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Focusing on KC's film community: tales of two moviemakers



Kansas City based actors Jeffrey Staab and Chad Alan Crenshaw on the set of Qikfinger Films' new Sci-fi short, E.P.G.

Photo by Jenifer Cady

In the last installment this KC examiner focused on four related topics: Kansas City's potential as a prime location for Hollywood movies, the recent appointment of Stephane Scupham as fulltime [KC Film Commissioner](#), the rapid development and growth of KC's independent film community, and the experience of one local filmmaker shooting a short sci-fi film in Kansas City.

Since he wrapped shooting on his short, titled *E.P.G.*, writer/director Andrew Pritzker has immersed himself in the long process of post-production work. He says he finds KC's post-production community just as encouraging as he finds the community of actors and crew here. As mentioned in the last installment, Pritzker hopes to have *E.P.G.* completed by September, after cutting the film, layering digital effects, mixing sound and other post-production steps.

“Kansas City has an impressive collection of post-production facilities,” Pritzker said. “It takes more than locations and talent to make a great film town. It takes an advanced post infrastructure to attract and keep productions. KC has it. With that said, our editor, Paul Millspaugh is based in L.A. Our digital effects editor, JJ Johnson, is based in Orlando. They've been my friends for quite some time and I trust them. Our sound design, however, will be done right here in KC by the creative and talented C.J. Drumeller. I'm really looking forward to it.”

The day after he wrapped shooting on *E.P.G.*, Pritzker learned that a Kansas City 48 Hour Film Project he co-wrote with Directors Chad Crenshaw and Davis DeRock, a comedy called *Espionauts*, had won 48 Hour honors for Best Film, Best Direction, Best Cinematography, Best Editing and Best Ensemble Acting. (www.48hourfilm.com/kansas-city-mo).

The [48 Hour Film Project](#) is an international organization, run locally by 130 cities around the world. Mark Ruppert, creator/executive producer, came up with the idea for the project back in 2001. According to its national website (www.48hourfilm.com/en/about), “the 48 Hour Film Project is a wild and sleepless weekend in which you and a team make a

movie—write, shoot and edit—in just 48 hours. On Friday night, teams draw a genre from a hat. They are then given a character, prop and line to include in their films. On Sunday night, in a wild dash to the drop off event, the film is turned in— and teams celebrate. The film is then screened at a local theater in front of an audience of filmmakers, friends and families.”

Jason Turner is starting his fourth season as the Kansas City Producer of the 48 Hour Film Project. Turner is as well-known in KC’s film community for his boundless energy, enthusiasm and retro-Hollywood good looks as he is for his acting, writing, directing and producing talent. He says that his role in the organization, with assistance from local indie film producer Rachel Manna, is to “help assemble teams, answer questions, and secure venues and judges set for the competition. The first year there were 10 teams. Since I have been the producer the team sizes have doubled.”

Kansas City’s Burgeoning Film Community

Turner’s goal is to someday have Kansas City host the 48 Hour Filmmapalooza, the finale international festival for the 48 Hour Film Project. Already known for the quality of its 48 Hour films, Kansas City recently was allowed to compete in the exclusive 48 Hour horror division. Despite its smaller number of film-team participants, Kansas City was chosen for the quality of its films. “The international eye is on Kansas City,” Turner said. “We have a beautiful city, and it is worth getting international attention.”

In the last five years both the 48 Hour Film Project and the Kansas City film community, in general, have grown dramatically, to the point that many actors and crew members, including Turner, work fulltime locally. Turner also expects exponential growth in the next five years. “With Steph Scupham as the new film commissioner and the various film-focused groups in the area such as Independent Filmmakers Coalition, the KCWIFT, and the Film Society we’ll all benefit.”

Turner believes Kansas City is tied to the Lawrence, Kan., film community as well as to cross-state St. Louis. “With that kind of wingspan, we are as influential as larger cities, but have the Midwestern charm and hospitality to share,” he said.

An example on the Kansas side is *Red Bird*, a western web series in which a “badass woman gunfighter goes on a bloody quest for revenge against the men who killed her son.” The series was created by Misti Boland and Jeremy Osbern, and is produced by Through a Glass Productions in Lawrence. On the Missouri side, Turner singled out Heather Laird, a Kansas City-based casting director known for her work on *Winter’s Bone* (2010), *Ride with the Devil* (1999) and *The Good Lie* (2014), who’s a “world-class casting director and has been a positive influence in our city.”

Like Scupham, Turner believes that Missouri and Kansas state tax credits are the single most important issue for local filmmakers and that these state tax credits would cause explosive growth of the KC film industry. “A lot of people seem to forget that the filmmaking business is still a business. When budgets are calculated, when filmmakers can save money and put that money toward the production and keep their cast and crew happy, it makes for a better film for everyone.

“There are several ‘no budget’ productions in our city because we love to make films,” he continued. “But if they had budgets and ‘A-list’ talent such as actors and directors, the economic health of our city would prosper. Movies and productions cost money. When a lens you want to buy costs as much as a car, you start to realize there are better ways to attack that. Rent that pricey lens, and pay an experienced crew to make that lens worth it.”

Life of a Kansas City Film Actor

Turner divides his time between producing, writing, directing and acting, but always thinks of himself as an actor first. “Acting is my passion. And I love my kiddoes! They are developing an interest in films as well,

particularly horror. My son is interested in doing effects makeup and my daughter might have been bit by the acting bug—time will tell.”

Is it possible to work fulltime as an actor living in the KC metro—doing commercials and short and feature-length films? Turner says that he recently started getting more and more paid gigs as an actor, but that making a living fulltime as an actor is challenging in Kansas City. “You have to really hustle and get out there for auditions. The feature films made around here seem to be overshadowed by commercials, and commercials are where the best paying gigs seem to be, but I am willing to travel.”

Mostly, Turner remains optimistic about the future of cinema in Kansas City. He points to KC’s diverse film-production-friendly geography: “Suburban, rural and metropolitan, all within 30 minutes or less drive time. That is incentive enough for filmmakers. Many films that come out of Los Angeles don’t stray too far from the studio homes, Turner said, because of the traffic and logistics. “Also, Kansas City has some amazing things for non-filmmakers to enjoy as well—such as having a pretty amazing baseball team. Go Royals! The community needs to continue to help this city’s amazing film talent to grow beyond our state lines.”

Finally, Turner talked about what he’s working on now: post production on an animated short based on a comic book he wrote called *Sentinel* (www.ironcitychronicles.com). “I have also been in a long post-production on a short film based on this story. It is essentially a story of a futuristic detective with special gifts trying to stop a killer.”

Turner also has several projects in development. After the detective story has a chance to breathe, he intends to try to do one feature film a year.

“Mostly as an actor, but sometimes I might wear the other hats as well. I have a very dark horror idea that my brother Trevor Turner wrote that I am looking for the right director and team to make it happen. Chad Crenshaw, Davis DeRock and I are writing a feature screenplay that we intend to film in the next year or so.

“This summer I am also filming a final scene for a film called *Top Coat Cash*, directed by David Tittone. It’s a story about bank robbers. We are filming a scene in Las Vegas, and I am very excited about that. I am also acting in Nicholas James’ *Found Wandering Lost* with the amazingly talented Jeffrey Staab.”

He also keeps busy with his production company, [Darktrainfilms](#), which he founded with his brother to produce commercials. “The filmmaking portion of it was a side effect. I’ve not had enough funds to hire people as an employer. However, I have been able to collaborate with local talent. Everyone knows everyone in the city. So eventually you will run into people on film sets or auditions several times over.”



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