

Independent Filmmaker Doug Karr and Actor Andy Jones, Take On Mental Health With Ambitious 22 Minute Comedy Short

“Who’s crazy? Who’s insane? *The Straitjacket Lottery* creates its edginess by shuffling the ordinary and the absurd. Its tight structure and ironic characters prove the power of satire to provoke belly laughs.”

—Joan Nicks, Film and popular culture critic at Brock University

PLOT SYNOPSIS

Boris Durban, a familiar blue collar worker, is issued his orders for a patient transfer: five mental health patients due at a maximum security facility by eleven o’clock. But when a patient with intense claustrophobia manages to overcome her illness by leading the way for the other patients to escape, Boris is confronted with an empty bus. With the clock ticking, he tries his best to recover the patients, but his attempts are foiled. So, in his compulsion to deliver, Boris decides to fill his quota by enticing some unsuspecting civilians onto the bus. *The Straitjacket Lottery* is a comedic short which takes it’s audience on an outlandish ride and explores the thin line between idiosyncrasy and insanity.



TFCA REVIEW

—Adam Nayman, *Toronto Film Critics Association*

Doug Karr’s *The Straitjacket Lottery* is that rare thing: A Canadian short film that’s actually funny. And what’s more, the humor arises not out of contrived quirkiness (a prerequisite, it seems, in so many other films of this kind) but directly in correlation to the situation and the characters. It’s a testament to Karr’s handling of the material that the central conceit of the film – ordinary citizens are coerced into traveling on a bus for mental health patients by a driver whose previous charges have run away – eschews both obviousness and, more importantly, mean-spiritedness. Even when the screwball plot reaches a fever pitch, it retains a gentle, Rube Goldbergian sense of plausible inevitability – which is not to say predictability, as Karr has at least one appreciably left-field twist up his sleeve. It’s also worth mentioning that *The Straitjacket Lottery* has a clean, polished look that would shame filmmakers with both bigger budgets and years more experience, and that Andy Jones (of CODCO fame) manages to create an entirely realized character arc in just 20 relentlessly plot driven minutes.

The Straitjacket Lottery premiered at the 2004 Niagara Independent Film Festival where it won Best Comedy. It was also nominated for Best Comedy and Best Male Performance for Andy Jones at the 2004 Canada Golden Sheaf Awards. It has since been accepted at festivals all over Canada including The Atlantic Film Festival in Halifax, NS, The Antimatter Film Festival in Victoria, BC and The Nickle Film Festival in St. John’s, Nfld. The film was also recently accepted to The Farmington Funny Film Festival in Michigan and The Coney Island Film Festival in New York. Producers Sierra Bellows, Rick Saulnier and Writer/Director Doug Karr are available for interviews. For more information or to schedule an interview, please contact Sierra Bellows at (416) 929-4665.



PRINCIPAL CAST



Andy Jones

A native of Newfoundland, Andy Jones has been performing for over 25 years. From 1985 to 1992, Andy starred in CODCO, one of Canada's best known and most controversial television comedy shows. His film credits include *Rare Birds*, *Life With Billy*, *Extraordinary Visitor* and *Kids in the Hall: Brain Candy*. Andy Jones also works regularly in the theatre as well as writing and performing his own live comedy shows which tour the nation.



David Huband

As well as being a feature film actor, David Huband's television commercial reel is extensive. David's feature work includes *Cube Zero*, *Wrong Turn*, *The Ladies Man*, *Frequency*, *Police Academy 3* and *Tommy Boy*. His television work includes *Kung-Fu*, *Robo-Cop*, *Top Cops*, *The Newsroom*, *The Red Green Show* and *Street Legal*.



Tara Slone

Tara Slone is known best as the lead singer of the acclaimed rock band, *Joydrop* (Tommy Boy Records). Her acting credits include *Foolproof*, *Twist of Fate*, *Hart to Hart: Two Harts in Three-Quarters Time* and the television series *Nikita*.



Joe Cobden

Montreal based actor/comedian Joe Cobden has appeared in *Confessions of a Dangerous Mind*, *Suddenly Naked*, *Nuremberg* (TV Mini Series), *Hollywood North* and Roland Emmerich's soon to be released *The Day After Tomorrow*. Joe's most recent performance is in Martin Scorsese's upcoming film *The Aviator*.



