

TALENT MONTHLY



Daffany Clark

"...no matter what you go through or your circumstance you can rise above it..."

THE FOSTERS



Aleks Paunovic

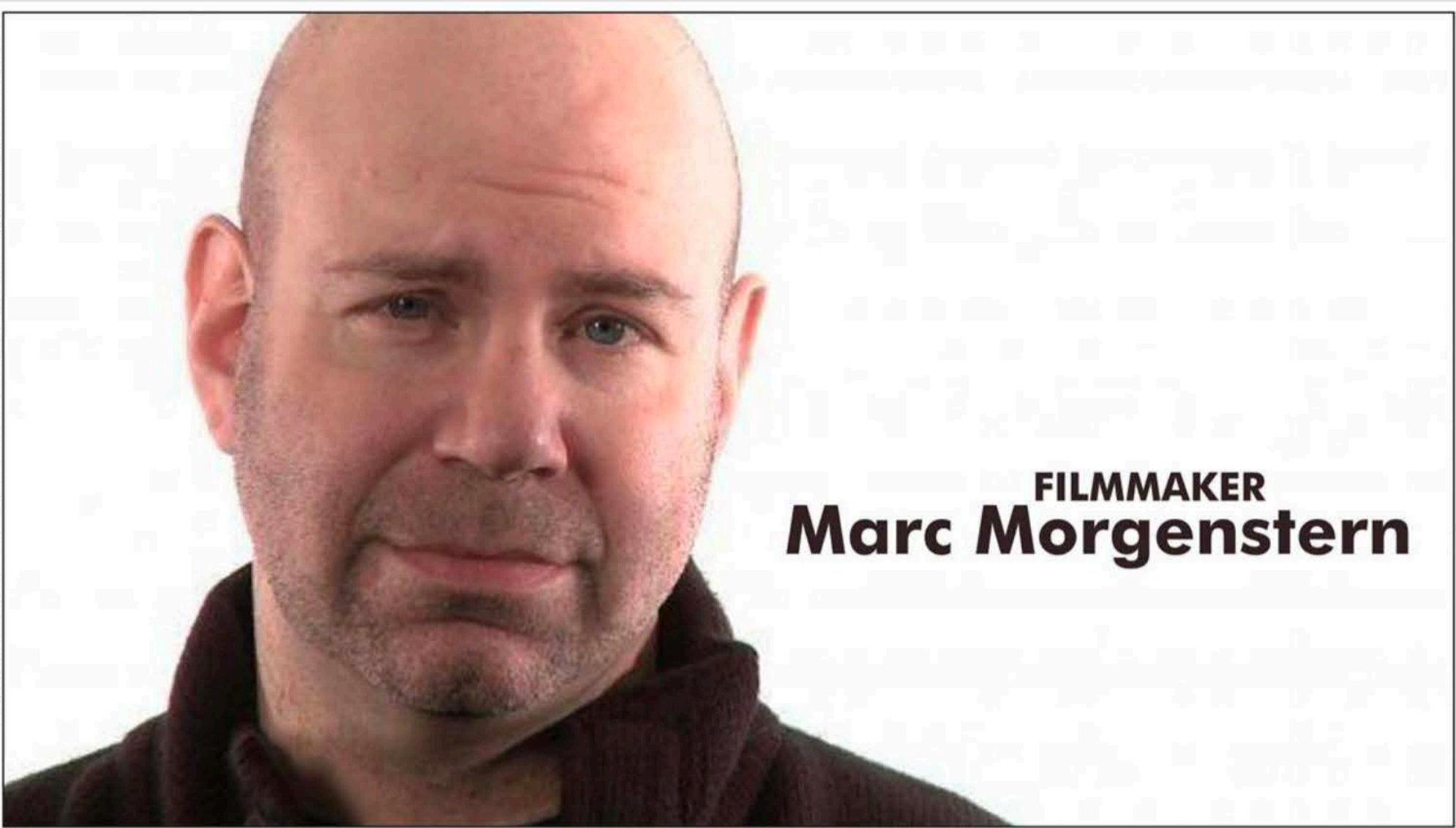
Naomi Snieckus

Gonzalo Menendez

WHEN DOES CELEBRATING TALENT GO TOO FAR?

