CHICAGO – One of the most anticipated gatherings in the local acting community is the annual Chicago Acting in Film Meetup (CAFM) Holiday Party, and this year’s bash is moving to downtown digs at the Hard Rock Hotel on December 10th, 2012. The co-directors of CAFM are actors Grace McPhillips and Steve Scholz.

CAFM was founded by Grace McPhillips five years ago, and has expanded every year since. The membership has a growing and diverse range of employment opportunities in the Windy City, including TV shows (“Chicago Fire”), commercials, films and web series in production. CAFM has established itself as a vital co-mentoring and educational group for working actors in Chicago, with monthly meetings and seminars. Their upcoming holiday event is open to the public, as Grace noted, “Everyone’s invited!”

The co-directors of CAFM, McPhillips and Steve Scholz, are veteran actors and performers in Chicago. Scholz has a deep theater and Chicago improv background, including The Second City Conservatory, Annoyance Theater and iO Chicago. He has appeared in feature and short films including “Mr. Gloom” (with McPhillips) and “Manipulating Life.” Grace McPhillips hails from Montgomery, Alabama, and moved to Chicago specifically to pursue a career in independent film, TV, voiceover and stage. The talented actor is adding writer and producer to her resume, having worn all three hats in the award-winning 2012 short film, “Fitting.” She is currently in pre-production for a feature film called “Beautiful Little Fools.”

The CAFM representatives sat down with HollywoodChicago.com, to talk about the organization, the state of the Chicago actor, their individual careers and the holiday party at the Hard Rock Hotel on December 10th.

HollywoodChicago.com: You are expanding substantially the CAFM Holiday party this year. What was behind the expansion and what benefits do you foresee in that expansion?
Interview: Grace McPhillips, Steve Scholz on Chicago Film Holiday Event
Published on HollywoodChicago.com (http://www.hollywoodchicago.com)

Grace McPhillips: We wanted to make it sexier.

Steve Scholz: We also wanted to go into a bigger space, because we outgrown our previous space, as we found out. We had 255 people at last year’s event, which pushed the fire code of the previous place. We considered some downtown venues, but Hard Rock Hotel came through.

McPhillips: And they sweetened the deal by offering a winter getaway for the grand prize in the raffle.

HollywoodChicago.com: Coming to the end of the year, what characteristics has defined the state of the film industry in Chicago and the film actor in 2012?

McPhillips: It's definitely been a busier year in TV and film for sure. Many of our members got opportunities to be on ‘Boss,’ ‘Chicago Fire,’ ‘The Mob Doctor,’ ‘Underemployed’ and with ‘The Onion’ network. That was pretty unusual, I can’t remember that many shows shooting here, at least in the last few years. The film numbers have been lower, and I’m not entirely sure why, except maybe the economy.

Scholz: There has been student projects, web series, film shorts and self productions in our group. In many instances, these have gone on to festivals or have gotten distribution, but as Grace said it’s not as though any big films have come through.

McPhillips: And besides big studio pictures, there hasn’t been any high end independents, in the $500,000 or less range.

HollywoodChicago.com: Grace, you have seen the organization you started expand exponentially in the last four years. What has satisfied you the most regarding the feedback you’ve received about the meetup and its advantages for the film community?

McPhillips: We’ve received positive feedback it on two different levels – inside and outside the group. Outside of the group, the feedback has come from the casting directors, who have found that our self-mentoring in business etiquette and demeanor has been noticed, and they think it is great what we’re doing.

Within the community, the group is grateful that we’ve promoted a greater understanding of the industry, and have also given guidelines to prevent idea theft.

HollywoodChicago.com: Every year we talk about viability for establishing a true film identity for Chicago. In both your opinions, is that still possible, and what factors down the road are necessary for that vision to come to fruition?

Scholz: I believe it is possible, and I think what will distinguish Chicago is the pride we take in the work that we do. Chicago has a thriving theater scene – both dramatic and comedic – with a whole bunch of actors that also get pulled into pilot season and commercials. What happens is these outside forces come in, get the benefit from our community, and then leave as the project ends. What I would like to see is have the community reinvest in itself, and figure out ways in which we can offer some sustainability for the entire production community, actors included. To get beyond just outsiders coming in to give us work, we’re going to have to create our own work.

