



Creating a Scene

Filmmaker **Tom Quinn**'s vision of Mummer life has earned him national recognition. BY MOLLY KNIGHT RASKIN

AFTER WORKING ON a dead-end feature film for almost a decade, Tom Quinn could have easily shelved his dream of a career in moviemaking.

Instead, he did just the opposite.

In 2004, Quinn began work on a feature of his own, a small film called *The New Year Parade*. With a shoestring budget and a cast of neophyte actors, Quinn had no illusions of grandeur.

"I remember talking to everyone when we first started and telling them, 'This is a long shot, so keep your expectations low,'" he says.

"What's happened since is crazy. We've been incredibly lucky."

Since its completion, *The New Year Parade* has won numerous accolades, among them the Grand Jury Prize at the Slamdance Film Festival. And Quinn, 31, was named one of *MovieMaker* magazine's 10 Young Writer-Directors to Watch.

Quinn calls it luck, but critics have attributed the success of the film—a drama about the disintegration of a South Philly Irish clan—to burgeoning talent. *Indiewire* called Quinn's style "Altman-esque," and *Variety* magazine credited

him with having "a strong artistic sensibility and the confidence to build his story around intimate, sometimes mundane life moments."

That sensibility, Quinn says, came from a childhood spent crafting stories and using the family video camera to make movies in the backyard of his Bucks County home. After graduating from LaSalle University, Quinn began production on *The New Year Parade* in 2004, along with partners Steve Beal and Mark Doyle. He also started studying for his MFA at Temple University, which he completed while working on the film.

The New Year Parade tells the story of Jack and Kat McMonogul, South Philly siblings who are grappling with their parents' recent separation. Jack is a member of the South Philadelphia String Band and hopes to win a prize in the annual New Year's Day Mummers Parade, the age-old Philly extravaganza of music, costumes and dance.

Instead of re-creating the preparations for the parade and the parade itself, which would have been prohibitively expensive, Quinn came up with a novel idea: cast real-life members of the Mummers. It was a risk, considering none of them had any acting experience.

"It could have been perceived as a major weakness," Quinn says. "Instead, we used it to our advantage and looked for amazing people who had really interesting things to say."

Frank Voight, a character in the film and a member of the South Philly String Band, says Quinn succeeded in telling two compelling stories.

In addition to the family divorce drama, Voight says, Quinn "showed exactly what this parade is all about, and how preparing for it can affect your entire life."

To do so, Quinn spent multiple nights a week at practice sessions, interviewing potential characters and immersing himself in the colorful culture of the parade.

"He's the hardest worker and was incredibly committed to this film," Voight adds. "I know he'll be successful. He'll be my free ride to the Oscars."

What's next for Quinn? First, he's enjoying being a newlywed. His production company, Two Street Pictures, will be busy preparing for the January release of *The New Year Parade* to coincide with the actual parade. Then he hopes to work on his next film. Until then, Quinn says he's just enjoying the buzz over his first one.

"Everything that's happened has been such a nice payoff," he says. "There were so many times I had the feeling that things weren't really progressing, but they were all just pieces of the puzzle. Now I can look back at it all and understand exactly why it all happened." ■

photograph by Michael Schradi