

ENTERTAINMENT

Canadian filmmaker creating movie based on The Spider and the Fly

by GAYLE MACDONALD
TORONTO (CP) — Brad Peyton, his hair twisted up in a natty bun, is sitting in a downtown Toronto eatery, nursing a glass of water and doodling odd pictures in his ever-present notepad. The Gander, Nfld., native has long, lean fingers, and pale hands that move constantly. They gesture when he talks. They sketch and write when the mental urge strikes (which is often). But suddenly, they pause — just for a few seconds, to trace a mean gash on his cheek.

“I wish I could say it was a bar fight,” the 25-year-old filmmaker says. “But I tripped falling up the stairs. I mean, how stupid is that? It doesn’t even make sense.”

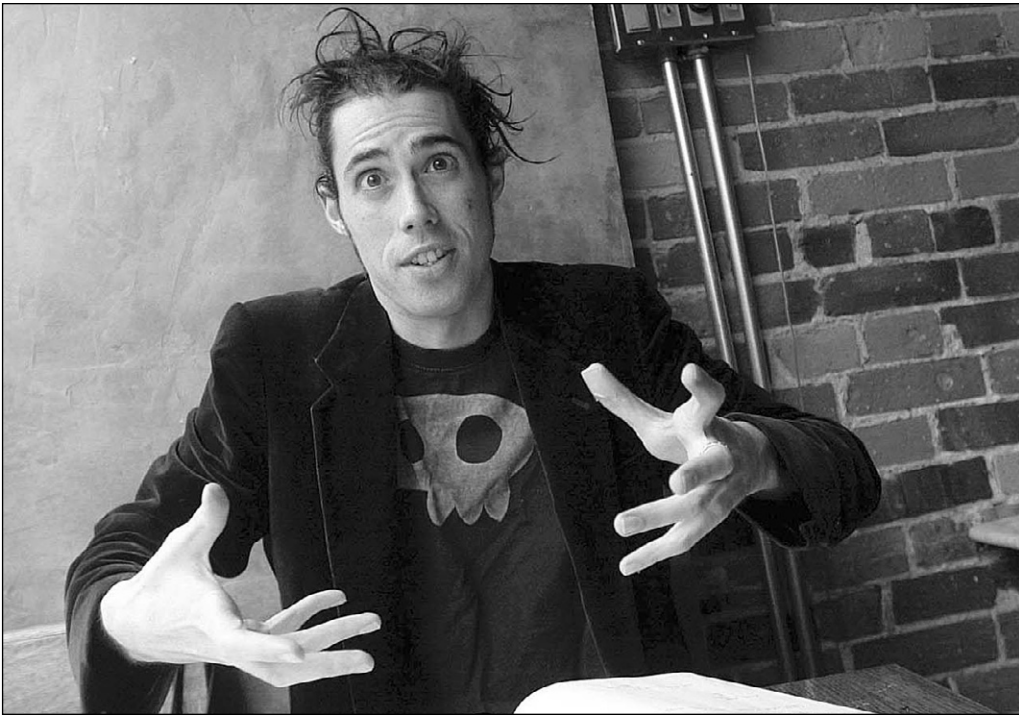
Then again, nothing much does when it comes to this adolescent-looking director, whose career trajectory over the past nine months has been almost as bizarre as his decidedly twisted short films, Full and Evelyn, the Cutest Evil Dead Girl.

Peyton, who has never made a feature-length film, was recently hired by Tom Hanks’s company Playtone to write and direct the L.A. firm’s first full-length animated movie, based on the cautionary classic, The Spider and the Fly. (“Will you walk into my parlour?” said the spider to the silly fly in Mary Howitts’s 1829 poem. “ ’Tis the prettiest little parlour that ever you did spy.”)

All of which is a roundabout way of saying that Peyton is now one of Canada’s most promising movie-makers. Not only did Playtone (the company behind My Big Fat Greek Wedding) bet on this kid from the Rock. But Universal Studios, who will be providing financing, was so wowed by his presentation and script pitch for The Spider and the Fly that it handed him a cheque (in the low six figures) and signed him for a three-picture deal — which means that if they like what he does with the first computer-generated animated movie, they’ll sign him up for two more tries.