McPhillips: And so many of the head writers on shows originally came from Chicago. How can we keep them here? That’s the million dollar question.
HollywoodChicago.com: Grace, you are still raising funding for your latest film production. What is the status of that production and what can we expect in 2013 for your career?

McPhillips: We are still raising funds, yes, but we have secured international distribution. It’s important to me to line up the post production dots, before we even start shooting. I’ve seen one too many producers get divorced, hate life and go bankrupt because they go full force into shooting, but lack the funds for everything afterward. As soon as the film is in the can, the shelf life begins.

HollywoodChicago.com: What is the project and how would you describe it?

McPhillips: The feature film that I’m actively in pre-production with is called ‘Beautiful Little Fools.’ It’s a southern fried comedy mixed with the dramatic story in the life of Zelda Fitzgerald [author F. Scott Fitzgerald’s wife].

HollywoodChicago.com: How did your award-winning film ‘Fitting,’ help in propelling ‘Beautiful Little Fools’?

McPhillips: ‘Fitting’ gives me credibility when I walk into a room. Since it was an award-winning short, it makes me more of a legitimate filmmaker.

HollywoodChicago.com: Steve, you have had a long career here in The Second City style of improv and comedy. How much experience have you had with the industry in Los Angeles, and why did you choose, in that sense, stay in Chicago?

Scholz: I’d like to think rather that I just hadn’t yet taken the step to Los Angeles. [laughs] Part of it is that I enjoy being in Chicago, I like this environment. Many friends and performance acquaintances have move to both coasts. I’ve been contributing to a weekly podcast in L.A. called ‘The Movie Guys,’ and I like the fact I can be here and contribute while not having to be there.

HollywoodChicago.com: Are you of the philosophy, ‘don’t go to L.A., let L.A. call you’?

Scholz: That was my philosophy for the longest time, because if I auditioned for something here and it brought me out there, perhaps that would be the way to go. But as I realize how much the industry has changed, even in the four years I’ve been part of the Meetup, productions can be shot anywhere. Los Angeles is not necessarily the place where everything is set now. There is a potential for actors to do things elsewhere. I don’t feel like I need to be in Los Angeles, to do what I would do if I were there.

HollywoodChicago.com: We still see a substantial flight to Los Angeles of either top drawer or ambitious actors from Chicago. Based on your observations in the meet-up situation of the last four years, what does the Chicago actor bring to L.A. now that maybe he or she didn’t bring them in the 1990s?

Scholz: I would say business savvy. There is a greater awareness, in large part because due to Grace’s efforts and the Meetup in general to let actors know what the entertainment industry is about. We’ve also had panels about splitting time between L.A. and Chicago. We brought in a Los Angeles agent for a seminar, to give reality checks regarding making the transition to Los Angeles. It’s education that many of our membership used before they moved.

McPhillips: Specifically with our group, I’ve heard that we’re the hardest working actors, we’re prepared and basically we’ve got our sh*t together.

Scholz: We’re not just networking, we’re actually finding the work, we like getting done to business as well as throwing a party.

McPhillips: And one thing I’ve observed in running the group, we have a lot of people come back to Chicago.

HollywoodChicago.com: What has been the biggest change in Chicago Acting in Film Meetup in 2012?

McPhillips: This year, becoming a 501 c 3 non-profit group, and establishing a working budget. The one thing we want to do with all that is showcase our member’s work. Because there is plenty of opportunities to see theater in Chicago, we want to start the same opportunities for seeing local film actors.
The 4th Annual “Chicago Acting in Film Meetup” Holiday Party will be at the Hard Rock Hotel in Chicago on December 10th, 2012, starting at 7pm. Click here for more information and to purchase tickets to the event.

By PATRICK MCDONALD
Senior Staff Writer
HollywoodChicago.com
pat@hollywoodchicago.com

© 2012 Patrick McDonald, HollywoodChicago.com

Source URL (retrieved on Oct 18 2017 - 11:33am):

Links:
[15] mailto:pat@hollywoodchicago.com
[16] http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/about#PAT