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"Osso Bucco" star Mike Starr to appear at Midwest Indie Film Festival screening

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Mike Starr makes a personal appearance

River West Films premieres their romantic-mob-comedy "Osso Bucco" at the Midwest Independent Film Festival on Feb. 5, followed by a theatrical self-release beginning Feb. 8 at the Wilmette Theatre.

"We're trying to create a pedigree, or a compelling argument for why the film will succeed," said Gary Taylor, who wrote the script, and directed with Fred Blurton. They're producing with Douglas Weidner.

"You want to be armed with that argument when you shop the film to buyers," Taylor said. "We decided that a quicker strategy than [the festival circuit] was to get into theatres right away, generate as much good press as we can and have a statistical sampling of the box office."

Mike Starr ("Goodfellas") plays Jelly, a mob accountant trying to go straight, who's being set up for a hit by his cousin Nick (Christian Stolte, "Crime Fiction") and uncle Sal (Mike Nussbaum, "Men In Black").

Jelly stops off with Nick for a last meal at Jelly's favorite restaurant before an ill-fated mission to Italy. They're caught in a blizzard with the waitress Jelly loves (Illeana Douglas, "Ugly Betty") and two detectives (Aaron Roman-Weiner and Antoine McKay).

Jelly stops off with Nick for a last meal at Jelly's favorite restaurant before an ill-fated mission to Italy. They're caught in a blizzard with the waitress Jelly loves (Illeana Douglas, "Ugly Betty") and two detectives (Aaron Roman-Weiner and Antoine McKay).



Co-stars Illeana Douglas and Mike Starr

Douglas Weidner produced.

Costume designer Ellen Ryba introduced the filmmakers to Wilmette Theatre owner Carole Dibo. Since buying the Wilmette in 2006, Dibo and her partner Sam Samuelson have devoted one of their two screens to independent film much of the time, with a "Talk Back" series.

It brought John Turturro and Jeff Garlin to the theatre with their films "Romance and Cigarettes" and "I Want Someone to Eat Cheese With."

Resolution Digital Studios is supplying HD projection for the "Osso Bucco" run at the Wilmette as well as the Midwest Indie.



Director Fred Blurton and writer/director Gary Taylor

The run at the Wilmette is open-ended, with the option of continuing it, and of expanding to additional theatres depending on how the first week goes. The filmmakers are shopping for domestic and foreign sales agents, and are particularly focused on positioning the film for a European sale.

Writer Gary Taylor made the main character an atypical mobster

Springboarding off his years as a waiter at Scuzzi and Trattoria #10 and employing River West's "reverse engineering" model of tailoring the project to their means, Taylor set "Osso Bucco" primarily in the single location of an Italian restaurant. "But I didn't want to make a restaurant movie," he said.

A fan of mob stories like "The Sopranos" and "Goodfellas," he threw the Outfit into the mix.

"Mob stories provide a really rich canvas of characters to write," he says, "but I set out to write a main character who was an atypical mobster, someone you could truly get behind and accept him as a protagonist. Tony Soprano is a great character but at the end of the day he's a bad guy."

Casting director Nancy Green-Keyes got the script to Starr, who lived in Chicago for a short time during the late '90s and whose children live here. Starr helped to attract Douglas, whom he worked with on "Goodfellas." Tenner, Paskal and Rudnicke cast the rest of the roles with Chicago actors.

Taylor and his partners, production professionals in their day jobs, raised the under-\$1 million budget from private investors and major in-kind support from vendors like RDS and Fletcher Chicago.

"Osso Bucco" shot 17 days in 2006, almost entirely at Sal's Restaurant, which had closed and was about to be sold. Joe Langenfeld edited at Blurton's Fred Blurton Productions. They online edited, HD conformed, and post-produced audio at RDS with Mitch Apley, composer Karen Martin-Messner and audio engineer Bryen Hensley.

Taylor is finishing the script for his next film, the romantic comedy "Growing Up Straight," which he's developing with Blurton and Weidner as the next River West production, with a planned shoot next year.

"Osso Bucco" screens Feb. 5 in the Midwest Independent Film Festival at Landmark's Century Centre, 2828 N. Clark St. Doors at 6 p.m., screening at 7:30. The filmmakers and cast will attend.

"Osso Bucco" screens Feb. 8-14 at the Wilmette Theatre, 1122 Central Ave., Wilmette. See wilmettetheatre.com for show times. The filmmakers and cast will attend the Feb. 8 screening at 7:30 p.m. See www.ossobuccomovie.com. Ed M. Koziarski is in post-production on the feature film "The First Breath of Tengan Rei." Email edk@homesickblues.com. —Ed Koziarski

DATEBOOK

TODAY IS FEBRUARY 5, 2008

FEBRUARY 5 • MIDWEST INDEPENDENT FILM FESTIVAL screens "Osso Bucco" at Landmark Century Cinema, 2828 N. Broadway, \$10. Reception, 6 p.m., screening, 7:30. Post screening at Cousin's, 2833 N. Broadway.

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