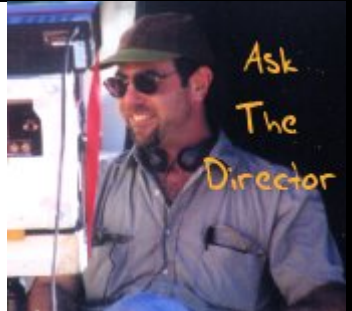


Josh Becker DGA

Directing From The Edge



Q & A Archive
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Name: Charles
E-mail: CSCorder@hotmail.com

Dear Josh:

Can you give us more details on your World War I script (its genesis, research, how long it took to write) and its prospects for reaching the big (or small) screen?

Charles

Dear Charles:

The script is called "Devil Dogs: The Battle of Belleau Wood," and it's a true story about the first battle the Americans were involved in during WW1, as well as the single worst day in U.S. Marine Corps history (they lost nearly 1100 men that day). It has taken me four years to write and rewrite this script, and I believe I've read nearly everything extant on that battle. As to its getting financed and produced, God only knows.

Josh

Name: Thom
E-mail:

Dear Josh:

Who is your favorite talent to work with? If you had to pic a show to direct which one would it be? Or if you had the chance to direct your own series, what would it be? thanks

Dear Thom:

I don't really care for series TV and don't watch it, so there really isn't any show I desire to work on. Not being

a TV guy, I wouldn't ever have my own series. I've completely enjoyed working with the cast of "Xena," however.

Josh

Name: Jonathan Kenworthy
E-mail: kenny.plisskin69@virgin.net

Dear Josh:

Thanks for the advice on steady-cams. Anyway the films coming on a treat. I just wanted you're opinion on my little idea for distributing my movie, basically I have access to facilities that I can use to put the film on to DVD and I was thinking about setting up a website and selling (for a cheap price) it that way. Is this a viable idea. We will copyright the film first of course, Any thanx again, and if I run into any more production problems, I'll probably pester you again

Cheers
Jonathan

P.S.sorry about any spelling/grammer errors I'm shattered

Dear Jonathan:

It's an approach. It didn't work for me, but it might work for you. The problem, I found, was that no one has heard of the movie, so why buy it? That's why anything that gets a theatrical release, no matter how poorly done or badly attended, will sell much better in video and DVD because of the advertising the theatrical release caused. You should still try to get a distributor to release it, and try to get as big of an advance as humanly possible.

Josh

Name: Dawn
E-mail: dawnm2000@yack.com

Hi Josh,

A friend of mine hooked me up to your link,I have seen so much of your work and have to say love it.Since this is my first time here ,Are you working on anything new I can look forward to.

Thank you
Dawn

Dear Dawn:

I have viewed the first trial answer print of my new film, "If I Had a Hammer," in 35mm. I will have an intrim video version complete within two weeks, and the film itself will be entirely done within a month. Whether or not I can get a distribution deal so you wonderful folks out there get a chance to see the film, is the big question.

Josh

Name: Daniel Neumann
E-mail: neumann@hellseals.de

Hi Josh,

As I've just seen, TSNKE is coming on dvd. Now I have a stupid question only an insane fan could ask ... do you have the possibility selling signed dvds (I mean signed by you and not by some secretary... :)? I'd love to buy one...

Thanks
Daniel

Dear Daniel:

I will happily sign your's or anybody else's DVD or video sleeve, free of charge, as long as you include a stamped self-addressed envelope. Don't send the entire DVD or tape, just the artwork in the sleeve, which will save you mucho postage. Shirley, the wise and kind webmaster here at Beckerfilms, says, "Send it to Shirley Robbins, PO Box 86, East Vassalboro, ME 04345, and I will forward it to Josh for you."

Josh

Name: Charles
E-mail: cscorder@hotmail.com

Dear Josh:

Two completely unrelated questions:

1. In "Running Time" when Carl and Buzz are shot in the alley after the heist, I noticed that blood splattered on the camera lens. Was that intentional or a happy accident? (I thought it was a neat touch. It reminded me of the scene at the end of "Hell's Angels" -- or was that "Dawn Patrol" -- where the hero bombs the German ammo dump and pieces of debris ricochet off the camera lens during the explosions.)

