

Interview: Sean Patrick Leonard, on World Premiere of 'Rockabye' at Twister Alley Film Festival

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on April 28, 2017 - 4:04pm

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CHICAGO – The sudden drama of tragic death is beautifully rendered in a new short film called “Rockabye,” a Chicago-based production directed by David Bradburn and written/performed in by Sean Patrick Leonard. The World Premiere of the film will take place at the Twister Alley International Film Festival in Woodward, Oklahoma, on April 29th, 2017.

The film centers on John (Leonard), who through his injuries has obviously been a part of a severe trauma. It is revealed that his beloved wife died in an automobile accident on her 39th birthday, leaving behind the injured-but-alive John – who was the driver of the car – to soldier on with their two children. Trying to cope with the loss and his new situation is a struggle for the now single father, and the sensitivity toward the difficult process of life after a tragic event is revealed.



Sean Patrick Michael in a Scene from 'Rockabye'

Photo credit: Crash of Rhinos

HollywoodChicago.com caught up with Chicago-based actor, writer and producer Sean Patrick Leonard to talk to him about “Rockabye.” Leonard has been a professional actor for 20 years, and was the Artistic Director for Speaking Ring Theatre Company. In films and TV he has been featured in “Machine Gun Preacher,” “Chicago Fire” and “Chicago Justice.” He spoke of the emotions and circumstances that inspired the screenplay, and the process toward the finished film.

HollywoodChicago.com: Your script was based on a circumstance that occurred after you were laid up in an accident. What did you most learn during your recovery that is reflected in the script?

Sean Patrick Leonard: I think the most important lesson I learned – that’s reflected most in the script – is my love of family. While recovering, I needed to stay focused and concentrate on healing, in order to keep serving my wife Mercedes... and children Ruby and Jack... in the best way possible. In this short life of ours, I had to focus my gratitude on what I have, and not what the injuries were. My family gave me the strength to move forward every day.

HollywoodChicago.com: The film highlights two life changing traumas – losing a wife and becoming a single father. Psychologically, what do you think is affecting your character the most, and how did you want to play that psychosis in the short film?

Leonard: Psychologically, I believe what affected John the most was about losing his wife. That feeling of the loss of partner, best friend and lover left John searching for something to grasp onto, and unfortunately he went to the bottle and pills to numb the pain. That’s the band-aid that many people turn to in such situations.

I wanted to show that journey of a man feeling absolutely heartbroken, using coping mechanisms that he thinks will help him stay strong for his children, and carry on. It wasn’t until his daughter Judy calls him the way she does – by taking his face in her hands and telling him that he needs to ‘take a time out’ – that he allows his true vulnerability to be exposed, which was the first step to really healing and authentically becoming strong for his kids.

HollywoodChicago.com: Interestingly, in your press release, you mention that John has to deal with a ‘society that does not fully appreciate single fathers.’ Since we never really hear much about success or fail rates of single fathers, what do believe the overall impression of them are in culture and society?

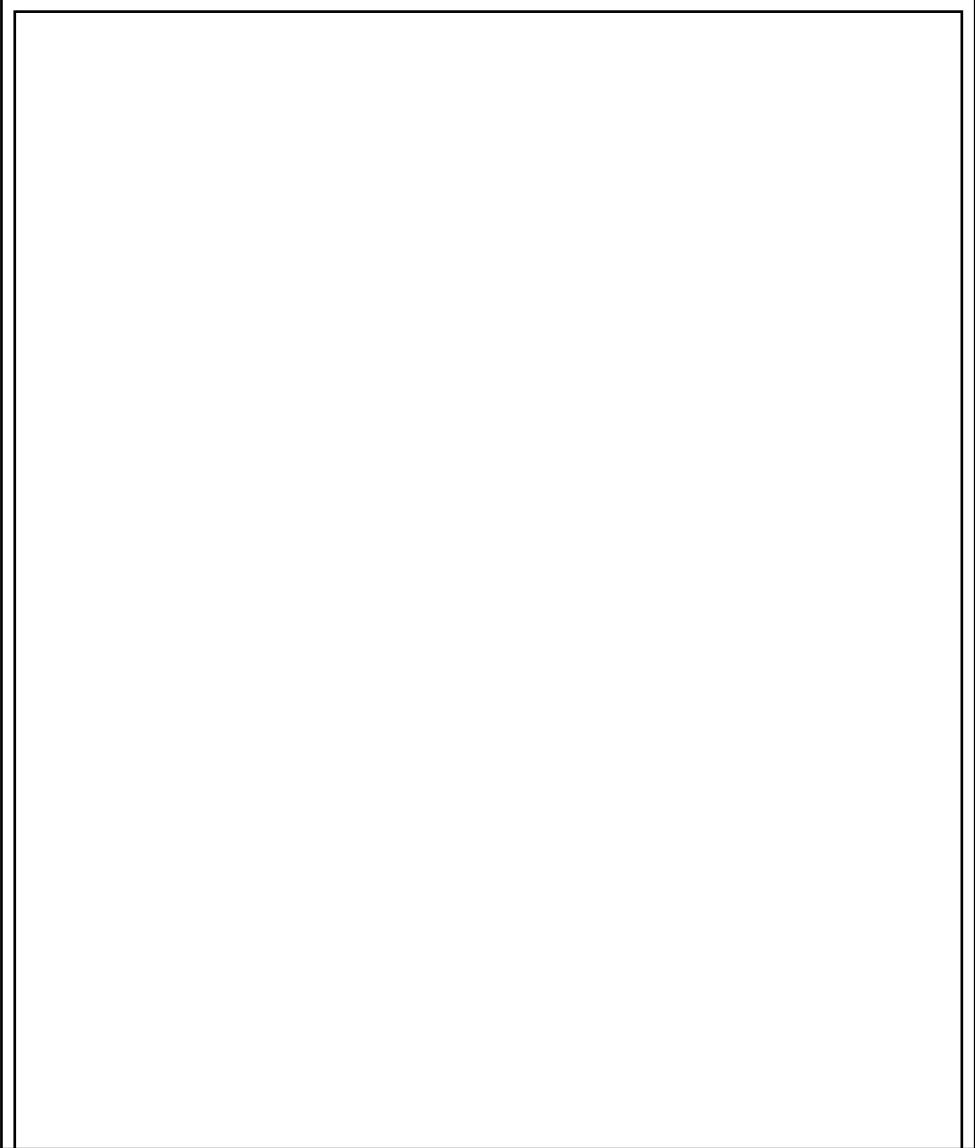
Leonard: I believe that the impression of single and/or stay-at-home fathers in today’s society is that they are a bit of an afterthought. Often, fathers are seen as ‘babysitters,’ and perceived as weaker than men who are traditional bread winners in the family. Because this breadwinner ideal has been in place for a long time, men felt that going to work and bringing home a paycheck was how they fulfilled their role in the nuclear family – so in general they checked out when it came to changing diapers, playing with their kids, or just showing affection to them.

