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# The curiosity of Chance:

## A **MUST SEE** FOR THE MGLFF

by Thomas Barker

EVERYONE REMEMBERS WHAT IT WAS LIKE IN HIGH SCHOOL. FOR SOME PEOPLE, HIGH SCHOOL WAS ONE OF THE MOST MEMORABLE AND ENJOYABLE EXPERIENCES OF THEIR LIFE, BUT FOR MOST GAY PEOPLE, HIGH SCHOOL CAN BE A TRAIN WRECK OF EMBARRASSING MOMENTS, DISTURBING EVENTS, AND AWKWARD SEXUAL INFATUATIONS. WITH ALL OF THOSE THINGS, IT'S A WONDER WE EVEN SURVIVE THE WHOLE ORDEAL. YET, AS A RESULT OF THESE SOMETIMES DRAMATIC EXPERIENCES MEMBERS OF THE GAY COMMUNITY CONTINUE TO BECOME STRONGER, MORE ACCEPTING, AND JUST OVERALL WELL ROUNDED INDIVIDUALS.

The Curiosity of Chance demonstrates this perfectly as it tells the story of a 16 year old boy who has accepted his sexuality but has trouble with just being himself in a time and place where individuality is frowned upon and conformity is key to survival. Set in the 80s, writer/director Russell Marleau uses true John Hughes style to tell this really compelling, heartwarming, and humorous story. Just like Pretty in Pink, Sixteen Candles, and Ferris Bueller's Day Off, Russell creates a beautiful collage of bubble gum colors, sardonic wit, and simple yet relatable relationships.

The story begins with none other than Chance himself, who is played by Tad Hilgenbrinck of American Pie Presents: Band Camp. The movie opens with Chance moving to an International High

School in "anywhere" Europe. On Chance's first day of school he wears a suit, tie, and top hat. Immediately he is categorized as strange and too different for the rest of his classmates. From that point on, things just get worse for the guy. Chance continually fights with his militant father and becomes the target of the school bully. His only saving grace are his best friends – a sharp tongued black girl, a neurotic and paranoid high school photographer, and his neighbor and crush, varsity jock, Levi Sparks, played by Brett Chukerman of Eating Out 2.

Things get really crazy when Chance happens to meet the super fabulous drag diva, Claire Vuoyant, played by Danny Calander. The super star drag queen takes Chance under her wing and

serves as his mentor. Before you know it, Chance is on stage in his dead mother's old cocktail dress singing Abba's Dancing Queen for a club full of women impersonators. Somehow, pictures of his performance appear all over International High, and you can only imagine what happens next.

The Curiosity of Chance is definitely a movie you will not want to miss during the Miami Gay and Lesbian Film Festival. It is just full of the comic conventions of the high school genre – the idiot faculty, the good-hearted but delusional parents, and the fairy tale reversal of popularity. I was so impressed by the film that I took a moment to sit with Russell, Tad, and Brett to find out more. And if there's something we didn't get to ask here, be sure to stay for the Q&A



Chance, Twyla and Hank pose in front of school



Chance gets ready to sing



following the screening this Sunday at 3:15 p.m. at the Colony Theatre on Lincoln Road. Both Russell and Brett will be available for questions.

Here’s what they had to say about their fabulous film, *The Curiosity of Chance* and why we’re encouraging Wire readers to view it.

**How long did it take to write *The Curiosity of Chance*?**

**RUSSELL:** I had a very basic idea which was writing a story about a high-school student who sort of winds up leading a double life (while going to HS) performing as a drag queen. And then what would happen if everyone at school found out about it. That idea floated around in my head for a few years. When I finally had the time to sit down and write it – the entire script probably took about three months to write. And what came out was not entirely what I first imagined it to be – but that’s sort of what the writing process is, it becomes a different journey than what you first expect.

**Where did you get the inspiration for the story?**

**RUSSELL:** I’d always wanted to write a teen-comedy and was really inspired and influenced by John Hughes’ teen classics from the 80s. There have certainly been a handful of really good teen-genre films made since then, but overall I think most teen films pale in comparison. So I just wanted to write a story that would have a lot of the fun conventions of the genre, but with a bit of a queer-twist. I guess my main inspirations were trying to come up with a teen film with a gay lead that would be entertaining for a wide audience – regardless of sexuality. And my own nightmare of a high school experience also influenced the story. But in the end, my story was nothing like *Chance*’s.

**Why did you place the story in the 80s?**

**RUSSELL:** The main reason for setting the film in the 80s is that I felt it would make the central conflict of the film more believable. For *Chance* to be an ‘out’ high school student in the 80s is much harder than to be out now. I realize – depending on where you might live – it’s still tough. But in the 80s, it was almost unheard of to be out in high school – very few people were. So I thought it would heighten *Chance*’s struggle and make his conflict with Brad (the bully) that much more believable. And, I guess it was another nod to the teen-films from the 80s that I loved the most.