2. What's your opinion of the film work of the late director Sam Peckinpah? Which film would you rate as his best?

Charles

Dear Charles:

I believe that was "Hell's Angels," which also has one of my favorite little war bits of two planes flying straight at each other in a dogfight, both pilots get shot and the planes run head-on into each other, blow-up and drop out of the sky. Anyway, in "RT" it was a happy accident based on having shot it four or five times already and me not liking the squibs I was getting and finally asking the pyro effects guy for the biggest squib he could give me--he said, "Well, he's only getting shot with a .38," and I said, "Pretend it's a 12-gauge shotgun," and he grinned and said, "I can do that," and that's why the happy accident occurred. Regarding Mr. Sam Peckinpah, I really love "The Wild Bunch" and I don't think any other film in his career comes close. It's one

of those crazy films where everything went right for some reason. It's probably got more out-of-focus shots than any other big movie with name actors and it doesn't matter. William Holden, Robert Ryan, Warren Oates, Ben Johnson, Strother Martin and Edmund O'Brien could not be better. It just gets better every time I see it.

Josh

Name: Benedict
E-mail: ben@berneusdavin.com

Dear Josh:

Since your answers are based purely on your experience, you may not have seen this, but it just occurred to me and I thought I'd ask. When you write dialog that will be subtitled, do you write English and have "in Spanish" in parenthesis, or do you write it in Spanish? Or whatever the language might be.

Thanks.

Dear Benedict:

In my WW1 script, "Devil Dogs," I have a few lines in French. I put the line of dialog in French, then on the next line wrote, Subtitle: and gave the translation.

Josh

Name: Jason Roth
E-mail: rothj@river.it.gvsu.edu

Dear Josh:

Following up on one of Blake's questions- Who are some actors whose performances you enjoy?

Later,
Jason

Dear Jason:

I like actors with good voices, that are well-trained, have a lot of energy, and have a look, which doesn't mean they have to be attractive. That's how I cast, and that's what I look for in actors. Among the contemporary actors that I particularly enjoy, there are: Robert Duvall, Emma Thompson, Meryl Streep, Robert DeNiro, John Turturro, Michelle Pfeiffer, Harvey Keitel, Tommy Lee Jones, Uma Thurman, Samuel L. Jackson, Nick Nolte, Jessica Lang, John Hurt, Anthony Hopkins, Jeff Daniels, Donald Sutherland, Gene Hackman, John Travolta, Matthew Brodrick, Denzel Washington, Ian McKellan, Tom Hanks, Edward Norton, Tom Cruise, Nicole Kidman, Kevin Spacey, Ving Rhames, Julianne Moore, Al Pacino, James Woods, Billy Zane, Steve Buscemi, Morgan Freeman, Willam Macy, Willam Defoe, Kevin Bacon, Gary Sinise, Ed Harris, Larry Fishburne, to name a few.

Josh

Name: S.C.
E-mail: scornett@yahoo.com

Hey Josh,

Just responding to "Slick Willy's" post... I think Harrison Ford is a great actor, when he's cast in the right roles. ...Granted, he's a little reserved, but when he's got a role that he can work with, he does a great job, and he's DEFINATELY more versatile than most of the "typecast" actors that you see, nowadays. What do you think, Joshy?

-S.C.

Dear S.C.:

I certainly don't think Harrison Ford is a great actor--I can't think of a single great performance, or even a really good one, for that matter--but I can watch him.