DIRECTOR BIO

Doug Karr has worked in the industry since 1997 as a writer/director. Coming from a solid background in documentary filmmaking, *The Straitjacket Lottery* is Karr's first major dramatic effort. Karr's other credits include co-direction of the award winning experimental documentary *LSD25* (Jury Prize Winner at Brandon's Thirty Below Film Festival, Grand Prize Winner at the Cabbagetown Film Festival), cinematography and editing for *The June Bug Symphony* (Nominated for Best Cinematography at Yorkton Film Festival, winner Best Short Film at the Niagara Falls Film Festival) as well as production and co-direction of the hour long documentary *Lifecycles: a story of AIDS in Malawi*. His films have been seen by audiences at dozens of film festivals around the world and on various television channels, including Bravo!, The CBC, The W Network, The Independent Film Channel and Link TV.

FACTS AT A GLANCE

THE FILM

Title: The Straitjacket Lottery
 Duration: 22:19 minutes
 Genre: Drama/Comedy
 Language: English
 Original Medium: Super 16mm, Colour
 Screening Formats: Digital Betacam, Mini DV, Betacam SP, and VHS
 Sound: Stereo
 Aspect Ratio: 1.85:1
 Released: January 2004

FEATURED PLAYERS

Boris Durban	Andy Jones
Ralph Stipes	David Huband
Nancy Lesh	Tara Slone
Angus Weir	Joe Cobden
Francine Leslie	Stacy Smith
Janet Knight	Kathryn MacLellan
Howard Blantyre	Daniel Matmor
Mrs. Gould	Deborah Allen
Donald Hunter	John Davie
Lance Chancery	John MacLaren

KEY CREW

Writer/Director	Doug Karr
Producers	Sierra Bellows Rick Saulnier Doug Karr
Executive Producer	Emmerson Denney
Director of Photography	Robert Macdonald
Casting	Sheila Lane
Music	Dave Scott
Production Designer	Eron Carruth

ON-BOARD *THE STRAITJACKET LOTTERY* PRODUCTION

Newfoundland actor Andy Jones is behind the wheel of a decrepit bus that belches so much black smoke that the passing Halifax pedestrians give him dirty looks. The exhaust almost obscures the bus' rear which read "Elmsdale Mental Health Centre" and no one seems to notice the four straitjacketed figures that peer out the windows. Mr. Jones has the pedal to the floor and when he opens the bus door at 60 km the lens of a Super16mm camera peeks out.

Waiting at the curb, a police officer in full rain garb leans against his motorcycle. Art Director Eron Carruth is using cello tape and black paper to cover over the insignia on both the bike and the cop. The imposing Officer Lane looks bemused as Carruth asks if the production can borrow his Billy club. "Do you need it for the actor playing the cop or to keep the production assistants in line?" Lane asks. On set it's day four of a seven day production schedule and among the rough and ready crew of *The Straitjacket Lottery* the sights and sounds are frenetic, comic and even a little surreal.

For writer/director Doug Karr the subject matter of mental health and compulsion is familiar territory

The zany comedy *The Straitjacket Lottery* is the brainchild of writer/director Doug Karr. After three years of writing and a stint with script doctor Allan Magee, courtesy of the Atlantic Film Festival, Script Development Program Award, the story of bus driver Boris Durban's patient transfer mishap was ready for camera. For Karr the subject matter of mental health and compulsion is familiar territory after his award winning experimental film *LSD25*, which documented a young woman's dangerous love affair with acid and her resulting confinement in a mental health facility. Indeed, the two films share the Nova Scotia Mental Hospital as a location, though this time Karr has permission to shoot inside the grounds and doesn't have to sneak past the admitting nurse like last time, which shows significant development in his filmmaking technique.

The *Straitjacket Lottery* script was performed at Script Out Loud at the 2002 Atlantic Film Festival. The public and commissioning editors from several Canadian broadcasters were able to hear the script read by local actors and ask Karr questions both about the writing itself and the viability of producing the script. The Bravo! Network's Judy Gladstone and CBC Atlantic's Penny Langley got a first look at a story that a few months later they would finance.

Doug Karr and his producing partners Sierra Bellows and Rick Saulnier spent the next year securing additional funding as well as cast, crew and finally locations and equipment for the film. Karr had long admired the work of actor and comedian Andy Jones, of *CODCO* and *Rare Birds* fame, and cornered him with script in hand after one of Jones' stage performance in Toronto. After reading the script and suffering far too many phone calls from Karr, Jones agreed to come on board as the film's lead character, Boris Durban. The role of Nancy, the acutely paranoid girl turned rocker, seemed a natural fit to actress and singer Tara Slone (lead signer of *Joydrop*). David Huband (*The Newsroom*, *Cube Zero*), whose extensive television and film work has made him a familiar face across Canada, came on as the gentle and funny schizophrenic, Stipes.

