



'The Hell's Half Mile Film Festival takes place in Bay City October 2-5th. Over 50 Films will play at the State Theatre, Delta College Planetarium & Learning Center and the Masonic Temple. Tickets are \$5.00 per night. Music tickets are \$10.00 (as bands will be featured) and all access passes are available.

For tickets and more information call 893-0343.

Matthew Wayne: PSA the Series: A Mocumentary

By Robert E. Martin

Take one Hollywood Producer from a famous acting family. Add a sprinkle-sprinkle of the hottest music video Director in the stratosphere. Spice that up with an International Film/Fashion/Pop Star. Sweeten the brew with the nicest, animal-loving girl from Minnesota. Simmer all of that under the watchful (and awkwardly spastic) eye of a Grade-C Safety Technician, and you've got the makings of one hilarious comedy series.

PSA: the Series follows the quirky struggles of five individuals trying to film a series of Public Service Announcements on a shoestring budget. Believing they have \$8 million to complete the safety commercials, the cast and crew quickly learn that the budget is only a couple thousand. But the bumbling band of Safety Crusaders push forward, trying their best to protect the world from its first batch of overlooked domestic dangers: biplane mishaps and glue gun catastrophes.

Such is the premise behind **Matthew Wayne's** (below) newest project. Originally from Bay City, Wayne earned his Bachelor's degree from the University of Notre Dame and then received a Master's in screenwriting from the University of Southern California.



Waynee's first screenplay, **UNKNOWN**, hit theaters nationwide in November 2006. The psychological thriller had an all-star cast and was released by the Weinstein Company and IFC Films. In addition to writing, Wayne also has extensive experience directing actors and making films, including over a dozen short films and music videos, including a video for Warner Brothers.

His idea for **PSA: the Series** came while watching old educational videos. "They were ridiculous and absurd, and inspired the idea of a bunch of bumbling filmmakers trying to make modern day safety videos. I spent a couple months assembling the cast and crew and rehearsing before we shot the first two episodes. The entire series will run at least 8 episodes."

"The most challenging aspect of shooting **PSA: the Series** was coordinating such a large cast and crew into the 2-day shoot. But overall, with such hilarious actors and a professional crew our days ran pretty smoothly."

With a \$2000 shooting budget and a cast & crew of nearly 30 people, PSA was shot in L.A. and edited out of New York City. On top of that he had an animation crew design all the visual effects.

When asked what he feels most distinguishes this project, Wayne quickly points to the amazing cast of improv actors he was able to assemble. "Living in Los Angeles, you have access to actors who have extensive experience in film and television. I was excited to get such comical veterans as **Marquis Alexander, Jeffrey Cannata, Jordon Krain, Margi Simmons, and David Villar**. They brought their quirky characters to life with so many funny moments. This series is purely a light-hearted mix of slapstick humor and raunchy jokes. If we can get the audience to laugh, our goal has been accomplished."

Hell's Half Mile will be hosting the **exclusive premiere of PSA: the Series**, the first time it will be screened anywhere in public. Additionally, Wayne will be conducting two film workshops at the Festival for people who want to improve their screenwriting and skills and for anyone looking to improve their camera skills.

Waynee teaches a 12-week screenwriting seminar in Los Angeles that usually costs over \$600; but participants at HHM get an excellent opportunity to take the abbreviated workshop for \$40 for one workshop, or both for \$60.

Bitter & Twisted: Christopher Weekes' Amazing Odyssey of Loss & Discovery in Australia

by Robert E. Martin

Christopher Weekes made his engaging new film **Bitter & Twisted** at the age of 24, with little money and pulling every favor on the planet in order to complete his vision. He premiered it at the **Tribeca Film Festival** one month ago. The first feature film he's written or directed, the auteur notes "I wanted to write a movie that showed Australia in a way it's not normally presented, without the bush and beer cans. The Australia I grew up in was more about frozen chops, power lines and driveways."

