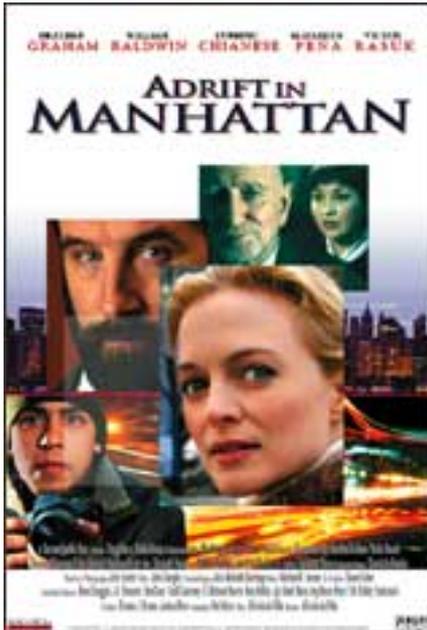


Alfredo De Villa on Adrift In Manhattan

Written by NaRhee Ahn

Friday, 12 October 2007 01:13



Adrift in Manhattan, Directed by Alumnus Alfredo de Villa, SoA '98 Alfredo De Villa, SoA '98, discusses his latest feature, *Adrift In Manhattan*, starring Heather Graham

CUE: Congratulations on your theatrical release of ADRIFT IN MANHATTAN. Tell us the story of how the film was conceived, produced and distributed. Which production personnel were also Columbia alumni?

ADV: The film was conceived initially as personal response to my first feature film, WASHINGTON HEIGHTS. As you often do with your first films, I traveled widely (the film went onto to 50+ film festivals around the world) with it and saw it with a variety of different audiences. I realize that my favorite parts of the film were those where very little happened, where you were just experiencing the emotions and the characters. I thought to build an entire feature story from a component of such moments. Could a collection of those moments build to something greater than the moments?

Nat Moss, who I met at Columbia Film School (he didn't finish the program, but participated during the first two years) set to write the script. He and I had worked on WASHINGTON HEIGHTS. We quickly sent the final script to another Columbia Grad, Scott Foster, who, eventually, would become our coproducer. Via Scott we got the script to UTA and Steve Brown, who raised the financing and became the primary producer. We first attached Heather Graham and Elizabeth Peña, then went to Victor Rasuk, Billy Baldwin and Dominic Chianese.

Production happened during February of 2006. We had edited the picture by July of that same

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year. We found out early that we got into the Sundance Film Festival and waited to premiere the film at the 2007 edition of the Sundance Film Festival. We were lucky and sold the film a week after the festival to a company called Screen Media Films.

CUE: What were some of the most difficult aspects and lessons you learned from your experience?

ADV: One of the most difficult aspects of making the film was that the screenplay, as conceived, was risky because there were no explosions and it contained a very risky sex scene. It was both difficult from the financing, production and creative point-of-view. It was a big risk for me as a director, a big risk for Heather Graham as an actress and a huge financial risk from the investors. Even when the film costs substantially less than a typical feature film, the script was dark, small and risky. It was incredibly dependent on execution.

I did the film because I had to. The theme and style of the film was with me for a very long time and I had to explore it. It is hard to pin-point a reason why I have to do a film, but I knew, once I finished, I felt like I was ready for an entirely different experience. But the most and, perhaps, the best lesson learned from making and promoting this film came from the promotional side. The film posits a challenge to movie-goers; it's not an easy film to watch. I found out it connected to many viewers in a strong emotional sense. I also found that, most unfortunately, the press had no idea how to watch it.

CUE: What was the highlight of your journey with the film?

ADV: Shooting it and editing. I just followed my gut when I shot it and had no idea what I had until we put it together.

CUE: If you could give young filmmakers any piece of advice, what would that be?

ADV: Stick to your vision. Make a story that has powerful emotional connection to who you are. Stay within the limits of reality. I don't mean avoid fantasy-driven genres like horror and Sci Fi, but make sure your observations are always rooted in reality. And keep working. After your

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finish shooting a film, start thinking about the next one. Every one will try to discourage you; the business will try to crush you. But just keep moving.

CUE: Tell us a little about your next project.

ADV: There are three different scripts, out of which one will probably go. One is about the tragic fate of two Mexican-American singers who sang rap-style ballads about powerful Northwestern drug-dealers in Mexico. The mafia killed the father in 1994 and, 10 years later, the son. The other script is about the incredible journey of this elderly couple on the run from the law. And, lastly, I'm working on a story about the escape of the then-guerrilla group called Los Tupamaros (who have since become a legit political party) from the high-security prison of Uruguay. 110 Tupamaros dug deep under the prison and escaped, leading to one of the worst violent and repressive backlashes from a right wing government. Can we live under such circumstances?

CUE: What are you most looking forward to in taking your next step?

ADV: Selfishly, as a Director, my next step is to find a simpler and clearer style to tell a story. I'm looking for scripts that have a simple, defined premise from which to build an emotional journey.

Adrift in Mahnattan opens in select venues September 21, 2007. Official site: adriftinmanhattan.net