Josh

Name: Thom
E-mail:

Dear Josh:

Yeah I just wanna say that I like your "real" opinions on films. I also respect that you dont kiss anyones ass to get somewhere. I feel the same way. I just got a few questions:

1. How did u get your first shot at directing TV episodes?
2. How does a director get in rotation for projects?
3. How does a director make high budget films? Do they get signed to a company, do they sell thier screenplays?
4. Where do the music video directors come from, how do they get the job, to direct a video?

thanks

Dear Thom:

1. My first TV gig was on the first season of "Real Stories of the Highway Patrol" where I directed the re-enactments. I got this job because I am friends with Craig Peligian, the show's producer (who has gone on to produce "Survivor" and is now shooting "Survivor 2"). I've known Craig since we were little kids in Michigan. I then got the job as 2nd unit director on two of the five "Hercules" TV movies, and then I directed the fifth "Hercules" TV movie. I got these jobs because I am friends with Rob Tapert, the executive producer, whom I've known for 25 years. After a year and a half of being a leper, I was hired to direct ep #14 of the first season of "Xena."
2. There is no rotation that I know of, at least on "Herc" and "Xena" and those shows. Rob Tapert tries to match up the right director to the right episode.
3. Having never made a high budget movie I can't really say. Having a script producers desire is a great way to get in, though. In lieu of that, they would have to want you and offer you the project.
4. I have no idea where music video directors come from, perhaps they're hatched.

Josh

Name: Charles
E-mail: cscorder@hotmail.com

Dear Mr. Becker:

Bruce Campbell led me to your site which led me to buy "Running Time." I watched it last night and enjoyed it very much. I look forward to seeing more of your movie work. (P.S., I enjoyed your Xena and Jack of All Trades episodes, too.)

Charles

Dear Charles:

Thank you. It was nice of you to bother telling me. Anybody that buys a copy of any of my films is OK with me.

Josh

Name: The Real Slick Willy
E-mail: slickwilly@hotmail.com

Dear Josh:

Ahhh... You have great taste in hating the skills (or lack there of) of today's film stars. You neglected to mention, perhaps an oversight, the "top" guy that not only couldn't act his way out of a paper bag, but would have great difficulty in distinguishing between where he began and the paper bag ended. I am referring to the incredible Harrison Ford.... NOT! Let's hear it for under acting in a big way! Bwa-ha-ha-ha-ha!

Slick as always

"Yes I'm the real Willy. The real deal Willy. Would the real Slick Willy please stand-up."

Dear SlickWilly:

Yeah, Harrison Ford is kind of a bore, but he's better than a lot of people.

Josh

Name: Blake Eckard
E-mail: bseckard

Josh,

What film, at the time you actually watched it, most impressed you. For whatever reasons.

Who's the worst famous actor working today? Strange questions I know.

Make your war movie! And when you do, put Campbell in it. Has that old movie look.

Dear Blake:

Interesting questions, actually--they made me think. Undoubtedly, the film that had the greatest impact on me was "How the West Was Won," in 3-screen Cinerama in 1963 at the Music Hall theater in Detroit. I was five years old and completely and utterly blown away by the experience. I bothered my parents endlessly for the next two or three weeks until they took me back to see it again. I still have the hardcover program, too. I saw "The Longest Day" in 1967 on a re-release that greatly impacted me, as well. The next year, 1968, I saw "Oliver!" which made me want to be in the movies, and I also saw "2001: A Space Odyssey" for the first of many times and was very impressed. In 1970 I really became a serious movie nut and went back and saw "Patton" five times. I saw "The Godfather" 14 times in the theater and "The Godfather Part 2" 12 times. For the next several years movies used to blow me away all the time: "Five Easy Pieces," "The Last Detail," "A Clockwork Orange," "The Last Picture Show," "Slaughterhouse Five," "Play it Again, Sam," "Cabaret," "Papillon," "The Exorcist," "The Texas Chainsaw Massacre," "Love and Death." In 1976, the year I moved to L.A., I kept going back and seeing "Taxi Driver," "Carrie" and "Rocky" over and over again. In 1977 I was at the very first matinee showing of "Star Wars" at the Chinese Theater and was so impressed I sat through it a second time. It doesn't hold up like everything else on the list, but was fun at the time. I remember being blown away by "Alien" and also "Aliens." I got hooked on "The Duellists," Ridley Scott's first film, and saw it many times at the theater. "Platoon" moved me greatly when I first saw it. The last film to do this to me was "Unforgiven," which I went back and saw again two days later. Regarding your second question, for many years the answer was immediately Paul Muni, the most overrated ham of the 30s and 40s. Right now I find Roberto Begnini pretty awful, Ralph Fiennes bugs me, Mel Gibson and his phoney, non-accent accent tortures me, Johnny Depp is way overrated, Keanu Reeves is pretty terrible, I don't particularly like Ben Stiller and don't think he's funny, nor Michael Meyers and his completely not-funny "Austin Powers" movies, Brendon Fraser isn't very good, I find Jim Carrey to be a total ham and entirely unfunny, if I never have to see John Leguizamo it will be too soon, Edward Furlong is awful, Kevin Costner is pretty awful, Warren Beatty should retire, Sylvester Stallone ought to retire, too, Matthew McConaughey stinks, Mark Wahlberg hasn't got a clue, John C. Reilly bugs the shit out of me, as does Rosie Perez, Greg Kinnear seems like a complete nothing, I can't watch Renee Zellweger because she's always doing weird things with her lips, all the Baldwin bros. beside Alec can get lost, Kim Basinger can't act, Demi Moore is pretty awful, Courtney Love is a blot on the screen, Chris Cooper is a bore, Jason Patric is a roaming hole in the screen, as is Winona Ryder. I'll stop now, but you asked.

