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Michael Fitzer (left) and Archie Borders grab a bite at Louisville's Twig & Leaf.

THE PLEASURE IS ALL OURS

Filmmakers bring Hollywood to their Louisville home

by Julie Wilson Photos by James Byrd Photography



The movie is called “Pleased to Meet Me,” a befitting title that blends an essence of Southern hospitality and a thread of wit, which could easily describe Louisville itself. Archie Borders and Michael Fitzer call Louisville home, and they invited some friends over to help them make this film.

Joe Henry – a Grammy Award-winning singer/songwriter.

Academy Award nominee **Aimee Mann**.

John Doe – legendary front man for the punk band X.

Grammy Award-winning singer/songwriter **Loudon Wainwright**.

No kidding! With friends like that... So exactly how did these two manage to attract such high-end talent? “Well, I’m exceptionally talented and, no, wait...that’s not true,” said Borders, who wore the director and producer hats for this indie film. Not that he isn’t talented, but it was actually fate that brought this team together.

After several rewrites of the script, Borders needed an outsider’s perspective. Enter David Henry, a friend of Borders who also became the film’s co-writer/producer. And it just so happens that David’s brother is the aforementioned Joe Henry; they shared the script with Joe. “After reading the script, Joe said ‘I’m in,’” explained Borders.

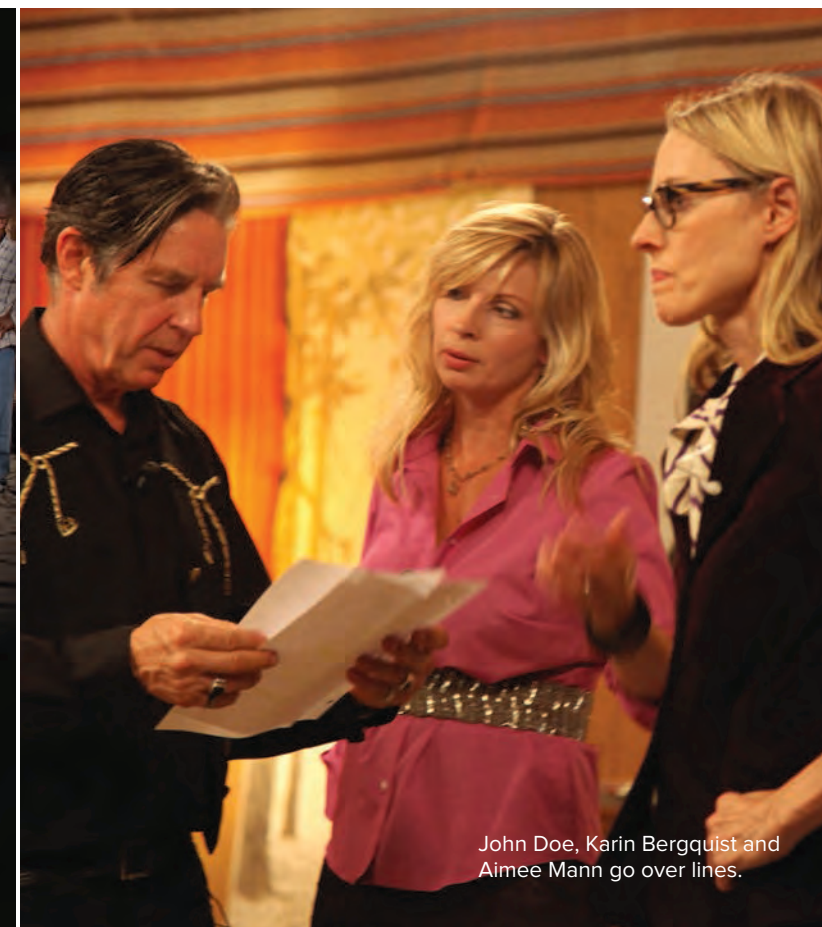
But playing the lead character of washed-up rocker Pete Jones was not Joe’s destiny. “We originally offered the lead role to Joe, but to his credit, he felt he wasn’t the best person to play the

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John Doe as "Pete Jones" in "Pleased to Meet Me."