Charles Rahi Chun

Ben Reed
ACTOR • PRODUCER



FILMMAKER
Marc Morgenstern

Independent filmmaker and director, Marc Morgenstern has found his niche in Hollywood filmmaking. His latest film is *VITALS*, starring Charlene Amoia and Christopher Showerman, Tim Russ, and Claudia Wells.

Tell us about your latest film *VITALS*.

"It's a Hitchcock-type thriller that's very contained in a couple of locations. It's about a man who wakes up in a foreign motel room. He is in a tub of ice, a kidney is missing, and he doesn't know how he got there, why he's there, or what's going on. The only thing he knows is that in the room next to him is his wife, who has also been abducted. These two had taken a vacation together to work on their troubled marriage, and now they're abducted and they have to put everything aside to try to work together and find a way to escape before the organ harvesters return and finish the job."



A scene from the film VITALS

What inspired the idea for the film?

"I belonged to a producer's group in probably 2003. We would meet every so often and we would discuss movies that we could throw together that would be relatively inexpensive. As we were talking about ideas, I said, "Well what if someone wakes up in a tub of ice missing a kidney? And because they're in a hotel room they can't really go anywhere or they'll die." A few people thought that was cool, and that was the last we ever discussed it. Now flash forward ten years and it came to my mind

again – oh hey, what about that kidney idea? So I wrote it. It was on the tail of another film I was working on, *THE SECRET LIVES OF LOVERS*. *SECRET LIVES'* production had been postponed because I ran out of money, but I still wanted to do a film. I was living in Toronto, Canada, at the time, but was moving to California. I wanted to get to L.A. and immediately do a film, just sort of to announce that I'd arrived. You know, get an agent to bring people to see my work, and hopefully get more work from it. So between April and July 2013, I wrote *VITALS*. When I'd been in L.A. for three weeks, I went to a pitch-fest and pitched the idea to producer Calix Lewis Reneau. He thought it sounded great and that we could do it inexpensively, so we went for it. I'd been in L.A. for three weeks and already had a movie to work on! By December 6 we were in production, and we were done by the 21st."

Holy cow, that's crazy!

"I'm not going to say I'm living a Hollywood success story, but for a guy who has basically just arrived in Hollywood, it's kind of cool to have a film done already."

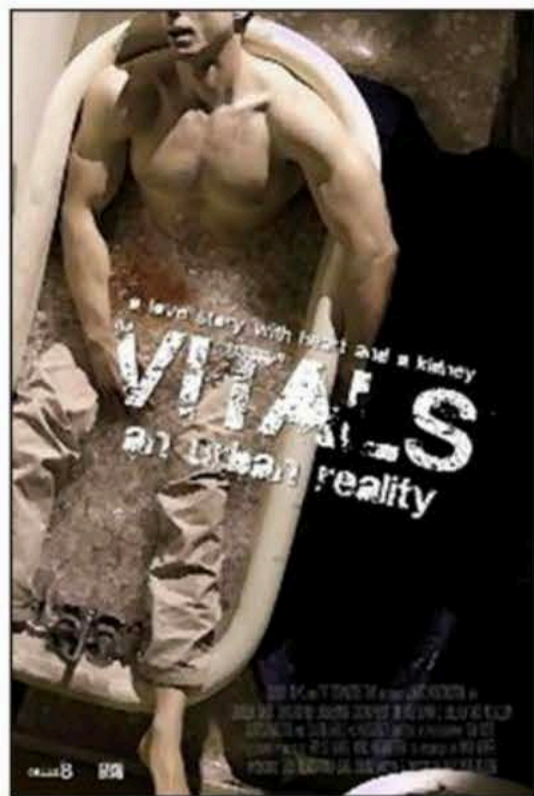
That is very cool!

"When I was doing story research for *VITALS*, I was trying to look up people who have gone to the police saying that their kidneys are missing. That's when I started thinking...maybe no one goes to the police because they don't survive. People just take their organs and leave them for dead. The fun part of the film is, although the characters are left for dead or extremely incapacitated, they wake up and they try to escape. Of course as the film goes along the story is revealed in more detail. At the crux of everything, the stories that I find most interesting, are the ones where ordinary people find themselves in extra-ordinary circumstances. It allows the viewer to experience the story from a very personal level – if it were me this was happening to, how would I react? What would I do? That's the point of view that *VITALS* was born from. By the way, I just found out my next film was funded and I am excited!"