Josh

Name: Jonathan Kenworthy
E-mail: tkenworthy.freemove.co.uk

Dear Josh:

Great site, just spent an age reading the story structure essays, thank god someone is posting some decent material on the net, anyway my main reason for this little message, is that I could use some help. basically Myself and a few others are making our own little feature, and really I just need some advice, on the best way to knock up a makeshift steady-cam if thats possible. I heard about the shaky-cam used....well you know where, but I'm just not certain on the whole physics of the thing, I can't seem to find any in depth info on DIY camera fittings, and certainly can't afford the real deal, so really anything, even if you can just point me in the right direction, that would be a help, thanx for listening From an English fan, (I hope that makes sense.)

Dear Jonathan:

I'm not sure what kind of camera you're using, but if it's not a big, heavy 35mm camera then you really don't need a Steadi-Cam. All you need to do is put on a wide-angle lens and hand-hold, which I did for about half of my film TSNKE (and that was a 16mm Arri-BL, which is a pretty big camera). A shaky-cam was simply an 18-inch piece of 2x4 with a hole drilled in the middle to screw the camera on, and was used exclusively for the force POV shots in "Evil Dead" when Sam was running full-tilt. I've run just as fast hand-holding a camera. And of course wheel-chairs make very good dollies. Good luck on your film and you're welcome to ask any other production questions you'd like.

Josh

Name: Michael Pearsall
E-mail: fanaka66@yahoo.com

Josh,

I was wondering how 'Hammer' is coming along. I saw in the FAQ that: "I will have my new film, "If I Had a Hammer," with complete picture and sound, transfered to digital beta video tape by the end of next week. " I'm just not sure what week that was. Is it done?

Good luck,
Michael

Dear Michael:

You would bring that up. You see, I had this slick plan to go from my cut 35mm negative directly to video, but alas, that didn't work. Now I'm doing what everybody else does and I'm having the answer print made. I will see the first trial answer print tomorrow morning at 10:00 A.M. at Deluxe Laboratories. I will then transfer that to video, which should be next week, really.

Josh

Name: ted reis
E-mail: ted_reis

Dear Josh:

Wow! I am a gigantic Quinn admirer--I'm so glad I found this website! Your anecdotes have painted a fascinating picture. How lucky you must feel to have directed him! I am an actor myself, the stories here about only go on to prove that Anthony Quinn is a maestro. Tempermental, yes, but worth it most definately. Thank you for sharing!

Dear Ted:

Yes, Quinn was a handful, but worth it. He could take the cruddiest little scenes and make something moving out of them.

