

Interviews: Three Filmmakers at the 2015 Chicago Critics Film Festival

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CHICAGO – One of the great benefits at the Chicago Critics Film Festival is the opportunity to meet the filmmakers, for both Q&A after their film screenings and one-on-one opportunities in the Music Box Theatre lounge. Like these three – Kris Swanberg (“Unexpected”), Kurt Kuenne (“Batkid Begins”) and Noah Pritzker (“Quitters”).

HollywoodChicago.com also got a chance to talk to the three filmmakers on the Red Carpet, who all have created uniquely styled movie projects.



Kris Swanberg, Director of “Unexpected”

“Unexpected” was an unexpected surprise at the festival, a low key gem and slice-of-life, depicting two women (portrayed by Cobie Smulders and Gail Bean) who have surprise pregnancies, and are forced to deal with the issues surrounding the socio-economic, relationship and education status during their maternity. Writer/director Kris Swanberg – who is married to director Joe Swanberg – creates a virtuous look at modern women, who are redefining their identities as mothers in a time of expansive humanist possibilities.



‘Unexpected,’ Directed by Kris Swanberg
Photo credit: Chicago Critics Film Festival

HollywoodChicago.com: You had an exceptional depiction of African American life in Chicago, and the displacement caused by their social and financial situation. What traps did you want to avoid in creating such a scenario?

Kris Swanberg: I was very aware of the class issues I was presenting, and I used to teach on the westside of Chicago [Smulders character was also a Chicago teacher], so I was hyper aware of creating a reality, without overdramatizing it. I wanted to make sure, despite the economic disadvantages, that these neighborhoods were shown to have loving families, who work and live. I’ve found that to be missing from

other media.

HollywoodChicago.com: What type of character did you want to create regarding the City of Chicago and the school closing issue – which is ripped from the headlines – that isn’t necessarily talked about elsewhere?

Swanberg: The school closings really affected those neighborhoods, and as a former teacher I wanted to make sure that it was part of the film, without it being what the film is about. It’s in the backdrop, but I wanted to ‘talk’ about it. It was important to include, because today it is part of the life in the Chicago Public School system.

HollywoodChicago.com: How did Cobie Smulders get involved in the project, and what element of Samantha do you think made her the perfect choice for the character?



Director Kris Swanberg

Photo credit: Kris Swanberg

Swanberg: I met with Cobie in Los Angeles when I was casting the film, and she really related to the script personally. She has kids, and is a working mother, and felt the same anxieties and internal conflicts that Samantha feels in the film. That really struck me, and because of that we were collaborators on the dialogue and emotional elements of the film, and she was able to bring in her own personal experiences to the role.

HollywoodChicago.com: What has your husband and director Joe taught you about filmmaking, and what have you taught him, that you think are been equally important?

Swanberg: We met in film school, so we were taking the same classes, so we learned the basics at the same time. And now we’re making films very differently – ‘Unexpected’ is a highly scripted film, and Joe of course uses more improvisations in his work. That’s an incredible style, and he’s very talented at it, but in general going the script-in-hand route is much better for me. We’re both trying to find truth and authenticity in our stories, and we’re both trying to work out our personal feelings, issues and conflicts within our films.



Kurt Kuenne, Writer & Editor of “Batkid Begins”

“Batkid Begins,” subtitled “The Wish Heard Around the World” is a glowing emotional gift within a documentary film, completing the cycle of 2013’s media sensation – the virtual closing down of the City of San Francisco, to give a cancer stricken six year-old (Miles Scott) the opportunity to be the superhero Batman for a day. Going into the details of the background of this Make-a-Wish Foundation miracle, the film is a wondrous and soaring confirmation of what can happen when a drop of goodwill becomes an ocean of connective human spirit. The documentary, directed with a sure hand by Dana Nachman, was co-written and edited by Kurt Kuenne.



'Batkid Begins: The Wish Heard Around the World,' Written and Edited by Kurt Kuenne

Photo credit: Chicago Critics Film Festival

HollywoodChicago.com: The parents of Miles Scott, AKA Batkid, are farmers. How do you think they've helped to save him, to the point in which they've made his journey to being Batkid almost inevitable?