Oh that's fantastic! What's the name of your film?

"*THE SHERLOCK JUNIOR DETECTIVE AGENCY*. Imagine *CRIMINAL MINDS*, but if they were 12-year-old kids solving school yard problems. It's cer-

tainly not real serious, but the kids do take their job seriously. One concept is, a dog goes missing and they have to figure out who took the dog and why. It all stems from when I was a kid. When I was about that age, I would play outside and would be my own detective. I would try to solve crimes, whether those crimes existed or not. I always thought this was a cool concept. So, back to the script...each of these kids has their own



talent. One's good at math, one excels at computers, one's an athlete – they all look at the crime and they apply their collective information like they do on CRIMINAL MINDS or CSI or any other crime show. It is fun and simple. When I wrote SHERLOCK JUNIOR, I wrote it very quickly – in just 10 days. It was based on a concept that I'd had for several years that just flowed out of me when I sat down to write it. It ended up becoming this perfect storm of everyone wanting to see pure, clean, innocent entertainment. I didn't dumb it down for kids. Instead I maintained its intelligence level. It was interesting, fascinating,

had twists to the stories, detective elements, and danger elements, and as soon as the producer read it she said it was just amazing. Then our investor read it and we had our funding in less than a week. It just goes to show you that pure, clean, good entertainment is still paramount; still valuable."



Are you going to finish filming THE SECRET LIVES OF LOVERS?

"I plan to. Part of the reason I set it aside was because I was moving down to L.A., so I didn't even have a chance to raise the money to finish the film. And part of it was...the producer I was working with just didn't do the budget properly, so when it came time to assess what we were doing, he came to me and told me we had run out of money. Now, it remains to be seen whether I have to start it new or bring back the actors. I paid all the actors already just so I wouldn't be beholden to them, in case I needed to do it over. I'd like to use the same actors, but I'm here in L.A. now, and they are all in Toronto. That could be a little bit of a nightmare."

The first movie you filmed, THE VAMPIRE CONSPIRACY, you wrote, directed and did all the effects too?

"We filmed THE VAMPIRE CONSPIRACY in 2003, and we ended up producing it in about January 2004. It actually was quite the blast to do. I was originally just going to write it and produce it, and these two other people were going to direct the film. One was going to be the technical director, and one was going to direct the actors. The week before we

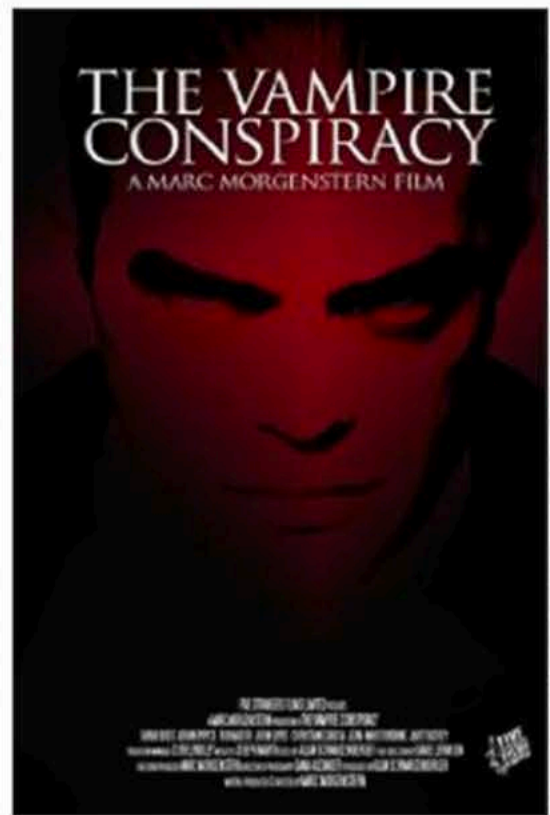
started filming, the acting director decided that he wasn't going to do it because we were shooting starting the day after Christmas. In Canada, that's Boxing Day, and it's a holiday. We had reserved 10 days to shoot it. He was newly married and he decided that it was more important for him to be with family, then to do the film.

