

ONCE NOT FAR FROM HOME

A STARS NORTH™ FILM

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ROLLING OUT THE RED CARPET 'NOT SO FAR FROM HOME'

Stars North's latest film to premiere at the 14th Annual Florida Film Festival

SHOWTIME:

Saturday, April 16, 2005 ● 4:30pm

ORLANDO, FL (March 21, 2005) — On Saturday, April 16th, Orlando-based production company, Stars North, will premier its latest film project, *Once Not Far From Home*, for audiences attending the 14th Annual Florida Film Festival. The film, directed by Ben Van Hook and written by Todd Thompson, features a strong cast of recognizable faces, including TV's Erik Per Sullivan (*Malcolm In The Middle*), Skye McCole Bartusiak (*The Patriot*), Daniel Hugh Kelly (*Star Trek: Insurrection*), Orlando's own, Brett Rice (*Monster*) and veteran actor, James Best (*The Dukes of Hazzard*).

Once Not Far From Home is the second in a series of four short films being produced by Stars North. Their first short, *Time & Again*, which starred Academy Award®-nominee Seymour Cassel, premiered for a sold-out audience during the 2003 Florida Film Festival and went on to earn the filmmakers over six independent film awards, including Best Short Film and Best Original Score.

Such is their hope for *Once Not Far From Home*. Produced by Thompson and Stars North partners Smithy Sipes and Kathryn Ruscio Kelly, this film is a dramatic piece that explores the notion of true love between a curious little boy, a beautiful young girl and a mysterious old house that holds the secrets to their love and fate. The movie is set in the South sometime in the 1930s and is a captivating, thought-provoking tale that illustrates how first loves can last forever. Stars North shot the 35mm piece over a four-day period last July and has spent the last seven months editing, compositing computer-generated images (CGI), mixing sound and composing an original score for a film they describe as their most challenging project to date.

Thompson's goal when penning the script for *Once Not Far From Home* was to create a visual poem; a story that was driven exclusively by moving images set to music. When combined, he hoped that these two ingredients would make for a reminiscent, emotional experience that audiences wouldn't soon forget.

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“We were basically making a silent film,” director Ben Van Hook explains. “There is no dialogue between the main characters which made it extra challenging to direct. I knew I had to capture the perfect facial expressions, subtle nuances and find the right emotion levels in each scene in order to successfully communicate the tale we wanted to tell.”

And if lofty story concepts and challenging performances weren't tough enough, there was certainly an abundance of “other” production feats that this band of die-hard filmmakers had to overcome.

One such challenge included the untimely death of one of their principle actors, Jack Kelly, who was to play an older version of Erik Per Sullivan's character later in the story. The actor, who enjoyed a lifelong career working as a stunt man and character double for Hollywood legend, James Cagney, passed away only three weeks before cameras were ready to roll.

“This would have been his (Kelly's) last project” Thompson explains. “He was so excited to be a part of it, and would call me at least once a week to remind me that he was ‘ready for action!’ He was 86 years old and so full of life, and we were absolutely speechless when we got the bad news. We've decided then to dedicate the film to him at the April 16th premiere.”

Even without their fair share of challenges, Stars North knows that the “Road to Hollywood” is a long one. But something the filmmakers certainly have an abundance of is talent, not to mention the knack for attracting a network of industry professionals who share their enthusiasm and passion for making good independent films.

“We couldn't have done this film, or any of our films for that matter, without the help and support of everyone involved” producer Sipes says. “The crew we had while shooting, and the people and companies we worked with to process, edit, composite our special effects and mix the final score were all top notch. This film is definitely a tribute to all their hard work and dedication.”

With the full cast and crew in attendance, *Once Not Far From Home* will premiere at the Enzian Theater on Saturday, April 16th at 4:30 p.m. as part of the Florida Film Showcase at the 14th Annual Florida Film Festival. Tickets to the screening are available by calling (407) 629-1088 or online at www.enzian.org. Director, Ben Van Hook will be representing the film as a panel member during the Florida Filmmaker's Forum at the Enzian Theater on Sunday, April 17th at 11:30 a.m.

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Interviews

Interviews with actors **Erik Per Sullivan**, **Skye McCole Bartusiak**, **Daniel Hugh Kelly**, **Brett Rice**, **James Best**, director **Ben Van Hook**, writer/producer **Todd Thompson**, and producers **Smithy Sipes** and **Kathryn Ruscio Kelly** are available. Please call (407) 292-6240 for scheduling.

Additional PHOTOS and ACTOR BIOS are available by request or by visiting www.starsnorth.com.

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About Stars North™

Stars North™ is an independent movie production company based in Orlando, Florida. The company produces commercially appealing, quality films with memorable characters, engaging plots and redeeming messages. Stars North™ is committed to developing and producing projects in Florida that employ local cast and crew for worldwide distribution. The company has released four short films to date: *The Paper Route* (1999), *King Pathetic Creep* (2000), *The Chad Effect* (2001), *Time & Again* (2003) and *Once Not Far From Home* (2005).

For more information, please contact Stars North™ at (407) 292-6240, or visit the company's Web site: www.starsnorth.com.