



Coffee Shop

Interview with Monty Lapica, writer / producer / director of *Self Medicated*

Filmmaker Monty Lapica is a native Las Vegas. His first feature film, *Self Medicated* (cf. www.selfmedicated.com), had its world premiere at CineVegas this June, to critical acclaim. A powerful and inspirational film, it was based on his own life experiences as a troubled youth. Lapica is a magna cum laude graduate of Loyola Marymount University School of Film and Television. He is currently working on his next film, *The Methodical*, which will begin shooting next year.

Neon Fan: After graduating from film school, what other projects did you work on (shorts, commercials, documentaries, etc.) prior to *Self Medicated*?

Monty Lapica: None prior to *Self Medicated*. Immediately upon graduation I took a job as an assistant to a film executive, which was a miserable experience in the way that it seemed like a million miles from actually making films. Although, part of the job duties included going to the Cannes Film Festival, where I ended up quitting the job while in France and backpacking around Europe for the rest of the summer. I decided during that trip that I would have to somehow raise the financing independently if I was ever to make my own film, which, with the help of my friend and producer, Tommy Bell, we began doing exactly that immediately upon my return to the States.

NF: At what point did you decide that this was going to be your first feature film? How did you go about securing funding and convincing others the film needed to be made?

ML: I started writing the script during film school but abandoned it for a while to work on another. Ultimately, I realized that *Self Medicated* was a story that could be filmed on a relatively low, independent budget so I concentrated my efforts there. Financing was secured on the strength of the script alone as I had no prior work to show any potential investors, only the script.

NF: Was it difficult finding crew, equipment and other resources here in Las Vegas? Which of these did you need to bring from L.A. to make the film?

ML: Our crew as an amalgam of L.A. and Vegas based people. The same for equipment. We brought our camera package from L.A. but rented most of our grip and lighting equipment in Vegas.

NF: What was your greatest challenge in keeping the film on budget and how did you overcome it? Which aspects proved easier / less expensive than you had expected?

ML: The schedule we had was incredibly tight and fast paced, so keeping up with the schedule and not falling behind was the biggest challenge in terms of staying on budget. Often we only had the time for a few takes before we were forced to move on due to time constraints.

NF: Other than the Sedona, AZ and Hawaii scenes, was the entire film shot on location in Las Vegas? Where were the desert and treatment facility scenes shot? Did you find the permitting process to be straightforward or were there delays therein?

ML: The majority of the film was shot on location in Las Vegas. We filmed the Brightway Hospital scenes in a closed-off wing of the working California State Mental Hospital in Norwalk, CA.

NF: Of your four roles in the film—writer, director, producer, actor—which was the most difficult and why?

ML: In my opinion, writing is by far the most difficult aspect of filmmaking. However, directing is very difficult as well; no matter how keen of an eye you try to maintain on the set, inevitably you will see things during editing that you missed during production.

NF: Were there times when you were all ready to shoot a scene and suddenly realized something critical was missing or not right (e.g., a prop, lighting, makeup, wardrobe)? If so, please elaborate.

ML: All the time. Independent film is all about finding creative way to solve problems. There's always something that's not exactly right or could be improved but there's never enough money or time so you make due with what you have and try to find the best possible solution.

NF: As we all know, many films which seem to be going well during production fail with critics and at the box office. Describe your emotions when, at the world premiere at CineVegas, you finally realized that all your hard work *had* paid off and that the film *was* a success.

ML: It was incredibly rewarding to see that people seemed to be genuinely affected by the film on an emotional level. The critical reception was wonderful as well, but to me, personally, nothing meant more than to have people approach me individually after the screening and tell me how the film touched them personally, or how the film inspired them.

NF: Discuss how and why you chose to bring on Tommy Bell as your co-producer and what he contributed to the filming and outcome of the film.

ML: Tommy has been my close friend since we were only four years old. We always had an interest in film so it was

natural that we chose to collaborate in our first venture into filmmaking. He was instrumental in raising the money to make the film and was very involved during pre-production and throughout production. Also, he was very helpful during editing and had some good insights into trimming the film into its optimal running time.

NF: Did the Nevada Film Commission serve as a resource during filming? Was it necessary to work through them to secure permits, etc.?

ML: Yes, the Nevada Film Commission was very helpful throughout production and was especially accommodating when it came to securing permits to film on and around The Strip, despite the fact that we were a low budget movie.