I also believe that attitudes toward that stigma are changing. More men are staying at home, while their wives take on the breadwinner status. This can create a more varied and equal partnership, as fathers take that time with their children to provide balance. In the case of a single parent, it is doubly challenging, you have to be there for your kids and also survive. I grew up in a single parent home with my mother Mary, and she had to take on both roles as mother and father. I am forever grateful for the responsibility she took on, in making me the man that I am today.

HollywoodChicago.com: In a short film reality, you are capturing a moment in time, but you also have to define it virtually immediately. How did you work out that situation in the evolution of the script, and did you change your initial idea at all?

Leonard: I never deviated from my mission of making this story a small slice of a bigger pie – although I had to simplify the script to make it more clear and concise. Originally, the script was twice as long... there were more scenes of the daily struggle with the injuries, more of John’s torturing himself, and more potential challenges regarding the raising of his kids. Through the director David’s detailed notes, plus budget and resource limits, I was able to pare down the script to a point where the audience won’t be hit over the head with too many obstacles, and it became a story that leaves them wanting more.

HollywoodChicago.com: Obviously the shoot was done on one set, and I assume quickly. How did director you and director David Bradburn establish an atmosphere that produced what he wanted from your material and the performances?





Sean Patrick Leonard of 'Rockabye'
Photo credit: Crash of Rhinos

Leonard: The pre-production was about eight months. After we had a benefit for production costs, and a crowd funding campaign, we knew that the budget was going to be tight, so that's when I went to work on the script. It was originally almost 16 pages long, and I shortened it to eight pages. We shot the entire script in one day on October 30th, 2016, which just happened to be on the day of game four of the World Series – which made it more crazy because I'm a die-hard Chicago Cubs fan. [laughs] And then the post-production was about three months.

David and I, along with producer Kiea Houseton, agreed that we wanted a sense of claustrophobia. We wanted the audience to really feel that John's life felt cramped, while it was falling apart at the same time. We achieved this by not only trashing my apartment, to get a bit of hoarder-holding-onto-the-past environment, but we also shot the film pretty down and dirty. There were a lot of handheld shots and close-ups, that were used to generate a feeling that the audience will be right there with John, going through his pain.

HollywoodChicago.com: As an actor, with parts large and small, which performance do you believe defines you best as an individual, and how do you believe you best took ownership of it in that performance?

Leonard: In my performances over the years, I feel that that there are a couple of performances that reflected me as a person and actor. 'Rockabye' is the first, because I wrote it based on my real life and that came straight from the heart, and showcased humanity, vulnerability, and love of my family.

The second is my performance as Sam in 'The Life and Death of an Unhappily Married Man,' which was directed by Josh Hope. I normally play bad guys, and though Sam somewhat fit that role in the script – he was the town drug dealer –the character was much that just just that. He was in a dysfunctional relationship with his girlfriend Misty, but they also represented the most stable and loving relationship in the film. Sam showed off my sense of humor, fiery passion and the fact that all of us have flaws... but for all that, having love in your heart will always conquer all.

The World Premiere of "Rockabye" will take place at the Twisted Alley International Film Festival in Woodward, Oklahoma. on April 29th, 2017. [Click here](#) [16] for more details. Featuring Sean Patrick Leonard and Mercedes Rohlfs. Directed by David Bradburn



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