

## Local waiter turns tables on Hollywood

BY DENIS HAMILL  
DAILY NEWS COLUMNIST

Posted Tuesday, June 5th 2007, 8:02 PM

He had a Brooklyn dream and now he's made a Brooklyn movie called "Made in Brooklyn."

"It was chosen from over 5,000 films from 79 countries to open the Brooklyn Film Festival," says filmmaker Luca Palanca from Windsor Terrace, son of a green grocer from Prospect Park West who grew up spinning Hollywood dreams.

Now Palanca has written, produced and starred in his own movie consisting of four comedic vignettes about Brooklyn guys being, well, Brooklyn guys in oddball situations.

The film was a smash hit at the recent Berkshire Film Festival and premiered at the brand new Steiner Studios in the Brooklyn Navy Yard on June 1 and will play again on Sunday to close out the local festival.

"People from the Weinstein Company e-mailed me to say they'd heard the buzz about the Berkshire Festival and were eager to see the film at the Brooklyn Festival," says Palanca.

This all started eight years ago when movie-star-handsome Palanca flew west to become a star. Instead, the Brooklyn kid who spun Hollywood dreams wound up spinning pizza pies in Mulberry Street Pizzeria on Cañon Drive in Beverly Hills, owned by Cathy Moriarty, who shot to fame as Robert De Niro's sexy-tough-broad wife in "Raging Bull."

"All the contacts I made in Hollywood started in Mulberry Pizza," Palanca told me last year as they filmed "Made in Brooklyn," on the stoop in front of his mother's Prospect Ave. house, where he grew up dreaming of the movies. "I will be forever thankful to Cathy Moriarty for giving me work and introducing me to people and for encouraging me to stick with my dreams."

In 1999, Palanca co-wrote and produced a 22-minute film called "Choose Life," with actor Peter Dobson about two hit men who whack the wrong guy. It screened at the Sundance Film Festival in 2000 and was optioned for \$250,000 by a big-time producer who wanted to expand it into a feature film. That went into what Hollywood calls "development hell."

But Palanca persevered, continued writing and waiting tables, struck up a romance with Tahnee Welch (daughter of Raquel Welch), and then he met Jon Sheinberg of The Machine and Malek Akkad of Paranormal Films, the producer of the "Halloween" movie franchise.

They took a look at "Choose Life," and agreed to finance three more humorous vignettes about Brooklyn that they



Filmmaker Luca Palanca had Hollywood dreams.

could package as a feature-length movie.

Palanca showed them the three short scripts - "Happy Birthday, Joe," "Wood" and "Let It Go" - that along with "Choose Life" make up a single-story compilation, all mob-themed and set in Brooklyn, that are all connected by a little girl selling lemonade.

"They read them and said, 'Let's do it,'" says Palanca. "They gave me creative control and under a million bucks and we put the movie together with Brooklyn favors. Everybody stepped up - family, friends, neighbors, local cops and firefighters. All the actors in the film, professional and first-timers, are friends of mine. We got sets and props and extras for a song. Brooklyn helped make 'Made in Brooklyn.' Then when we went to Staten Island to shoot some scenes and relatives and their neighbors helped out. When we shot in Brooklyn, my mother cooked for the whole cast and crew."

The movie was directed by Jeff Mazzola, Sharon Angela, Joe Tabbanella, Luca Palanca and Gregory Alosio and features such noted stars as Michael Rispoli ("Two Family House"), Vince (Johnny Sack) Curatola of "The Sopranos," Richard Portnoy ("Seven"), Lorraine Mazzola ("It Had to Be You"), Katherine Narducci ("The Sopranos"), Ray Garvey ("Anything Else") and Tony Mangano ("NYPD Blue").

"I'm proud of this film," says Jeff Mazzola, who boasts producer and director credits on "Made in Brooklyn." "It was a tough but fun shoot but when it premiered in the Berkshire Festival the audience went wild laughing. That was a thrill."

When he was shooting, I asked Palanca what advice he had for other Brooklyn dreamers with Hollywood stars in their eyes. "Stick to your dreams," Palanca said. "Be nice to people. Out of 100 creeps you wait on, there will be one good person who might help change your life. So don't be negative. Everyone has their day in this business. And don't ever forget where you come from, especially if you're from Brooklyn."

Palanca says he's confident of getting a distributor based on the festival circuit buzz. "But I'm already setting up my next movie, called 'Ball,'" he says. "It's a drama based on a true story, and I want to cast it with all top stand-up comics."

[dhamill@nydailynews.com](mailto:dhamill@nydailynews.com)

#### **FILM FESTIVAL:**

For more information about the June 10 "*Made in Brooklyn*" screening, go online to [www.wbff.org](http://www.wbff.org).

[http://nydailynews.com/boroughs/brooklyn/2007/06/05/2007-06-05\\_local\\_waiter\\_turns\\_tables\\_on\\_hollywood.html](http://nydailynews.com/boroughs/brooklyn/2007/06/05/2007-06-05_local_waiter_turns_tables_on_hollywood.html)