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The Dallas Morning News

May 31, 1996
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Column: FILM & TV OUTTAKES

Alamo City has a role in comedy

Native son's movie to be a family affair
Author: *Jane Sumner*

Article Text:

Native Texan Jim Robinson's work has been on PBS, CBS and the Discovery, Disney and Family channels. Next week, the director, known for his documentaries, music videos and TV spots, is back in his hometown of San Antonio to shoot a movie, the romantic comedy **Still Breathing**.

The independent film is a family affair. Mr. Robinson will direct his own script. Wife Denise Pizzini (Like Water for Chocolate, A Walk in the Clouds) is production designer. Mom Marge Moody is handling the Texas casting.

The tale's hero is Fletcher McBracken (Brendan **Fraser**), an eccentric street performer living in the Alamo City. For years, the men in his family have had dramatic midnight visions of the women who will be their lifelong loves. Only his vision leads him to Roz

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Willoughby (Wyatt Earp's Joanna Going), who is busy conning rich men in the art world.

Others in the Zap Pictures project include Ann Magnuson (Clear and Present Danger), Angus McFadyen (Braveheart), four-time Grammy winner Lou Rawls and Oscar winner Celeste Holm (Gentleman's Agreement).

On Monday, **Still Breathing** begins a three-week-plus shoot at such landmarks as the San Jose Mission, the Alamo and the San Antonio River. Then the company moves to Los Angeles for a week and a half. San Antonio's Johanna Woollcott is unit production manager, and Lisa Lopez (Like Water for Chocolate) is set decorator.

Tex Cleaver

Want a look at the Garland kid who won the coveted role of the big-screen Beav? You can catch 8-year-old Cameron Finley on commercials for Brinks Home Security and Grandy's.

The Garland resident, represented by Marquee Talent in Dallas, has been involved in show biz since age 3, but Leave It to Beaver will be his first lead. Playing the Beav fulfills four of the young actor's goals.

"It's a starring role," he says. "My friends will get to see this because it'll be PG or PG-13. I'll get my picture on a video box and maybe even get to be an action figure. If all those come true, I'm going to have to make new acting goals."

Mom Lexa Finley says she didn't want her son to be crushed if he didn't get the role. So she started preparing him for rejection. But Cameron wasn't having any. "You've got to think positively," he told her.

First film

For 10 years, First Tuesday Productions' Pierre Bagley, known for his smashing fashion videos, yearned to make a motion picture. In 1994, he went and did it. Using his own funds, he wrote, produced (with Linda Dippel), directed and edited *The Message*, which gets its world premiere Monday at General Cinema's NorthPark 3 and 4.

It's the Hitchcockian tale of a bright young man from the wrong end of Manhattan who wants to be a player in the New York art scene. But when N.O.R.M.A., his state-of-the-art answering machine with artificial intelligence, develops a mind of her own, he turns into the target of a Harlem drug lord.

Mr. Bagley's stars are New York actors Jaime Perry and J.D. Wyatt, and Dallas actress Liz Piazza Kelley. He shot exteriors in Manhattan and interiors in Dallas and McKinney.

"I wrote it to make it as a short," he says. "It became bigger and bigger. Finally, we closed down Madison Avenue at 5 p.m. and got the run of Central Park. You wouldn't have known we were as small a film as we were."

Hollywood isn't sure what to make of *The Message*, he says. "They're looking at this film saying, 'Cool! But it's got a black cast . . .' I'm an artist first. I should be able to pick and choose and paint in any colors. It's not a racial or gender issue. I chose something that makes us all go bump in the night."

Mr. Bagley says he paid for the film out of his own pocket because "I needed to get it started and it made sense for me to take the risk." Besides, he says, "It's hard to raise money in this town. They don't think it's real."

On Monday, they'll see how real it is when Mayor Ron Kirk and agent Kim Dawson host *The Message's* invitational world premiere. Mr. Bagley reports that he's already sold the first foreign rights to Germany and that Orion is interested in domestic distribution

Caption:

PHOTO(S): Brendan **Fraser** portrays an eccentric street performer living in San Antonio in Jim Robinson's romantic comedy **Still Breathing** .;

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