

FILM

The Elephant in *The Room*

Portland Filmmaker Andy Blubaugh's Feature Debut Intersects with Headlines

By AMANDA SCHURR

Late last year, Portland filmmaker Andy Blubaugh began production on *The Adults in the Room*, his feature debut. His two shorts had screened well at Sundance; *Filmmaker Magazine* named him one of the "Top 25 New Faces" in 2007. As with his previous efforts, Blubaugh planned a uniquely personal approach in order to what he calls "make connections to a larger human experience and explore a more common thread."

This time around, that meant telling the story of his first love, a clandestine affair as a teenager with a man twice his age.

And then came January.

Some seven months later, *The Adults in the Room* has taken on a relevance and timeliness Blubaugh couldn't have imagined when the project was accepted at New York's Independent Film Week in September 2008. Blubaugh admits he'd been watching the initial headlines concerning Mayor Sam Adams and Beau Breedlove and, "when it really blew up, was a mixed bag" for the production.

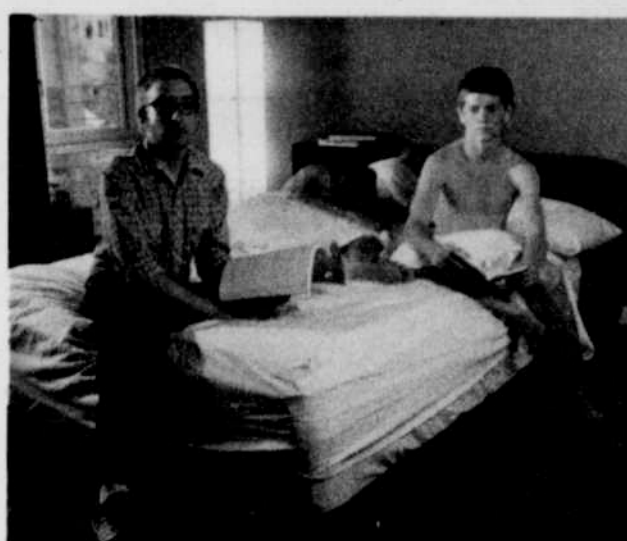
"It created a great opportunity for me as a filmmaker to observe the way that everyone in the city was reacting to the events," explains Blubaugh, a Cleveland native who moved to Portland in early 2000. "Suddenly this idea of what it means to be an adult, what metric we use to measure adulthood, was on the tip of everyone's tongues, and that's ultimately what my film was about."

Other dialogues all but halted—a significant problem for Blubaugh since his story is told in a hybrid of documentary and narrative formats, intersecting in the present day. "This is not an exposé. I'm not attacking anyone," notes Blubaugh, who says the Adams "issue" has nonetheless been incorporated. "There are no ultimate conclusions to be made—what I'm interested in is the discussion and when the discussion dries up, it makes it very difficult to continue with the film."

According to producer Phoebe Owens, the film's financing took a hit as well. "We've had people who were originally interested in investing that won't now because they just don't want to be involved with something that they feel can so easily connect to [the Adams scandal]," she says.

Modestly budgeted at about \$75,000, *The Adults in the Room* has eight days of shooting at month's end to capture the narrative half of the film. Blubaugh and Owens hope an August 9 benefit at Montage will raise the funds necessary for this, what Blubaugh describes as "the most labor intensive and the most money intensive part of the project."

The documentary portion, now wrapping up and featuring interviews with columnist



Filmmaker Andy Blubaugh (left), seen here with actors Ryan Findley and Calvin McCarthy, explores questions about youth and intimate relationships he encountered in his own life in *The Adults in the Room*. The film, now in production, is a mix of documentary and narrative storytelling.

Dan Savage, among others, was captured on digital with a small crew; the upcoming narrative shoot, which traces Blubaugh's formative relationship via actors and dramatic recreations, will be shot on Super 16 mm with a crew of about 35. Plans are to submit a rough cut to Sundance by October 1.

Blubaugh, who teaches at Northwest Film Center, says that while the Adams-Breedlove debate has put his own journey in a very public context, the questions he set out to address haven't changed, the individual matters of accountability no less simple. "At what age are we comfortable saying that a young person has the agency to make their own decisions, but also at what age do we trust ourselves with the young people?" he asks.

"That's why I'm making this film now. I'm the age that this man was when our relationship began and I teach children that are the age that I was when our relationship began."

Blubaugh hopes the film will transcend headlines and catalyze an "internal discussion," one that both he and Owens view in shades of gray—a marked contrast to the seeming black-and-white, for-or-against opinions regarding Adams. "[Blubaugh] has all these mixed emotions," Owens says, "but when he looks back on his relationship..., it's first love and for him that trumps everything. So it's very messy and complex."

And in progress. Blubaugh says he hasn't yet arrived at an answer to his question, to whether or not "I [became] the grownup that I thought I was going to be." "I go back and forth," he admits. "Right now I'm at my most observant point. I'm just trying to take in the entire experience and analyze it and make sure that the film is responding to what is happening every single day." JO

A fundraiser, documentary preview and silent auction for *The Adults in the Room* is at 7 p.m. Sun., Aug. 9 at La Merde at Le Bistrot Montage, 301 SE Morrison. Suggested donation is \$20 and includes food, drink and more. Visit www.theadultsintheroommovie.com.

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