

Oscar-Winning Director Weighs In on His Latest Picture

by Kam Williams
Special to *The Skanner News*

Born in Chicago on May 14, 1951, Bob Zemeckis won an Academy Award for Best Director for the hugely successful "Forrest Gump." The film's numerous honors also included Oscars for Best Actor (Tom Hanks) and Best Picture. The Library of Congress recently selected the film to join the esteemed National Film Registry.

Zemeckis re-teamed with Hanks on the contemporary drama "Cast Away," the filming of which was split into two sections, book-ending production on *What Lies Beneath*. Earlier in his career, Zemeckis co-wrote and directed "Back to the Future," which was the top-grossing release of 1985, and for which Zemeckis landed an Oscar nomination for Best Original Screenplay.

He then went on to helm "Back to the Future, Part II and Part III," completing one of the most successful film trilogies ever. In addition, he directed and produced "Contact," starring Jodie Foster, based on the best-selling novel by Carl Sagan; and the macabre comedy hit "Death Becomes Her," starring Meryl Streep, Goldie Hawn and Bruce Willis.

He also wrote and directed the box office smash "Who Framed Roger Rabbit?," cleverly blending live action and animation. And he directed the action-adventure hit "Romancing the Stone," pairing Michael Douglas and Kathleen Turner.

In March 2001, the USC School of Cinema-Television celebrated the opening of the Robert Zemeckis Center for Digital Arts. This state-of-the-art facility is the country's first fully-digital training center, and houses the latest in non-linear production and post-production equipment as well as stages, a 50-seat screening room and a USC student-run television station, Trojan Vision.

Here, he talks about his latest film, *Flight*, a combination special f/x and legal thriller starring Denzel Washington, Don Cheadle, John Goodman and Melissa Leo.

Kam Williams: Hi Bob, thanks so much for the interview.
Bob Zemeckis: You bet.

KW: I'm honored to have this opportunity to speak with you. I loved the film and found it fascinating. I told my readers I'd be speaking with you, so I'll be mixing my questions in with theirs. What interested you in making *Flight*?

BZ: I thought it was a wonderful, beautifully-written screenplay with some really interesting, complex characters, including Denzel's, obviously. I found it to be very bold and very courageous.

KW: Did your being a pilot play into your decision to

make it?

BZ: No, not at all. But I would think that just being a pilot was helpful in creating a sense of realism to the incident on the airplane.

KW: When I saw the film, I sat next to a pilot friend who explained to me that everything that was going when the plane lost its hydraulics was technically accurate. That prevented me from being at all skeptical.

BZ: Well, that's good.

KW: Larry Greenberg asks: What did you do as a director to show Whip Whitaker's [Denzel Washington's character] inner struggle to the audience?

BZ: Most of the credit for that has to go to Denzel. He really has an amazing talent, and was able to evoke the inner pain that the character was dealing with on a constant basis. I think his entire performance is sort of shrouded in the internal misery that Whip was feeling.

KW: Harriet Pakula-Teweles asks: How does a director who is truly gifted in the use of special f/x prevent them from overwhelming the performances of a great actor like Denzel?

BZ: Well, I use special f/x in exactly the same way that I use a camera. They're simply an extension of the camera, and they're there just to complement what the actors are doing?

KW: How do you balance storyline versus special f/x?

BZ: Like I said, the special f/x are there to serve the story. Just like the camera is there to serve the story, and the cast is there to serve the story. I think that's the only way that I approach it.

KW: Editor/Legist Patricia Turnier asks: What message do you think people will take away from *Flight*?

BZ: I don't like to use that word "message." My feeling is, if you want to send a message, you should Twitter. I think the movie is a very human story that everyone can identify with on some level and that, at the end of the day, is a very hopeful story.

