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WEEKLY V Icaño

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Movie Magic

You don't have to move to LA to make a film. Tacoman Joe Rosati and friends release their homegrown film 'Limbo' with two screening parties at Jazzbones. By Stacy Wagoner

Ben Warner, left, and Joe Rosati perform voice overs for their film, 'Limbo.'

how much worse can it get for a 30-something guy to have to move back in with Mom and Dad? Not much, some would say. But it can get worse, a lot worse. He could lose his girlfriend, his nightclub, and go bankrupt in the same year, freezing his life in a state of limbo. Tacoma-born Joe Rosati will soon have his true story — or something based on his true story — blown up on the big screen.

At this stage in his life there was no place to go but up. Rosati set off by going back to Pierce College in Lakewood where he had earned his associates degree 15 years earlier. He enrolled in a theater class and met Mike Winfrey and Ben Warner.

"One of the first things I remember him saying was, 'Hi, my name is Joe. I used to run a nightclub,' which is an awkward way of starting a conversation," Winfrey says. "He told me a little bit more about it, and I could kind of see a basis for a story."

Winfrey took notes on his friend's life from the low points to the high points. When he had a draft written, Winfrey showed the story to Rosati, and together they began working on "Limbo."

Rosati's misfortune actually happened over the course of a year, but it was written and filmed to happen all in one week — for the sake of the movie. Rosati, Warner, Winfrey, and his longtime movie partner Nick Snapp collected funny stories in their lives and melded them into the original script.

"We had chemistry in making each other laugh and laughing at and with each other about whatever," Rosati says.

The four guys bonded over a project performed on a scale that none of them had ever attempted. Each has his specialty. Winfrey and Snapp have been making movies since first grade, Snapp says. But a movie this detailed was a new challenge for them. Rosati is a motivator, explaining that owning a nightclub required that he "had to be 'on' for everybody, making everybody in a great mood and having a good time." Warner fit as the comedian of the group. He says he was just along for the ride. "Plus, we get backup dancers now, and that's what I've always wanted," he adds.

During the six months of filming there were several scenes that were cut, and some were added on the spot.

"It was written from our experiences," Rosati says. "We had to do a lot of stuff and make it up right there."

One scene was written with Rosati, Winfrey and Snapp motor boating around Commencement Bay. There was a problem as they were setting up to shoot the scene: the motor fell off the boat, and they had to be towed by a

passerby. But that didn't frazzle them; it only required a slight adjustment to the script.

"We had to be creative, which is great for an indie film," Snapp says. "It's definitely a learning process the whole way."

With a limited budget, they had to find new ways to get their project done. Relying on friends and networking, they were able to film in some locations with no trouble.

"When you don't have money to do it right, you improvise, and it actually comes up better than the 'proper' way of doing it," Winfrey says.

They filmed in Tacoma and the South Puget Sound area at businesses that they believe need recognition. The locations let them use their facilities for free in return for free advertising.

"They took sympathy on a guy who used to run a club that had no money," Rosati says.

"We tried to encompass a lot of cool places in Tacoma," Winfrey explains. "There's a lot of cool clubs in Tacoma that no one knows about or gets very little business and should get a lot more. There's a cool lounge on top of the Sheraton (Hotel) called the Vertigo Lounge."

They also filmed at Jazzbones, The Spar, The Harmon, Lacoste Coffee in Lakewood, and even did a few shoots in Panamonica's, which no longer exists.

"Panamonica's had one of the best vibes in Tacoma," Winfrey says. "It's too bad it closed down. That's one of the things we wanted to do. We wanted to help all the places where we shot to get

some recognition and boost their business."

Not only did they shoot locally, but they also used music from bands exclusively from the Northwest. They all had a part in choosing songs, but Snapp, they say, has a knack for making it work with the scene.

They're treating this project as a stepping stone to bigger things, not just for themselves but for everyone who helped them out.

"We want to do something that can help everyone involved advance," Rosati says. "Whether it's their business or their acting career, I think we can make it a positive thing for everybody."

Rosati describes the process of "Limbo" as a dream come true. He returned to school on a whim, which brought him to meet his three best friends.

"They couldn't have the exposure without me, and I couldn't have the drive and passion without them," Rosati says.

Rosati makes his life a spectacle for Tacoma for the first time when "Limbo" premieres at Jazzbones Thursday, Feb. 2. The movie starts at 7 p.m. and is followed by two bands featured on the soundtrack, Umber Sleeping and Weather. The second screening of the movie is Friday, Feb. 3, at 6 p.m. with Fear Train Caravan playing afterward.

"It's a dream come true," Rosati says. "I couldn't have designed what happened any better than it did."

'Limbo' Screening Parties

- Two screenings of the local film, "Limbo," followed by live music, both held at Jazzbones.
- Thursday, Feb. 2, 7 p.m., music by Weather and Umber Sleeping at 9 p.m., all ages until 10 p.m.
- Friday, Feb. 3, 6 p.m., music by Fear Train Caravan at 8 p.m., all ages until 10 p.m.
- Jazzbones, 2803 Sixth Ave., Tacoma, (253) 396-9169.
- Admission is \$5.

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