

PRODUCERS ON DIRECTORS

Richard J. Bosner

Reflections on Fruitvale, Sundance and director Ryan Coogler

By Robert Goldrich

Producer Richard J. Bosner recalled his first meeting with Ryan Coogler, director of the acclaimed *Fruitvale*.

"Twenty-six years old, a USC Film School graduate, a really smart, educated guy," said Bosner of Coogler. "He has a great sense of what's needed, of what he wanted. Sometimes you do these low budget movies and the filmmaker never went to film school, never made a short film, yet thinks he can do it all himself."

"They don't know how to let go and let different departments do what they are supposed to do," continued Bosner. "On *Fruitvale*, Ryan let each department take the reins of what they were responsible for. Everyone looked to him for his vision yet he trusted everyone to get what he wanted. No one was micromanaged. Everybody's opinion was valued."

Indeed judges and attendees at the 2013 Sundance Film Festival valued *Fruitvale* which won both the U.S. Dramatic Grand Jury Award and the U.S. Dramatic Audience Award. The film became the darling of the Sundance Fest.

A drama based on the real-life 2009 shooting death of young, unarmed African-American man Oscar Grant by a law enforcement transit officer at a Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) station in the Fruitvale section of Oakland, Calif., *Fruitvale* marked Coogler's directorial debut.

Bosner served as line producer on the film, which represents his highest profile credit to date.

Nina Yang Bongiovi, one of the producers on *Fruitvale* along with Forest Whitaker via his Significant Productions, contacted Bosner based on his extensive experience with independent features, commercials and corporate films shot in the Bay Area.

Bosner had some concerns going in. "With shooting taking place on the BART system and at the actual Fruitvale station where Oscar was shot, we had to be concerned about everybody's safety," he said. "This was an event that didn't happen that long ago and we didn't want to fuel any kind of resentment or upset in the community."

The project reunited Bosner with production designer Hannah Beachler. The

two first met each other at Wright State in Dayton, Ohio, where Bosner studied for a semester.

In fact Bosner and Beachler are both represented by talent agency Dattner Disposito and Associates as is *Fruitvale* cinematographer Rachel Morrison (who is profiled separately in this issue's Cinematographers Series feature). "We had a very tight-knit crew that worked well together," said Bosner.

Up the ladder

Starting his career as a production assistant, Bosner worked on *American Idol* for contestant audition sessions in San Francisco. He later went to Los Angeles to continue on *American Idol*.

Trained at the Academy of Art in San Francisco, Bosner moved up to production coordinator on such films as *The Secrets of Jonathan Sperry* in New York and *LA Mission* in San Francisco.

The latter was an official Sundance selection in 2009. Bosner graduated to unit production manager, contributing to *Ryan and Sean's Not So Excellent Ad-*

venture in L.A., and *All About Evil* in the Bay Area.

He then assumed the producer and/or line producer role on varied independent films in the Bay Area such as *Stitch In Time* (line producer/producer), *The Chateau Meroux* (line producer) and *Garden of Eden* (producer on this film directed by Carolyn Cavallero).

In between long-form assignments, Bosner took on assorted commercials and corporate communications projects in Northern California for the likes of BlackBerry, Hewlett Packard, Oracle and Bausch+Lomb.

Now *Fruitvale* has cast the spotlight on Bosner with the promise of higher profile projects to come spanning features and commercials. *Fruitvale* stars Michael B. Jordan (as Oscar Grant), Octavia Spencer, Ahna O'Reilly, Chad Michael Murray, Kevin Durand and Melonie Diaz.

Spencer is also a co-executive producer of the feature film. "To see the response this film has gotten has been gratifying," affirmed Bosner.

The buzz about the film, which will



be released theatrically by The Weinstein Company later this year, extends well beyond Sundance to the Oscars, with some suggesting that it could be on a trajectory akin to *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, a little known independent film that went on to awards show prominence.

A bit of history bodes well for *Fruitvale*'s prospects on the awards show circuit. *Fruitvale* is the first film since *Precious* in 2009 to win both the U.S. Dramatic Jury and Audience Awards at the Sundance Film Festival.

Precious went on to score assorted honors in 2010, including two Oscars (Best Adapted Screenplay, Best Supporting Actress) and a total of six nominations, including Best Picture and Best Director (Lee Daniels). *Precious* also earned Daniels a DGA Award nomination.

Eric Stern, John Benet

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At the same time, Stern noted that Iñárritu serves as producer on many feature films, including several he's directed. "He has a producer's brain and will strive and push for what he's after, always very much aware of the bigger picture and the producer's side of things to make it all come together."

Location, location, location

Benet added that the relentlessness exhibited by Iñárritu in casting applies to all other aspects, including locations. For "The Things That Connect Us," Iñárritu envisioned a wooden log across a river as conveying the "bridge" concept so integral to the Facebook brand. "We looked for a river we could put a log across. We looked all over for the right location and couldn't find it," said Benet. "Finally we were in this place in Portland where you have to hike past mounds of trees to get

anywhere. Trees fallen by flooding were everywhere. Alejandro hiked to a gorge about a half-mile down and there was the perfect sight—a gigantic tree over the water. Alejandro is a combination of intense drive mixed with a belief in serendipity, the belief that you will find that element that makes it all special."

Stern noted, "Alejandro also did that with the Facebook spot in the streets of New Orleans—great faces, musicians and performers all found during a day of free-flowing shooting."

That, observed Benet, is the delicate balance a producer has to maintain when working with Iñárritu. "It's counterintuitive to how a producer thinks—planning for everything and wanting everything lined up. With Alejandro you have to be patient that he will find what his vision calls for. He sees something that you hadn't planned for or finds something you couldn't find and uses it to make the work

better. I remember him coming upon a swarm of river flies lit by a perfect beam of sunlight while we were in the middle of nowhere [on the Facebook shoot]. He is open to serendipitous moments."

But there's more than serendipity to Iñárritu's success. "He is incredibly selective about his projects," assessed Stern. "He's very busy as a filmmaker, with projects across all kinds of media. When he runs across a great idea and his availability matches up, he takes full advantage of that window of opportunity to express his voice as a filmmaker."

And agencies, continued Stern, are trusting of that voice. "The creatives at Wieden+Kennedy are amazing partners and incredibly trusting of Alejandro to deliver all the components of a project as he sees fit. Managing that process is something John and I did hand in hand during prep and shooting of the Facebook spot. It's an honor to be part of that process."