Josh

Name: Alam

E-mail:

hi josh!

i know this is probably a stupid question but i always get confused when people use the term 'film noir' because it seems to mean different things to different people. i know it supposedly means 'black film' or 'dark film' but other than that i have a hard time figuring out what type of films it is referring to.

should it even be considered a genre, or is it more a style of cinematography? and are you a fan of it?

love the site! and thanks in advance

Alam

Dear Alam:

"Film Noir" is a term coined by the French during the fifties. In Hollywood they were called "crime thrillers," or, as the case may be, "cheap crime thrillers," which were being made from the time sound arrived in 1927-28. The films that really set this genre apart, however, were made in the second half of the 1940s, with a variety of imaginative, very cheap 'B' pictures, like Edgar G. Ulmer's "Detour," Joseph Lewis' "Gun Crazy," Sam Fuller's "Pickup on South Street," and several films by the young director Anthony Mann, "T-Men," "Raw Deal," "Railroaded!," "Side Street." Many of these films were photographed by the same cinematographer, the great John Alton, who prided himself in using very little light, frequently to hide the fact that there was no set. This is where the term "noir" comes from because there was so little light used. It's a genre I like very much.

Josh

Name: Michael Anthony Lee

E-mail: mal@kingston.net

Josh,

Just wondering what you need to accomplish before you can get a SAG or DGA or for that matter, be part of the WGA? I know you know many people who have some or all of these cards, and I know you are DGA yourself.

What are the up's and down's of having any of these?

Best,

Michael

Dear Michael:

Getting into one of the guilds is a Catch-22 situation--you must be hired by a signatory company, meaning the production company has signed an agreement with the guild, but of course, most companies would rather hire guild people if they're paying guild rates. I was hired to be 2nd unit director on the Hercules TV movies in 1993 which is what got me into the DGA. I'm still not in the WGA, even though I have two writing credits on

Xena, I have written four produced features, and I sold a script to a WGA signatory company under a WGA contract for guild rates. At this point, however, I do not want to join the WGA, because they would get in my way when I make my indie features. The DGA has several low-budget agreements that allow me to make my films, WGA would demand that I pay myself a minimum of \$48,000., which is utterly ridiculous on really cheap movies. If you're in a guild you'll get--when you work--decent wages and residuals, but you can no longer work non-union.

Josh

Name: DREW
E-mail:

Long Time No See,

Just wanted to let you know that I recently moved to Pittsburgh, PA, and I'm now currently enrolled at Pittsburgh Filmmakers. It's a two year school that gives you hands on experience with film equipment, and the best part is you can take out a Super 8 camera whenever you want. Plus a 50 ft roll is only nine bucks. Regardless, I just wanted to say thanks for all the times you gave me a straight answer to my questions, no matter how trivial. Thanks.

Dear Drew:

My pleasure. Make some good movies.

Josh

Name: BrickRage
E-mail: Brick2Rage@aol

Dearest Josh,

You give lots of examples of structureless films, ie., no defined acts 1,2, & 3. How about listing several films with great2awesome structure and character development, so that us less film savvy folks can get a clue and become enlightened.

Thanks very kindly.

BrickRage

Dear BrickRage:

Look around the site, sir, there is a [list of over 750 of my favorite films](#), most of which have very good structure. Also, check out any William Wyler film (learn more about Wyler by reading my essay "[An Ode to William Wyler](#)"). Or, read my [six structure essays](#) where I give many examples, although my favorite example still remains "The Bridge on the River Kwai."

Josh

Name: Sam MyPeckisinmyPaw

E-mail:

Hi Josh,

What is it about David Lean's style that impresses most directors? Why do you like his work?

Thanks,

Sam

Dear Sam:

David Lean told intelligent, epic stories in a beautifully visual way. Also, having been an editor, his sense of montage and juxtaposition of images was really terrific. Beyond all that, Lean had great taste, probably the most important attribute of a great director.

Josh

Name: Sam MyPeckisinmyPaw

E-mail:

Hi Josh,

1) You made a great statement when you answered a fellow's question and I was wondering if you would please be so kind as to expand on what exactly you meant: You said, "If you study anything to fall back on, you will fall back on it and never become a director. Go for broke and don't leave yourself anything to fall back on." Do you mean that because of the overwhelming disappointment and rejection involved in the profession that most people who have something else to rely on (financially) will eventually give up?

2) What would you do if you weren't a director? What else could you do that you would be willing to devote 100%?

