



From left: John Leguizamo as Chi Chi, Wesley Snipes as Noxeema and Patrick Swayze as Vida

THE MAN BEHIND THE QUEENS

Douglas Carter Beane on bicoastal success, le tout Hollywood in drag, and the role of the responsible "New York fag writer"

by Daniel Vaillancourt

On Sept. 8, Universal Pictures will release the long-awaited *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything, Julie Newmar*. The comedy, written by openly gay playwright and screenwriter Douglas Carter Beane, stars Wesley Snipes, Patrick Swayze and John Leguizamo as Noxeema, Vida and Chi Chi—three New York City drag queens who revolutionize the tiny fictional town of Snydersville, Neb., when their cross-country

Cinema

trek to Tinseltown is derailed. According to Universal, America is about to learn a thing or two about being fabulous. "During one incredible weekend," reads a recent promo piece, "eyes will be opened, broken hearts healed and hair teased within an inch of its life."

The film, produced by Steven Spielberg's Amblin Entertainment, was directed by Beeban Kidron (*Used People, Antonia and Jane*). Openly gay Bruce Cohen (*The Flintstones*) served as

executive producer. Academy Award nominee Stockard Channing (*Six Degrees of Separation*), Arliss Howard, Blythe Danner, and Melinda Dillon co-star as Snydersville locals.

Ever since Spielberg showed interest in Beane's original screenplay—his first—the confirmed New York writer has been busy in Hollywood. Current Beane film projects in pre-production include *Father's Day*, a remake of the French comedy *Les Compères*, with Robin Williams and Billy Crystal slated to star, for Joel Silver at Warner Bros.; *This Could Be the Start of Something Big*, a comedy for Oliver Stone; and the screen adaptation of Beane's first stage play, *Advice from a Caterpillar*, which deals with bisexuality.

Best of all, Beane is creating a sitcom for Carsey-Werner (*Roseanne, Grace Under Fire*). The untitled show, a vehicle for up-and-coming actress Parker Posey, revolves around the rela-

tionship between a gay man and his best friend, a straight woman. If all goes well, it will hit the airwaves by mid-season.

Holed up in the hot, humid Big Apple, the 35-year-old scribe recently took time out from his hectic schedule to answer questions. *His* most

pressing inquiry: "Wong Foo-mania... Do you have it yet?"

Tell us about Wong Foo.

It's about the difference between what is supposed to be middle America

and what is supposed to be the gay community. It's about learning and helping each other.... You will have a good time. You will laugh. It's a fun movie. And when it's all over, you'll feel proud, which is my favorite thing.... This is for everyone. I wanted a film that straights could go see, and "get," and have a good time. But I also wanted gay people to go and, at the end, say, "That is so cool." I mean, it is a mainstream film. There's no

denying that. It is Universal. I mean, there is something about seeing that huge globe on a big screen that says, "Universal," and then the next shot is Patrick Swayze quoting *Gypsy* and putting makeup on his face. You just go, "Wow!"

What inspired you to write the screenplay?

I actually wrote it as a writing sample.... I got the idea when I was with my mom on Easter vacation [in 1993, in Cape May, New Jersey]. It was spring break and RuPaul was on MTV. My mom was watching, and said, "She's a lovely girl, but she has terrible proportions." And I thought, "That's what they think of drag queens?" [I'd also seen clips from] *The Gay Agenda*, in which there's a line that says, "These so-called drag queens want to take over your town." And I just thought, "That's something to be afraid of? I think in most towns it would be a plus."

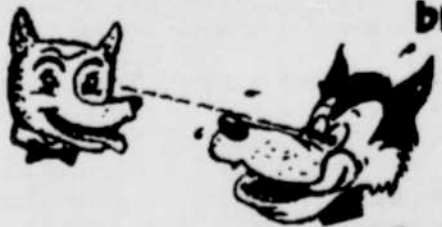
How did the script find its way to Steven Spielberg?

I wrote it very quickly, in about a week and a

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