

MPTD Interview with SpeakeasyShorts Winners

Leslie Green: Welcome to Real Talk with Film DC. This is your host, Leslie Green, Director of Communications for the DC Office of Motion Picture and Television Development, also known as the DC Film Office.

This month we're sitting down with recent winners of the Speakeasy Shorts film competition, Travis Edwards and Anthony Greene. Anthony Greene happens to be one of our filmmakers of the month, so we're really excited to have him with us today as well. Thank you both for joining us on Real Talk with Film DC.

Anthony Greene: Thank you.

Travis Edwards: Thank you.

Leslie: Absolutely. First of all, let's tell our listeners, for those who may not know about Speakeasy Shorts, this is a film competition that started last year through the efforts of DC Shorts and Speakeasy DC to combine the art of filmmaking and storytelling into two great evenings, and it's a really cool concept where they pull 16 filmmaking teams and 16 storytellers together, and the filmmakers have five days to shoot, write, and edit, and screen these short films that are based on the 16 stories.

The kicker is none of the teams have heard the stories before they have a chance to get in there and do their work filming those stories. The grand prize-winning team, which Travis was a part of, they won a thousand dollar cash prize, which is pretty awesome. So Travis, let's start out with you. What made you and your team decide to enter this type of competition, and tell us what the premise of your film was, this award-winning film.

Travis: The quick premise is essentially someone who doesn't like their office job and just gets really burned out on that lifestyle pretty quickly, but Rob Raffety, the director, and myself, we've worked on quite a few projects together, and we knew a lot of the actors, and a lot of the other people we don't know worked together, so one of the big draws for us is just being able to do something. It's an excuse to do it. It has deadlines. You have to make something, and to me, that's just really appealing.

Leslie: What was your role on the film?

Travis: I helped write and I was also the cinematographer and editor.

Leslie: Excellent. Now, Anthony, you were recently recognized as our September 2013 Filmmaker of the Month. Congratulations again on that achievement.

Anthony: Thank you for that.

Leslie: You were the director of "Going Down," the first runner-up in the competition, and I know the storyline behind your film was a little racy, so we can't talk about a lot of what's in that film, but...

Anthony: Really? We can't talk about it?

Leslie: No, no, no. We're not going to talk about that.

Anthony: [laughs]

Leslie: Folks can go to see that on Speakeasy Shorts' website, which I'll give at the end of the program today. Tell us what the experience was like, taking a true story that you just heard...because you were the director and writer for the short film.

Anthony: Mm-hmm.

Leslie: What was it like taking that story that you just heard live on stage and then turning it around to film it in less than a week?

Anthony: Actually, it was fun, first of all. It's a fun thing to do, especially from writing. When you have a story that's already given to you and you pretty much just have to adapt it, it's not as hard as trying to come up with it on your own, so we were able to have more fun with it.

I did direct it. I had a co-writer, Cheryl Brown, and I also edit...edited it with...I always say, "Edit with," but I did that with Cheryl also.

It was fun. I talked to the storyteller. We went back and forth in the email. He gave me the biggest points they had, and I just took it, and it took me about...really, because that next day I really didn't do much, so it...we knocked it out in about 45 minutes.

It was a great story, and it wasn't like that much to do. It was just a way to try to adapt it over, and make it our own, and make it feasible to shoot in a short amount of time, so it was just a fun experience, period.

Leslie: It was a blast. I saw the film. It was very, very funny.

Anthony: I appreciate it. We still can't talk about it though?

Leslie: No, we can't. We can't, but I'll ask this next question to both of you.

[laughter]

Leslie: What made you decide to go into filmmaking, and what is it like, the good, the bad, the ugly, in terms of filmmaking here in DC? Travis, you want to answer the question first?

Travis: Yeah. I had made short films with friends throughout my childhood, which I feel like is the typical answer these days, and then I got a little bit older and then entered some things in the small film festival at Oregon, actually, then we got in. We won some things. I'm like, "Shoot, this is a viable options. If I work hard at this, I think it's something I can actually pursue as a career."

Then moved out to DC, and DC's actually been a very, very wonderful place to do film work because there's so many people there that need film work, essentially. I found a couple really great communities, and a lot of people who are doing really interesting work, so it's definitely been a really nice place to be doing film work the last eight years or so.

Leslie: Great. Anthony, what about you?

Anthony: I've always been first and foremost a film lover. Watching movies from childhood up to now is just my first and foremost thing. I worked a lot out of high school. I had kids early, I was raising them, and when it got to the point where I just didn't know what else to do with myself, I had no creative outlet, I started creating the stuff that I love so much.

Movies are my escape, and creating them is a way to delve further into that escape and be more...it's kind of therapeutic, in a way, for me, so it's my way of breathing when things were becoming too constricted in my life in those times.

