



IMPACT

CFA GAINS TITLE AS MICHIGAN'S FIRST ACCREDITED FILM SCHOOL



2009 Compass Graduates Matt Vanderploeg & Philip Bolzman prepare for a shot on the set of "Confiteor," a 2009 Compass thesis film.

Holding an endorsement that no other film school in Michigan can claim, Compass Film Academy (CFA) became accredited this summer by the Accrediting Commission of Career Schools and Colleges (ACCSC). Additionally, CFA, applauded for its organizational skills and impressive presentation, received its accreditation status in record time.

Gaining accreditation was a multi-step progression that, among the tiers, included highlighting the academy in a 450-page Self

Evaluation Report and hosting the ACCSC team on-site where they could evaluate the academy's curriculum, resources, measurement processes, learning applications and placement successes. To acquire accreditation typically takes more than a year to complete; however, CFA finished the process in less than six months.

Following CFA's submittal of the evaluation report in April 2009, the ACCSC team performed its on-site evaluation in mid-July, which fell during pro-

duction of the student's thesis projects. The timing allowed the evaluation team to bypass viewing students in a classroom learning setting and, instead, witnessing first-hand their knowledge in action on the impressive set of *1 New Message*, a 9/11 centered film.

The ACCSC commission was to vote on CFA's accreditation in November, but through the highly praised and expedited recommendation of the evaluation

team, CFA was ushered onto an earlier vote docket, garnering approval on August 11. The ACCSC evaluation team further honored CFA by asking permission to use its submitted documentation as an example to other schools.

The ACCSC endorsement, which is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education, opens the doors for CFA to seek Title IV and other educational advancements and for its incoming students to have access to more financial aid options.

"At Compass Film Academy, they've been developing high caliber, passionate filmmakers for years, right here in Grand Rapids."

- George Heartwell, Mayor of Grand Rapids

CFA ALUMNI WIN TOP FESTIVAL AWARDS

Students from CFA's 2009 graduating class wasted no time in securing their first film awards. *The Commandant*, a second-term project, won the 2009 Grand Rapids Film Festival's "Audience Choice Award." The film's producer, Ross VandeWaa, and his writer/director partner, Stephen Pell, were presented with the award.

The Commandant also was among the CFA films accepted for screening at the 2009 Michigan Film Festival. *Wake Up* and *1 New Message*, both 2009 CFA thesis projects, debuted to packed houses as well. Taking the top spot in the festival's "Mitten Map" competition, however, was *Hills of Holes*, a film created by CFA alums Brad Porter (2005) & Phil Carrell (2007).



A-LIST ADVISORY BOARD GIVES FILM CURRICULUM THUMBS UP

In a recent meeting, CFA's Advisory Board commended the academy for its ability to present an integrated and industry current curriculum conducive to cultivating top talent for the film industry. They also praised the academy's high placement abilities, which this past year boosted to approximately 15 percent above the national average, efforts due to Evan Koons, CFA's Industry Specialist, who joined the staff full-time at the beginning of the year.

"These statistics are vital and a litmus test for your program," commented Ralph Winter, CFA Advisory Board member and owner/producer for Winter Road/Ralph Winter Productions. "Through [the students'] work, growth in their films, positive reviews from internships and job placements, you will know if you're hitting the mark."

The Advisory Board, which is comprised of film industry powerhouses, among them Ralph Winter (*X-Men Series*,

Wolverine, Fantastic Four), Writer David Weiss (*Shrek 2, The Smurfs*), and Producer,

Sparrman, former Vice President/Creative Director at Warner Brothers and current owner of Strange Cargo Entertainment, was impressed with the students' professionalism and protocol awareness.

"No one seems lost," Sparrman said, "everyone knows where to be and what to do."

In addition, the advisors applauded the faculty's wide-range of skill sets, as well as students' access to specialized professionals who aid in the integrated training through lectureships, mentoring, and

other educational opportunities.

CFA is proudful that its students are exposed to a multitude of professionals and arenas within the industry, including each member of its top notch Advisory Board. Their learning exposure has translated into an array of opportunities. All of CFA's 2009 graduates have been presented with internships or employment options, including on-set and behind-the-scenes work for several large budget feature films.



From L to R: Cort Langeland, Keri Lowe, Bill McKendry, Ralph Winter, Carolyn Burns, Mark Clayman, Jon Sparrman, Guy Sawyer

Rick Eldridge (*Bobby Jones: Stroke of Genius, The Ultimate Gift*), meets bi-annually to review the academy's curriculum objectives and content and to offer recommendations befitting future trends in the industry. Their goal is to provide academic oversight, making sure that CFA's graduates are fully prepared for entering the film industry.

