



Stu Pollard action!

by Keith Sisson

Filmmaker Stu Pollard never left his Louisville, Ky. roots, even when going to school at Georgetown University or working for a New York City ad agency. It's those ties that give the emerging writer/producer/director the ability to capture, portray and sometimes even spoof Southern culture in a way that we can all appreciate.

Pollard grew up a fan of thoroughbred racing—an industry that is featured prominently in his first film, the romantic comedy *Nice Guys Sleep Alone*. The film stars Sean O'Bryan, Sybil Temchen, Vanessa Marcil, William Sanderson, and Morgan Fairchild. But it was a long jaunt from the Bluegrass to Tinsel town.

"I was a business major [at Georgetown], so it was a little odd that I would spend my spare time running around with a pre-historic camcorder, documenting various collegiate lunacy as well as directing skits and sketches," he says.

Thinking of this imaginative outlet only as a hobby, Pollard graduated and took an advertising job in Manhattan. After wearing a suit to work for three years, he felt his creative juices were drying up. With a great deal of encouragement from his Georgetown brethren, Pollard left the Big Apple behind for one of the nation's most prestigious film schools, the University of Southern California.

"It was there where the shift came for me, where film making went from being a hobby to something I was going to pursue professionally," he says.

Once on USC's campus, it wasn't long before Pollard found his niche. Being surrounded by classmates with incredible artistic and technical talent, Pollard deduced he was one of the few with a business background. He soon became one of the schools most prolific student producers, managing the logistical and budgetary elements

of nearly two dozen short films.

"I was the guy all the writers and directors came to for help with schedules, budgets, and any other part of the film making process that involved calendars, spreadsheets, and checkbooks."

A number of the filmmakers Pollard collaborated with as students have gone on to successful careers: Breck Eisner is presently directing *Sahara* starring Matthew McConaughey and Penelope Cruz; Nathan Hope is director of photography on CBS's *CSI*; and Ted Iredell is the executive producer of MTV's *Making the Band*.

"The best part about attending USC's film school is the people you meet. Film is such a collaborative medium, and USC is responsible for introducing me to just about every person I know in the business."

After film school, Pollard carried his role of producer forward into the private sector. He formed a production company, Lunacy Unlimited Productions, and began creating everything from music videos to CD-ROMS. But Pollard couldn't get away from his desire to make movies—and he eventually turned to his hometown of Louisville to help get him started. Looking back, Pollard, now 37, recalls the major challenges to getting *Nice Guys* off the ground.

"The most challenging phase of any indie film is the money-raising period. Without studio financing, the filmmaker is completely responsible for his or her own funding. One great thing—of many—about Louisville is that its fundraising climate has proven fertile for its native filmmakers."

Nice Guys Sleep Alone was shot entirely in Louisville in the summer of 1999. Settings included Churchill Downs, Hermitage Farm, and



local restaurants ranging from the upscale Jack Frys to the slightly less refined Genny's Diner. The latter is famous for serving deep fried pickle chips ("Frickled Pickles") and a signature burger called "The Sweet Daddy."

"The Sweet Daddy is made up of these three humongous patties—each approaching a pound—somehow crammed on a bun with all the fixins. In reality, the burger was simply too big to capture on film, even with trick photography. So we basically had to create a scaled-down version to make it look a little more consumable."

Nice Guys... also features a seersucker-clad, slow-talking Southern lawyer who peddles a "Pre-Relationship Agreement," a legal document that is much like a prenuptial agreement but geared specifically towards couples on a first date.

"One of the best things about the *Nice Guys Sleep Alone* website [www.niceguysmovie.com] is that we have the entire Pre-Relationship Agreement available for download. It's humorous, and at the same time, healthy. In today's dating world, folks sometimes work so hard to make a good first impression that they conceal many of the important things on which genuine relationships are forged:

religious views, political dispositions, feelings about kids, etc.," Pollard explains.

"The Pre-Relationship Agreement is a great icebreaker. And its incredibly direct line of questioning inspires something that's not exactly omnipresent in most first date conversations: honesty."

Nice Guys Sleep Alone grew to have a successful life outside of Louisville, garnering domestic distribution deals with HBO and Netflix, and scoring international distribution in over a dozen countries overseas. You can purchase the DVD just about anywhere, and can order signed copies directly from Pollard through the film's official website.

"I attribute a huge amount of the success *Nice Guys...* enjoyed to Louisville. The hometown support we received—both in production and release—inspired me to shoot my next film there as well," he said, "The best way I can say 'thank you' is to come back and do it again—bigger and better."

Pollard is making good on his promise. His latest effort, *Keep Your Distance*, recently wrapped production, again entirely in the "City of Beautiful Churches." This new offering takes on a deeper and more sophisticated slant. Also written by Pollard, this film asks questions such as: Who can you trust? What's important in life? Is it power, love, respect? What makes you happy?

"*Keep Your Distance* throws a lot at you from the get go. There are multiple characters and story lines for the audience to follow. The idea is to engage the viewer and challenge him/her to seek out which people and events in the film are the most important.

Keep Your Distance is now in post-production and will be hitting the film festival circuit later this year. Notable Southerners in the cast include Texan Christian Kane (*Just Married, Life or Something Like It*) and Savannah, Ga., native Stacy Keach (TV's *Mike Hammer*).

As for Stu Pollard's future, he hopes that after directing two successful indie films, he'll begin to get the attention of larger players in the movie business. Acknowledging that it would be a dream to bring a major studio picture to his hometown, he is also quick to point out that he loves being his own boss.

"I like doing things my own way. It's nice to not have to worry about people looking over my shoulder, or executives telling me to kill off a character or change the ending. All directors are control freaks, so I of course thrive with the large amount of creative control I enjoy as an independent filmmaker. It's a challenging and risky way to make films, but all the hurdles make the finished product that much more satisfying."