I was OK at it, and I kept pushing with it, and it kept getting bigger and bigger, and the steps started getting higher and higher. For me, it was just being able to do something that brought me a lot of joy and love, and now I get to be able to create it, and it's one of the greatest things for me. It's really therapeutic for me.

Leslie: That's wonderful. Are you doing filmmaking full-time now?

Anthony: Yes.

Leslie: That's great. That's really great. Congratulations.

Anthony: Between filmmaking and doing the Real Independent Film Extravaganza at West End every year, that's pretty much how I survive, and I like surviving based on what I want to do.

Leslie: What's your experience been like, filmmaking here in DC?

Anthony: For me, DC is varied. You have a lot of different type of locales here. You've got a lot of different type of people. It's like a smaller New York, but it's cleaner, and people tend to be nicer, but it's a great place to do it. I haven't had any issues with like, "Oh, I can't stand working in DC."

I like working in DC. You can do a lot of things here. You have a lot of different places you can go. You have a lot of different places that you can set things up, get a lot of shots. When I did "The Henchman's War," we shot it pretty much 80 to 90 percent here in DC, and the first thing that people would ask, and think for that matter, we shot most of it right here in the area and people would ask me, "Where'd you get the locations from?" We got them from right here.

It's a very varied place. There's all different type of things going on here, different types of people, faces, actors, you've got a lot of technical folks that know what they're doing behind the camera, so it's a great place to be.

Leslie: It is. It is, and Travis, what do you like most about filming here in DC?

Travis: I think the same thing that was just touched on there. It's just the simple variety to it, and for logistics of shooting, it has a winter, it has a summer, it has a spring. There's a fall. People are usually really nice. They stay out of your way. There's greenery. There's buildings. There's pretty much everything there.

Leslie: Yep.

Anthony: You can make a Korean "Ghostbusters" here and it'll look right. You have everything you need to just do whatever you want to do here.

Leslie: That's true. That's true. What are some of your favorite locations to film here in DC?

Anthony: Well, we did some stuff down at The Hive in Anacostia for "The Henchman's War."

Leslie: It's called The Hive?

Anthony: The Hive right there in...it's, I need to say it right, Hanfleur Gallery, and they have The Hive connected to it, so we did some shots down there, and Nikki Peele helped out a lot with that. So that was a cool place. We got to shoot there.

For one of my short films we got to shoot stuff down at the National Mall. I don't know if I'm supposed to say this. We kind of guerrilla shot inside the American History Museum, but that was years ago, but...

Leslie: [laughs]

Anthony: There's so many different places here that you can do stuff. It was just cool. Even when we did "Going Down" we were right there in Chinatown DC, places like the [indecipherable 09:04] Institute. There's just so many different, cool places, the Intimate theaters, and you can just do a lot of stuff here, so really just downtown DC, the National Mall. They look different depending how you shoot them, but you can get so much out of them here.

Leslie: Travis, what about you? What are your favorite locations to film in DC?

Travis: I think [indecipherable 09:24] the same things, where we were filming the places where we weren't quite sure if we were supposed to be filming, but it always seems to work out, like anywhere around Capitol Hill and getting any of the government buildings that are there. It's kind of nice because they're internationally recognized landmarks, but yet you can just walk right up on the street and film outside of there.

Leslie: What projects are you guys working on currently? Anthony, I'll start with you. I know you just has...was it "Henchman's War" that premiered at West End?

Anthony: "Henchman's War" was released at West End from the 20th to the 26th, and then it went to Hollywood for a week in November, so now we just accepted to the Idyllwild International Festival in California, so that's in January, and we're working on trying to get everything together for "Henchman" to get out, distribution-wise.

"THICK," we actually showed it at West End twice, showed off both shows. We're looking at distribution for that also. Actually, we're looking at becoming our own aggregates for distribution, because it might...so with Sky Rocket Productions, that I did the movies under, they're looking at becoming aggregates for distribution now.

Also, I work with them with development, reading scripts, trying to bring projects in, setting up stuff there to get people hired and get films made.

That's pretty much what most of my time is going to now, and then we're gearing up for another year for the festival.

Leslie: Tell us a little bit about that festival that you host each year.

Anthony: It's a great festival. This will be its fifth year. I came in on the 30th, so this will be my...OK, I want to do the math right now. I came in on the third year as programmer for the festival. We try to get films from all over the world. We try to mix it up with documentaries, foreign films, feature films. We try to get as much local stuff as possible. We're there at West End for a whole week.

It's independent to the max. We really try to keep it just low-brow. We really want to be about the films and the filmmakers as much as possible. For the first couple of years we've been doing it independently out of pocket, and now we want to see if we can get the non-profit thing going to help us out with raising money and stuff like that.

I really try to get as much interesting and different things as possible. We had Yariv Mozer's "The Invisible Men," which was about the persecution of gay men in Israel, which was an incredibly good documentary, and he actually was able to make it over here to do a live Q and A for the film, which was a really great thing.