Photography pgs 14-15 by James Moses



John Doe, Karin Bergquist and Aimee Mann go over lines.

part," said Fitzer, who took on the roles of producer and director of photography for the film.

Instead, Joe recommended his friend, John Doe. "John has been working as an actor and musician for over 30 years," said Borders. "It was huge to us that we hire musicians who can act rather than actors playing musicians."



Joe Henry also pulled in friends Aimee Mann (he produced one of her albums), Loudon Wainwright (they worked together on tracks for the movie "Knocked Up") and Karin Bergquist, of the Cincinnati-based band Over the Rhine. "Archie, Dave and I went to LA last April and met with John, Joe and Aimee," said Fitzer. "[We] conducted a table read and instantly saw the chemistry."

But it was more than fireworks between the actors and Joe's

intervention that got everyone on board. "While Joe of course played a major role in getting the stars into the film, it was also the strength of the story that brought them to Louisville," said Fitzer.

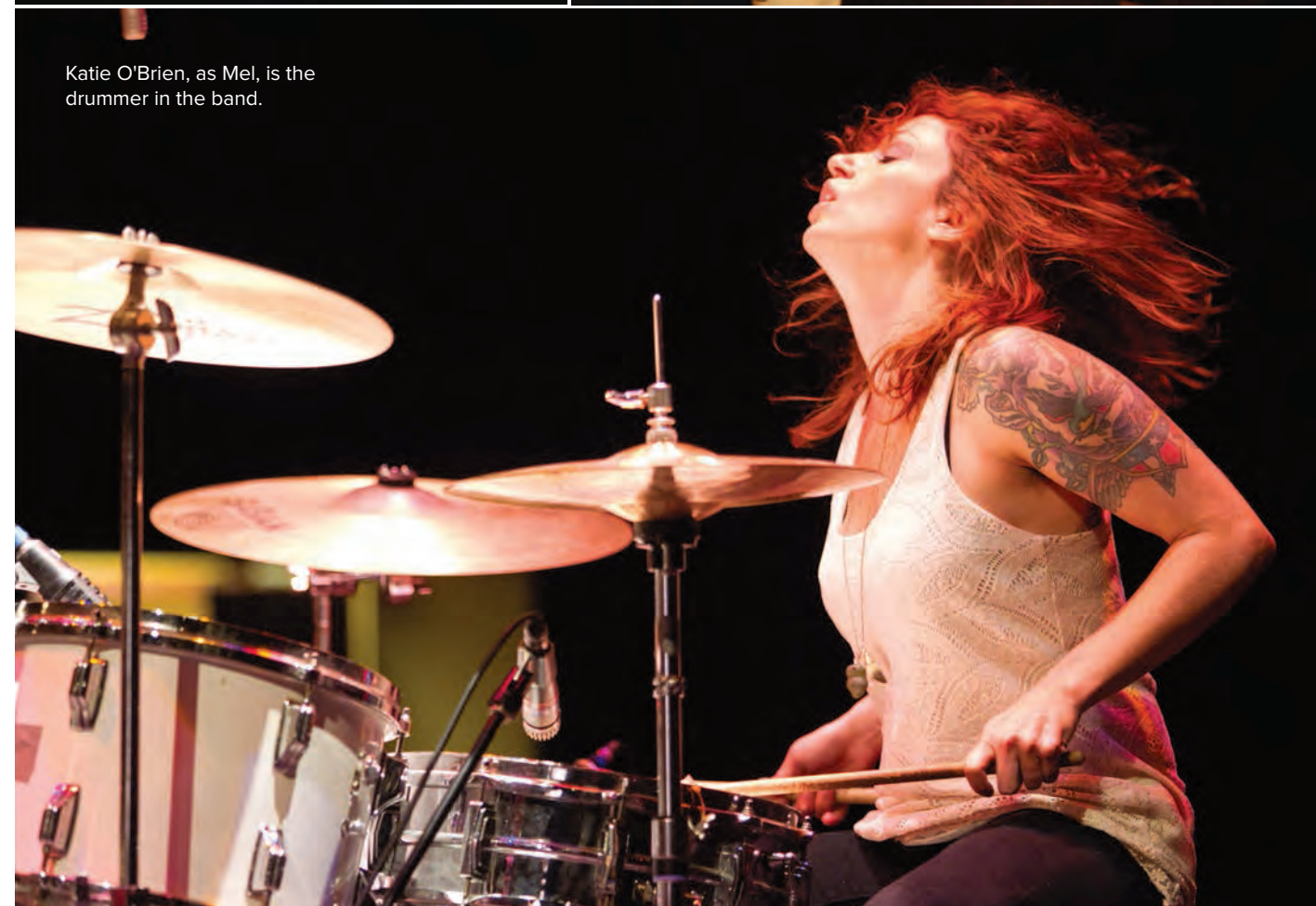
"Everyone Speaks Elton John"