KW: Patricia also says: I believe that the word "can't" should not be addressed to people, especially children, when they share their dreams with the world. They have all their lives ahead of them and nobody can predict their destiny. I am sure that in the past you met many naysayers while you wanted to be involved in the movie industry. What is the best advice you can give to aspiring filmmakers?

BZ: Yeah, I think the best advice is to get a video camera and just start making movies, little movies... youtube videos... and write. We're in desperate need of good screenplays.

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KW: Attorney Bernadette Beekman asks: How did you achieve that breathtaking effect of a plane flying upside-down?

BZ: It's all digital.

KW: Bernadette would also like to know: What is your favorite charity?

BZ: Gee, I have a lot of them.

KW: Documentary filmmaker Kevin Williams asks: Do you feel any pressure to measure up to your ever increasingly-impressive body of work every time you make a movie?

BZ: I really can't worry about that sort of thing. All I can do is just keep doing what I've been doing, which is to do movies I'm attracted to. If the screenplay is an interesting story, just go for it.

KW: Kevin has another question: What film most inspired you to become a director?

BZ: *Bonnie and Clyde*. I saw it when I was in high school. I was being moved emotionally, and I thought, "Well, this is pretty powerful stuff." And I wanted to find out more about what it was a director actually did. That sort of put me on the path.

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COMMUNITY CALENDAR

SEATTLE 2012

THE SKANNER.com

If you have an event you want to share with the community, email it two weeks in advance to *The Skanner* at info@theskanner.com

Thursday November 15

COLLEGE PLANNING CLASS – HOW TO CHOOSE THE BEST COLLEGE FOR YOUR STUDENT AND YOUR POCKETBOOK. This is a valuable class for all parents with college-bound students. The class will focus on high school Junior's and Senior's, but all grades levels are welcome. 7 - 8:30 p.m. Shoreline Library, 345 NE 175th St. Shoreline, WA

Friday – Sunday November 16 – 18

24TH BEST OF THE NORTHWEST SHOW. There will be over 250 talented regional artists selling their

handcrafted work. Everything from jewelry, designer clothing and paintings and much more. Admission is \$6 on-line or \$8 at the door. Children under 12 get in free. Seattle's Smith Cove Cruise Terminal on Pier 91 by the Magnolia Bridge. For on-line tickets please visit www.nwartalliance.com

Saturday November 17

4TH ANNUAL PRE-BLACK FRIDAY HOLIDAY BAZAAR. Come join us for a day of fun! Win free items during our raffle drawings, door prizes, crafts, jewelry, artwork and much more. 9 a.m. – 4 p.m. Kent-Meridian High School, 10020 SE 256th St. Kent, WA

Thursday November 22

WEST SEATTLE HOLIDAYS: HALL AT FAUNTLEROY'S FREE THANKSGIVING DINNER. Join us for a free community Thanksgiving meal. Noon – 3 p.m. All are welcome for a traditional turkey dinner with all the trimmings. We will gladly accept donations for desserts. 9131 California Ave. SW in the Fauntleroy Community Schoolhouse, call us at 206-932-1059 if you have any questions.

Friday November 23

MY MACY'S SEATTLE HOLIDAY PARADE AND SANTALAND. The parade will feature 25 inflatable floats, local middle and high school marching bands and much more. The parade will conclude with Santa. 9 a.m. – 10 a.m. Macy's Downtown Seattle.

Friday – Sunday November 23 – 25

FREE NATIVE HOLIDAY GIFT FAIR: 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. all three days. The Duwamish Tribe invites the public to its Longhouse Thanksgiving weekend for a Native Holiday Gift Fair. Free admission and parking for all shoppers. 4705 West Marginal Way SW. Downtown Seattle.

Saturday November 24

2012 SEATTLE CHILDREN'S/KIDS MARATHON. 10 a.m. at the Seattle Center. Kids begin their final half-mile from the corner of 5th and Harrison. Kindergarten through Eighth grades to complete a full 26.2 mile marathon at a rate that is fun and safe for them.