"I figured I would just jump in as the other director and we would both work together to do that film. But one day into filming, the second director became ill...like really ill! So I had to finish the project without a lot of...well, without anything. It was really hard for me to do that film by myself because the two directors hadn't really done anything in the way of preparation. The rest of the crew and the cast, we just pulled together and finished the film and everyone was spectacular to work with. It was a nice, micro-budget, cheesy vampire flick. (Now, every time I prep for a film now, I over-prepare – just in case someone has to jump in and cover for someone else.)

"Because I have a marketing background, I put together a graphic novel of THE VAMPIRE CONSPIRACY while the film was being edited. Then when we were ready to sell the film, I went to a fan expo...like a Comic-Con type of thing, where I met a sales agent. The sales agent was interested in working with me; he set it up for sales and distribution and we ended up getting world-wide distribution from it. It was translated into a couple different languages and was a blockbuster at Target and Walmart. It turned out to be a bigger deal anyone expected. Probably the best and the worst thing that happened to me through the process, was when someone posted it online for illegal download. Of course I saw no money from anyone who downloaded the movie illegally, and for a guy who had scraped and scraped to make the film, that was hard to deal with. On the plus side, it allowed people to see the film. People would watch it and click over to the IMDb page to see what the film was all about. Because of that, the ratings shot up. I think the best ranking we got was 672."

That is fantastic.

"Yes it is. People were looking at it and it was in between MILLION DOLLAR BABY and THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK. We made the top 700 films. So if anything, at least it got us that. Because of that minor success, I've been directing films since."



In a weird way they did you a favor.

"They did. Now I wouldn't suggest to anyone that they download illegal films, but yes, they kind of did me a favor. As I'm sitting here in my Orange County apartment, making another film and looking at what happened in hindsight, it was a big favor."

You did AFFAIRS ACROSS AMERICA: THE ASHLEY MADISON STORY? Isn't that a cheating/dating site?

"The way I stumbled into that was, for a publicity stunt, Ashley Madison (which is a dating website for married people), took a tanker truck and they did a car wrap on it. Basically, they said, "Have an affair anywhere." And then they hired a small little camera crew to follow it around the U.S. When it was done, they had a bunch of footage of this tanker truck in different cities and they didn't know what to do with it.

"I had met with them about the idea of doing AFFAIRS ACROSS AMERICA, and proposed turning the cities into different aspects of infidelity. Every city is known for certain things – we could pair that up with the different angles of infidelity. For example, Chicago is known for its sports, we'll do infidelity in sports. Washington, D.C., is known for politics, we'll do infidelity in politics. We had New Orleans, which was our international flavor. We had L.A., which was the entertainment industry. And we did New York, which was business-focused. They had gone to Las Vegas and gone to the adult video awards where they interviewed a bunch of people.

"So we took the footage that we had, which by itself meant nothing, and I wrote a script centered on these different aspects of infidelity. There are a bunch of sites out there with people doing their confessions about cheating. Obviously there are people out there who feel guilty and want comfort with/from like-minded people. I took a lot of people's stories from sites like that, re-wrote them so that you wouldn't be able to identify the person, and did these monologues before we went into each city. There are people who feel really bad about infidelity and will confess it to their spouse, and there are people who have no qualms about cheating on their spouses and think that cheating is the best thing since sliced bread. When I took all the footage and added a script and monologues to it, it ended up becoming quite an event. But...it didn't belong to me, it belonged to Ashley Madison Agency, they wanted to have their in-house person edit it, put it together, and release it. As far as I know they are still doing that post-production work."



Did you do any editing on it? Or is their team doing all of it?

"I edited some of the stuff that went together. I did all the monologues, I did some of the footage, but all the graphics and everything else will be done by Ashley Madison.

What was the most interesting part of the film for you?

"I had the opportunity to interview Robin Leach, Richard Dreyfuss, Dave Navarro, and Evan Seinfeld there. Evan Seinfeld actually gave a great interview."



What was the interview with Robin Leach like?

"I couldn't shut Robin Leach up. I ended up with so much footage of him! We were back stage at the red carpet where they take pictures of all the porn stars, and Robin Leach was in there and was the toast of Vegas because of his LIFESTYLES show for Las Vegas. I did a great little interview with him and he went on and on and on...he was fantastic.

