

Shreveport Times Article

Making it big: Director of short films aims to make first feature

January 18, 2005

By Alexandyr Kent

Jeffrey Goodman spends a lot of time in the dark. This 31-year-old filmmaker is fascinated with film noir, a genre popular in the 1940s and 1950s. Film noir portrayed shadowy crime worlds where detectives were truth-seekers, hit men were angels of mercy and femme fatales caused all sorts of problems.

Films like *Se7en* (1995), *L.A. Confidential* (1997) and *Road to Perdition* (2002) have proven noir films still can grip the public's attention every now and again. But Goodman wants to see more of them. He's working to transform his recent award-winning short film, *A Matter of Principal* (2003), into a full-length feature. If he has his way, he'll shoot it in Louisiana.

Goodman, the son of Dr. Carl and Sylvia Goodman, grew up in Shreveport, but he didn't discover his ambition to become a filmmaker until his junior year in college. A student at Washington University in St. Louis, he took advantage of a study-abroad program and spent a year in Normandy, France. There he spent his free-time going to cinema clubs. The first time he saw a noir film -- Fritz Lang's *The Big Heat* (1953) -- he was hooked.

"I couldn't believe how compact, how powerful and how uncensored the activity was. Burning Gloria Grahame's face, Glenn Ford's wife being blown up in the car ... all these things just seemed so raw, so real and so truthful. And without a filter on them," says Goodman. "I just felt a certain truth in noir, in the movies and literature, (more so) than in the other things I was being exposed to."

When Goodman settled back into life in the U.S., he began pursuing his passion to direct films. In summer 1997, he worked as a stage director for the Marjorie Lyons Playhouse's production of *Funny Girl*. The play's director, Bob Busieck, allowed Goodman to take directing and video production classes at Centenary College during the fall. He made his first short film in November 1997.

Also during this time, Goodman worked on a commercial shoot for Harrah's Louisiana Downs. A connection he made on the set allowed him to pursue a job in Los Angeles, which he landed in January 1998.

In Los Angeles, he continued to gain hands-on experience in the commercial and music video industry working as a production assistant and later as a camera assistant. Outside of his working life, he made five short films. His latest effort, *A Matter of Principal*, is

pure film noir. The story centers on a retired hit man named Quarry who can't sleep because he's not killing anymore. When Quarry gets involved in a kidnapping and ransom case, he rediscovers peace of mind.

A Matter of Principal did well on the festival circuit. It was screened at the Memphis International Film Festival and the Cinequest Film Festival (San Jose, Calif.), and it was awarded Best Dramatic Short at the DIY Film Festival (Los Angeles) and Best Short Film at the Cedar Rapids Film Festival (Iowa). It also was a semi-finalist in the Sundance Lab Competition.

Goodman is confident his work and short filmmaking experience have prepared him for the challenges ahead. "I kind of looked at making short films as my film school. A Matter of Principal is about as involved a short as you are going to get. It was 20 minutes long. It was shot at night and in the snow. It doesn't get much more difficult than that," says Goodman. He shot it at a mountain resort in California.

Goodman believes he can transform A Matter of Principal into a full-length feature. The project is currently budgeted at \$2 million. Yet he is realistic about the effort it's going to take. "I believe the hardest thing in this business is making your first feature," says Goodman. "Fortunately, I'm hooking up with a writer with some name recognition and some notoriety."

A Matter of Principal was originally a short story written by Max Allan Collins. Collins also wrote Road to Perdition, which in 2002 was transformed into a feature film starring Tom Hanks and Paul Newman.

"I'm not a writer," says Goodman, "Ever since I got into directing, I knew that if I was going to make it ... I was going to have to find a writer who didn't want to direct, or just come across material and actually get someone to let me direct it."

Goodman had been reading as many noir short stories and novels as he could while he was in Los Angeles in the hopes he'd find a story he could make into a film. When he first contacted Collins about A Matter of Principal, Road to Perdition was not even a graphic novel. Collins initially said no, but that didn't dissuade Goodman from continuing to ask.

"I thought, if he wasn't going to let me direct (A Matter of Principal) three years ago, he's certainly not going to let me do it now (after Road to Perdition became a film)," says Goodman. "But why not try? We started talking. I showed him my last couple shorts. ... Finally, he said 'Look, Jeff, I'll let you do it, but the one condition is that you let me do the adaptation myself.' Which for me -- I'm not a writer -- was a no-brainer."

Goodman was very pleased with how the short turned out, and so was Collins. "I am thrilled with the short film that Jeffrey made from my short story and screenplay," wrote Collins in an e-mail interview. "It's very true to my vision, and I was able, as executive

producer, to have input during the post-production stage. Jeffrey and I worked very hard together on the final edit of the piece."

Collins also is optimistic about the short's feature-length potential. "Jeffrey and I are collaborators, and I know I can be confident that I will be a part of the process, and that my vision -- through Jeffrey's -- will be honored," wrote Collins. He added, "If the feature turns out as faithful to my work as Jeffrey's short film did, I will be very happy indeed."

Goodman is specifically interested in making the film in Louisiana, and he's now working to secure financing. He already raised money to have Collins turn *A Matter of Principal* into a feature-length screenplay, and Goodman has the feature-length screenplay in hand. He believes the current upswing in film production in Louisiana -- the features *Ray*, *Love Song for Bobby Long* and the upcoming *Mr. 3000* have all been shot here -- will make it easier. Specifically, he believes the state's current tax incentives for film production will attract investors to the project. For example, investors who invest between \$300,000 and \$8 million in a production filmed in Louisiana can claim a 10 percent tax credit based on the budget.

Alex Schott, director of the Governor's Office of Film & TV Development, is a central player in Louisiana's growing film industry. He says Goodman's biggest challenge lies ahead. "The hardest part is getting the money," says Schott. He adds that Louisiana is a good place to make a first feature, and the state's tax incentives have begun luring productions away from Canada and other locations outside of Hollywood.

Schott said Goodman has some advantages over other directors who are trying to put together a first feature. "For the people who want to be filmmakers, they have to keep working," says Schott. "(Goodman) has racked up an arsenal of short films. The advantage he has is that he's linked up to a very respected writer. He's got the talent behind him." Schott later added that his office will do everything it can to help Goodman get his feature made.

Goodman is determined to make it work. "To get this movie made, I'm going to have to make some concessions. I'm going to have to make some compromises," says Goodman. "I'm willing to do that. Max is willing to do that."