that. Gus is an aging guy, and his daughter Mickey is now having to take care of him. He’s a guy stuck in his ways, in terms of his relationship with her and baseball. His inability to change jeopardizes both his career in the game and his interaction with his daughter, he needs to learn to adapt. That’s a classic theme, where you reach a point in your life where priorities need to be re-evaluated, and for him and her it’s about getting away from their careers and toward their relationship.

HollywoodChicago.com: You've worked with Clint Eastwood on seven films as first assistant director, and the main producer on so many other films, what did you learn most from him about the rigors of filmmaking that proved valuable in this solo directing debut?

Lorenz: In a broad sense, it's about approaching the process with confidence, which is what he does. I see many filmmakers get bogged down with insecurity, and that wastes a lot of time and energy, because they start chasing something they're not sure of. The way that Clint has always done it is to make a plan and stick with it, march forward and don't let distractions stop you. That's what I try to do. It's been a great film school.

HollywoodChicago.com: Baseball as a metaphor for life is a time honored theme in the movies. How do you think baseball serves as a metaphor in 'Trouble with the Curve'?

Lorenz: As I described earlier, life throws you a curve and you have to learn to deal with it. Gus has reached a point in his life where everything is changing, because his age caught up with him. And Mickey has her career, but something changes in her father, so she gets thrown a curve. You have to figure out how to adapt and move on.

HollywoodChicago.com: You worked with two of the hotter actors currently operating, Justin Timberlake and Amy Adams. What impressed you about their approach to their characters, and what advice about those characters did you give them, that you think comes out in the finished product?

Lorenz: They have different styles, and are both great to work with. Amy came completely prepared, even down to the pronunciation of all the baseball names she has to say. She knew everything, sometimes more than me, which was a little unsettling. [laughs] She was also extremely accommodating if I asked for an adjustment, I really enjoyed working with her.

Justin likes to improvise, to make the role more of his own and to craft it with his ideas. That was great, and the reason I cast him. He has great energy, comedic timing and charm, and that's what I wanted for the role.

HollywoodChicago.com: Did you have to reel him in sometimes?

Lorenz: At times, yes. But that's the way he likes to work, to try things and get feedback. Throwing out different jokes and ideas, sometimes I would say go for it and other times don't do it. [laughs] Sometimes I had to remind him he was playing the role of a baseball scout.

HollywoodChicago.com: Given your long history with Mr. Eastwood, how did you approach him as an actor on 'Trouble with the Curve,' when you wanted something else from him in a scene, or did you leave that decision to him?

Lorenz: Well...[laughs]. It was intimidating at first, even though he's been my friend for years. But it's Clint Eastwood the actor, and his style as a director is to let actors do their thing, and make adjustments as necessary. I tried to treat him the same way, and got his confidence more as the filming went on. I know that he was observing carefully during the first few days to see if I could pull it off. As he saw my confidence, he got more comfortable in the give-and-take, and in asking what should he do in certain scenes.

HollywoodChicago.com: As a director on your first film, what there any touches you used for the film in your decision-making that was an homage to a director that you have admired previously and what was it?

Lorenz: I'm always looking to steal from others. [laughs] Anything that works. I went through some old baseball movies to check out the angles that directors have used previously, and cherry-picked some stuff that I thought worked well. As far as individual styles, nothing specific. I tried to have my own style, even beyond what I know that Clint doesn't do.



Robert Lorenz Directs Amy Adams and Clint Eastwood in ‘Trouble with the Curve’
Photo credit: Warner Bros. Pictures

HollywoodChicago.com: How did you land with Clint Eastwood as an assistant director and producer? What encounter got you that first job on ‘Bridges of Madison County’?

Lorenz: Like you get any job in Hollywood, networks and connections. I had worked with a guy in Canada who had worked with Clint on ‘Unforgiven.’ He got a call for Bridges, but couldn’t do it, and recommended me. I started as a second assistant director, and got promoted. Since I’ve always wanted to direct, I’ve always approached the first assistant job through the eyes of the director – as in what is he looking to accomplish. He became aware of that, and me.

HollywoodChicago.com: What are the specific duties of a first assistant director, as you define it?

Lorenz: The assistant director handles all the logistics, organizing the cast, crew, the equipment and devising the schedule for the day. Ideally, the more you can take off the director’s plate, the more he can interact with the actors and key producing personnel like the Director of Photography. Then they can focus on the individual shots and getting it done.

