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ENTERTAINMENT

film clips: Bonnie Britton
 Her Majesty didn't see 'Her Majesty'
 February 20, 2005

What did Queen Elizabeth II think about Mark J. Gordon's movie "Her Majesty," in which a young New Zealand girl proves to be her biggest fan?

Through a friend, a print of the film made its way to Sandringham Castle at Christmastime. The queen didn't have a chance to watch the movie, he was told, but she liked the trailer. And the baseball caps printed with the film's name went over well with the younger royals.

"My dream was to get a photo of the queen wearing a cap that says 'Her Majesty,' and me standing next to her," said Gordon. "Second to that, I'm happy that some of the others liked it. I don't know if she wears baseball caps."

Much lauded at film festivals, "Her Majesty" is in a city-by-city theatrical launch. It was a favorite at the 2002 Heartland Film Festival, where it won a Crystal Heart Award.

"I think the film is unique because it's both family-friendly and independently produced. We have to earn every audience member," said the Los-Angeles based screenwriter/director. Funds to make the movie came from 35 Silicon Valley investors.

Childhood idol

Set and filmed entirely in New Zealand, "Her Majesty" is the tale of a little girl who worships Queen Elizabeth II. Young Elizabeth (Sally Andrews) becomes a one-girl letter-writing campaign to get her small town added to the queen's official royal tour. Her dream comes true, but not without a price. Both good and bad events lead up to the queen's arrival.

Before making "Her Majesty" -- his first film -- Gordon had several vacations to New Zealand planned, but never got around to taking them. Finally, he

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said, he decided to write a story set in that country as a way to "get back there." His first trip to New Zealand was to shoot the film.

That makes the authenticity of the film even more remarkable.

"I was reading about the country and became fascinated with the culture and the history. I came across this pamphlet on a day in the life of a marching girl. I also had another book that had a blurb about the Queen who came to visit New Zealand after her coronation," said Gordon. "That probably would have been enough for a studio film, but for me, I wanted more depth to it." Early script development took place at the Sundance Institute Screenwriter's Workshop.

Gordon said he wanted to write it on several levels. He also wanted adults to enjoy it.

Getting it right

One of the most difficult -- and often the most expensive -- small films to make is a period film.

But Gordon nailed it:

- The movie was made with an all-New Zealand crew and cast.
- By accident, location scouts discovered a small plaque honoring the queen's visit that was installed on "Coronation Steps" in the small town of Cambridge, where they did much of the filming.
- Among the 1,200 extras in the parade scene were people who were children when the queen visited, and remembered being on the streets waving flags and cheering as she arrived.
- The restored Bentleys and Land Rover in which the Queen and her aides toured New Zealand in 1953 were used in the movie.
- Replicas of the Crown Jewels worn at the 1953 Coronation are seen in a daydream sequence.

"I think people worked hard on the film because it was a New Zealand story," said Gordon. "We were really trying to do it right."

Though he has finished other scripts and is dying to make more movies, he said he's sticking with a rigorous promotion campaign to honor the work of the actors and those who supported getting the film made.

"I would not have spent this much time promoting it if I hadn't seen the wonderful early reaction of audiences, particularly at Heartland, where people came up and were really taken with the film," he said.

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