Thanks and great site,

Sam

Dear Sam:

Most people that start off wanting to be directors, writers, actors or producers end up dropping out somewhere along the way. This is how all of those other positions on movie crews get filled. If you are not driven like a crazy person you really haven't got a chance of making it. If you have something to fall back on, as you put it, the rejection and disappointment will most certainly cause you to end up in your fall-back position. If you really want to be a director, writer, actor or producer, then you'd better give it everything you've got because your chances absolutely stink. If I weren't a director I would just be a writer, and if I couldn't do that I'd probably have become a cinematographer.

Josh

Name: GENNIFER LISE STEWSART

E-mail: HABIBI_71@YAHOO.COM

Dear Josh:

HOW BIG IS THE BIG BEN IN ENGLAND?

Dear Gennifer:

Big Ben, the bell in the clock tower of the Houses of Parliament in London, is 9 feet in diameter, 7 1/2 feet high, and weighs 13 1/2 tons. It was named after the Commissioner of Works at the time, Sir Benjamin Hall, a very tall, stout man.

Josh

Name: Charles James
E-mail: cjames@btgservices.com

Dear Josh:

I love your site both from a professional side (web designer) and a personal side (film junkie).

I just wanted to know if you could share in some of your knowledge of how to submit a television show idea to producers for a possible new show?

Thank you for your time, and again, great site!

Charles James.

Dear Charles:

Since I've never done this I'm actually guessing. Obviously, the way this sort of thing is usually done is through an agent. But, in lieu of that, it would seem to me that the things a TV producers wants to know are: 1.) What's the idea? (in a tremendously concise form, like one sentence, in the cover letter), and 2.) Does the idea continue, is there a series lurking in it? To judge this I would need a couple of complete scripts, maybe three.

Josh

Name: Benedict
E-mail: ben@berneusdavin.com

Dear Josh,

Have you heard about projectgreenlight? It's a contest by Affleck, Damon, and Miramax whose winner will be given the greenlight for their original script. But they also get to direct it. This sounded like a great idea, but it occurred to me that someone who can write a good script can't necessarily direct a movie. I expect some huge bomb (not that that would be new for Hollywood). Do you have any opinion on Damon/Affleck as writers, Good Will Hunting as a movie, or the fact that some shmoe, with little or no credibility, will be given a shot at something that normally takes extreme determination, will, love, and sacrifice?

Thanks for your time.

Benedict

Dear Benedict:

I'm rather glad you asked. I saw Affleck and Damon on the news and the next day I checked out their website. I cannot participate because I have "professional credits," which are not allowed. What this says to me is, anyone that has their shit together in the slightest can't be involved, therefore whatever they end up with will almost certainly be crap. Any enterprise that does not respect experience is doomed to failure. And yes, why should this lucky, credit-less, bozo also get to direct? I don't know. I was one of the few (the proud) that did not like "Good Will Hunting." I didn't believe one single second of it--Matt Damon is the smartest guy in the world? He makes marks on a blackboard and older fellows with leather patches on their elbows ooh and ahh and that proves it? Right!--and all of the Robin Williams scenes are directly lifted out of "Ordinary People." I particularly dislike stories that end with a psychiatrist saying, "Your problem is this . . .," and the guy starts to cry, saying, "Thank God! I'm cured!" and the music swells.

Josh

Name: Dusty Huffman
E-mail: L5g@hotmail.com

Dear Josh:

Just wanted to know what you think of commercials being shown before a movie now? I think the whole movie experience is going down the toilet anyway but the addition of commercials is just sad.

Dear Dusty:

I hate it, but it makes sure the theaters are making some money even when the films they're showing don't make any money. It doesn't make a lot difference to me, however, since I don't go to the theater very much anymore.

Josh

Name: naomi martinez
E-mail: froggy_0202@yahoo.com

Dear Josh:

Ok, I have this careers class and today I got a research assignment on a career of my choice. I want to be a director so naturally I chose to research directing. I've been looking all over the web and in all kinds of career books but can't find some of the answers to the questions I've been asking. Then I stumble upon your site and go to the Q&C, you said to read the FAQ section so I did but didn't really get the stuff I needed so I'll you directly. . .well. . .you know via e mail. :) ok here I go.

