



THE BROOKLYN FILM REVIEW
ISSUE II

AN INTERVIEW W/ JOHN FLYNN

BY STEPHEN DUFFY

I caught up with John Flynn while he was editing *Rain*, and got to talk with him about directing, thesis filmmaking, and some personal favorites. *Rain*, based on the disappearance of Avonte Oquendo, tells the story of a social worker from a janitor's union questioning an autistic employee about some strange occurrences at the school.

BKFR: So, how are you doing?

JF: I'm actually doing really well, thank you.

BKFR: So how long have you been here in the Brooklyn College Film program?

JF: I've been here for about two years, I transferred from community college. Entered in 2012.

BKFR: Why did you come here?

JF: There are a lot of different film programs out there; the New School, New York Film Academy, NYU Tisch School of the Arts. They all proved to be really expensive, and the general consensus of Brooklyn College is that you can get the same education as all these schools but for far less. That's been proven to be quite true, if not better, than the expectations [I had]. I've been really happy with the program here, especially with professors like Jay Kim, Tom Riley, and Mustapha Khan. These guys have been working in the industry so when they tell

us, "This is how it's done," you can firmly believe it. When you apply that to your films, it's real work scenarios instead of just student films.

BKFR: So you've enjoyed your time here?

JF: Absolutely.

BKFR: Do you have a favorite professor here in the program?

JF: Definitely Tom Reilly.

BKFR: Tim Reilly's class your favorite class?

JF: Absolutely. It was his class that inspired me to just go shoot a film that was not part of the curriculum. I felt that based upon the classes that I've taken with him that I have the knowledge to go helm a project—a production—that is actually of something, not just grab a 5D and a couple friends, but a whole crew and everything.

BKFR: All right, so you just shot your thesis film, *Rain*. How do you think that went?

JF: It went phenomenally. It was, thus far, the best experience I've had on a set. Everything was well planned and well executed. That's mainly from me, as a director and producer, and understanding what works and what doesn't, all through a lot of different trial and error scenarios. This film is an accumulation of everything I've learned as a filmmaker applied, on top of all the difference influences I've had. Tom Riley being one of them; him and Woody Allen's method of filmmaking, as well as many other directors. This is really everything I've learned making movies coming to fruition.

BKFR: What would you say your greatest achievement shooting *Rain* was?

JF: The greatest achievement in shooting my thesis was definitely

the actors; finding the right actors because this film [primarily] takes place in one location and only has two characters in it, so finding the right actors was crucial. I found two perfect actors, and I wouldn't have traded them for anyone in the world. That was the best; the one right below that would be finding P.J. Valentini, my D.P. I was always trying to find a D.P. to work with, and it really was such a pleasure to work with him.

BKFR: How about any hurdles you had to go through?

JF: The hurdles? Thankfully there really wasn't any big problem. There were some transportation issues that I had in the beginning, but we quickly resolved that. Honestly the entire production just went smooth as butter.



[production still from *Rain*]

BKFR: Is there anything that you wish you could have done differently?

JF: [Pause] Honestly, no.

BKFR: Do you have any advice for students who are writing their thesis screenplays, or who are about to go in to production? Maybe how to get their shoot to go as well as yours did?

JF: My shoot went as well as it did because it took place in one location. If your film takes place in one location, not only does it make everything easier for you as far as transportation, gear, with no company moves, it also puts the spotlight on you as director, and you as a writer. With different locations, fancy cuts, crazy special effects, and convoluted stories, you're forced to stay in the confines of one room with a couple characters and tell a compelling story. That in itself is a challenge, but all your gear can stay there, you don't have to rent trucks every day, everything is just so much easier. Then that gives you resources; money to go spend at Panavision, or Arri CSC and get these professional cameras [and lenses.] So instead of spending money can go in to different places. Let's say you want to make your house in to a 1920's house, you have it all take place in the house, and you can spend all

