



Kansas Independents Create Musical “Air”

Lawrence, Kansas: One of the most popular movie musicals of all time is remembered for the phrase “We’re not in Kansas anymore, Toto.” But now a young team of filmmakers from Kansas have just taken on the un-common challenge of creating a modern musical that is smart, courageous, and full of heart – maybe they are living in the land of Oz!

AIR: The Musical is a feature film about falling in and out of love as it follows the lives of three ordinary couples who feel out of place in the world. It’s about making connections, and the music that sets up the soundtrack to our lives. The film was produced by Through A Glass Productions of Lawrence, Kansas lead by Jeremy Osbern and Chris Blunk. Osbern served as both Director and DP and he and Blunk co-wrote the script. Osbern and Blunk formed TAGP after meeting in the University of Kansas Film School.

“We shot *AIR: The Musical* over the course of four years in the Kansas City area, in between the usual commercial and music video work we do at TAGP,” says Osbern. “When we had short ends left over from other 35mm projects, and our crew was free, we’d go out on a weekend and shoot another scene from the movie. Fortunately, we were able to have a wonderful group of actors and crew professionals who came together to work on this movie.”

The third member to join this “musical journey” was composer Steve Unruh. “It was a great creative experience to collaborate with Jeremy and Chris in creating the music,” notes Unruh. “‘Air’ was a huge artistic challenge. We wanted the music to propel the characters and scenes beyond traditional stereotypes. The song lyrics are part of the dialogue, and the three couples in the story are different ages, and in different stages of life. So we used rock, jazz, classical, doo-wop, punk and country to represent their inner thoughts and feelings.” Original songs wind through this tale of old regrets and new loves, as fragile couples discover the hidden melody in themselves and in each other.

TAGP used their experience with music videos to develop the feature and used some interesting in camera effects staging a scene with hundreds of extras at a trendy music club in the West Port District of Lawrence. “One scene has lead Donnie, played by Dylan Paul, singing in a club while all the dancers are in slow motion,” explains Osbern. “We over-cranked the camera and had Donnie lip sync at twice the speed, so he is performing normal, ‘frozen in time’, as all the dancers move in slow motion. The final look is very effective.”

Through A Glass Productions raised the capital for the production locally through many small individual investors who shared in the teams’ vision and message of the film more

than just a financial return. The same was true for many of the actors and crews who gave of themselves and the goals of the film for their love of their crafts. Even though the budgets for an independent film are tight, Osbern and Blunk knew they wanted to shoot on 35mm film rather than the less expensive but often lower quality digital approach.

Working from the heartland, the film involved companies across the country. Stephen Deaver oversaw the final post-production stages of *AIR* for TAGP. “We shot in Lawrence,” Deaver explains, “and processing and dailies were done in Minneapolis, then the off line was cut here on FCP from Standard Def DigiBetas, and final HD selects were transferred at Cinefilm in Atlanta. We were all over the map.”

Upon completion of the offline cut *AIR: The Musical*, has played at festivals across the country, and won ‘Best Feature’ at the Kansas City Filmmakers Jubilee. Even better was the opportunity to ink a deal for theatrical distribution overseas which required a high-quality master of the film in under a month.

“We turned to Cinefilm Labs in Atlanta,” says Writer/Producer Blunk. “where we had done some music video work. They initially caught our eye several years ago when they were the first to offer 35mm negative processing and direct-to-drive telecine.” An initial workflow plan to scan 2K Cineon files proved to be too time consuming and the post process fell behind schedule. “Then CineFilm stepped up,” exclaims Blunk, “knowing that we had a very narrow window of time. They were able to take our EDL, transfer the negative on their Spirit and DaVinci 2K, and do a magnificent job of color timing, all within a few days and get us back on schedule.”

From symphony concerts to rock clubs, from honky-tonks to city streets, *AIR: The Musical* shows there is harmony in even the most unexpected places. In many ways, this is a typical story of independent features as a labor of love for talented young filmmakers risking it all on an uncommon dream of a movie musical . Their work has amazed the critics and their success in making an early distribution deal just shows that maybe ‘the yellow brick road’ does lead through Kansas after all.



Julie Anne (played by Brenda Harvey) and Malcolm (Granville O'Neal) try to put the past behind them as they share a dance during a country swing number - one of the many diverse genres of music featured in *AIR*.



Director Jeremy Osbern plots 'Sarah's Dance' with choreographer Ellie Goudie-Averill. Sarah lives above a theater and as she crosses the stage alone one night, 'dances out the void' in her life. (Shown L-R: costumer Summer Eglinski, actress Megan Carter, Goudie-Averill, and Osbern.)



"Sarah (played by actress Megan Carter) emerges from her wrecked car where she will find an unexpected new love."



Director/DP Jeremy Osborn sets a scene in the unconventional musical *Air*. The Kansas production team called in many favors with cast and crew often donating their time, but chose 35mm and DI support from Cinefilm in Atlanta to assure the look and quality of the product.



Many of the rock numbers for *Air* were staged in popular college clubs near the University of Kansas. This scene shows Donnie (played by Dylan Paul) singing to a track at double speed while the camera over-cranked, creating slow motion dancing around the vocalist. One of many in-camera techniques employed by Through A Glass Productions.

