



OU, I LOVE YOU

BY LYNETTE LOBBAN

Filmmakers often use an establishing shot at the beginning of a scene to tell the audience where they are and what kind of action they can expect. The Grand Canyon and a horse signal a Western. The nearly deserted subway car rattling through the dark—a gritty urban drama. So what would one make of an opening shot that featured Bizzell Memorial Library, Gaylord Hall or the Spoonholder on the North Oval? Those savvy enough to recognize such landmarks instantly would say, “The University of Oklahoma,” which was exactly the idea behind a spring film project.

Based on the compilation style of *Paris, Je t'aime*, which debuted at the 2006 Cannes Film Festival, *OU, I Love You* features 12 short films that have two things in common: The subject matter deals with love, and all were filmed on OU's Norman campus. The fuse for the OU take on the French film was sparked during a conversation between film student Josephine Bozek and Andy Horton, the Jeanne H. Smith Professor of Film and Video Studies.

“A group of us were screening the results of a 24-hour film shoot by OU students, and we thought, ‘Wouldn't it be fun to try the *Paris, Je t'aime* concept here?’ ” says Horton. “The Paris approach of multiple writers and directors seemed like it would work. It's a wonderful way for students to make a statement and get variety. It's important to make shorts. By making shorts, students are going to learn everything they need to make a feature film. They're telling stories; they're working with cast and crew. We feel like it gives them the confidence to say, ‘Hey, if I can do a short one, I can do a longer one.’ ”

The idea was promoted by the OU Student Film Production Club, with an open-campus call for directors and writers selected on the basis of work submitted to a panel of judges that included Horton, screenwriter and poet-in-residence James Ragan and political science professor Ronald K. Gaddie. Seventeen writers

and directors ultimately were chosen from more than 50 scripts and 27 directors' reels. Writers and directors then paired up according to mutual compatibility and creative vision for the film. Dozens of students from the School of Drama attended open auditions and were cast by the directors.

“It was a wonderful collaboration of talent,” says Katrina Boyd, professor of film and production club faculty sponsor. Students took turns directing their own films and crewing for others—setting up lights, booms and manning cameras as needed. The result was a learning experience like no other for students interested in the art of filmmaking.

But not all real-life experience is pleasant, and some students learned more than they bargained for about filming on location, corralling extras and meeting a tight shooting schedule.

Reed Walker, a Houston freshman, was both writer and director of the romantic comedy *Speed Recovery*, about a girl who tries to rebound from an unhappy relationship with the help of a speed-dating service. Filming turned unexpectedly chaotic when the Chinese consulate from Houston showed up for a celebration at Oklahoma Memorial Union in the middle of the shoot.

“I tried to work around the noise,” says Walker, “or work them into the script, but in the end it was too hard to explain why dozens of Chinese were in the background of a speed-dating



Parisians keep the Eiffel Tower in their hearts, while OU film students gave star treatment to beloved Norman campus locations during a spring film blitz.

event. We will go back and try again. I've always loved watching films, but I never realized how much work it takes to bring that movie to life."

Boyd says Walker will get the chance to finish his film in time for the final DVD version of *OU, I Love You*, which will be released in the fall.

Writers learned to trust their instincts while creating a screenplay—and to let go and trust their directors once the script was finished. Harrah junior Shaeffer Holt, whose first screenplay *Thursday* made it into the final cut, says writing for *OU, I Love You* was like taking a crash course in screenwriting.

"I did the whole thing in about two weeks," says Holt. "I learned to have faith in what direction I wanted to take in my writing and then turn it over to the director. I didn't know Travers [Jacobs] before we started, and I was really excited to see what he would do with it."

Holt's short tells of two people who meet by happenstance one Thursday afternoon at the Gimeno Fountain. As a director, Jacobs exhibited considerable artistry and patience while making the film outside on a blustery Oklahoma day. His careful attention to detail in setting up each shot and his use of 16 mm showed in the final product, which was rich in color and texture, putting his actors and location in the best possible light.

Given the nature of the assignment, locale was often an integral part of the plot, as in the case with *Hey*, written by Nate Williams. Director Kevin Lough made great use of Gaylord Hall as two stair-crossed lovers constantly miss each other as they wind their way up and down the building's central staircase. Adams Hall also plays a starring role in a short of the same name when two strangers become friends after spending a night locked inside the business building.



Robert Taylor

Production assistant Matt Housley, who wore many hats for different directors during the campus film blitz, and actor Nathan Raglin get ready to film a scene from *Thursday*, near the Gimeno Fountain.

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In their audience-pleasing, romantic comedy, writer Robert Flippo and director Kenny Madison employ the elevator of a tower dormitory as a device for hilarious encounters between a nerdy, but sweet, Trekkie and his dream girl.