Peyton, a pretty down-to-earth sort, is still trying to get a grip on it all. “You know when life suddenly becomes so surreal that all the pieces suddenly start fitting together and all you’re doing is watching them fit together around you? Well, that’s what the past few months have kind of been like,” says this Hollywood novice, whose dad ran a flower nursery and whose mom is a nurse.

“All the time I’m thinking, ‘This is fun. This



CP photo

Brad Peyton is a young Canadian filmmaker from Newfoundland who just signed a three-picture deal with Tom Hanks production company, Playtone, in LA.

is interesting. But, boy, is it ever wild.”

Just earlier this year, Peyton was working as a director’s assistant and selling some of his cartoonish acrylic-and-ink paintings to pay the rent on his tiny downtown Toronto apartment. Now he’s hobnobbing with Hanks and Hanks’s producing partner Gary Goetzman, partying with the likes of Hollywood bad boy Colin Farrell, meeting with British producer David Heyman (of the Harry Potter films) and getting calls from Steven Spielberg’s shop.

“I never thought I’d be working in Los Angeles,” says Peyton, whose black-magic film style has been compared to Tim Burton (The Nightmare Before Christmas, Edward Scissorhands). “The Spider and the Fly was my dream project, something if I was lucky, that I might get to do eight films from now.

“But I love all of it. I don’t want to do anything else with my life. I just want to get up and make stuff up. I want to bring you to worlds you’ve never been to. I want you to meet people you’ve never had the chance to meet and you never will, except for in my films. I want you to be able to feel in a way

you can’t feel in your everyday life,” he says, his long arms sweeping the room.

What roused all this interest in Peyton in the first place was a seven-minute, \$16,000 film that he made as his thesis project at the Canadian Film Centre in Toronto in 2002. Called Evelyn, the Cutest Evil Dead Girl, it’s a grotesque, absurd black comedy about a poor little dead girl who tries to make friends.

It was roundly applauded during a screening for Peyton’s class at the centre. Toronto filmmaker Jeremy Podeswa came up to Peyton later that same night and told him to send it to an entertainment lawyer he knew in New York. Peyton did, and soon enough the short, made with producer Jim Mauro and starring Canadians Nadia Litz and Josh Close, was making waves, and getting circulated, through the right circles in Manhattan and L.A.

It premiered at last year’s Toronto International Film Festival, and went on to win several awards (such as the grand jury prize at the Nodance Festival in Utah, and best soundtrack at the renowned short-film fest in Clermont-Ferrand, France).

Building the Road to Alaska

History Television documents the building of the Alaska highway

TORONTO — During the Second World War, United States army engineers were assigned the enormous task of building a highway from Dawson Creek, to Fairbanks, Alaska, in only eight months. History Television examines the battle waged against time and brutal Northern elements in The War in the Woods: The Building of the Alaska Highway, airing Monday.

This one-hour documentary depicts the massive construction of the Alaska Highway through Northern B.C. and the Yukon. Following the bombing of Pearl Harbor, and under the potential threat of another Japanese attack, the U.S. made homeland security a domestic priority. An inland

route connecting Alaska to the continental U.S. was deemed a military necessity and the Americans were willing to build the highway at their own expense.

The Canadian government approved the project and allowed the American army to occupy thousands of kilometres of land in B.C. and the Yukon. This led to an influx of heavy machinery and thousands of U.S. troops, who were unaccustomed to the harsh conditions of life in Northern Canada.

As American soldiers worked through the Rocky Mountains they faced -40°C temperatures, thick muskies that would trap bulldozers for days, and a massive infestation of mosquitoes. While the army struggled in an epic battle against nature, the Second World War and its tumult were in full throttle.

The War in the Woods: The Building of the Alaska Highway is part of the award-winning series Turning Points Of History, produced by Toronto’s Barna-Alper Productions.

Copenhagen to celebrate 90th birthday of the Little Mermaid

COPENHAGEN (AP) — She’s been beheaded twice, her arm has been amputated and vandals keep pouring paint over her.

Despite all this, the Little Mermaid has made it to her 90th birthday. So Copenhagen officials plan to hold a party today to celebrate the longevity of the Danish capital’s most famous landmark.