1. What kind of license or certificate is required to be a director?
2. What kind of physical working conditions does this job include?
3. What kind of work schedule does this job entail?
4. What are the normal methods of entry into the occupation?
5. How stable is this career?

6. And finally, are there any other related occupations one should study in order to fall back on?

Neways, if you could help me out I'd be very grateful if not. . .thanx for listening. :)

Sincerely,
Naomi M. Martinez

Dear Naomi:

1. No license necessary, unless it's a DGA shoot, in which case you'll need a DGA card.
2. It includes every kind of working condition, from working all day waist-deep in a swamp, to baking in 110 degree heat in a gravel pit, to freezing your fingers off outside in the snow.
3. The work schedule is generally from 7:00 A.M. to 7:00 P.M., although there are occasionally night shoots where you work all night.
4. There are no normal methods of entry into this profession.
5. My career is completely unstable.
6. If you study anything to fall back on, you will fall back on it and never become a director. Go for broke and don't leave yourself anything to fall back on.

Josh

Name: obidi
E-mail: obidi_2000@yahoo.com

Dear Josh:

excuse me you can send to me the brief history of microfilms?

Dear obidi:

During World War 2, in a secret laboratory under the running track at Chicago University, scientists invented a machine that could shrink objects. They subsequently shrank a reel of 35mm film down to 3.5mm and thus microfilm was invented. Oh yeah, they also invented the atom bomb there, too.

Josh

Name: JT
E-mail: jcarroll@austin.rr.com

Josh,

In a reply a few posts back, you said "Casting and producing the show is their job, not yours." Obviously this was pointed at a playwright, but is this universally the case? Meaning is the "renpic strategy" of funding/writing/producing a series viable? or will no one even bother to take the time to look at your finished product?

JT

Dear JT:

Ren Pix doesn't finance their own shows, they work for Universal TV (now owned by Studios USA) and always have. Ren Pix can't give a green light to a show, Universal does. Nobody finances their own TV shows.

Josh

Name: Tanya

E-mail:

Hi Josh,

I would assume that when an actor signs a contract to make a TV show or a movie, there's some type of option or clause stating their pay and percentage of profits or residuals, if any. Could they take less pay for a percentage of the profits or residuals? It would be a gamble, but their decision. Are there contracts that basically state, if you make the show, that's it, you get nothing more than your flat rate, take it or leave it. Wouldn't this all be negotiated before you take the job. Is the problem that they are not offering any options for percentages etc., or any residual package? I am trying to understand what they're asking for specifically, and is it before production begins or after it's done. Also, for example, if I invent something for the company I work for, and it's used to make them money, even though I'm on their payroll when I invented/created it, should I continue to receive payment for it's use. You've got me thinking residual time too!

Thanks, you're always a big help,
Tanya

Dear Tanya:

All actors, writers and directors begin with union contracts. Some people, however, get more than union contracts. No one gets less. The unions control the residuals. Regarding your second question, this is called "work for hire." If I am a writer employed by a production company to write a TV show, everything I write for that show belongs to the company. But I would still receive residuals, as per the union contract. Otherwise, it's freelance.

Josh

Name: Sherry Grant

E-mail: preacherskids@hotmail.com

Dear Josh:

I am a young playwright and presented my first major stage play at the Baltimore Arena (worst venue for a theatrical production) but they were the only people who gave me the time of day and would accept my production. It drew a decent crowd for a hip hop theatrical production but I'm still not satisfied. I wish to do a pilot for a sit-com from my theatrical production but have no idea what to do to get started. I can get the funding, just need alot of direction. Can you offer any advice?

Dear Sherry:

That's not where TV sit-com pilots come from, which doesn't mean you can't do it, but don't expect much. If you took your script for a sit-com pilot to a TV production company, what they'd want to see are six or twelve more scripts, not an independent version of the pilot. Casting and producing the show is their job, not yours.

