



The Oregonian

Shot at skateboarding to stardom

Director Gus Van Sant auditions local kids for his next movie

Wednesday, August 16, 2006

STEPHEN BEAVEN
The Oregonian

If the road to Hollywood is paved with excessive lip gloss, shaggy haircuts and saggy pants, one of the kids who lined up Tuesday afternoon to audition for Gus Van Sant is going to be a big fat movie star.

Like maybe Joe Clark.

He is all dude, top to bottom: 18, black cap turned backward, long blond hair and a battle-scarred skateboard. In other words, perfect for "Paranoid Park," the Van Sant movie about a teenage skateboarder who accidentally kills a security guard.

Clark showed up along with hundreds of other teens at the Ambridge Event Center in Northeast Portland for a cattle-call casting session. Unlike many of the hopefuls who braved the block-long line, Clark has acted in high school and local theater.

"I've been acting and skating all my life, and once I heard about this I had to come," Clark said. "This is basically exactly what I've been looking for."

Van Sant is primarily looking for skateboarders 14 to 30 years old and students between 14 and 18. On Tuesday, the director kept an eye out for kids with a certain look and attitude, said Lana Veenker, a Portland casting director working on the film. Acting experience is a plus but not a requirement.

Van Sant plans to cast about 20 roles, including the lead, from Tuesday's casting call and two other Portland auditions, Veenker said.

"If we can find our lead actor out of Portland, Oregon, we'd be thrilled," Veenker said.

Of course, it's the longest of long shots, especially considering the audition process.

The kids, and more than a few adults, filed into a conference room and filled out a questionnaire asking for contact information and skills they might use in the film. Then, as hip-hop played overhead, they got back in line and waited to have their pictures taken.

Stars sometimes emerge from such humble settings.

John Robinson was 16 in 2002 when he decided to audition for Van Sant's award-winning movie "Elephant" at a Northeast Portland church. He was a high school kid from Lake Oswego, no movie experience. He showed up, figuring he had a snowball's chance.

"The line was already backed up, out the door and around the block," Robinson said Tuesday from Los Angeles. "For some reason I decided to stay. I ended up standing in line for four hours. It was ridiculous."

And yet, with floppy blond hair and an angelic face, he ended up with a leading role in a critically acclaimed movie that catapulted him into a serious acting career. He's already finished work in upcoming movies starring Pierce Brosnan, Liam Neeson and Jon Voight.

It's a crapshoot, he said, but worth the time. And the stress.

"I'm sure the kids standing in that line today are freaking out about how it could be this big break," Robinson said. "The whole thing is surreal."

True. Otherwise, how would a guy such as Nathan Doyle end up at an audition with an art-house auteur like Van Sant?

Doyle is 23. He lives in Tigard. He listed himself on the questionnaire as 270 pounds. His special skills? He speaks Chinese. He works in produce at a WinCo, and his only acting experience was a recent commercial for the supermarket.

"It consisted of stacking pork chops," he said. "It's the easiest \$250 I ever made."

He's not sure how he fared in the audition, though. He handed in his questionnaire, posed for a mug and left.

"I didn't trip and fall on my face," Doyle said. "I didn't do anything to make a fool of myself."

Clark was a bit more optimistic.

Van Sant chatted with him for a few minutes about where he was from and how he had heard about the audition. Finally, Van Sant asked him to come back Thursday for a proper audition.

"I'm pretty stoked about it," Clark said.

Skateboard in hand, he left the conference center to break the news to friends.

Stephen Beaven: 503-294-7663; stevebeaven@news.oregonian.com

©2006 The Oregonian