We were trying to build it up because it was fairly new. Festivals are all over the place. It's kind of oversaturated, so you're trying to find a niche, but we're still building it up and trying to make that happen, and also foster a good relationship with local theaters so that the independent films produced in this area can have a place to be screened, which was kind of like the model of what we were trying with "The Henchman's War."

We're actually going to bring a lot of other films in, starting next year, to give them the same treatment that we did for "The Henchman's War" from other producers that have their own fully-produced independent films.

Leslie: What's the name and website of the festival for the listeners?

Anthony: It's Real Independent Film Extravaganza, and it's realindependentfilm.com.

Leslie: Excellent. Travis, what about you? What projects are you working on right now?

Travis: Right now I'm actually shooting and editing two feature documentaries, and one of them we just put up our second trailer ago on puppy mills. It's called "Dog by Dog" documentary. Then we're going to have another one, we're actually doing it all simultaneously, which has been kind of an odd process so far, called "Consequence and Cruelty," which we

should have a trailer up in a couple weeks on that, about neuroscience in the criminal justice system.

One of the great things about DC that I think [indecipherable 13:27] into that is that there's always such a variety of work. My background is doing documentaries, but I've also been shooting web series, and doing short films, and short documentaries. There's just all sorts of variety in the area, so it's kind of fun to take one skill set and apply that to other things in the same large pool, but by no means as specific.

Leslie: Last question, and I always end with this question because I believe that we should always pay it forward to those rising filmmakers who are coming behind you, so what advice would you give to those aspiring filmmakers just getting their start here in DC as media professionals? What advice would you give them to get their start in the industry?

Anthony: You want to go first, Travis?

Travis: Yeah, sure. Well, one of my favorite stories is from a friend of mine, who's actually a photographer, but he told me years ago, when I just moved to DC and I wasn't quite sure how to break into anything, or what I should be doing, that when he first started doing photography, he just kept a journal.

He organized it by, "These are projects I can do in an hour. These are projects I can do in half a day. These are projects I can do in a day. These ones will take a week," and he would just brainstorm as much as he could and fill out that journal, so anytime he ever had any downtime, he could say, "Well, hey. There's a project I could be doing right now."

I think that's such a great of looking at doing film work too, that there's always a project to be working on. There's always something, even if the project winds up being terrible or you don't like it. You're still going to learn something. You're still going to get better. You're still going to meet people. I've never seen anyone who just works prolifically that has any issues.

Leslie: That's good. Anthony?

Anthony: For filmmakers, the first thing I would suggest is that they actually watch films. It's funny because filmmaking has become...it's more technical now. Things are so much cheaper to come by, the equipment is easy to get, you can get it on a personal level, and a lot of people forget about just enjoying the medium, first and foremost.

Watch movies. There are no movies that are made that weren't inspired by other movies that were seen. Watch movies. Get them in your head. Enjoy them.

Another thing is make them. Watch them and make them. Make them. Whatever you do is subjective. Somebody's going to like it, somebody's not going to like it, but if you're not making it, then nothing is happening and you're not learning.

I wish I could've went to film school, I really do, but I learn good when I'm hands-on, and I learn so much within the short film projects, and the documentary projects, and stuff, now that I feel a lot more confident for the next thing I'm going into, so the more you do, the better you're going to become. You can still get the schooling and everything, but you need that experience, that

hands-on experience, so that you can be really confident with your decisions and what you do with your team.

Watch movies and make movies is the biggest thing that I would be able to tell somebody to go do.

Leslie: You both have great advice, and again, if you want to see the short films that both Anthony and Travis created for the Speakeasy Shorts filmmaking competition, you can go to www.dcs shorts.com and you can click on the Speakeasy Shorts link. Again, thank you for tuning into Real Talk...

Anthony: We can't tell them what "Going Down" is about like at all?

Travis: [laughs]

Leslie: We can't talk about what?

Anthony: We can't them what "Going Down" is about?

Leslie: We're not going to talk about that. We're not going to talk...they just have to go and watch the film, right? [laughs]

Anthony: It's a family film. It's about love.

Leslie: It's not about love, actually.

Anthony: Togetherness.

Leslie: Yeah.

Anthony: It is.

Leslie: No.

Anthony: That's not about love to you?

Leslie: No.

Anthony: Travis, do you think "Going Down" was about love?

Travis: That was all it was about.

Anthony: It was all about love. When I wrote it I was thinking about love, and I don't want to go buy that from the shop, but other than that it's a love story.

Leslie: [laughs] It is a love story indeed.

[laughter]

Leslie: Well, again, thank you all for tuning into Real Talk with Film DC. This is your host, Leslie Green, signing off. Don't forget to check us out on the web at film.dc.gov, like us on Facebook at [facebook.com/filmdc](https://www.facebook.com/filmdc), and follow us on Twitter [@dcfilmoffice](https://twitter.com/dcfilmoffice). Catch you next time.

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