No, that's not Hollywood code for "We need another hit score from Rocket Man himself." It's the name of the Public Radio

International segment by Starlee Kine that inspired "Pleased to Meet Me." Borders heard the story – eight years ago, mind you – on PRI's "This American Life" and after tossing the idea around, the movie started to become a reality.

The premise: six musicians, who have never met, come together for one day, and one day only, to create a band. Their 24-hour experiment will be recorded for the syndicated radio show "World Café." But it's the motley crew of characters that makes this film

Katie O'Brien, as Mel, is the drummer in the band.



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truly magnetic (yes, I got to see the festival cut last December – trust me, it’s worth the wait).

That cast of characters came to Louisville last summer to shoot this indie pic. And while they weren’t demanding top dollar, making a film of this caliber doesn’t come cheap. They needed funding, and this is actually how Fitzer and Borders got together. Fitzer came to the table with a line on a potential investor for the film.

Borders explained how atypical this is among film professionals. “Please know, first, how unusual this is,” he said. “The norm for this kind of thing, at least among most filmmakers, is to jealously guard your money sources like they’re the frickin’ Holy Grail.” In fact, Fitzer was contemplating using that revenue source for a project of his own, but believed so much in “Pleased to Meet Me” that he redirected those investors toward this film. “Needless to say, you don’t find that kind of generosity very often,” said Borders.

Fitzer makes sure to mention that he wasn’t able to get all the funds they needed. “I was able to raise more on my end and Archie raised more from his list of contacts and before we knew it ... we had only half the money,” he said.

But, when life hands you lemons, you make lemonade on a shoestring. “While we were at a party one night I said ‘Why are we waiting? Let’s go shoot with what we have in the bank. Otherwise, we may never get there,’” said Fitzer.

And so this is where that Kentucky “don’t tell me what I can and can’t do” mentality comes into play. Borders was on board with this notion, so off they ran. “We reset the budget and our

expectations then set forth determined to make a great film on a very small micro-budget,” said Fitzer.

And in Louisville, not necessarily known as a filmmaking mecca. But it worked! In fact, when asked if Louisville is a viable place for filmmaking, Borders said, “I think Louisville already is, as is Kentucky, a viable place for filmmaking. There just needs to be a shit load more of it, which takes education by the business and investment and tourism communities.”

Fitzer notes that Louisville was a recipient of some of the economic benefits from the movie. “We estimate that even on our small budget we were able to put close to \$80K back into the local economy over a three-week period,” he said. “Just think if budgets were slightly bigger on projects and this kind of activity was happening 10-15 times a year!”

You never know, it may very well be Borders and Fitzer – now known as the production company of 180 Degrees – who turn Kentucky into the Hollywood of the South. “We have a state with diverse cultures, locations and stories,” said Fitzer. “We have the talent here to build a strong filmmaking community.”

➔ The 180 Degrees production team is currently working on distribution outlets for “Pleased to Meet Me.” We will keep you posted when you can find it at a theater near you.