



HURRICANE AARON

SYNOPSIS

Brothers Aaron and Cory share a shameful secret—a secret worth killing for. When Army vet and convicted murderer Aaron (J.R. Howell) is released early from prison, he seeks to re-establish contact with his brother, Cory (Michael Bonini). But when Cory's devoutly religious fiancée, Cass (Carolyn Laws) discovers that the brothers' bond is closer than it should be, her efforts to pull them apart threaten to unravel them all in this mind-bending psychosexual thriller.

SPECS

2.35:1

Color

5.1 Surround

91 Minutes

Canon C300 with Rokinon Prime Lenses

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

In September 2016, Hurricane Hermine flew from the Gulf of Mexico to the Atlantic Ocean, displacing thousands of people, leaving hundreds of thousands without power, and causing millions in property damage. At my farmhouse in the Florida panhandle, I was directly in its path. That night, I began to write HURRICANE AARON, a mind-bending psychosexual thriller involving two homicidal incestuous brothers who end up trapped together in an otherwise evacuated town during a hurricane.

How do we begin to understand the male proclivity to violence? The entitlement to sexually exploit? The power plays, the urge to dominate, the myth and obsession of the alpha male? Shared language of violence that reinforce and are reinforced by rituals, behaviors, and thoughts—where does it all come from?

Before the night of the hurricane, I had wondered these questions. What no one could have foreseen was the aftermath that would follow. Later that year, beginning with the November defeat of the first woman nominee from a major party for the United States presidency, the country would learn the extent of the depravity of seemingly routine harassments, assaults, and outright attacks to which women are



subjected. As the deluge of victim testimonials sprang forth, so did my anger, which led me to reflect: isn't that where it starts?

Patterns of violence tend to repeat. Self-violence—the harms you do to your own heart when you start seeing yourself the way the world sees that you are not, when you lose sight of the complete, valuable being you are just as you are—extends outward. At one point, you were some abuser's victim and, although you may not have been your first abuser, you were your own first victim. Abuse—physical, emotional, psychological—can be a cycle.

Is it any different for the male experience, especially in the United States?

In the film, there is a revelation that Cory and Aaron, who are both brothers, had a long term sexual relationship with one another. That experience occurred while Aaron was younger and a victim of their father's own physical abuse. When Cory seeks to end that relationship, Aaron consciously endeavors to induce his brother's affection with a pattern of brutal attacks followed by soothing rewards. At one point, before Aaron forces himself onto his brother, Aaron, who has only ever known kindness from the hands of his many abusers, states, "This is what love is." Thus, the film's strong depictions of sadism,

particularly when coupled with nudity or sexual symbolism, suggest a deeper meaning, not just for the characters and not just for this story.

During the post-production process of the film, in the final week of July 2018, I lost my mother to cancer. That it happened on my birthday brought the loss that much closer. I lost my mom, but that week, I wasn't the only one. Indelible in the hippocampus is the screaming of migrant children in cages separated from their parents, with terrifying reports of abuse, inadequate facilities, and even death. Cycles of abuse can be national.

In the film, acts of violence have tragic consequences for every character. Cory's wheelchair is a constant but subtle reminder—he has to live for the rest of his life with a disability that resulted from his own act of murder. Cory spends the entirety of the filming seeking forgiveness for his past misdeeds and although his experience suggests that forgiveness is a powerful means of breaking the cycle, he emerges from the hurricane surrounded by wreckage. The cryptic visual fractures of identity, double and multiple exposures, and flash frames, asks you to consider that Aaron and Cory are two violent parts of the same whole.

THE SOUND

A major component of the film is its sound design. One of the film's major characters is a hurricane, an all-encompassing act of God that threatens an entire town. The majority of that character was created with innovative sound design using advanced 3D sound editing features and binaural sound. With these techniques, wind gushes fly from behind the audience, overhead, to in front and away, as the sounds of other phenomena, objects, or actions move throughout the theater creating a dynamic sound environment.

Audience emotions are guided with low frequency infrasound combined with high frequencies and mid-frequency bended pitch to induce anxiety, impose pressure, or release tension. Total silence is used to heighten suspense.

ASMR (autonomous sensory meridian response) triggers are used in several points throughout the film as a way to touch the audience, often in disconcerting ways.

It should be noted that the film's writer/director and titular character also composed the sound design and he did so with the intent of using ASMR triggers to remotely interact with the viewer/listener.

BIOGRAPHIES

J.R. Howell, Before becoming an actor/filmmaker, J.R. worked for more than a decade as an attorney in the field of human rights, putting his law degree to work for the African American community, immigrants, HIV/AIDS issues, women victimized by sexual assault in the workplace, individuals with disabilities, and those struggling with substance abuse and addiction. His role as a lawyer was often indistinguishable with that of a social worker and devoted friend. In this capacity, he experienced both first hand and vicariously the heights and depths of the human condition. He's taken those experiences and plunged them into the pathos of his art.

Michael Bonini (Cory Frehr) is an American actor based in New York City. He began his professional career after studying theatre at Clemson University and is now an ensemble member at Michael Howard Studios in Manhattan. Michael has worked with multiple television networks including NBC, History Channel, and ID Discovery. Some theatrical credits include Vincent in Brixton as Vincent Van Gogh, Eurydice as Orpheus, and Measure for Measure as Pompey.

Carolyn Laws (Cass) is a Los Angeles based actress who received her BFA in Theatre from UNC

Greensboro. She also studied under revered acting coach JD Lewis. She received an Award of Merit in Acting from the Southern Shorts Film Festival for "Damiane and Her Demons"; a film she produced, wrote, directed, and starred in. She was recently on Fatal Attraction on TV ONE and starred in Gate 128 by Reflex Productions. Some theatre credits include "Time Stands Still" with Paper Lantern Theatre Company, and "Trifles" with Triad Upstage Cabaret.

Chad Darnell (Dr. Cheska), a native of Atlanta, returned "home" to Georgia in October 2013 after spending 13 years working in Los Angeles as an actor and casting director, producing and directing his own projects, and developing numerous projects for many established directors and producers. Darnell's feature film, Birthday Cake (the feature film sequel to Groom's Cake) premiered on the festival circuit in Summer 2013, winning multiple awards including: Best Comedy Film and Best First Feature Film at Out on Film in Atlanta, Director's Showcase and Best Comedy Film at Kansas City Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, and Fan Favorite in Palm Springs to name a few.

CREDITS

Written and Directed by J.R. Howell
Produced by Country Road Films, LLC
Director of Photography: Mark Christian
Editors: Susie Landers, J.R. Howell
Assistant Director: Tony Schermetzler
Composer: J.R. Howell
Art Director: Lynn Sweat
Assistant Editor: Brian Alexander
Boom Op/Location Sound: William Bishop
Production Assistants: Josh Davis, Miguel Angel
Marrero

J.R. Howell as Aaron Frehr
Michael Bonini as Cory Frehr
Carolyn Laws as Cass
Chad Darnell as Dr. Cheska
Mandy Peters as Jackie
Doug Mobley as the Correctional Officer
Kurtis Brock as Aaron's Doppelgänger
Alvin Jackson as the Judge

Filmed on location in Live Oak, Florida
Post-production in Austin, Texas

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