

FLICK PICKS

## Louisville Native Goes the Distance

by Tim Hill

Most film directors would tell you they came into the world shouting "Action!" and have had moviemaking in their blood ever since. Not Louisville native Stu Pollard. "I wasn't really interested in movies as a young guy," he admits.

But he was a big fan of sports. While attending high school at Kentucky Country Day in Louisville, he got to announce scores on the school's P.A. system, which expanded into a morning show complete with recorded post-game interviews of coaches and players.

That lit the creative spark. Pollard moved on to Georgetown University, majoring in business. But he spent his spare time, as he puts it, "running around with a pre-historic camcorder, documenting various collegiate lunacy as well as directing skits and sketches."

Filmmaking was put on the back burner when he headed off to New York to work in a big ad agency. Still, the lure of turning his collegiate hobby into the real thing became too tough to resist. With the urging of some of his college buddies, he applied and was accepted into the prestigious film school at the University of Southern California.

How was he admitted into a top-flight film program without any real background? "I'm really not sure," he says. "Clerical error? Blind luck? I've often theorized that they admitted me because I was a nice complement to the people who were there for strictly artistic reasons."

However he got there, the contacts he made would serve him well. Pollard's fellow students were among the best and the brightest young film talents. "My thing was that I did what no one else liked to do. I was the one guy who knew Excel. I could help with schedules, budgets, and any other part of the process that involved calendars, spreadsheets, and checkbooks. I ended up being very helpful to some very good filmmakers."

Those contacts paid off when, in 1999, he shot his first independent feature film, "Nice Guys Sleep Alone," and then, in 2004, "Keep Your Distance." "I called on people I did stuff for, and they were more than happy to help me because I had helped them," he says. So fellow USC grads served as directors



Rafel Winer/Lunacy Productions Writer/director Stu Pollard in his hometown of Louisville.

of photography, producers, even composers on Pollard's debut film efforts.

Both "Nice Guys Sleep Alone" and "Keep Your Distance" were shot in Louisville, and both films featured Churchill Downs as a key location. The Seelbach Hotel, Cave Hill Cemetery, Hermitage Farm, fancy restaurants, and hole-in-the-wall diners also appear in the movies.

The city also proved to be a fertile spot for raising the finances for both pictures. "Investing in a movie is not for everybody. It requires a mindset a lot like horse racing," Pollard says. "The thing that's great about Kentucky is that the folks recognize that. You don't invest your kid's college fund. You don't go into it for strictly financial reasons. The chance for hitting a home run is there. But the only variable I control is getting the movie made. Whether the marketplace will bear it, I couldn't promise."

The budgets for both pictures may have been limited, and they may have lacked the marketing clout of a major studio. But Pollard was still able to attract some major acting talent to both his films. "Nice Guys Sleep Alone" features Morgan Fairchild and William Sanderson (Larry of TV's "Newhart"). "Keep Your Distance" stars Gil Bellows (Billy in TV's "Ally McBeal"), Kim Raver (from TV's "Third Watch" and "24"), Jennifer Westfeldt ("Kissing Jessica Stein"), Stacy Keach, and Elizabeth Peña.

"Nice Guys Sleep Alone" ran for 18 months on HBO, two years on the Lifetime Movie Network, and is currently airing on the Women's Entertainment Network. It went on to become one of the top rented indie



Rafel Winer/Lunacy Productions LOUISVILLE'S FIRST COUPLE: Susan & David Dailey (Kim Raver and Gil Bellows) enjoy the perks of being the most popular local celebrities in Louisville, KY.

titles on Netflix.com. It can be purchased at the movie's Web site, [www.niceguys-movie.com](http://www.niceguys-movie.com). "Keep Your Distance" just completed a tour of festivals and college campuses (it debuted at the Kentucky Theatre last September), and Pollard says he expects the film to become available for purchase at [www.distanceflick.com](http://www.distanceflick.com) in February or March.

Pollard still has his Kentucky connections. His father, Carl Pollard, who is chairman of Churchill Downs, and his stepmother live at Goshen's Hermitage Farm, and his sister Susan lives here in Lexington. But will Pollard's old Kentucky home-based films be seen by large numbers of moviegoers? He's quick to point out that, thanks to the healthy cable TV exposure and international distribution to more than 20 countries, "Nice Guys Sleep Alone" has been seen by at least a million people.

He's a big believer in old-fashioned promotion of his films. "A common flaw among indie filmmakers is that they give up on their films too quickly, especially if they don't make a big splash right away," he said. "The reality is that we live in a time where there's never been greater opportunities for our work to be seen. Everywhere there's a zip code, it seems, there's a film festival. There's been a huge proliferation of cable channels, the popularity of DVDs has exploded beyond belief, there's video on demand, and the Internet. The list goes on and on and will continue to grow. Bottom line, there's an audience for virtually every film ever made. It's just a question of seeking it out."

**Keep Your Distance**  
Rookie filmmakers are judged on promise. Their first productions are usually done on such a shoestring that you have to look beyond their obvious limitations. But Stu Pollard shows more than promise in his second directorial effort, "Keep Your Distance." This stylish psychological thriller is an expertly directed, beautifully shot effort.

David Dailey (played by Gil Bellows) is a popular radio talk show host and commu-

nity celebrity. He and his beautiful wife Susan (Kim Raver) reign over Louisville's social scene. Meanwhile, Melody Carpenter (Jennifer Westfeldt), a recently divorced pharmaceutical sales rep, is being hounded by her boyfriend Sean (Christian Kane) to get married. The story kicks into gear when anonymous notes addressed to David begin to appear. The notes unravel secrets that threaten David and Susan's marriage, and bring David and Melody together.


A sign of the polish of "Distance" is how quickly you forget you're watching the effort of an inexperienced director with a small budget. You are pulled into the intrigue of the story. The actors are clearly pros, especially Jennifer Westfeldt, a Renee Zellweger look-alike with a luminous screen presence. Christian Kane, Jamie Harrold, and veterans Stacy Keach and Elizabeth Pena add considerable acting clout to the movie.

One star of the movie is Louisville itself. The city comes off looking beautiful, and Pollard used more than 100 locations to show off the river city's many attributes, including scenic country roads and glorious sunsets. And he shows a flair for action with a suspenseful and heart-pounding car chase along one of those country roads.

"Distance" does venture off into some R-rated sexual situations as some of the secrets are revealed. But it still keeps its focus on the thriller component, culminating in a suspenseful climax in David's dark country house on a rainy night. Some of the plot resolution comes at a pace that had me doing a little more processing than going with the flow. But it still managed to surprise and provide a thrilling conclusion.

"Keep Your Distance" shows off the talents of a local filmmaker who makes Kentucky look good. Unlike his debut film, "Nice Guys Sleep Alone," there's not a hillbilly or a stereotype in sight. Just a beautiful canvas for a compelling story.

**Keep Your Distance. ★★★.** R (sexuality and language). Louisville boy makes good. **SS**



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