"Probably the best interview was Theresa Flynt. She's taken over Hustler for her dad, and it was very interesting getting the female perspective of someone who owns and runs such a pornography empire that has a huge amount of content in it about infidelity and cheating. She's a staunch monogamist, she said her business is just a product that sells well. It's very interesting how people separate their personal views from their work – almost like a cognitive dissonance thing. In the circumstance of a documentary, you aren't really *selling* or *promoting* the content, you're *discussing* the content. You're discussing the individual and how the individual reacts to something.

"Would I want to come home to my wife every day knowing that she's involved in an infidelity project? I don't know. I think it would depend on what she does and how involved she is. Or...like Flynt, is the infidelity-based product just a business just like any other business. DESPERATE HOUSEWIVES...their product is infidelity. It all just ends up being drama on television. I don't know, it can be a tough line to draw. I think the endgame is what decides it for me. If the endgame is entertainment, that's different than if the endgame is actually encouraging people to commit infidelity."

What do you want people to know about you or your filmmaking?

"I'd like to position myself as a writer/director, and the reason for that is...you've seen videos, I'm sure, where you can't help but wonder, how did this get made? Even independent films, just...what is going on here? The reason I want to be the writer/director of films is that that way I can control the sticks. I can get quality beats. I can create tension and conflict and then put it all together and make it seem like it is less effort than it is. Trust me, it is tremendous effort, but your end product shouldn't show that. I want my audience to see a seamless film. I want them to throw themselves into the experience that they see on the screen rather than observing the nuts and bolts of what happened behind the scenes.

"I want my original vision to end up on the screen. As a writer/director, you start from nothing and you create that vision. I want my visions to translate beautifully to the screen, and I want to go on to bigger projects and bigger budgets. Keep in mind though, I don't think the size of the budget determines the quality of the script. I found out that the latest Tom Cruise movie, EDGE OF TOMORROW, cost like \$150 million to make. And all I could think was, why couldn't they make it \$151 million and have a decent script?"

"It was a fun movie because it had a lot of action in it, but there were just

inherent problems with the character and the script. I guess when you're in a studio and you're dealing with the scripts that are given to you, it's less about making the film good and more about the deal. If a project lands in my lap and they tell me, "We got Bradley Cooper to star, we got Paul Haggis to write it, you're going to direct it," my first reaction is still going to be "Okay, let's go through the script and make sure it's ready to go." Their response to that would be, "Oh no, the deal's done. Just do it." That's more what it's like in the studio system. I grew up with movies in the 70s and 80s where good or bad, it was all about the passion of filmmaking. I think we need to go back to that.

"It's great when you have a film like THE GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY that does something like a billion dollars in business, but James Gunn had never directed a movie that size before. He'd done just a couple things; I think the biggest film he directed was maybe \$15 million. So here's this independent film director that came in and turned this project into sort of an independent film with special effects. And that certainly showed in the film style. If you enjoy that kind of film, it's fantastic! I do, and I hope he makes a dozen more just like it.

"You also have these amazing films coming out now that could hardly even have been made 5 years ago, like IRON MAN, and all these superhero films. They're great, but audiences can only watch so many reboots of SPIDERMAN, right? They need and want other stories too. Another great thing is the fact that the female action star is on top now. That adds a different take on something when you see a female leading an action film. If it's a male action star, there's such a disconnect with why they're doing what they're doing, but it seems like when there's a female action star at the helm of the film, there's purpose and reason behind it. I think that's great."

How'd your wife handle all this? I know the first time you do a full feature film it's insanity.

"When my wife Tanya and I met, I made my living doing commercials, so she understood what being on set was, or that I might have to be gone for a couple of days. Before we got married, I had done VITALS (we've only been married since July 2014). She's so supportive and so amazing – I couldn't ask for a better partner. Every step of success I get, she's the first person that has to know and she continues driving me forward. She is so awesome! She understands and she gets it. She sees the sparkle in my eye when I come up with a new idea and she's there for the frustration when I'm dealing with complications. She's smart and asks the right questions. It's fantastic. I wish everyone had the same partnership I have."

For more information about Marc Morgenstern, go to www.FiveStrangersFilms.com.

