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HartleyFilms.com/empire

 @EmpireShort

Best Director
Alternative
Film Festival
2020

Finalist, Best Film
Alternative
Film Festival
2020

Official Selection
Ambrosia Food
& Drink Film Fest
2020



EMPIRE

LOG LINE:

Joe, one of the great coffee cup artists of his generation, has lived for years as New York's self-proclaimed Godfather of Coffee Cups. Now he faces a changing world that is forgetting the classics.



ABOUT THE STORY:

You know those pictures on paper coffee cups? Who makes those, anyway?

I'm ever fascinated by the unseen people who create the seemingly miniscule pieces that make up our world.

***Empire* is an exaggerated imagining of one of these people, as well as a slight love letter to coffee and the local joints that sell it. For Joe, these coffee cups are everything. He talks about a cup from a diner the way some might talk about Davinci's David. Joe takes himself seriously as an artist responsible for the betterment of society. And he demands a certain amount of respect from the coffee shops in his domain.**



Q & A WITH THE DIRECTOR:

Q: How did you find a design for the cup?

A: I wanted a cup representing the New York City skyline and landmarks. Something that looked like it could have existed in the 60s or 70s and might still be a staple at various neighborhood coffee spots. The cup was designed for the film by artist Hannah Feldman in a retro style. As of this writing, I still have about 1,900 custom-printed “Empire” cups in my office.

Q: So there aren't really any artists working exclusively in the medium of paper cups, right?

A: The closest might have been Leslie Buck, the cup salesman who created the classic blue-and-white “Anthora” cup with a Greek design and the words “WE ARE HAPPY TO SERVE YOU.” Our character, Joe, would have been his contemporary (and references Buck) but Joe is more of an artist.

Q: How much research into coffee cups did you do?

A: Probably too much. In writing *Empire*, I dove into the world of our main character to inform his obsession. I found that paper cups go back to 1907 but lids didn't come along for decades. I collected different designs. I found new details on these disposable cups which have long been a part of my life. If filmmaking doesn't work out, I might become a coffee cup historian.

Q: How did you find locations for the film?

A: The NYC-coffee connection is important to this story. I walked my neighborhood and popped into every café I liked. Luckily, we were able to film at a few of my favorite real life shops around Astoria and the Upper West Side.

Q: Besides coffee history, what did you learn making *Empire* ?

A: I was constantly reminded of the importance of collaboration. I had a well-formed vision of how the major moments would look and our DP, Alex, found ways to step it up. David, our Editor, pulled out moves I hadn't thought of. And Ezra personified Joe in ways I hadn't imagined, just with the way he fidgeted with his coffee—the man has a way with sugar packets as well as his fellow artists.

Q & A WITH THE DIRECTOR:

Q: What is the importance of diversity to *Empire* ?

A: While it does not play an overt role in the actual story, diversity was key behind the scenes. As an Iranian-Jewish filmmaker and first generation American, I don't meet too many people from my background on set. And I've heard several people kindly suggest that I tell stories specifically about people "like me." The vast majority (about 87%) of our cast and crew are minorities and/or female. And we filmed exclusively at minority-owned businesses. But our short is just a good story that happens to be told by a diverse group of talented people. And I think our diversity helped us pull off something a little different than what we usually see.

Q: Where did you get the music?

A: I was lucky to have Greg and Tyler create an original score for the short. Greg is a music producer, hip hop artist, and part of The Grand Affair. Tyler is a phenomenal saxophonist, guitarist, and singer. While writing *Empire*, I had been listening to "Bitches Brew" by Miles Davis. I played it for Greg and Tyler along with a couple other tracks by Freddie Hubbard and Frank Zappa. As a duo, they understood the feel of the piece and immediately knew what it needed. Tyler laid down all of the sax parts in just two takes on day one. I think it was key that we never used any temp music while editing *Empire*. So the original score never had to fit into the mould of other music. Instead, the music and video were tailored for each other.





PRESS FOR *EMPIRE*

GIVE ME ASTORIA

Featured



Astoria-based Filmmaker
Fundraising for Short Film,
Empire!

**“really captured a particular
element and character of
the Upper West Side”
- *I Love the Upper West Side***

I love the UPPER WEST SIDE.COM

New Short Film Set on Upper West Side

👤 Mike Mishkin 📅 September 18, 2020 📁 Arts & Entertainment



CAST:

Ezra Barnes – Joe

Ezra was the Founding Artistic Director of Connecticut’s Shakespeare on the Sound and has run the Young Actors Workshop in Brooklyn since 2003. Film credits include: Motherless Brooklyn, Noah, Joshua. Television: Jessica Jones, The Sinner, Orange is the New Black. Off-Bway: Breakfast with Mugabe, Far & Wide.

Ruthy Froch – Austin

Ruthy has most recently been seen on the 1st National Tour of Broadway’s *Fiddler on the Roof* as Hodel.

Isidore Elias – John

Aside from acting, Isidore is a playwright, librettist and songwriter whose work has been produced in the US, Canada and Europe.

Claire Buckingham – Louise

Claire is an actor, writer, and comedian. Credits include: *Adulthood*, *Blue Wall: The Series*, & *This Bra is Killing Me*

Louis J. Vetter – Dante

Louis is an actor and hip hop artist also known as Just Louis. His song “My Bag” is also featured in *Empire*



CREATIVE TEAM:

Alex Zielinski - Cinematographer

David Root - Editor

Bevin McNally - Costume Designer

Brian A. Neris - Sound Editor

Original Score by Greg Mozian & Tyler Clayton Appel









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