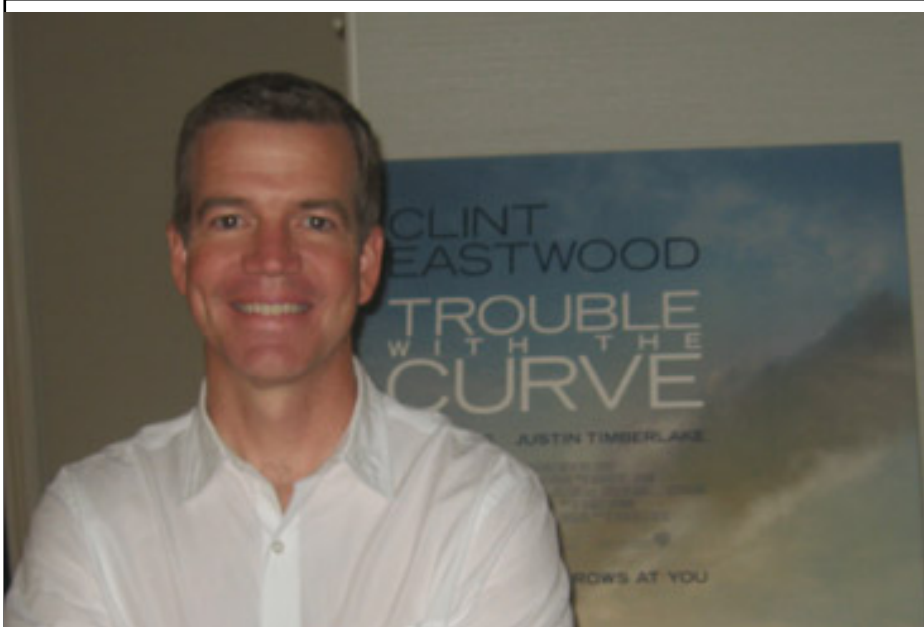
HollywoodChicago.com: Who was your AD, and how did you get along?

Lorenz: It was David Bernstein, who had worked under me and others in that capacity. I kind of make it tough on assistant directors, because I did it for so long, but at the same time I have great respect for them, because I know how hard the job can be.

HollywoodChicago.com: You are described on IMDB as the overseer of all aspects of Mr. Eastwood’s film productions with Malpaso. How did you evolve into that role and what is it about your relationship with Eastwood that has allowed such responsibility?

Lorenz: I touched on that a little bit, by thinking like he does as a director. But Clint has a history of promoting within the ranks, when he sees people are doing a good job, and also take advantage of the fact he can bring them in at a cheaper rate as they’re starting out. [laughs] For me, it was very fulfilling to get more responsibility and to do more. We both got something out of the relationship.

HollywoodChicago.com: You left the Chicagoland area and moved to Los Angeles at a young age. What was the origin of your first on-set credit in Los Angeles. What connection or happenstance got you the gig?



Robert Lorenz in Chicago, Sept. 4, 2012
Photo credit: Patrick McDonald for HollywoodChicago.com

Lorenz: I would have gladly stayed in Chicago, I love the area. But the business was in Los Angeles, and I had the choice to go there or New York. I chose Los Angeles because I figured if I ran out of money I could sleep on the beach, which is more difficult to do in New York. [laughs] I knew a few people who knew some people, but nobody directly. My first job was going into a job board at UCLA, and answering a card asking for production help on an independent film. They were very excited to learn I could load a film camera. I worked for them, met some people, and that got me on my way.

HollywoodChicago.com: Which collaboration with Clint Eastwood, as a subject and production, still resonates with you today?

Lorenz: ‘Mystic River’ is my favorite film that I’ve worked with him on, because our vision for the film was similar. I felt like we were in sync on that film, and it turned out like it would have if I had directed it. That was a great experience.

HollywoodChicago.com: I have to ask – what compelled Clint Eastwood, in your perspective, to make the speech to the chair at the Republican convention?

Lorenz: I have no idea. I haven’t talk to him since the convention. You’ll have to ask him yourself.

HollywoodChicago.com: I knew you were going to say that. [laughs]

“Trouble with the Curve” opens everywhere on September 21st. Featuring Clint Eastwood, Amy Adams, Justin Timberlake, John Goodman, Matthew Lillard and Robert Patrick. Screenplay by Randy Brown. Directed by Robert Lorenz. Rated “R”



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