Josh

Name: Tanya

E-mail:

Hi Josh,

I don't quite understand the difference between the entertainment industry and any other kind of industry. I'll try to use an example for my question. If a race car driver buys a car, once he's paid for it, it's his. The car maker doesn't get paid everytime they use the car (do they?), even though the car owner is making money using the car. Isn't the actor paid for his services like most workers? I am probably missing a step, or not understanding something, but what is the difference.

Thanks,
Tanya

Dear Tanya:

A song or a movie can and frequently does have continuing value, a car does not. Every second you drive a car it's losing its value, not so with artistic/intellectual creations. For instance, when TV first started to become popular after World War 2, one of the first hit TV shows was The Three Stooges, which wasn't a TV show at all, but the Stooges theatrical shorts re-packaged. Columbia Pictures made a ton of money in a new medium and the Stooges got nothing. They were playing car wash openings to support themselves. In France they recognize this value more than we Americans. Because you buy a piece of art, which includes movies, does not mean you own it. You are the custodian of it. You can't cut a movie or even insert commercials and I say, "Right on!" I actually believe there are limits on capitalism. Just because you own a Rembrandt doesn't mean you can burn it. So Columbia pictures owns over 200 Three Stooges shorts that remain valuable in each new medium as it's invented (movies, TV, video, DVD, etc.), shouldn't The Three Stooges profit from that? It's what they did that gives those shorts their real value, right?

Josh

Name: Tanya

E-mail:

Hi Josh,

What is the residual situation at the present time, how does it work? In your opinion, what should be done to fix it? Are they basically the same issues the potential strikers are asking for?

Thanks,
Tanya

Dear Tanya:

Everything was worked out pretty well when there was just network TV. Now, however, there are all these channels that show Hollywood material with professional actors, writers and directors that don't pay residuals, like: TNT, USA, Sci-Fi. And the commercial producers just don't want to pay residuals. My feeling is, if you want to work with professionals, then you pay the price. If you don't want to pay the cost of using professionals, then get out your Handy-Cam and make your own shows and commercials. TNT showed the entire series of "Brisco County" several times and the star, Bruce Campbell, never received a cent in residuals. That ain't right nohow. Places like TNT are crying poor when they are owned by giant conglomerates like Time-Warner. General Motors is crying poor when they'll happily spend a million dollars on a 60-second spot, putting an SUV on top of a butte in Utah, but don't want to pay residuals to the actors. I don't feel bad for giant companies that simply don't want to pay the cost of working with pros.

Josh

Name: bill

E-mail:

Dear Josh:

If you do the whole credit card thing again, you should use something like paypal. People may pay via credit card OR bank accounts, it's relatively easy for everyone. Did you copy the movie yourself or did you basically have someplace make them up for you?

Dear Bill:

I used a duplication facility, Santa Monica Video.

Josh

Name: Scott

E-mail:

Dear Josh:

This question is related to the one that Bill asked. How much did it cost to set up the system so that you could accept credit card orders?

Dear Scott:

It was a couple of thousand dollars. To me it wasn't worth it. If I had a hot porno site I guess I'd feel different.

Josh

Name: Benedict

E-mail: ben@berneusdavin.com

Josh,

What is your opinion or assessment of the impending strike that could potentially crumble Hollywood? It's hard to imagine a juggernaut such as Hollywood is to be crippled by anything. It sounds a little like Y2K in the sense that the awaited apocalypse turns out to be nothing more than a flicker in a cell phone. Unlike you, I have seen dozens of movies that I have enjoyed in the 90s, but there is a very large part of me that won't miss it -- the part that is sick of hearing people whine about a \$20 million paycheck and knowing that only a "handful" of people make any money in this ludicrous industry. If it happens, do you think that it will make filmmaking more accessible to individuals?

Dear Benedict:

I think you're being just a tad apocalyptic. The Hollywood film industry has weathered a lot of changes in the last 85-odd years, I don't think these strikes will cause to all to come tumbling down. Maybe they will, but it doesn't feel like it sitting here. Being a DGA member, I am entirely in solidarity with the strikers and the impending strikers. The residual situation is completely screwed up and must be fixed. And it will be. The old movie moguls fought the unions tooth and nail, but here they are. This will work out, too.

Josh

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