While observing students running a mock set, Advisory Board member Jon

ALUMNI UPDATE



After graduating from CFA in 2001, Matt Burnell set out to make a positive impact through his work. Noted for great attention to detail, his work ranges from feature films to non-profit projects. When not working with Hollywood veterans -- Burnell just wrapped in post-production on Director Rob Reiner's film *Flipped* -- his non-profit work at home in Grand Rapids captures his attention.

Honored recently with Hospice of Michigan's prestigious Crystal Rose Award, Burnell was recognized as a key player in advancing the organization's mission and vision. His work with Hospice began in 2002 when he designed QuickBid, a successful, online silent-

auction program for their fundraising events. Several years later, Burnell is still committed to the organization's mission and supports their efforts by providing video production services for educational workshops, interviews and promotional spots.

In 2006 Burnell collaborated with the organization to produce the groundbreaking documentary, *Except for Six*, a film that educates audiences on end-of-life care, which he demonstrated by following three patients through their Hospice journeys. The film was well received as it toured the state. It also aired on PBS in Detroit and screened at the Michigan Film Festival. Today, the film is syndicated and touring the country.

Burnell's company, Matthew Burnell Creative Media, is a multi-media production company that serves both businesses and non-profit organizations.

CFA FIRST TO SIGN SAG AGREEMENT

Compass Film Academy made national news by becoming the first film school to incorporate the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) New Media Agreement into the classroom. News of the relationship was featured in Screen Actor Magazine, SAG's national publication which circulates to over 130,000, for being the first of its kind in the United States.

Working on set with SAG actors is just another example of CFA's drive to provide its students with a high caliber of professionalism and an authenticity they may not get at other institutions.

Marcia Fishman, Executive Director of SAG's Detroit Branch noted, "Watching these shoots [at CFA] was very much like watching action on many sets. It's obvious the room is filled with future filmmakers, the real deal."

HOLLYWOOD (VIRTUALLY) HITS GRAND RAPIDS

Compass & Celebration! Cinema team up for an interactive discussion with renowned Hollywood director

Compass Film Academy, with the help of Celebration! Cinema and MPower Pictures, coordinated a “live chat” via the big screen. The interactive discussion took place following the sneak preview of the culturally affecting movie, *The Stoning of Soraya M.*, a true story of an Iranian woman wrongly accused of infidelity and stoned as a result.

The film’s writer/director, Cyrus Nowrasteh, answered questions from the audience that ranged from the sensitive storyline to the film’s budget to the overseas safety of the crew.

The special interactive chat, which took place at Celebration! Cinema North in Grand Rapids, was a first for both CFA and Celebration! Cinema. Carolyn Burns, VP of Publicity and Marketing for MPower Pictures and a member of CFA’s Advisory Board, arranged the Q & A.

Nowrasteh, an accomplished screenwriter, director and producer, has racked up numerous film and television credits, among them *The Path to 9/11*, *The Day Reagan Was Shot*, *La Femme Nikita*, and *Falcon Crest*.

According to Nowrasteh, *The Stoning of Soraya M.* was his most challenging project to date, claiming that it was Soraya’s heartbreaking story that inspired him to press on even when the filming encountered major challenges and protests.

“At its heart, this movie is a human drama filled with tension, peril and hope; it also is a true story that I felt strongly had to be told, a story the whole world



“Stoning of Soraya M.” Director Cyrus Nowrasteh speaks via Skype with the audience.

needs to know,” said Nowrasteh.

When asked by an audience member where the filming took place, Nowrasteh pleaded the fifth, “We are unable to disclose the location because our host country allowed us to film with the understanding that it would remain anonymous.”

The Stoning of Soraya M., an MPower Pictures release, was adapted from French-Iranian journalist Freidoune Sahebjam’s 1994 novel of the same name. The film stars Academy Award nominee Shohreh Aghdashloo, whose commanding performance, most likely, will catch the Academy’s

attention again. It also stars James Caviezel (*The Passion of the Christ*) and Mozhan Marnò.

The movie has been racking up awards, including runner-up for the Audience Choice Award at the Toronto International Film Festival; the Heartland Festival is Truly Moving Picture Award, second runner-up for the Cadillac People’s Choice Award (TIFF), the Los Angeles Film Festival’s 2009 Audience Award, and has earned the Critic’s Choice distinction from the Broadcast Film Critics.

CFA FACULTY LECTURE AT NEW FILM FESTIVALS



Three CFA faculty members were invited to share their expertise at two new film festivals: the Michigan Film Festival and the Grand Rapids Film Festival.

