

Interviews: Red Carpet Premiere of Made-in-Chicago Film 'Landline'

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CHICAGO – Local Chicago filmmaking got a major debut last weekend with the premiere of “Landline,” written, directed and starring Matthew Aaron. Appropriately, he got the World Champion Chicago Cubs involved, as the plot includes a PR agency pitching a new campaign to the team. The Red Carpet walk had a couple of featured performers in the film who both are Chicago natives – Jim O’Heir (“Parks and Recreation”) and comedian Jay Washington. “Landline” has a one week run at Chicago’s Music Box Theatre (details below), and on Tuesday, April 4th, 2017, the film will be released digitally through most TV and internet providers.

Ted Gout (Matthew Aaron) is happily married to his husband Jack (Patrick Hartigan), but is suffering anxiety because he needs to land the Chicago Cubs account for his PR company. Unfortunately, his work rival Barry (Chad Michael Singer) is fighting him for it, and his boss Fiona (Betsy Brandt) is turning up the pressure. This stress causes Ted to start doubting his marriage, and he plans an escape by discarding his modern technology (mobile phones, screens).



Former Chicago Cub and Hall-of-Famer Ryne Sandberg in 'Landline'

Photo credit: 1837 Productions

He starts by tossing all that stuff out, hooking up a landline phone and getting away from it all by going camping with his friends Larry (Jay Washington) and Norm (Lee Kepraos). He probably would have been better off soliciting advice from his Dad Chuck (Tom Arnold) or his Uncle Steve (Jim O’Heir), but the situation is such that only Chicago Cub Hall-of-Famer Ryne Sandberg (as himself) can resolve it.

The film celebrates not only Chicago and its beloved Cubs, but also the relationships that make up the LGBTQ community, and the day-to-day wackiness of the working world. HollywoodChicago.com was on the Red Carpet for the premiere.

★ **Jim O'Heir, Uncle Steve in "Landline"**

Jim O'Heir is a Chicago native, and cut his teeth on the improvisation comedy scene here in the 1980s and '90s. After he moved to Los Angeles, he worked steadily with character roles in films and TV, and he got a big break portraying Jerry Gergich on TV's "Parks and Recreation."



Jim O'Heir Portrays Uncle Steve in 'Landline'
Photo credit: Timothy M. Schmidt for 1837 Productions

HollywoodChicago.com: What promoted your interest in becoming a performer and what were your direct Chicago influences?

Jim O'Heir: I was on stage one day at The Second City, taking their classes, and it hit me like a bolt of lightning...this is what I want to do. Now that didn't mean it would necessarily pay my bills, but I knew I would always perform.

I started out as a disc jockey in Rensselaer, Indiana. I went from there to Chicago and The Second City. After that training, I got together with five other people from there and started a comedy group, and we never stopped – for four years, we did a new show every year. We took one of the shows and moved it to Los Angeles, and it opened up a lot of doors for me. If it wasn't for that comedy group, and The Second City, I guess I'd be selling something, because I have no other skills. [laughs] Thank God it worked out, is all I can say.

HollywoodChicago.com: I like to ask this question a lot. When was the first time in your career you looked around at where you were at and said, 'how the hell did I get here?'

O'Heir: I can tell you a kind of Chicago story about that. There is a Chicago actor named Neil Flynn, who was on the TV show 'Scrubs' and is now the Dad on 'The Middle.' We were both Chicago guys who moved to Los Angeles, I didn't know him well but we'd meet each other once a week at a Wendy's in L.A. We'd bitch about auditions, and how we had to keep plugging away. Cut to seven years later, we're both at an awards event, we spied each other there, and we literally said to each other 'how the hell did we get here?' [laughs] From Wendy's to a some swanky show business awards – that was definitely the moment.

★ **Jay Washington, Larry in "Landline"**

Another product of Chicago, Jay Washington is a hard working comic and actor, who began his entertainment career as a professional wrestler. In 2015, he had a high profile role in Spike Lee's "Chi-Raq."



Jay Washington Portrays Larry in 'Landline'

Photo credit: Timothy M. Schmidt for 1837 Productions

HollywoodChicago.com: You've had an odd road in your performance career. Can you describe it?

Jay Washington: Now I'm a stand up comedian, and that's how I morphed into acting, but I started out as a professional wrestler and did that for 16 years. I was always being an actor, in and out of the ring, so going to the next phase was fairly easy. [laughs] It literally came naturally to me once I started auditioning.

HollywoodChicago.com: You actually had a pretty upfront supporting part in Spike Lee's 'Chi-Raq.' How did you get along with him?

Washington: I had been a fan of his since I was a kid, so actually working with him was totally surreal. He has a certain attitude on the set, like a general in an army, he wanted to make sure that everything is going forward and moving like a well-oiled machine. He's a veteran filmmaker, and doesn't play any games.

HollywoodChicago.com: What do you think was most misunderstood about that film?

Washington: It was the idea that Spike didn't care about Chicago or the situation here. He does. There were rumblings that he was trying to profit off the pain of the city, but I say that he's been here and has supported the city before, during and after working here. It had nothing to do with the movie per se, and everything having to do with what is happening on the South side.

HollywoodChicago.com: What are you doing currently in your career?

Washington: I lived in Los Angeles now, and since I was born and raised on the South side of Chicago – 76th and Winchester – and it's been a transition, to say the least. So as far as 'Landline' was concerned, the weirdest thing was I'd never been in Wrigley Field on the North side. [laughs] I got to tour the whole place, and be on field. It was beautiful to be a born-and-bred Chicagoan and do this film.



Matthew Aaron...Writer, Director & Lead Actor in "Landline."

Matthew Aaron took on the writer/director/star combination in "Landline," and the premiere was his first major film release. His other two films are "The Way We Talk" and "Bromance."



Writer, Director & Lead Actor Matthew Aaron of 'Landline'

Photo credit: Timothy M. Schmidt for 1837 Productions

HollywoodChicago.com: Okay, what is the origin of 'Landline,' how did you get the film off its feet and into production?

Matthew Aaron: It started with my use of technology. I was on Facebook and Instagram all the time, and I felt like it was affecting my life. It reminded me a bit of like Albert Brooks film 'Lost in America.' I wanted to kind of update that, to have my character just give up on something that is just so major in society.

HollywoodChicago.com: When did the Cub angle come in?

Aaron: Well, I'm a huge Cubs fan. [laughs] Really, I knew we were going to be lower budgeted, and I also knew that the film wouldn't be edgy enough for Sundance or other festivals, so I knew we needed something that would speak to Chicago. I'm very proud that in the film we predict that they will win the World Series, and they did. That made us feel good.

HollywoodChicago.com: Since this film basically was born from you, what was the most personal element within it regarding yourself?

Aaron: The most personal thing to me, as an actor and an artist, was the connection to the LGBTQ community. You don't see many 'family friendly' type films with prominent LGBTQ characters – and also let's mention the connection with the Cubs, a top level sports corporation. Major League Baseball really stepped up to the plate, and approved their logos for a film with gay men and trans actors. I consider that such an achievement, that's what means the most to me personally.

"Landline" will screen at the Music Box Theatre, 3733 North Southport Avenue in Chicago, through Thursday, April 6th, 2017. [Click here](#) [16] for show times and ticket information. On Tuesday, April 4th, 2017, it will debut on several digital and TV platforms. See local TV provider or

online platform for download information.



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