

Camera Men

With his new movie about to premiere, Stu Pollard talks shop with fellow filmmaker Archie Borders

There aren't a lot of professional filmmakers in Louisville, which is why Velocity jumped at the chance to get directors **Archie Borders** ("Paper Cut") and **Stu Pollard** ("Nice Guys Sleep Alone") to sit down and discuss Pollard's latest film, "Keep Your Distance," a thriller shot here in town.

"Keep Your Distance" premieres Thursday at the Kentucky Center. To mark the occasion, Archie and Stu grabbed a cup of coffee and talked some nuts and bolts filmmaking.

Archie: How have you changed as a filmmaker since "Nice Guys Sleep Alone?"

Stu: The biggest change this time around was that I was more confident. On "Nice Guys," the typical shot list was standard TV-style coverage: master, two-shot, close-ups and then at the end I'd try something cool — if I had time. But we were basically always a little behind schedule, so nearly all the more visually adventurous stuff got kicked to the curb. On "Keep Your Distance," one of my first mandates to (director of photography) Matt Irving was to have more fun with the camera — especially with movement and composition.

You've shot both of your films in Louisville. Since "Keep Your Distance" is a different type of movie than "Nice Guys," how did you approach it aesthetically?

"Keep Your Distance" is a more dramatic and suspenseful story than "Nice Guys." So in aesthetic terms, I tried to shoot Louisville in a more sophisticated — and less stereotypical — way. I think the result is a setting that still possesses loads of natural beauty, but also feels much more cosmopolitan.

How do you approach a scene? Do you come in with a detailed shot list or do you do some improvisation?

In terms of performance, I work extensively with an acting coach prior

to pre-production. My shooting script will have the standard script text on one side, while the other is this monster chart of adjustments, back story, alternate lines and subtext. My theory is to be as prepared as possible for any question — however bizarre — an actor might ask.

With regards to shot-listing, Matt Irving and I met for about four hours a day during prep and had the entire shoot planned out before Day One. It's empowering to have a plan going in; it puts you in the best possible position to get what you want out of your cast and crew. And the great thing about having a plan is that you can always abandon it if it's not working.

How much leeway do you give your actors in a scene?

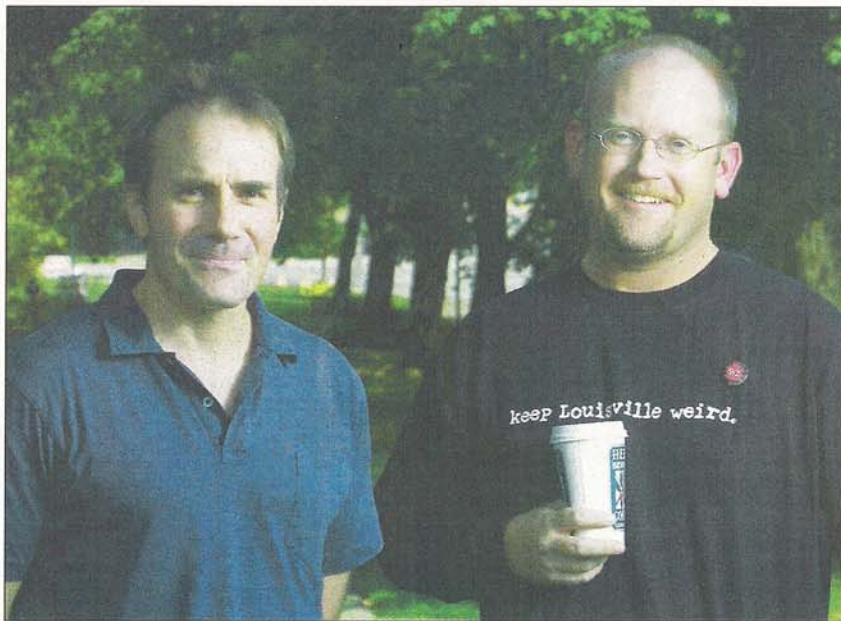
It depends on the actors and on the scene. This particular cast included Jennifer Westfeldt, who wrote a pretty kick-ass film in "Kissing Jessica Stein." Anytime she had ideas on the script or her character, I listened to them, because I have such immense respect for her as an actor and a writer. And we incorporated many of her ideas into the film.

On the flipside, not every suggestion — regardless of who's making it — is going to be a good one. So I certainly had to play diplomat on occasion, trying to finesse it in such a way so that no one gets upset. That works nine times out of 10, but sometimes you just resort to the horsetrade: "Let's try one my way and one your way," and usually, you discover a third way that's better than what either of us had in mind.

How many weeks did you shoot?

Six weeks of principle photography, three days second unit and then three or four days of pick-up shots.

How was it mixing a Louis-



Archie Borders ("Paper Cut"), left, and Stu Pollard ("Keep Your Distance," "Nice Guys Sleep Alone.")



"Keep Your Distance" stars Jennifer Westfeldt and Gil Bellows.

ville film crew and a Chicago crew?

I think (Chicago-based) producer Christina Varotsis set an incredibly collaborative tone from the outset, and that allowed everyone on our crew to feel like they were part of a big family — regardless of where they were from. One of the nice things about out-of-towners is introducing them to Louisville. For them, there's that summer camp-like excitement about being away from home.

The tricky part about the film community here is that there are usually far more short-term projects — commercials, etcetera — than there are long-form. So a lot of the best people in town are used to getting paid short-term (e.g. higher) day rates

and I'm coming along saying, "Hey, let me tie you up for five weeks and pay you next to nothing."

But we were able to work a few days with some local production guys I really, really respect like (cinematographer) Marcel Cabrera and (grip) Bobby Spaulding. And the film couldn't have been made without Louisvillians such as co-producer Jen Sims, art director Bill Green and soundtrack producer Todd Smith.

Looking back over your films, are there any recurring thematic elements you're trying to express?

Both films thrust the main characters into moral crossroads. They're asked to make difficult decisions —

'Keep Your Distance'

World Premiere
7:30 p.m. Thursday
Bomhard Theater in the Kentucky Center, 501 W. Main St.
Tickets: \$75 at the box office, or by calling 584-7777

The film opens Friday at Baxter Avenue Theatres, Tinseltown USA, Showcase Cinemas Stonybrook and Great Escape 16-New Albany.

On the web

Check out a photo gallery from the "Keep Your Distance" premiere and a review of the movie on Friday at www.velocityweekly.com.

ones where the right choice isn't always the easy one, or where the right thing to do isn't the cool or sexy thing to do.

And by telling a story set in contemporary reality, I'm hoping people will think about the ramifications of those choices — how they will affect the lives of the characters long after the movie ends.

Ultimately, I try to put ordinary people into extraordinary situations — and put the audience right there with them. So that from moment to moment, you're thinking, "What would I do?" ■