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Teacher/actor stars in 'heartbreaking' film

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March 10, 2011

By MYRNA PETLICKI Contributor

Cab drivers are supposed to listen to all our problems, right? So who listens to a cab driver when he is troubled? That's the question posed in "Left Alone," a heartbreaking new 15-minute short film starring Oak Park resident Paul Noble.

The film, which was produced by a new production company, Dark Yard Films, premiered on Feb. 18 at Beaufort International Film Festival in South Carolina, where it won the Best Short Film title. The husband and wife team behind the film, producer Natasha Warloe and writer/director Seth Boggess, credit Noble's work with helping the film attain that honor.

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Much of the filming of "Left Alone" was done in a cab at night.

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Paul Noble turned in a "haunting" performance in the indie film, "Left Alone."

"The audience connected with him in such a real sense," Warloe reported. "I heard people call his performance haunting," Boggess added.

Noble, who teaches at Oak Park and River Forest High School, has many acting credits from some of Chicago's finest theaters. In fact, it was his 2008 performance in Keith Huff's "Pursued by Happiness" at Steppenwolf Theatre Company that caught Boggess' eye.

Tailored role

"I immediately thought of Paul in the role, even before I started on the script," said Boggess. "When I wrote the script, I wrote with him in mind." The author didn't know Noble when he penned this screenplay based on a short story of Anton Chekhov's called

"Misery."

Noble plays Ian, who is tormented by the recent death of his 15-year-old son. Since Ian's wife died many years ago, he has a desperate need to talk to someone -- anyone -- about his painful loss. We watch as Ian tries to share his feelings with passengers, a coworker and finally the person you'd least expect to be sympathetic. Warloe and Boggess reported that audience members at the opening cried when they saw this film. So did this writer.

Noble noted that he might not have been able to do a film like this in the past, "But in the last 10 years, I've had some emotional stuff to go through so I've had more access to that part of my person," he said. "I'm on my second marriage. When my first marriage fell apart, that was pretty difficult. That brought to the surface a lot of honesty and less investment in covering things up." In addition, Noble's oldest brother

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died around the time of the filming.

Noble noted when he was first contacted about doing the film, he quickly realized, "They are just a 'mom and pop' and they were just starting out." He wasn't exactly looking for another project, since he has 18-month-old twins. "I've sort of come late to parenting so we've been really busy," he said. "Consequently, I've had to stop doing theater since that Steppenwolf gig."

When he was informed that the project would only take a few nights, Noble decided to go for it. He was also swayed when Boggess told him that one of his scenes in "Pursued by Happiness" was their favorite stage scene of all time. "It's pretty hard to resist when somebody tells you something like that," Noble laughingly admitted.

Night rider

It turned out to be more than he bargained for as Noble drove a cab around Chicago after dark while he was filmed. "I literally was with them for 33 hours, from Friday at 9 p.m. until Monday morning at 4 a.m. -- all the dark hours," he said.

Noble was pleasantly surprised to learn that Pete Biagi was director of photography. "Immediately, I could tell he knew what he was doing," the actor said. "I didn't know anything about film. I'd done one 'Prison Break' episode five years ago, like every other knucklehead in Chicago. But he was really kind."

The cast also includes actor Michael Pogue of Oak Park, one of Noble's former students, who is currently appearing in "Radio Golf" at Raven Theatre.

The project turned out to be a very positive experience for Noble. "It was fun and I was learning a lot," he said.

It's also going to be a great experience for anyone fortunate enough to see the film. "It's a universal story," Boggess said. "It's a story about loss. Everybody has that experience."

"Left Alone" is an official selection of the Washington D.C. Independent Film Festival, which runs through March 13, and will also be screened at the High Desert Shorts International Film Festival in Nevada Memorial Day weekend.

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