There will be speeches, performances by the Royal Ballet and a Danish Navy band. Fire brigade boats will salute with water cannons and 90 mermaids are expected to be swimming in the water behind the statue.

“Many think it is a monumental statue,” Martin Geertsen, Copenhagen mayor for cultural affairs, told The Associated Press. Actually, “she is a small, exquisite statue.”

The statue is based on a Hans Christian Andersen fairy tale, published in 1837, about a mythical sea king’s mermaid daughter. Carl Jacobsen, founder of Denmark’s Carlsberg breweries and an arts patron, commissioned Danish sculptor Edvard Eriksen in 1909 to create a mermaid statue.

Eriksen created the topless, girl-sized bronze and used his wife, a ballet dancer, as model. The statue was ready in 1913.

The statue’s international fame took off after it was beheaded in 1963. No arrests were ever made and a new head was cast from the original mould.

In 1984, someone sawed off her right arm, which was also replaced. A long cut in the statue’s neck, possibly a second attempt to decapitate her, was discovered six years later. The gap was welded. The statue was beheaded again in 1998 but the head was found and welded back on.

Rolling Stones postpone London show, citing Mick Jagger’s flu

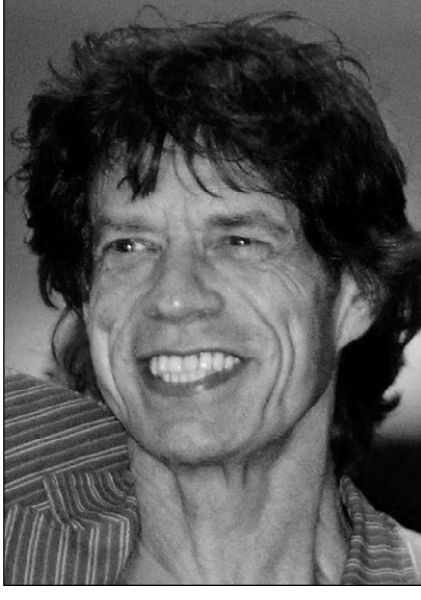
LONDON (AP) — The Rolling Stones have postponed a concert for the third time in a month because Mick Jagger has the flu, the band said Friday.

The rockers deferred a show planned for today at Twickenham stadium in west London, rescheduling it for Sept. 20. The band said a concert scheduled for Sunday would go ahead as planned.

“The doctors tell me that I must have two more days rest, and after that I will be completely recovered and ready for a full-on stadium show on Sunday,” Jagger, 60, said in a statement.

The band postponed a Wednesday concert in Amsterdam because Jagger had a sore throat and put off a date in Spain earlier this month because he had laryngitis.

“The Stones were looking forward to opening in the U.K. — for their hometown audience — with all guns blazing,” said tour promoter Michael Cohl. “We’re sorry to disappoint the fans



JAGGER

who were coming to the concert.”

Billy Crystal takes on writing children books after deal with HarperCollins

NEW YORK (AP) — Billy Crystal is the latest celebrity to take on writing stories for children, agreeing to a two-book deal with HarperCollins.

“My granddaughter’s birth has made me want to create things she will love,” Crystal, whose first grandchild, Ella, was born recently, said in a statement this week.

Next spring, HarperCollins will release Crystal’s “I Already Know I Love

You,” described as a “tribute to grandparents and grandchildren everywhere.” Crystal, 55, will then work on a second children’s book.

His films include Analyze This, City Slickers and the animated Monsters, Inc.

Celebrities who have published children’s books in recent years include Katie Couric, Jamie Lee Curtis and Spike Lee. Madonna’s The English Roses comes out next month.

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FREAKY FRIDAY	(G)	12:30, 2:45, 4:55, 7:30, 9:50	Frequent sexual contents, language
FREDDY VS. JASON	(18A)	1:20, 3:45, 7:00, 9:45	Horror, gory violence
PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN	(PG)	12:50, 3:40, 7:10, 10:05	Violence, frightening scenes
S.W.A.T.	(14A)	1:10, 3:50, 7:05, 10:00	Violence, coarse language.

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