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STAFF AND WIRE REPORTS

PARK CITY, Utah — Tom Quinn knows a good storyline when he sees one — and when he writes one.

That's why "The New Year Parade," directed by Quinn, a 1994 graduate of Archbishop Wood High School who grew up in Churchville and lives in the Mount Airy section of Philadelphia, is one of 10 fiction feature films premiering in competition at the 2008 Slamdance Film Festival this month.

Slamdance takes place just a block from the Sundance Film Festival, and has been rated the seventh-best festival in the world by E! Entertainment.

"The New Year Parade" follows two South Philadelphia siblings through the first year of their parents' divorce.

Set against the backdrop of Philadelphia's Mummer culture, the film becomes a heartfelt and sometimes heartbreaking summation of how traditions connect us to those no longer present.

Quinn began writing the story after interviewing close friends about their parents' divorces.

"For many of my friends, the real effects of divorce came 15 or 20 years later, as they worked to form more meaningful relationships," he says. "They worked through it and persevered, but there was a sense of reinventing the wheel. Although many of them had shared experiences, they had never discussed them with each other. We all felt that young people should be encouraged to talk openly about these things."

Those interviews led Quinn to write the fictional story which follows 25-year-old Jack McMonagul and his younger sister, Kat, as their parents separate.

At 16, Kat believes they will reconcile and keeps the situation secret. As months pass, and tensions mount, she becomes isolated between family and friends with no one to confide in.

Meanwhile, Jack is forced to mediate between parents and carry the family finances. While his mom avoids confrontation, their dad works as captain to lead the South Philadelphia String Band to victory in the annual Mummers Parade.

A band member himself, Jack questions his loyalty as his parents' actions wear on his own relationships.

"The New Year Parade," which premiered Saturday at Treasure Mountain Inn and gets another showing at 6 tonight at that venue, has been called "a unique discovery film — mixing actors and non-actors, documentary footage and fiction — to take a closer look at how divorce can affect young people."

Quinn assembled a cast of mostly non-actors, including Eastern Conference Champions drummer Greg Lyons, a classmate of Quinn's at Wood, as Jack. Lyons and Quinn had attended elementary, high school and La Salle University together.

For the role of Kat, Quinn cast University of the Arts student Jennifer Welsh, who had just graduated from William Tennent High School at the time.

Although neither had acted before, they deliver nuanced performances that many young people probably will relate to.

The McMonagle parents are played with subtlety and grace by MaryAnn McDonald of Warminster, a mother of three whose daughter was close friends with Jennifer, and Andrew Conway of Philadelphia, a tango instructor and actor from

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Philadelphia.

Rounding out the cast are Barrymore Award winner Tobias Segal of Paoli, film and theater actress Irene Longshore of South Philadelphia

and a wide range of Mummers who bring an authenticity to the film.

Most of the production was shot with only one or two crew members, creating a comfortable environment for the cast to push themselves.

"Often, I would shoot and work with the actors, while Mark Doyle (of Philadelphia) set up lights and ran sound," says Quinn. "On some days, I would put a body mic on the actors and we would walk through the Italian Market or by the waterfront filming with no crew at all. Somehow, it

reflects on screen, giving a sense that we're peeking into these characters' private lives, seeing them when they are most vulnerable."

The Mummers' storyline had initially presented a challenge for the production.

"When I first approached producers with the script," he says, "many told me it was impossible on our budget because of its scale. It called for a costumed string band with a hundred members and a parade on Broad Street with 10,000 extras."

Fortunately, Steve Beal of South Philadelphia, a biology teacher at William Tennent and a screenwriter, was excited about the project and became its producer.

Quinn called Frank Voight, a fellow La Salle grad who played in the South Philadelphia String Band, and Beal and Quinn presented their concept for the film with hopes of shooting with the band for two weeks.

Instead, they were welcomed into the band for two *years*, accumulating nearly 80 hours of footage, culminating in a five-camera shoot on Broad Street during the 2005 parade.

"Because of the South Philadelphia String Band, we managed to capture Mummery in a way that's never been on screen before," Quinn says. "They incorporated our cast and crew into four months of rehearsals for the parade, acted in the film, and lent us costumes and their clubhouse for shoots. They were a total class act and amazing to collaborate with."

Many other members of the Mummers community also joined the production, including several members of the Quaker City String Band, which Jack considers jumping to, given the family tension.

"I was constantly amazed working with these guys," says Quinn. "We'd walk in off the street, knowing nobody in the room, and by the end of the night were shooting improvisational scenes and sharing drinks with some really amazing people. I think everyone realized we wanted to capture the tradition with respect and not exploit it."

Last June, "The New Year Parade" was selected as one of 10 films to participate in the IFP Narrative Rough Cut Lab, where filmmakers are paired with industry veterans to bring their work to a new level.

While there, Quinn worked with Scott Macaulay, editor of Filmmaker magazine and producer of films such as "Raising Victor Vargas" and "Gummo," composer Mychael Danna ("Little Miss Sunshine," "Capote"), editors Sabine Hoffman ("The Ballad of Jack and Rose") and Kate Williams ("Interview"), and producer Gretchen McGowan ("Redacted").

This year, Slamdance, which opened last week and runs through Friday, received more than 3,500 submissions.

Information: www.thenewyearparade.com; www.slamdance.com; blog updates on the IFP Narrative Rough Cut Labs at www.lab.workbookproject.com.

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