Kurt Kuenne: They are regular and nice people, who are good parents and love their kids. Mile's mother, Natalie, was even kind of freaked out when all those people showed up, she felt like at the last minute she didn't want him to do it, from what I understand. They were extremely grateful, but want Miles to have a normal life.

HollywoodChicago.com: When you approached your interview subjects, they all seemed so enthusiastic. How was the process of gathering those interviews, in the context of your story?

Kuenne: Well, all the adults became like kids when talking about this event. In that sense, kids like this documentary. My six year old niece saw it at a festival, and she kept telling me how funny Mike [Jutan] was, as The Penguin. I think this type of emotion shines through on the screen through the people being interviewed.



Writer/Editor Kurt Kuenne

Photo credit: Warner Bros.

HollywoodChicago.com: When I was watching the film, I couldn't help but think of our current troubles in Baltimore, Ferguson, etc. How do you think the feeling of human grace in the film would apply to healing some of the divisiveness generated by those other current events?

Kuenne: I think it's great that there are time and places in the world where there is harmony between policemen and citizens. I hope this film

can give an example to how relationships can be between the two societies. I hope it’s something that continues to inspire, in regard to treating people equally, and it’s a wonderful example of the good people coming together.

HollywoodChicago.com: Finally, what moment of truth in the film do you believe is so impossible, that no one could possibly think to make it up or write it?

Kuenne: I go back to what I just said, it’s the police and the crowds cooperating together. It was about the community helping each other, to grant the wish of a boy. That to me is something that if you put it into a fictional film, no one would believe it. That was most profound to me, that the police and the citizens had a symbiosis, that I’d never seen before.

 **Director Noah Pritzker of “Quitters”**

The emotional detachment found in American society is illustrated keenly in writer/director Noah Pritzker’s “Quitters.” Following a difficult teenager named Clark (Ben Konigsberg), after his mother is checked into a rehab institution, the story uses him as a affecting spirit who contrarily influences virtually every other relationship in his life. Director Pritzker creates an atmosphere within the City of San Francisco that is decidedly different, and follows through on the foreboding energy that Clark emits, in a dark and truthful film.



‘Quitters,’ Directed by Noah Pritzker
Photo credit: Chicago Critics Film Festival

HollywoodChicago.com: I was struck by the detachment in your film. What have you observed in general in society, that inspired the mood for the film?

Noah Pritzker: I wanted to make a different kind of movie about teenage kids, who are struggling to express themselves, even if they are intelligent. When you meet intelligent kids, you think they are emotionally smart as well, and that doesn’t happen as much as other aspects of education.



Writer/Director Noah Pritzker
Photo credit: AgX Productions

HollywoodChicago.com: Do you think that our modern society, and the breakdown of family within it, also contributes to that detachment?

Pritzker: That's interesting, but I only know my experience in the creation of the film. I assume that these type of stories have been going on for ages. It was about how I grew up, and how I wanted a bit more open communication.

HollywoodChicago.com: There is a lack of innocence with these teenagers in your film. What do you think that lack of innocence does to your characters?

Pritzker: Yeah, Clark has to grow up younger than most people. He is surrounded by a bunch of 'adult kids,' who are hip to what he wants to do. In the city, those type of kids do grow up a bit more quickly.

HollywoodChicago.com: What was the greatest truth you were trying to tell in your film?

Pritzker: The greatest truth was about 'can we have sympathy, even for difficult characters?' I was very interested in exploring that reality in 'Quitters.'

The 2015 Chicago Critics Film Festival continues through May 7th, at the Music Box Theatre, 3733 North Southport, Chicago. [Click here](#) [14] for film schedules and information. [Click here](#) [15] to purchase tickets and passes.



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By [PATRICK McDONALD](#) [17]
Writer, Editorial Coordinator
HollywoodChicago.com
pat@hollywoodchicago.com [16]

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