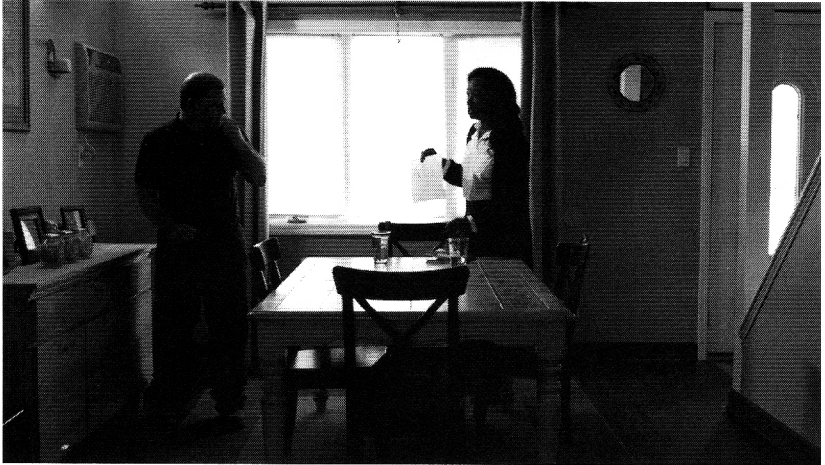
your money to set dress it to be like that. The world is your burrito at that point. My supreme and best advice I can give to everyone is to make your story as simple as possible; make your story a scene, the best scene from a feature film, one that can stand on it's own.

BKFR: Is there a scene in particular that you think of in that way?

JF: I look to the beginning of *Inglorious Bastards* as my influence because that is a stand-alone scene. To me that is the perfect short film. It's in one place, it has two characters, and it tells a very compelling, interesting, and tense story.

BKFR: Having completed the shoot of *Rain*, you're also closer to completing your time here at Brooklyn College. Do you have any plans for what you want to do after school? Or a job that you want to pursue professionally?

JF: Well, I'm currently in the very premature stages of developing my first feature. It's based on a best selling book, that for some dumb reason no one has picked up to be made it to a film. It's in the vein of *American Hustle*, *The Wolf of Wall Street*, and *Oceans Eleven*. It's an ensemble cast, dark comedy thing, about the formation of the TSA. So that's going to be hopefully my next project, but it's still a little too early



[film still from Rain]

to say that will be my next project. But that's the thing I'm going to be applying all my energy to.

BKFR: Do you want to direct professionally?

JF: Yes, absolutely. There's no other thing I'd rather do. I've done it all; I've [been an] A.D., a D.P., done grip and electric, I've produced. While I actually do enjoy being a cinematographer, and I do enjoy producing a lot, I really want to be a director. I love the ideas that I have and I think I can do it professionally.

BKFR: Awesome! So now a couple of favorites questions. Do you have a favorite piece of gear or equipment? Either on set or at any point in production?

JF: I was a little giddy over the fact that we had Panavision lenses; vintage, 1970's Panavision lenses used for 35mm film. The fact that

I was able to use those on modern technology; it's a blend of the old and new. I was very happy when I had that, because Panavision is the camera company. Whenever you watch your favorite films it's "Camera and lenses supplied by Panavision." Now here I am holding one of those lenses, and that was an incredible experience, let alone have them used as the glass on my film.

BKFR: Favorite film or director?

JF: Well a favorite film of mine, which actually goes back to the advice I gave to future thesis students, is *Rear Window*, directed by Alfred Hitchcock. That is one of the most tense and scariest films ever made, and it takes place in his apartment. The only time the camera ever leaves is when he's pushed out the window, and he falls out. It's one of the greatest films of all time, and one of the scar-

iest films of all time. That further proves that you can tell a compelling story in one room. As far as my favorite director goes, the man who ultimately got me in to cinema, the guy who I idolized since I was like, four years old, it's Stephen Spielberg. I grew up on Stephen Spielberg. I grew up on Stephen Spielberg's classic blockbusters; E.T., Jurassic Park, Raiders of the Lost Ark, Jaws. Those films, and I actually had the pleasure of seeing all of them in a packed theater, sitting in a theater with everyone who loves this movie, and everyone reacts and laughs and cries all together, it's like, that's what makes me want to make movies. So I would definitely say Stephen Spielberg in terms of me wanting to be a filmmaker, he it is, he is my number one influence, and he always will be. Forever and ever, I love that guy. I want to meet him. Once. That's it. That's all I need.

BKFR: Well John Flynn, thank you very much. It's been a pleasure talking to you.

JF: Oh, I talk too much. But I'll give you a good picture.