

Chris Brinker honored with Robert Smalls Award posthumously.



Friday, February 8, 2013. I'm listening to my phone interview with filmmaker Chris Brinker from earlier in the week, late (as usual) for my deadline. The producer-turned-director is wrapping up production on a film he's developed for a decade and a half, the dark fact-based crime drama, *Whiskey Bay*

.

The project also stars Matt Dillon and pairs Tom Berenger and Willem Dafoe for the first time since the two squared off in their Oscar nominated roles as Sergeants Barnes and Elias in Oliver Stone's *Platoon*. A continent away, Brinker's enthusiasm is electric – even over a sketchy wireless signal. This is kid-in-the-candy-store stuff – the guy who practically *willed* one of the biggest cult hits of the last twenty years to life is giddy at the prospect of seeing his first directorial effort on screen. It's infectious.

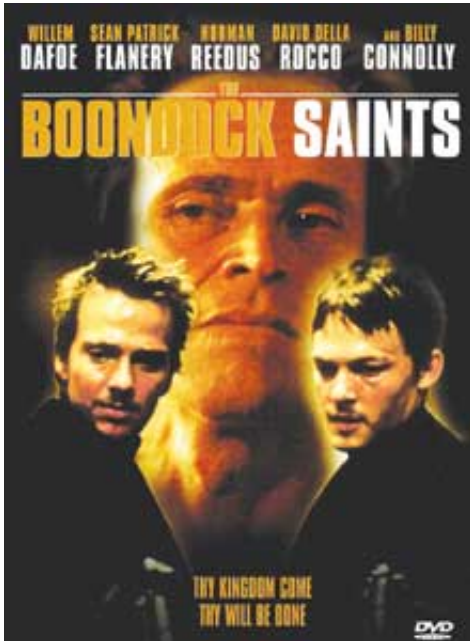
I pause the interview to call *Lowcountry Weekly* Publisher, Jeff Evans, about some visuals we need to secure for the piece from BIFF Executive Director, Ron Tucker. I'm on the phone with Jeff when Ron buzzes in.

An Indie Visionary's Last Interview

Written by Mark Shaffer

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"I've got some really bad news," he says.



Chris Brinker started out as a camera assistant and set painter, studying the filmmaking process from the inside out. He produced several award winning short films in the early nineties and landed a job at New Line Cinema working in the development division. In 1997 Brinker launched his own company and a year later he produced the cult smash *The Boondock Saints*. Brinker followed up with features like

Borough of Kings, *Lonely Street*

, and the inevitable

The Boondock Saints: All Saints Day

. Brinker was also heavily involved in developing interactive games, mobile apps, soundtracks, comics and graphic novels. He also owned and operated a film related merchandising company with a social network that pushed 6 million active users.

According to his brother and business partner, Michael, Chris was wrapping up one of the final shots for *Whiskey Bay* on February 7th when he complained of chest pains. He died early the next morning at Kaiser's Los Angeles Medical Center of complications due to a massive aortic aneurysm. He was 42 years old.

The following conversation took place by phone two days before his death and a week before he was due to arrive in Beaufort. He was thrilled about completing his dream project and humbled to be honored at the 2013 BIFF. He was also excited about taking part in a panel discussion with Tom Berenger to promote *Whiskey Bay* and talk independent film. I was to

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moderate.

“Now, you’re going to open it up to questions for the audience, right?”

“Absolutely,” I assured him.

“Good. Good. I’m *really* looking forward to talking to the audience and seeing what they’re interested in.” I could practically hear the gleam in his eye over a bad connection three thousand miles away...

Mark Shaffer: What finally prompted you to take a shot at directing?

Chris Brinker: Well, I’d been seeking another director to take on this project that I was



passionate about and I thought, *well, I’m a storyteller. I like to tell stories*. So, at 40 years of age I decided to direct a movie instead of buying a red Porsche. (Laughs)

I nurtured a few first time directors so I understood the process. So, about two years ago I said I wanted to make this film and I want to make it with a specific cast of talented, well-known stars.

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And with the likes of Matt, Willem and Tom you get incredibly talented, iconic artists. I was adamant with my producers and casting director that this story demanded that each part had to be cast with care. These are the guys I wanted in the film. All three were at the top of my list. They also have great value in cinema and distribution and that world because of their bodies of work. They're iconic actors, you know?

MS: Speaking of iconic, I believe this is the first



time Dafoe and Berenger have appeared on screen together since they faced off as Elias and Barnes, respectively, in "Platoon." (Matt Dillon's brother Kevin also appeared in "Platoon.")

CB: It is. That interested me on a couple of levels. I didn't know if that would be noticed but it certainly has been. There's a definite excitement to see them together again.

MS: Last time around they both got Oscar nominations, as well. It sounds as though they're treading similar character paths this time.

CB: Yeah, but the good news for Willem is that he gets his revenge here. (Laughter) I told Tom that we could call this "Elias' Revenge."

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