Other films like Mary Ozor's *A Vision of Love*, directed by Jack Patchell, are more character driven, with OU locations like the passion pit and Bizzell Memorial Library, skillfully woven into the mise en scene. An accomplished filmmaker and graphic designer, Patchell had two shorts featured in Oklahoma City's deadCENTER Film Festival this past June.

Also compelling was *Charlie's Classical Countdown*, written

and directed by Andrew Hajek. *Countdown* tells the story of a blind campus deejay, who falls in love with a pianist through her music and listens through the practice room doors in the School of Music trying to find her.

Not all love represented in the shorts is of the romantic variety. Director Leanna Litsch used Lloyd Noble Center as the backdrop for Reilly Smith's screenplay about a young man's passion for basketball, a tradition he inherited from his father.

Writers also explored the University's rich, and sometimes unexpected, cultural diversity. In *Happy in My Ness*, writer/director Jake McDaniel takes an "average guy" who spots a beautiful

Photo provided



Lynette Lobban



Robert Taylor



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CLOCKWISE from TOP LEFT: Leanna Litsch adjusts the camera to actor Bailey Mayfield's advantage while shooting *Tears of Sweat* in Lloyd Noble Arena. The logo for the film project, featuring the library clock tower, was designed by Jack Patchell, president of the Student Film Production Club. OU political science professor Ronald K. Gaddie takes a turn as an English professor with Jacey Little in *A Vision of Love*. As producers of *OU, I Love You*, Josephine Bozek, left, and Virginia Duke sorted through dozens of submissions from hopeful directors. Matt Housley, left, and Reed Walker survey the placement of extras and lighting in the food court of Oklahoma Memorial Union.



Photo provided

Director Jake McDaniel, far left, and crew took advantage of the beautiful interiors of newly opened Wagner Student Services Center for the location of his film *Happy In My Ness*. Jordan Roby, director of photography, in green, gets equipment ready to shoot a scene with cast member, OU drama student Skylar Adams at right.

young woman in the newly opened Lissa and Cy Wagner Hall. After working up the courage to talk to her, he is completely dejected when all avenues of conversation lead to dead ends. He starts to walk away, but as she pursues him with pocket dictionary in hand, he realizes she is French and that language, not disinterest, is their only barrier.

“So two societies and cultures collide,” says McDaniel, Tulsa junior, “but I wanted to show that even if you don’t understand the person verbatim, love is still possible.”

Welcome to the Daily features a young man from India who comes to OU to cut his chops as a journalist. Director Ryan Lawson says he warmed to the screenplay by Dane Beavers on first read. “I liked the one-liners, the quirky characters,” says Lawson. “Despite a difference in cultures, the guy falls in love with the newspaper and the newspaper falls in love with him.”

Lawson, a 2007 graduate of the OU Film and Video Studies program, says that Oklahoma is as yet an untapped market for the industry, and that is good news for FVS majors.

“The market for video and film is saturated on the east and west coasts, but here in Oklahoma, there is potential to create a market,” says Lawson, whose clients include an Oklahoma City communications company and the OKC Chamber of Commerce.

“Film is an art that is applicable beyond art in general. It has a place in marketing, in advertising. If we can convince large companies in Oklahoma to produce their TV ads here instead of LA, we could actually build a lucrative film and video industry. I see a future here. I can see that something could happen.”

As a case in point, Horton says he could see *OU, I Love You*, being utilized as a promotional film for the University. “It features the beauty of OU and the concept of love with variety and

originality,” he says. “Many disciplines contributed to this carnival of cinema.”

Lawson says that even though he grew up interested in film and video, OU is responsible for “99.9 percent” of what he knows about film today. He says some schools teach theory or production, but OU provides instruction in both.

“The film theory reinforces the technical aspects. Without the theory, you don’t know what the technical aspects are conveying to the audience,” he explains. “While we watched film, my professors would say, ‘Be aware where the camera is set, where the camera’s moving, be conscious of what kind of lens they’re using.’ If you are really passionate about film and video, I can honestly say that OU’s program will help you achieve.”

Film and Video Studies is an interdisciplinary program, offering an undergraduate degree and a minor. “We expose students to a wide range of films and minority cultures,” says Boyd. “They get a handle on understanding film language, and they develop a critical eye for what they’re seeing. It gives them a leg up on producing a quality, thoughtful work. It’s really nice when they do stuff with their peers; they learn from each other and challenge each other.”

Lawson says that training and experience are the first two steps, but financial backing is an important third. “If we can get the capital invested in young entrepreneurs who want to get film companies started, and bring in the big companies of Oklahoma as clients, filmmakers can stay in the state and have plenty of work,” he says.

“Right now, it’s a dream, but I think it’s important for everybody to have one.”

Lynette Lobban is associate editor of Sooner Magazine.