

Local Filmmaker's Reel Hits Snag at Canadian Border

Stanton Continues Promoting Movie "North Starr" and Producing New Movie Based in Cleveland

By ANN WISHART

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Returning from Los Angeles to visit his native Geauga County, independent filmmaker Matthew Stanton discovered not all of Canada is as friendly as he believed.

He had a plan when he left California — to stay in Northeast Ohio through the November elections, get his new film about Cleveland off the ground and work with his contacts in Toronto on tech-marketing his signature film, "North Starr."

But Canadian officials stopped him at the border last month, interrogated him and turned him back, afraid he was planning to emigrate from the U.S.

"I got detoured," said Stanton, still amazed he was unable to cross the border. "I've been working out of Toronto for two and a half years. I use Toronto as a hub. I have strong relationships there," he said.

The border guards looked in the back of his old van and saw his baggage and all he would need to stay for several months in Ohio and decided he was a risk.

For more than two hours, they quizzed him about his bank account, went through his cell phone text messages and his belongings and talked to his marketing people in Toronto, who concurred he was just visiting for business.

No dice.

"It was one of the most disappointing and ironic circumstances I have found myself in," Stanton said, citing part of an article he wrote in April that was printed in Venice Beachhead, a California magazine about the film industry.

"North Starr" traveled north in search of refuge and a desperately needed lifeline eventually finding a haven in the welcoming arms of The Media Concierge and the Duplium Corporation in Toronto. Canada is the third largest film industry in North America, but second to none in recognizing the important value in relationship building and genuine independent film support. It's a completely different culture up there altogether and Canadians, quite frankly, are the best," he wrote.

He has sold about 75 percent of his "North Starr" DVD inventory and, since the world has moved on to USBs, he was going to work with technicians in Toronto to alter the content to fit a thumb drive.

"This wasn't a situation where I was trying to sell (DVDs) in Toronto. I was resupplying my stock," Stanton said, adding he has made half a dozen trips into Canada with just his passport, but he suspects the political and economic environment in the U.S. has made the Canadians more cautious. Stanton's starving artist lifestyle — no property, no lease — rang warning bells for them.

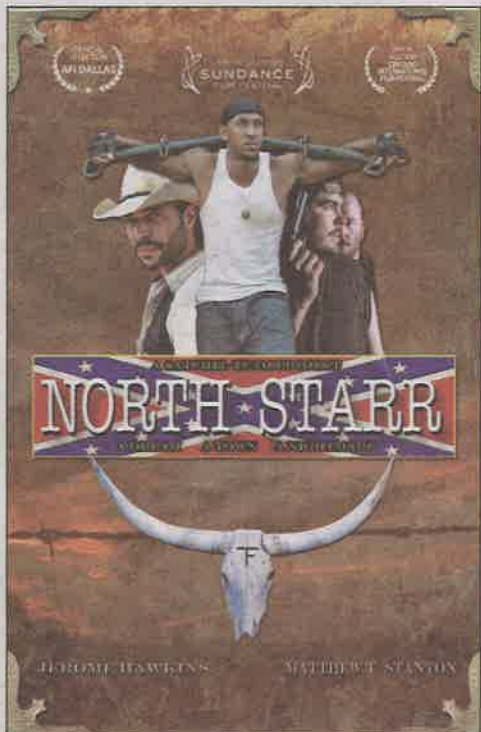
"Based on their assessment, I had no reason to return to the U.S.," he said, and the fact he has friends, family and a career in this country didn't hold water.

He told the immigration people about his success with "North Starr," which was nominated for a grand jury prize when it was screened at the Sundance Film Festival in 2008. They were unimpressed.

"Successful, eh?" Stanton recalls one of the agents saying, and he has come to the conclusion it was a matter of money.

"It really came down to how much was in my checking account," he said. "What is adequate?"

Stanton didn't receive an answer to his



SUBMITTED

Matthew Stanton wrote, produced and starred in North Starr, a film nominated for a grand jury prize when it was screened at the Sundance Film Festival in 2008. He is working on a film about Cleveland called "The Plum." He plans to visit Geauga County until after the elections in November.

query, but he hasn't taken the next step of contacting the Canadian government to question the decision.

"People say I should fight this but I have to respect that Canada is its own sovereign nation. If I plan on visiting Canada again, I'd better pad my bank account," he joked.

But, clearly, being a "content owner" of a film that took 14 years to produce and get recognized, didn't do the trick, Stanton said.

"Our relationship (in Toronto) is strong. Facetime is a great way to communicate," he said, and he may go with content streaming for now to get more eyes on the film.

Also his base is in Los Angeles, Stanton said producing a film there or in New York is prohibitively expensive, so he goes on location for filming. "North Starr" was produced entirely in Texas and Stanton had to develop a southern accent to act the part.

The two-hour independent film starts with a young African American witnessing the brutal murder of his best friend. He flees the badlands of Houston and finds himself in Trublin, a backward, racially intolerant town where he meets an unlikely kindred spirit who takes him under his wing, according to the IMDB website.

Stanton's goal is to continue to self-distribute and recoup the costs of production from the small subscription revenues.

Any profits will go to a charity in whatever geographic area the film is made available via streaming — possibly as far afield as Africa and Asia, he said.

That allows him to showcase his work to a mass audience, offer it at a reasonable price, keep control of his own work and build a reputation for helping others.

Meanwhile, Stanton is working on production of a screenplay he wrote years ago about a weekly newspaper in downtown Cleveland that is on its last legs. Stanton's role is that of a reluctant employee with little journalism experience who is assigned to write the final feature for the publication.

"He's not one who likes responsibility. He'd rather be surfing," he said, explaining



ANN WISHART/KMG

Independent filmmaker Matthew Stanton, Geauga County native, talks about his abortive attempt to get across the Canadian border last month in order to visit business associates in Toronto. He said he grew a goatee to fit the role of the star of his next film about Cleveland, The Plum.

that surfing in Cleveland on Lake Erie only occurs when the "surf" is up — in the winter, leading to the film's motto "Misery is what you make of it."

What the surfer ends up doing with the opportunity creates a realistic, positive image of Cleveland's inhabitants, Stanton said.

Stanton, son of Jack and Nora Stanton, of Newbury Township, graduated in 1988 from Chagrin Falls High School where he played football and ran track. He has a bachelor of arts degree from Loyola-Mary Mount University in theater arts and worked as a model, acted in commercials and then was with MTV networks for seven years before breaking away from television to make films.

Regardless of his financial standing, Stanton said he's having a great time, not worried about the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.

"Robert Redford told me 'It doesn't matter what's going on on Main Street. Focus on your stories and you won't fail,'" Stanton said, adding he is evolving and improving as an actor and producer.

"I aspire to improve, improve, improve. You can't get there without time and experiences," he said.

Stanton can be reached at fatbessy-films@aol.com and he said he is happy to ship copies of "North Starr" to customers right out of his van.



Race for Education



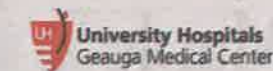
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