Bitter & Twisted is a multi-narrative drama of longing and loss, starting with the death of a young man and flashing forward three years to assess the toll it took on all those around him. Though it's not as heavy as it sounds, interjecting more quirk and humor on show than darkness and depression.

"I'd tried to get into virtually all of the film schools in Australia and couldn't even get short-listed," he explains. "I tried to make a few short films, but they turned out horribly. I just wasn't inspired enough. My passion always seemed to be in long form. So I gave up after a while and focused on making a 90-minute film, no matter how long it was going to take. My theory was that I'd rather spend five years to make a feature film than spend six years and make three short films."

"I know it sounds ridiculous, but I've felt over the hill since I was twelve, so when I turned twenty and still hadn't managed to prove to the world, and myself, that I could actually write and direct something - I basically stopped trying to apply for schools and began thinking of other ways to make it happen. Besides, most of these places charge almost as much for three years of tuition as it would cost to just turn around and make something, so I really was jumping into the project thinking of it as my "education"."

"I had only just turned twenty four when I finally managed to coax a cast and crew into taking a chance on this young guy who wrote a film in the back of his parents house, and to make it even worse I was paying for the whole film myself with what I was able to save up from working two jobs in between shooting. To say it was challenging is probably an understatement."

"I wrote the first draft at 19 and tried for years to get people just to even read it, but it's hard to be taken seriously at

that age - especially when you've never done something before.

"The real break came when I begged my best mate from school to drop a copy of the script in **Noni Hazlehurst's** (below) dressing room on the set of **Better Homes and Gardens**. Noni is this incredibly well known and respect actress in Australia who had been out of the "movie business" for some years while she worked on a variety show.

I'd written the main part of **Bitter & Twisted** with Noni in mind from the beginning. I've seen her play so many roles, on stage and on screen and knew she could do such an incredible job with the character. Luckily for me she called the next day to say she loved it."



Did Christopher find it difficult to write, direct & act in this film and retain a sense of balance about the production?

"To be honest I found it easier to direct scenes when I was on camera than the ones when I was off. Acting allowed me a closer proximity to the truth of certain moments, and so sometimes really interesting performances came out

of that process. Because I'd created storyboards for the entire film in a computer before hand, a large majority of my time on set was spent with the actors. The crew already had a template that they were working towards. I could talk to camera and show them exactly how I was hoping to frame and color a scene, then walk over to the actors for a few minutes while all of that was being set up. It saved a great amount of time in the long run doing things that way."

"Auteur" is a word I don't really sit well with. Films are meant to be a collaboration. A good director is just a bad director who surrounds themselves with talented people."

"This film doesn't look at all like any other Australian film you might have seen before. The cast, the crew and myself worked really hard to try and bring a dream-like quality to what's on screen. The story has all the usual themes of love, loss and grief you might expect from an indie film, but the characters here are anything but ordinary. Plus, if all else fails, perhaps you'd be interested to see what a film looks like when you have no money, a crew of 15 people and 20 days to shoot something, and a resounding refusal to give up on ourselves."

"But more than anything, I wrote **Bitter & Twisted** wanting audiences to walk away with a sense of hope. Grief isn't about how and why somebody died, it's about the people that get left behind. Death is something the living feel. Life is too short to be wasting time - trapped in time. That's essentially what the film is about. There can be hope even in the most hopeless of situations. But all that said, I tried hard to make the humor and quirkiness of these very strange and funny characters fun and enjoyable to watch. Above all things, movies are meant to be fun."

Weekes presently has two new projects in various stages of production - a U.S. series based on **Bitter & Twisted** commissioned during the Tribeca Film Festival, and another feature, which might be shooting by the end of the year in New York.

"I was really trying to do something positive with an incredibly negative time of my life after my mum died. I never in a million years dreamed it could have taken me on such an incredible journey as it has. For a while I imagined it was going to be this home movie I'd pull out for my friends when they came over and I'd be screening it on my lounge. Now only a month or so since it's been finished it's been seen all over the world, from New York to Sarajevo, to Montreal and Dungog. It really has been the most incredible journey. You couldn't script it this well."