**What is the message behind the story?**

**RUSSELL:** The main message is pretty universal – and typical of teen films – which is one of identity and finding yourself. So much of who we are – and will become – is tied to our high-school years which are so turbulent because of all the physical changes we go through and new experiences we start having. And so this movie is really about a guy who is trying to find his voice – trying to get at who he really is and will become. But at the start of the film,



Levi talks to Chance

you may think it’s a coming-out story – that *Chance* finding himself is all about his sexuality. But I purposely didn’t want to do that. I wanted to present a young gay character who was already out – but he’s dealing with identity issues that really have nothing to do with his sexuality. I thought that was important to show and I wanted the film to be universal. *Chance*’s sexuality is important to who he is and this story, but I wanted his journey to be as relatable to a straight person as it might be to someone who is gay. That was part of the big challenge of this film – for me at least.

**The soundtrack for this film is really great. How did you select the songs for the film?**

**RUSSELL:** Thanks for the compliment. Once we started editing the movie I earmarked a few scenes in which I wanted to use songs instead of score. I worked closely with our music supervisor on the film, Cathy Duncan, who did an amazing job in coordinating all the music in the film. I have a pretty good recall of 80s tunes – and so does Cathy – so we would bounce around ideas for different songs that we thought would work well in a certain scene, and then I’d have our editor drop them in to test them. Some of it was trial-and-error, and other times it worked on the first try.

In some cases I had a favorite song and I was looking for a spot to use it. But in the end we tried to choose songs that

were always in service of the film (and individual scene). We also tried to choose songs that would be familiar, but that haven’t been over-used on movie soundtracks.



Brett Chukerman

**The costume design is also really detailed. How were you able to perfectly capture the fashion of that era?**

**RUSSELL:** Once we decided to set it in the 80s, we kept a detailed eye on making sure the fashion was authentic. Two keys to the look were Lorette Meus – our costume designer who we were really lucky to get – she normally works on much bigger-budget films. And Frank Wollegheem who designed all the hair and make-up. They both loved the challenge of designing an 80s look, but it was definitely a lot of work and even harder being on a low budget. We also had enough people on the set with great memories of 80s fashion to make sure everything was authentic. It became a lot of fun for everyone to be making a ‘period’ film. There were a lot of laughs over the fashion and hair.

**Even though this is a “low budget” independent film, it looks like a mainstream blockbuster. How were you able to make that happen?**

**RUSSELL:** Lots of really talented people and a few tricks of the trade. Another big factor was having really good actors. To me, so many “low-budget” indie films feel and even “look” that way because the acting isn’t so good... even if it’s only a role or two. But we worked really hard to find good actors – and ones who could play their parts well. I think that goes a long way towards people viewing this movie as something that looks more “studio-made” as opposed to being independent.

**Speaking of actors, how did the two of you get involved with the film?**

**TAD:** I had just finished American Pie Band Camp playing this a-



Sir and Chance practice Jujitsu



**BRETT:** I LOVE THOSE JOHN HUGHES HIGH SCHOOL COMEDIES FROM THE 80'S, SO IT'S VERY EXCITING TO BE A PART OF A 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY VERSION OF THAT GENRE. LIKE MOST HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS, I HAD MY FAIR SHARE OF EMBARRASSMENTS AND TEENAGE AWKWARDNESS. I THINK CHANCE IS THAT AWKWARDNESS PERSONIFIED, AND EACH OF US FELT THAT WAY AT ONE TIME OR ANOTHER.

hole jock kind of character, and I was looking for a role that was completely opposite from that. When I got a hold of Russ's script I jumped on it, because I knew I had read something that could truly be great. It was extremely funny with this subtle hint of dark sarcasm, but also still packed with a lot of heart. It is rare to find a project like that, and I was happy to get the chance to read for it.

**BRETT:** I auditioned for the film pretty late in the casting process. Russell and the film's producer were already in Belgium, so I was cast off a taped session. Three weeks later, I was on a plane to Belgium.

**How do you guys identify with the story?**

**BRETT:** First of all, I love those John Hughes high school comedies from the 80's, so it's very exciting to be a part of a 21<sup>st</sup> century version of that genre. Like most high school students, I had my fair share of embarrassments and teenage awkwardness. I think Chance is that awkwardness personified, and each of us felt that way at one time or another. It gives me a great deal of pride to play the champion to Chance. Like I said before, being the hero we all wish we had in high school... it's pretty fun to get to be that guy.

**TAD:** One line of the lyrics in the song Chance sings and writes is "Don't worry who you are/ Stand up and you'll go far!" That to me sums up the movie. All the characters are struggling to find some middle ground, especially Chance and his Dad. Just like the lyrics I think the movie just shows you that in life we may think we have these problems that are unfixable, but they really aren't problems at all if we would just stop worrying about the small things, find confidence in how great we truly are as individuals, and eventually those problems will fade away!