Cort Langeland, CFA’s Executive Producer/Story Instructor, led a workshop on screenwriting and story structure at

both festivals, and then collaborated with the academy’s Academic Dean, Roger Schutter, to present a production workshop at the Michigan Film Festival.

The production workshop, conceptualized by Schutter, was a three-phase project that took an idea from script-to-screen in less than 24 hours. To bring the collaborative process to fruition in an educational and fun way, Schutter acted as

the film’s director of photography, Langeland worked with workshop attendees to write the script, and GVSU Professor John Harper Philbin served as the director.

Also at the Michigan Film Festival, CFA’s Industry Relations Specialist Evan Koons shared some great tips with aspiring filmmakers on how to break into the film industry.

ALUMNI UPDATE

Rachel Dik, a 2003 alumna, knows what it means to follow a dream. It was the beginning of the nation's economic downturn when she decided to take a professional leap of faith. As many were fighting to keep the jobs they had, Dik quit her full-time job to pursue a career in film.

Having already interned on the feature film, *The Ultimate Gift* (produced by Rick Eldridge, a member of CFA's Board of Directors), Dik refused to cave-in to fears or insecurities. Instead, she plugged away.

As a trained script supervisor, Dik began working locally on short films and commercial projects.

She was then hired by Rich Brauer (who later claimed the title 2009 Michigan Filmmaker of the Year) to serve as a script supervisor on his feature film, *Mr. Art Critic*, starring Bronson Pinchot.

From there she worked as a production office coordinator on the independent comedy *Tug*, starring Hailey Duff and Sam Huntington, and as a production assistant on *Up in the Air*, starring George Clooney.

In late 2008, while working on a basic film-training program sponsored by Michigan Works, CFA alumna Laura Anderson Burnell (class of 2001)



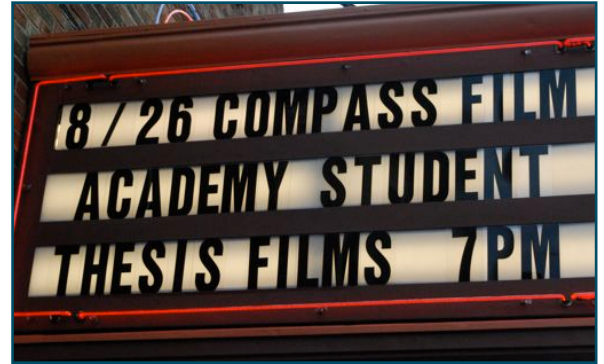
introduced Dik to Jeffrey Stott, the former executive vice president of Production Management at Castle Rock Entertainment and executive producer of *The Bucket List* and *A Few Good Men*. Dik mentioned to Stott her interest in producing a documentary about zoos. Coincidentally, Stott, holding a PhD in history, had written his college dissertation on the history of zoos, which Dik asked to read. Although surprised by the request, he acquiesced, and the two became friends.

While teaching another class a few weeks later, Stott asked Dik if she would be interested in working as his assistant on his next film, *Marmaduke*, based on the popular comic strip about a family and their Great Dane. She accepted the position.

Today, Dik is helping Stott wrap up production on *Marmaduke* in Vancouver, B.C., and traveling between LA and Vancouver as the film transitions into its June 2010 release. Dik also is working on her passion project: a documentary about caste-based discrimination in India.

BOX OFFICE SMASH

2009 Graduates Premiere To A Full House



Compass Film Academy's 2009 graduating class premiered their thesis films to a full house on August 26 at the Wealthy Theatre in Grand Rapids. It also was graduation night. Additional to presenting the culmination of their work as students, the evening marked the beginning of their filmmaking careers.

The sold-out screenings were followed by the awarding of diplomas. CFA's President Keri Lowe addressed the graduating students, reminding them of the power and responsibility they hold in developing content for the entertainment industry. Keynote speaker Guy Sawyer, CFA's Chairman of the Board, delivered a powerful message about "seizing the day" and showed

a clip from *Dead Poets Society* to inspire and motivate the graduates.

The event also featured the students' movie trailers and behind-the-scenes documentaries.

Two of the thesis films, *Wake Up* and *A New Message*, later were chosen to be screened at the Michigan Film Festival.

"These [thesis] films represent the end of a journey," commented Student Services Coordinator Phil Worfel. "To see them produce films of this quality is simply remarkable, not to mention seeing several of the films already receiving outside recognition. It gives us all hope for the future of the industry and validation for what we're trying to accomplish here at Compass."

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