Local casting in Halifax was generously facilitated by Sheila Lane at Filmworks who brought the highest caliber Nova Scotian actors to the attention of the production. Stacy Smith, Kathryn MacLellan, Daniel Matmor, Deberah Allen, John Davies and John MacLaren joined the cast. Veteran director of photography Robert MacDonald (who shot Atom Egoyen's first feature *Family Values*) came onboard as director of photography. "I think the key to our success was the unusual mix of personalities and levels of experience during the shoot," says producer Rick Saulnier. "There were highly skilled professional crew members alongside volunteers completely fresh to the processes of filmmaking. Those with experience took time to teach the greener crew the details of their jobs, allowing both sides to see the process in a fresh way."

ON-BOARD THE PRODUCTION CONT.

Among the many locations used for *The Straitjacket Lottery*, the bus took center stage. Previously used as a transporter of recycled newspapers, the bus's owner—an old timer from rural Nova Scotia whose weathered looks would make him an excellent extra for the film—had christened the vehicle with a confederate eagle across the hood that the art department had to paint over. An unlikely antagonist, the owner showed up days later on set and threatened to sue in an effort to squeeze more money out of the production. Members of the production team say they have begun to fear him. “If our production had a mascot, I think that the bus would be appropriate,” says Producer Sierra Bellows. “It’s rickety, but it runs. It’s like the straitjackets. We couldn’t find real straitjackets in Halifax for love or money, so I asked my friend Katie to sew a few. They close with safety pins and velcro and the actors have to keep their arms crossed, but they look great in the dailies. They’re home-made, but they work.”

Other than the bus, the film’s locations, spread out around Halifax, include a suite of 12 office medical offices, an auto repair service, and a stretch of residential street outside Karr’s family home. The locations are mostly donated just like the million dollar camera package lent by Panavision and the three cube vans of lighting and grip equipment donated by PS Production Services. Even some of the film stock has been donated by Kodak and the National Film Board. “The production value added by donations and volunteer labour has allowed us to make a film that could easily have cost hundreds of thousands of dollars. I admit that, at heart, the film is a little overambitious, but with all of this help we seem to be pulling it off,” says Karr.

On set, it is drizzling, muggy, and overcast. Lacking a trailer, the anti-prima donna, Andy Jones, has only the shotgun seat of make-up artist Tania Rudolf’s car for a moment of peace and quiet. He put the seat back while he waits for Tara Slone to finish the music video sequence in the bus. Slone is glammed up in rock star mode with a guitar slung over her shoulder.

Slone is backed up by a production assistant who happened to wear the perfect leather jacket to set today and can beat the drums in time with the playback. It is over 30 degrees inside the bus, but Slone still looks cool. The extra doesn’t fare as well; he’s sweating so much in his leather that the duct tape across his mouth keeps falling off—very rock.



Nancy played by Tara Slone (lead singer of *Joydrop*) belts lyrics inside the bus

Robert MacDonald bends his lanky frame over the camera to check the view finder before telling the grips to assemble a ten by ten silk. Karr hides his lack of sleep well and remains soft spoken until he’s handed a megaphone. He seems to be keeping it together despite the spotty weather, the forty person crew, the seventeen cast members, the problems with location permits, and the last minute crew changes. The only thing that belies his composure is that Bellows is telling everyone that he’s lost fifteen pounds in the past two weeks.

When asked about his favourite part of making movies, Karr says that being on set is the major payoff. “You are no longer in the planning stage” he says. “Everything that you’ve been working towards, concepts and blueprints you’ve had in your head for years, are suddenly beginning to realize in front of you. You suddenly get to see how these fantastic actors and crew start to bring life something that you’ve seen in your minds eye a million times.” Karr has an outlandish vision full of psychotics, buffoons, and home-made straitjackets, but it is inspiring to see it alive and walking around on this warm, wet day in August.

THE STRAITJACKET LOTTERY AT THE FESTIVALS

AWARDS:

WINNER - BEST COMEDY

Niagara Indie FilmFest, 2004

Nominated - **BEST COMEDY** and **BEST MALE PERFORMANCE** (Andy Jones)
Canada Golden Sheaf Awards, 2004

WINNER - The Atlantic Film Festival
SCRIPT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM AWARD, 2002

OFFICIAL SELECTION:

Nickle Film Festival (St. John's, Nfld)

Antimatter Film Festival (Victoria, BC)

The Atlantic Film Festival (Halifax, NS)

Giggleshorts International Comedy Short Film Festival (Toronto, ON)

The Cabbagetown Short Film Festival (Toronto, ON)

Farmington Funny Film Festival (Farmington, MI)

The Coney Island Film Festival (Coney Island, NY)

The Boston Underground Film Festival (Boston, MA)

**FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT:
www.thestraitjacketlottery.com**