**Tad, was it difficult shooting the drag scene?**

**TAD:** I was not nervous at all about the scene at first. But what was a tiny little section in the script turned into a huge shoot with hundreds of extras, crane shots, and a gaggle of drag queens all staring at me clomp around in high heels like the saddest looking prom date in history! I was so nervous that in the shot you could see the microphone in my hand shaking! One of the stylists who had just shaved my pits tried to get me to have a shot of vodka! I thought it would just make me more sick! In the end though, once the cameras got rolling something just clicks in your head and you just let go and go for it. And I was a little scared to see how good the footage actually turned out! I don't know if that's something I wanted to be that good at!

**Did you really sing for the sequence?**

**TAD:** Everything that you see Chance sing is really my voice. It was actually one of my favorite parts about the project. I got to go into the recording studio and sing 80's music with our awesome music producers. I felt like a rock star or something. It was totally fun, but I don't think you'll see me on American Idol any time soon!

**Brett, the scene where you are stripping for Chance is super hot. How was it during the shoot? Was it embarrassing to strip down in front of everyone?**

**BRETT:** It was fun. A little awkward because I was in my room at my house, and they were shooting through a window from the neighboring house, so I was stripping in a room alone with no real reaction or feedback between takes. Supposedly, there was quite

a bit of hooting and hollering from the crew in the other house. Maybe if we'd all been in the same house, I could have made a few extra bucks on tips!

**How does it feel to be called the "stud" of the movie?**

**BRETT:** Who's calling me that?! I guess you are! It's very nice to hear. I wasn't always the "stud" – certainly not in high school – so it's cool to be seen that way. I care more that they like the movie and my performance, but the flattery isn't all bad.

**Tad, what was it like kissing Brett?**

**TAD:** People always ask this! I have to admit as romantic and scandalous it may seem in the movie, kissing onset - boy or girl! - is never as fun as it seems to be! Its pretty much all planned out and choreographed. During one take though, I played a joke on Brett. The whole cast and crew were in on it and watching. On the last take, I had an assistant slip me a clove of garlic right before action, and I shoved it into Brett's mouth, trying not to break! But Brett sucked because as we all waited for him to notice, he just kept on going! I guess he takes his making out very seriously!

**What are your favorite scenes in the movie?**

**RUSSELL:** I always thought I'd get this question but I never have. You're the first to ask. My favorite scene was also my favorite scene when I wrote the script. The fact that it's still my favorite is a mini-miracle because I was sure the final scene wouldn't live up to what was in my head. We used the scene during auditions – so we started to coin it: "The break-up scene." It's the scene that takes place about half-way through the film, when Chance walks over to Levi's garage and basically forces him into telling him why he's decided to reject Chance as a friend. That was such a difficult scene for me to write – there's a lot going on in it and I wanted it all to come through without it getting too heavy-handed or too obvious. I obsessed over that scene before we shot it and talked to Tad and Brett a lot about it to make sure it came off just right. When I watch it now, I really love it. Tad and Brett are just so good in it – they hit every beat just right and the emotion of it just sort of sneaks up on you and so when it ends it kind

of breaks your heart. I hope it's relatable for a lot of people. I had such high-hopes for that scene, and the actors really came through for me on it.

**TAD:** My favorite scene in the movie is when I catch Brett across the way and he starts stripping for me. I just think the comedy of that is Russ at his best. Plus more intimately, I really like the scenes with Chance's sister. They all come across so delicate and simple and I loved working with Colleen.

**BRETT:** I love the scenes between Chance and Sir (his dad). Chris Mulkey is such a great actor, and I think there's some great heart and really important messages in the scenes between those two. Oh, and I do love getting to see me punch Brad outside the school. Watching him go down and the bloody nose is a bit of an ego-boost every time, I have to admit.

**Any scandalous antics take place on the set?**

**BRETT:** What happens in Belgium stays in Belgium.

**What are you currently working on?**

**RUSSELL:** I'm writing some things on my own – a new film script, a family comedy/drama – and working on two TV show ideas. I'm also talking to Bigfoot Entertainment about possibly directing a new film for them. I didn't write it but it's a really great romantic-comedy script they have.

**TAD:** I just finished a film shot in Budapest, Hungary called Amusement that will be out later in the year. It's a suspense thriller for New Line and Picturehouse, and I do not dress in drag!



Chance's first day of school

**BRETT:** I am currently working on writing a couple of projects for both film and television, as well as doing some theatre in Los Angeles. Oh, and my film "Eating Out 2" comes out on DVD at the end of May. You'll be shocked to learn that I strip in that one too!

**Anything you'd like Wire readers to know?**

**RUSSELL:** I would like them to know that they should come out and see The Curiosity of Chance at the Miami Gay and Lesbian Film Festival. And if they have any questions they want answered that we didn't answer here – then we'll answer them at the screening. Someone might even be able to talk me into revealing what was in Hank's briefcase. (w)



Claire Vuoyant makes an entrance