

Take a Wild Ride to 'York Street'

Homegrown Talents Debut Latest Feature

By Joe Maniscalco

When they were kids Jason Cusato and Edward Heegan would ride the F train together to class.

Today, the guys, both 30, are again riding the F train - this time to cinema notoriety.

"We rode the F train from the York Street subway station all the way down to Stillwell Avenue with the cameras rolling," Heegan says.

"York Street" is writer/director Jason Cusato's latest in a string of independent films which began with 2001's critically acclaimed documentary "When Broomsticks were King."

The film follows an aspiring writer whose fictional universe becomes painfully real after he gets embroiled in a dark underworld of crooks and crime while shadowing a group of low-level hoods.

"It's all about inspiration," Cusato says.

Cusato's own inspiration - an unabashed love of filmmaking - has served him well, giving the Park Slope native the wherewithal to stick with a project he actually put in the can three years ago.

"We weren't happy at the end of it," Cusato says of the earlier version of the film. "It was way too long." "It was over two hours."

This time out Cusato cut down the run time, got help from another filmmaker named Jody Dobson, juiced up the photography, re-shot the opening sequence and laid down an engaging new soundtrack courtesy of Heegan, who also plays a major role in the film.

"York Street" is now ready for its official opening at the Brooklyn Lyceum, 277 4th Avenue, on Saturday May 20, with an encore presentation the following afternoon on Sunday May 21.

Everyone who attends will get an exclusive copy of the York Street DVD and also get an opportunity to meet the cast and crew.

Audiences will immediately recognize the streets of Brooklyn stretching from DUMBO to Coney Island in the film. Cusato and his ParkSlopeFilms crew shot "York Street" entirely on location - a decision, the filmmaker says, that had more behind it than either logistics or aesthetics.

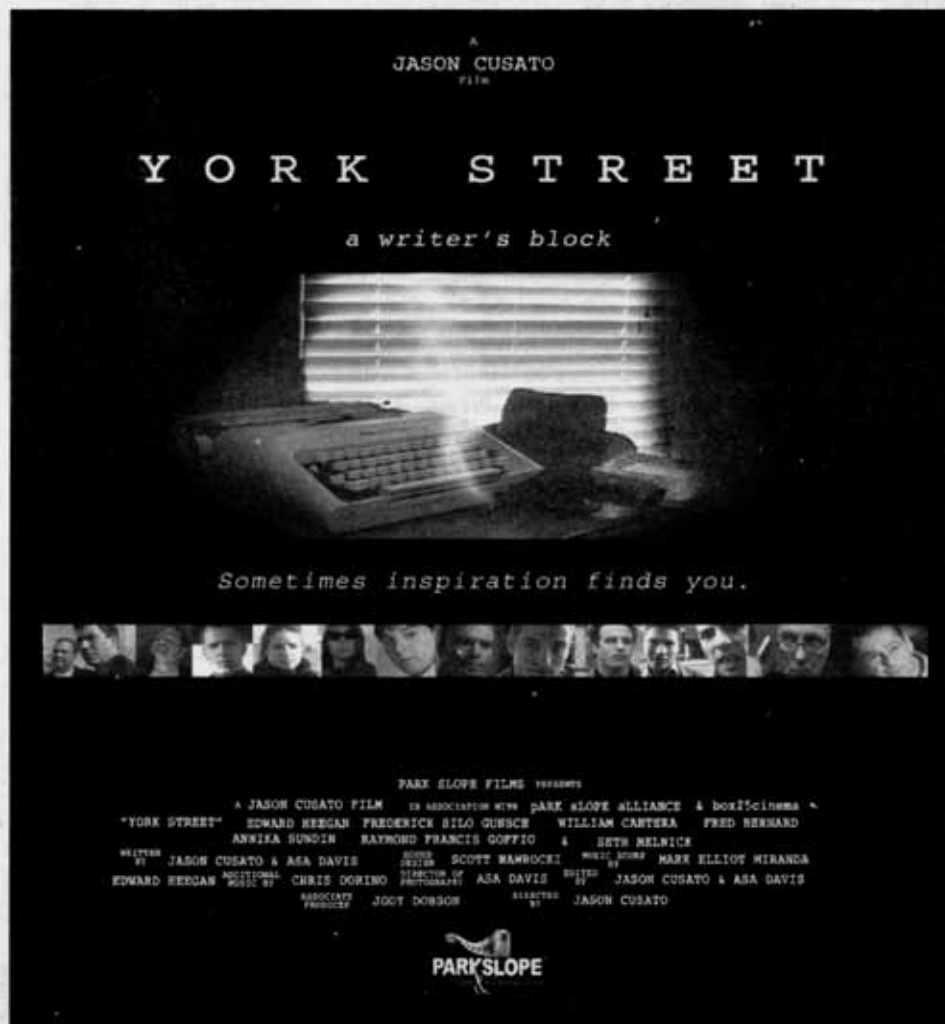
"The streets and landmarks serve as an added character in the film," Heegan explains. "They're integral to the plot line to see how all of these neighborhoods are interconnected."

The aforementioned F train ride to Stillwell Avenue was actually part of a harrowing chase scene involving an automobile bent on tailing the subway cars clacking overhead on the elevated tracks above McDonald Avenue.

In true guerrilla filmmaking style, the "York Street" crew shot most of their scenes on the fly without a permit.

But if an old lady or rummy would happen to wander into a scene, it was all the better, according to Heegan.

"We ran into different characters like a homeless guy or merchant who wound up getting into shot," he says. "We kept it because it



Above: Director Jason Cusato on the set of 'York Street.'
Below: Scenes from the ParkSlopeFilms production of 'York Street.'



held true New York value."

For Cusato, all of those characters the film crew encountered on the shoot as well as the countless others he met riding the F train and walking the streets of Brooklyn while growing up, served as indispensable sources of inspiration for "York Street."

"All of the characters in the movie are an extension of myself, Cusato explains. "And that made directing easier."

Ultimately, the goal of ParkSlopeFilms is to get "York Street" in the film festival circuit, where both Cusato and Heegan are confident about winning over audiences.

"We're not going to win an Oscar, but peo-

ple are going to appreciate that it was made by an independent company," says Heegan.

For Heegan, he finds his inspiration in actor Steve Buscemi. Both live in Brooklyn, and both have fought fires. Buscemi was a New York City firefighter for a few years before breaking out in the movies, and Heegan still answers the call today as a proud member of the FDNY.

He does get teased about his acting inside his Avenue U firehouse, but Heegan doesn't seem to mind.

And don't ask Cusato if he's at all intimidated by the big budget Hollywood flicks showing at the local Cineplex.

He likes some of them, but other he says are

simply "million dollar pieces of garbage."

The young filmmaker has learned a lot about his craft since first picking up a camera as a kid. What's the biggest thing he's learned?

"Preparation," he says. "My preparation is a lot better."

After three years, Cusato thinks "York Street" is finally ready for a close up.

Check it out.

Tickets for York Street at the Brooklyn Lyceum are \$20. Showtime for the May 20 screening is 7:30 p.m.; May 21's screening is at 4:30 p.m. To purchase tickets visit www.ParkSlopeFilms.com or call 718-369-0873. You can also visit www.BrooklynLyceum.com or call 866-Gowanus.