

EYE ON CONNECTICUT PRODUCTION

SOMETHING WHISPERED WITH CUBA GOODING JR.

Since the inception of Connecticut's film tax credit, there have been two kinds of feature films produced here. There are the major league studio projects, replete with A-list movie stars and massive crews that come to the state in large trucks bearing the studio logos on the side panels. And then there are the independent films, with modest budgets, home grown crews comprised of Connecticut residents hoping for a chance at the big time. When an indie project gets lucky, maybe a lower B or C list actor signs on to work for a few days on the project.

In addition to the tax incentives offered to filmmakers to bring projects to Connecticut, the state also began to train residents to work in the industry with a three week crash course in on-set protocols. It was believed that the presence of an increasingly competent crew base would, over time, draw more projects here and help Connecticut resident filmmakers achieve the goal of initiating projects that would have a chance at distribution.

Seven years later, Producer and Connecticut native Michael Goodin has bridged the gap between Tinsletown and the grass roots world of Connecticut independent filmmaking. His project, *SOMETHING WHISPERED*, starring Cuba Gooding Jr. boasts a tightly woven story that was able to catch the eye of major Hollywood stars, and a smartly conceived and well executed production plan. By all accounts, *SOMETHING WHISPERED* stands a fighting chance at gaining wide theatrical distribution.

Goodin, who is thirty-one, rose through the production ranks with several small budget independent features. He had been working as a producer in New York City for over five years with a specialization in independent films. He recently wrapped *MESKADA*, a feature film starring Nick Stahl (*TERMINATOR*, *SIN CITY*), Rachel Nichols (*GI JOE*, *STAR TREK*, and *ALIAS*), Kellan Lutz (*TWILIGHT*, *NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET*) and Norman Reedus (*BOONDOCK SAINTS*). Many of his productions have been screened at numerous prestigious film festivals including The Tribeca Film Festival, The Toronto International Film Festival and Slamdance. He has worked with a plethora of talented performers including The Sopranos', James Gandolfini, Oscar nominees Amy Ryan and Michael Shannon, X-MEN's Famke Jansen, and *THE DAY AFTER TOMORROW*'s Dash Mihak, along with numerous others. Originally from Middletown, CT, Goodin did not attend film school, but began his career as a classically trained actor. After graduating from the Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts, he set to work at learning the film business from the ground up.

I asked him how *SOMETHING WHISPERED* first came to his attention: "I was contacted by the director, Peter Cousins, and I immediately loved the concept. Two story lines, one which takes place in 1750, the other in 1850, in the same structure, running at the same time. It also has a musical component in the vein of "OH, BROTHER, WHERE ART THOU?"



TOP TO BOTTOM Cuba Gooding Jr. on the set of *SOMETHING WHISPERED*. / Aaron Bantum and Cuba Gooding Jr. acting in a scene on the set of *SOMETHING WHISPERED* in Connecticut. / Director Michael Goodin, Dean Cundey (DP), Jamiyl Campbell (Background, Production Supervisor), Michael Orefice (Gaffer), Jenna Dayton (Script Supervisor) and John Allegra (Animal Wrangler and Horses) on the set of *SOMETHING WHISPERED*.

After Goodin and his partners at Monolith Pictures came on board, the next steps were to find a location and talent. "The project was fully green lit when it got to us. It was fully backed. But the tax credits were a big factor (in making the film in Connecticut.)"

Set in 1850, the story centers on a man named Samuel (Gooding), who attempts to free his family from the brutality of institutionalized slavery, intent on escaping from the tobacco plantation they have been forced to call their home for two generations. Heading north towards Canada, via that network of secret routes and safe houses used by slaves in 19th century USA (aka the Underground Railroad), they are tracked by a group of ruthless hired slave hunters, who constantly threaten Samuel and his family.

As with any period piece, there are production challenges in regards to budget, and locations. "The story calls for things like horses and carriages, as well as buildings authentic to that era", explains Goodin. "The Connecticut Film Office was extremely supportive. Connecticut fit the bill when it came to our location needs. We needed a lot of seventeenth century architecture and country churches. One big concern was the weather, and how the film would look during certain seasons of the year. But, we found out that the weather here would actually help the look of the film." Says Director of the Connecticut Office of Film Television and Digital Media, George Norfleet: "We were very happy for the opportunity to host *SOMETHING WHISPERED* in Connecticut. Not only did the production employ many graduates from our Film Industry Training Program, the storyline of the film also speaks to Connecticut's rich history with the Underground Railroad and the many stations that can still be found today along Connecticut's Freedom Trail."

The growth of the crew base in Connecticut was also a factor in shooting the film there. Says Goodin: "We wanted to do as much east coast and Connecticut talent as possible. Seven years ago, there was not much crew base in Connecticut. But with the development of the industry here, I am more confident that the crew base can support projects such as ours." The Film Industry Training Program, which was almost slashed from the budget last year, has survived and is now paying dividends to filmmakers who now chose to bring their projects to Connecticut. As the industry continues to grow in Connecticut, more and more of the state's residents are finding work on film projects. Michael Goodin has bridged the gap between Hollywood and Connecticut, and is poised for success on a major scale with *SOMETHING WHISPERED*. The programs within Connecticut that support filmmaking will certainly help pave the way for others to follow in his footsteps. Stay tuned...

SOMETHING WHISPERED is slated for completion in late spring 2013 and will be in the major festivals next fall.

IMAGINE contributor, Peter Fox, also pens *If You Write...Read This* seen regularly both in print and on line in *IMAGINE's* Pen Park.