

Bronx-based production company has big plans for the borough

by Jon Minners

A Bronx-based production company is winning its way into the film industry.

Five Smooth Stones, a company created by three residents from throughout the borough, have sprung onto the media scene with their first film release, *All You Can Eat*, the winner of Best Film Overall honors at the Rhode Island Renaissance Film Festival and a current contender in December's Fade Up Film Festival in Manhattan.

Five Smooth Stones was created in January by Tishin Padilla, a filmmaker, writer and director from Throggs Neck, Mark Rivera, a producer, animator and technical creator from Castle Hill, and David Rivera, the company's marketer and promoter from Kingsbridge. It all started with the release of *All You Can Eat*, a short film running five minutes and 40 seconds that Padilla created while in college. Intended as a student film, a friend encouraged Padilla to circulate the piece among other short films, albeit with larger budgets.

"A friend of mine who worked with us and couldn't get in touch with me in time decided to enter the film in the Rhode Island Film Festival," said Padilla. "I actually didn't know anything about it until I was notified that I won."

Since then, things have been looking up for the upstart production company. The trio now has entered the film in the Fade Up Film Festival, which began last month. "We won the first round," said David Rivera. "Now, we will be competing against another group of films this month. It is a monthly competition ending in February and the winners will be announced in March. Hopefully, Five Smooth Stones and *All You Can Eat* will walk away with the top honors."

The film tells the story of two starving homeless men who encounter a mysterious stranger and must choose between



(Above, l-r) Tishin Padilla, Mark Rivera and David Rivera make up Five Smooth Stones, a film production company from the Bronx, shooting films in the Bronx and currently representing the borough in the Fade Up Film Festival with the short film *All You Can Eat*. — PHOTO BY JON MINNERS/JM

food for the soul, in the form of the bible, and an actual plate of food. The film does not go with the obvious religious message, adding a twist in the climax, offering the audience something to think about without beating them over the head with a message.

"We are Christians and we want to make films, however, we don't want to just make 'Christian films,'" said Padilla. "We want to make good films that offer a message of faith, but we put a lot of thought

into how to make a film without people feeling they are being preached to. We use strong metaphors and like *The Matrix*, we are not showing you the way, but we will show you the door."

The neovangelistic approach, as practiced in such recent blockbuster major motion pictures as *The Matrix*, *Bruce Almighty* and *Lord of the Rings*, plant seeds about faith in the films but never come out and directly discuss religion with their audiences. In fact, if people look

closely, the company's name also reflects religion without coming out and saying it. The moniker "Five Smooth Stones" actually is taken from the story of David and Goliath, namely what David picked up to fight the giant beast. Padilla believes the company's name is reflective of its films: people just feel it's cool and do not necessarily make the Biblical connection right away.

"God gives you what you need to fight your battles," said Mark Rivera, explaining his take on the production company's name. "Five smooth stones, used well, can take out a giant. We're facing a giant against other larger film companies and we are going with what we have."

So far, the filmmakers seem to be winning that battle. Five Smooth Stones' way of showcasing films has been well-received. Sizeable audiences have been showing up at the film festivals, with most viewers having nothing but good things to say about *All You Can Eat*, including the borough president. "Great job," said Borough President Adolfo Carrion, Jr. said of the film. "I love it."

One reason the borough president may have loved the film is because much of *All You Can Eat* was shot in the borough at Zerega Industrial Park. Their future release, *The Map*, is a story of a weekend dad who attempts to take his daughter camping, forgets the directions, gets lost, asks for directions, is misdirected and through the inquisitiveness of his young daughter, realizes he has no meaningful direction to offer her in life. Set to hit film festivals soon, *The Map* also showcases many areas of the Bronx, featuring scenes shot on Shore Road and in Throggs Neck, Silver Beach and Castle Hill. An animated short, *The Tinkerer*, a more modernized telling of the story of Adam and Eve created by Mark Rivera, also features the borough.

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"We love the Bronx," said Padilla. "Our movies, especially *The Map*, tend to show the Bronx in such a beautiful light. I have never really seen the Bronx look so nice on film before, with all the colors of fall. It is not a tourism video, but I am from the Bronx and I promise to really spotlight the borough in my films."

Five Smooth Stones is currently filming music videos and electronic press kits and creating websites, along with other video work, using the profits to help finance a future feature-length, live action digitally shot movie. With six Telly Awards, a Microsoft ActiveX Development

Award, a Dove Award Nomination for multimedia content, Best New Artists Production, five Communicator Awards and a notable mention from Disney Interactive under their belt, Five Smooth Stones appears ready to make that next big step.

"The odds are definitely against us," said Padilla. "We are Latino filmmakers and we are Christian. Some may see that as an obstacle. I don't. If you know how to make good films, you are going to make it. If you have the right talent, you are going to make it. With that said, we are confident that we will make it."

For information about Five Smooth Stones, visit www.fivesmooth.com.