

THE ARTS

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A BACKSTAGE VIEW

An interview with the writer/director of 'Vicious,' a thriller about a stripper's dark journey that screened in Manzanita

By **DAVE FISHER**
FOR COAST WEEKEND

The regional film "Vicious," slated for release this September, made its Oregon Coast debut recently on a cold winter's night in Manzanita. For writer/director Jason Rosenblatt of Portland, it's been a decade-long journey.

"I wrote and directed my first short films in college before attending the New York Film Academy six-week summer program and then the graduate film program at Columbia College Chicago," said Rosenblatt, who grew up in Beaverton and graduated from Lewis and Clark in 1999 with a bachelor of arts degree in psychology. "After a decade in film school and then working in the trenches of Hollywood, I returned to Portland in 2008 determined to stop talking about films and start making them."

The idea for "Vicious" came up shortly after Rosenblatt returned home from Los Angeles.

"I was looking for work that would allow me to continue to pursue my writing and editing work. I realized one option available, if I was a woman, might be stripping because there could be a significant amount of dead time."

Ideas soon flowed and the script went through a few years of rewrites with help from fellow Portlander

Randall Jahson, writer of "The Doors."

"So, the idea for 'Vicious' came in 2008, the first draft in 2009, and 10 years later the film, which was filmed in Portland, is finally being released," said Rosenblatt.

The 96-minute film, intended for mature audiences, stars Angela Nordeng, Tommy Harrington, Jason Richter, Geno Romo and Tommy Hestmark. "Vicious" features a number of Portland businesses, musicians and actors. The film is due for release this fall from Summer Hill Entertainment.

Forces to overcome

"Vicious" is the story of a young woman, Belle White, who is working her way through law school. By night, she is a stripper. Belle, who's stage name is Roxie, becomes alarmed when she finds herself the object of a middle-aged stalker who refuses to leave her alone until she agrees to quit working as a stripper. She delves deeper into the darkness of the world in which she has become entrapped, but in the end gains the strength to overcome those forces that played a negative role in her life.

The film gives audiences a glimpse into the enticing and exciting world of exotic dance and its flip side, a backstage view of the inner workings of a dark and



seedy profession.

The filming took place in late 2013 with reshoots in 2014. Editing and sound design continued through 2015. The film made the rounds at festivals in 2016 and 2017, during which it earned numerous awards, including best actress for Angela Nordeng, who plays Belle, at a variety of film festivals and Rosenblatt as best director at the Oregon Independent Film Festival.

Geno Romo, a Portland radio station DJ and one of the film's supporting

ered ultra-low- or no-budget. While there were investors, the investment amount was not significant compared to the majority of films that get completed and distributed."

Like Belle in the movie, Rosenblatt's means to an end involves another job, working a graveyard shift as a concierge at a downtown Portland condominium to help make ends meet. During production he received help from friends and acquaintances who filled in as "extras" during the shoot. In one particular scene, a raucous group of strip club patrons begin yelling and shouting obscenities at Belle as she performs onstage, bringing her to tears.

"They're not at all like that in real life," noted Rosenblatt. "It was a stretch for them to act like that."

Getting it right

As for how long it took to complete "Vicious," Rosenblatt has no regrets.

"What we did different from other films I've heard of is that we never gave up on re-shoots and fixes to get it right," he explained. "The initial production was 18 days, but then there were 12 days of reshoots and then another 20+ days of pickup shots. And more reshoots with producer Andre Khrul and then editor Sean Parker, as well as additional dialog and sound effects work with composer Bryan Minus and sound designer Jason Wells."

Romo, who plays the strip club owner, agrees that

the extra time was worth the effort. "It made for a better film, and if there's any money to be made, this guy (Rosenblatt) certainly deserves it."

Long range, Rosenblatt's goal is a career writing and directing stories as feature films, TV shows and web series. "I'm always writing and searching for the next story to tell," he said.

Currently, he's in regular production on a YouTube web series titled "Ted Tantrum: the Self Reliant Man," starring Alan Burrell. His second feature, "Intersection," has been shot and edited with the sound design and score still in the works.

"I am also in pre-production on four no-budget short films intended to target film festivals such as the McMinnville Film Festival, where, last month, I had three of my films play for audiences."

It's a busy time for the Portland-area native who, around the age of 13, decided he wanted to be a novelist and, later in college, that he wanted to be a screenwriter.

The trailer for "Vicious" and additional information can be found at summerhillfilms.com/vicious. Some of Rosenblatt's short films are available on Vimeo.com.

The Manzanita Film Series is a program of the Hoffman Center for the Arts in Manzanita. Films are screened monthly throughout the year and include unique and provocative films created by filmmakers from around the Pacific Northwest. For more information visit hoffmanarts.org.