

Feature film 'California Solo' to premiere at Sundance

Britpop character learns about himself and U.S. immigration laws

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In Marshall Lewy's film "California Solo," Scottish actor Robert Carlyle, known for his roles in "Trainspotting" and the James Bond action flick "The World Is Not Enough," let's his hair grow out and plays an aging Britpop musician who lives in the U.S.

When he is arrested for drunk driving and faces deportation Carlyle's character must face his past and come to terms with his inner demons.

The idea of using a Scottish character, instead of an illegal alien to examine the immigration and deportation topic was a different twist that really stemmed from Lewy's love for Britpop music that hit its stride in the mid- to late- 1990s.

"Britpop was a movement that I loved in college," Lewy said to *The Park Record* during a telephone interview from Los Angeles, Calif. "I went to visit some friends in Ireland and I returned with a lot of music that hadn't made it to the U.S., at that time."

Bands such as Oasis, Blur, Supergrass, Echobelly and Shed Seven are a few examples of the genre, which was influenced by the music that emerged from Manchester, England, in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

"When it came time to write the script, I thought about how old Robert Carlyle's character would have been during the movement's heyday in the early to mid 1990s," Lewy said. "That took me back to the music that I loved and I just started listening to it again while I wrote the script."

Lewy was again drawn to the emotional and anthemic quality Britpop.

"I felt the character was like the music, which has this epic and intimate quality going on at the same time," he said. "In fact, that's how the character sees himself."

Although Lewy had never met Carlyle before, he had him in mind when crafting the characteristics.

"I didn't know him and I didn't know I could get him, so I had a back-up plan because there are so many great actors from Scotland or Ireland that I could get, but he was the one I wanted," Lewy said. "So, even though the character was not like me, I was able to write in a voice that was able to capture him because I knew the characters he plays in his films."

In "California Solo," Carlyle plays Lachlan MacAldonich, a man who can become his own worst enemy.

"I know many people who have trouble getting out of their own way," Lewy said. "They have settled into this comfortably numb state over the years and aren't able to just sit tight in that space. The events of the film rock Lachlan out of that and force him to deal with his demons."

When Carlyle did sign on, he was able to bring a lot of that quality and a history of Britpop culture to the character, because he hung out with a lot of those musicians at that time, Lewy said.

"Robert arrived in Los Angeles for the shoot and had a lot of the clothes he used to wear to the Hacienda, which is like the Studio 54 of Manchester," he said. "He wore those in the film and buttoned the top button up to the neck, which was the image back then."

Furthermore, Carlyle has appeared in an Oasis music video and is good friends with the now-defunct band's founders Noel and Liam Gallagher.

"He also knows Paul Weller, who is known as the "Modfather" and the leader of the band the Jam," Lewy explained. "In fact, Robert wears a bracelet throughout the film that was given to him by Paul."

Those little details made brought MacAldonich to life for the shoot, which, when stripped down, could have become just another film about the United States immigration dilemma.

"Obviously, a lot of the stories we hear about immigration are focused on Latin-American families or Arab families," Lewy said. "In fact, there is a line in the film where Robert's boss, who is of Mexican descent says, 'I have all these Mexicans working on my farm and it's the Scottish guy that gets into trouble with immigration.'"

Although Lewy found irony in basis of the film, he talked to an immigration lawyer as part of his research.

"The lawyer walked me through what can happen to someone even if they have a Green Card and is a permanent legal resident of the U.S. who has lived here for years," he said. "They can still be deported, or as they say, now, removed, for something like a DUI, even if they have grandchildren here."

"The more I learned, the more I realized it would be a good basis for the spine of the film," he said.

Lewy shot "California Solo" last summer in 20 days.

"We filmed around the areas where I live in Los Angeles," he said. "It was fun, and the reason I had such a good experience with his film is that I saw what I have learned from the past. I found collaborators and when I worked with them, I knew we were making the same movie."

Lewy was able to set a tone to the movie and then let his collaborators loose to do their work.

"Directors come in all types," he said. "There are the Clint Eastwoods who are very hands off and there are the David Finchers and Stanley Kubricks who are known to be extreme micro managers."

"I try to do it with a loose hand to allow for improv and be open to other people's ideas, while still getting the movie that I want," he said. "I'm looking forward to seeing how people react to the film, starting with Sundance. I haven't watched it with an audience, yet. So it will be interesting to hear what they will have to say."

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(Photo courtesy of the Sundance Institute) Robert Carlyle plays Lachlan MacAldonich, an aging...