

# NEXT STEP

The Magazine About People Coming Together

entertainment

## Filmmaker Brings Hollywood To Philly

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**B**y the look of the crowd, over 250 people, one would think he or she was at a Hollywood film premiere with major stars to be found everywhere. Between the exquisite gowns the women wore, the finely tailored tuxedos the men wore and the limousines for the cast members, filmmaker Jillian Bullock had a lot to be proud of this evening. On Saturday, August 18, at the Franklin Institute Museum family, friends, political officials, record labels, the media and more gathered to see the latest film by Philadelphia director Bullock.

*Spirit* was a year in the making and it was the brainchild of Bullock, who along with directing the film, also wrote and produced. The script came to Bullock last year when she was struggling to overcome depression. Her source of strength for recovery came from an unlikely source, watching the characters in the World Wrestling Federation (WWF).

"In a sense, I do attribute them (WWF) to helping save my life in a way," Bullock stated. "It may seem strange, but I laughed for the first time in almost two years when I watched the sports entertainment show. It was like a continuing movie each week."

Bullock used that feeling to softly blend a story catering to young people. *Spirit* is the story of a teenage girl, "Dani Scott," who lives in a world of depression after a drive-by shooting kills her father and cripples her mother. Her only solace comes from watching the characters in the WWF. Eventually, Dani gets involved in wrestling and martial arts. She goes on to regain her 'spirit.' In the end, she gets selected to the US Olympic team for Tae Kwon Do.

first appeared in a wrestling scene in the movie, the audience started chanting Rocky, Rocky) Siaopo is scheduled to make his WWF debut later this year.

Production was going well for Bullock until one of her actresses dropped out, forcing Bullock to fill in. However, during her depressed state, Bullock had gained almost 100 pounds. In order to save her film, she knew she had to get back in shape. In an effort to drop the weight and make her action sequences authentic, Bullock sought out some of the best in the business. Along with training under the direction of Afa, Bullock also trained with former professional boxer James "Bad Boy" Barham and current undefeated welterweight champion Frankie Nunez for the boxing sequences. A few twists in the film found Nunez portraying a boxer/hitman. The film ended in such a way that the audience couldn't decide whether Nunez's character was the one who killed Keith or not. Bullock said she purposely wrote the script that way to ensure a sequel.

On such a small budget, it is amazing what Bullock has accomplished. Along with wearing the hats of director, producer, and writer, and being forced to take on a major acting role, Bullock was still able to bring a tragic realism to the film, mixing real human emotion and peppering that with action-packed sequences. The funky hip-hop soundtrack just put the finishing touches on one of the best independent films this year.

After the film and the tremendous response by the audience, which included a standing ovation, Bullock treated the cast and crew to an awards ceremony to show her appreciation for all their hard work and dedication on her independent production. NBC 10 newscaster, Don Lemon, along with international singing sensation Clinton Bullock, Jillian's son, were the presenters for the evening. Clinton flew in from Japan just to host the evening and sing two of his original songs; one of which is on the film's soundtrack. Bullock also acknowledged the sponsors who donated items for the evening. Bloomingdales donated the gowns for the female cast members. After Hours Formal Wear dressed the male stars. LISAAJ performed the makeovers, and Escape

Even though it may seem somewhat unorthodox, the film is enlivened and deepened by the director's thoughtful references to an unlikely source of inspiration - the WWF. What the film may lack in technical quality in a few spots, (the movie was made for roughly \$5,000), it certainly makes up for with the content due to the startling and provocative work by Bullock, who clearly has put a great deal of thought and personal conviction into the material.

Bullock used many unknowns when she cast for parts in her film. New York actor Mike Lane portrayed Keith, Dani's father. Even though Lane had a small role in Spirit, his on screen presence was the steady undercurrent that sealed the relationship with his daughter Dani, portrayed by newcomer, 14 year old Floricia Robles. Struggling to come to terms with her father's death, Dani resorts to desperate measures, going so far as to attempt suicide. It is through Keith's returning 'spirit' that propels Dani to go on and achieve great things.

Bullock also enlisted professional athletes from the world of wrestling, boxing and martial arts. Three time WWF Tag Team Champion Afa "The Wild Samoan," is the Executive Producer and wrestling consultant for the film. Afa, who has a wrestling school in Allentown and Hazleton, PA, has trained some of the best in the business, including Hulk Hogan and Bam Bam Bigelow. Even his nephews WWF superstars Riskishi and The Rock come to Afa for advice. Afa's next nephew in line, Solo Siaopo, is presently at WWF camp. He is also one of the leading male actors in *Spirit*. A splitting image of his cousin "The Rock" (when he

Limousines did the chauffeuring for the evening.

Special guest professional boxer and attorney Jacqui Frazier-Lyde was on hand with her husband, Pete, enjoying the film and the people. Frazier-Lyde and Bullock joked around about going a few rounds in the ring. Frazier-Lyde commented that if Bullock's fighting style in the film is how she fights in real life, she could be a champion boxer one day.

A beautiful reception was held after the awards show. Everyone was invited to partake of the delightful food and drink provided by Feast Your Eyes Catering at the Mayor's Reception room in City Hall. Even though Philadelphia Mayor John Street couldn't attend, he sent Christopher Brooks as his representative. Brooks presented Bullock with a proclamation declaring "Saturday, August 18, 2001 as Spirit Day in Philadelphia."

With *Spirit* wrapped, Bullock will head to California to meet with several distribution companies, who have expressed interest in *Spirit* and other projects she has in various stages of development.

