

Go! Sunday

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FORT LAUDERDALE INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

A Trumpian satire finds its pop-culture moment



Zack Norman, left, and Allen Garfield in "Chief Zabu."

ZABU COMPANY / COURTESY

'Chief Zabu' will screen Nov. 7 at the Fort Lauderdale International Film Festival

BY BEN CRANDELL
Staff writer

On the eve of Election Day, the Fort Lauderdale International Film Festival will screen "Chief Zabu," a low-budget comedy about an awkward New York real-estate developer in a frantic scramble for money, social standing, political influence and the power to put his name on the sides of buildings.

As if the point were not obvious enough, the movie includes a shot of a hospital emblazoned with the name "Trump."

You'd be forgiven for assuming the film has been rushed into existence to cash in on the high-profile foibles of a controversial presidential candidate. But in fact, "Chief Zabu" predates the rise of Donald Trump as a political brand by decades: It was filmed in 1986 and is having its premiere screenings 30 years after actor-director Zack Norman and writer-producer Neil Cohen misplaced it.

While Trump was not the inspiration for "Chief Zabu," Norman and Cohen credit him for stimulating their recovery of the film. The search began last November when polls began to confirm the billionaire's uncomplicated aspirations were resonating with a growing number of GOP voters.

"We were having dinner," Norman says, "and we looked at each other and we said, 'We made that movie. It's Ben Sydney!'"

"Chief Zabu" follows the clumsy ambitions of the owner of a Manhattan real-estate firm, a nebbishy dreamer named Ben Sydney, who drives a Mercedes he probably can't afford. The story begins as Sydney, played by veteran char-

acter actor Allen Garfield, is getting in over his head on an investment on the fictional Polynesian island of Tiburaku, seeking to be an independent country with a seat at the United Nations. (The film takes its name from the honorable island leader with whom the investors are getting cozy.)

While Sydney's immediate goal is to secure fishing, agriculture and road-building rights on the island, his parallel vision is fixed on how the windfall of money and influence will improve his status in New York. As his plans appear to fall into place, the newly confident Sydney strikes up a romance with a beautiful and self-involved film actress.

"It begins by him saying, 'I want to be a human being. I want people to like me, to respect me. I want my name on hospital wings. I want to build buildings,'" Norman says. "It's unbelievable, the consequence of time."

Cohen applauds Garfield's ability to make a likable character out of Sydney, "a very needful, delusional, insecure American human being who thinks he's found a way to become important."

Islamorada to Tiburaku

The idea for the film came to Norman during his day job doing New York- and Miami-area real-estate deals in the 1980s, under his real name, Howard Zuker. An actor best known for a role as Danny DeVito's sidekick in "Romancing the Stone," Zucker subsidized his film work as a standup comic, which took him to stages at the Eden Roc and the Playboy Club in Miami Beach.

Also a producer (he helped Henry Jaglom release the 1974 Oscar-winning Vietnam War documentary "Hearts and Minds"), Norman met Cohen, then a talent agent, while working with one of Cohen's actors. After Norman shared his idea for a movie, the two churned out

the script in a week while at Norman's time-share in Islamorada.

"Chief Zabu" was made for a paltry \$187,996 and filmed in 15 days about 100 miles up the Hudson River from New York on the campus of Bard College. The cast and crew, a motley group of 1980s character actors working for half union scale and 40 to 50 Bard students on break between spring and summer classes, bunked two to a room in the college dorms.

Some filming was done in New York, including scenes of the Plaza Hotel (just before Trump bought it) and a prescient shot of a sign.

"It's a sign that used to hang, and still does, on a hospital, that I used to look at every day while I drove into New York. It said, 'The Trump Pavilion,'" Norman says, laughing. "And I say in the movie, to Ben Sydney, 'You see that sign over there? How would you like some day to have your name up there like that? The Ben Sydney Pavilion.'"

Garfield, a friend of Cohen, was the first actor to sign on to "Chief Zabu," and he made calls that attracted others. Along with Norman, who plays Sammy Brooks, Sydney's smarter right-hand man, the cast includes the familiar-if-not-famous faces of Ed Lauter ("Shameless"), Allan Arbus ("M*A*S*H"), Shirley Stoler ("The Honeymoon Killers") and others.

"Chief Zabu" will be shown 6 p.m. Monday, Nov. 7, at Cinema Paradiso Hollywood, 2008 Hollywood Blvd., and 7:45 p.m., Monday, Nov. 7, at Savor Cinema, 503 SE Sixth St., in Fort Lauderdale. The Savor Cinema screening will be followed by the free Zabu Stomp Party in the theater courtyard, featuring the music of Gold Dust Lounge. Tickets to each screening cost \$11, \$8 for seniors and students, \$6 for members. Admission is free to those wearing an "I Voted" sticker. Call 954-525-3456 or go to FLIFF.com.

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Today

Music

The 14 Jazz Orchestra: The ensemble is comprised of 14 of South Florida's top jazz and studio musicians, under the direction of arranger, conductor and educator Dan Bonsanti. They'll perform cuts from their debut "Nothing Hard is Ever Easy" recording, as well as new compositions from their upcoming release. The concert is accompanied by a three-course meal. 5 p.m., All That Jazz Cafe, 3491 N. Hiatus Road, Sunrise, \$39.95, 954-572-0821, allthatjazzcafe.com.

The Edwards Twins: The identical twins play piano, dance, act, sing and perform more than 100 impressions. Popular in Las Vegas, Anthony and Eddie Edwards sing live hits as Barbra Streisand, Andrea Bocelli, Bette Midler, Elton John, Neil Diamond, Billy Joel, Tina Turner, Cher, Rod Stewart, Luciano Pavarotti, Diana Ross, Elvis Presley, Stevie Wonder and Ray Charles. 2 and 7 p.m., Boca Black Box Center for the Arts, 8221 Glades Road, Boca Raton, \$30-\$45, 561-483-9036, bocablackbox.com.

Dance

Giselle: Miami City Ballet presents the beloved full-length ballet to kick off their latest season. The story of a poor girl and the two men who love her has been a classical dance favorite since its 1841 premiere. 2 p.m., Broward Au-Rene, 201 SW Fifth Ave., Fort Lauderdale, \$20-\$189, 954-462-0222, browardcenter.org.

Comedy

Mike Lawrence: Originally from South Florida, the New York-based comedian was a staff writer on "Inside Amy Schumer." The Comedy Central Roast Battle champion also has a half-hour special on the network and co-hosts the popular "Nerd of Mouth" podcast. 7 p.m., Fort Lauderdale Improv, 5700 Lemondale Way, Hollywood, \$20, 954-981-5653, ftl.improv.com.

ASK AMY

Amy Dickinson

Marriage feels like same old thing

Dear Amy: My husband is 51 and I'm 41. We've been together five years, and got married seven months ago. I am ready to throw in the towel. I am feeling like I have been in this marriage before. I am again married to a guy who is too stuck on his mother.

My first husband, who was his mom's only child, had a controlling mother. For some reason, I have married another guy with the same problem. His mother is driving a wedge between us and he is allowing it.

I am thinking I should just walk away. We have no children together and I don't have to put up with it, right? — Ready to Leave

Dear Ready: Marriage requires huge adjustments in family systems. In order to be happily married to you, he must put his relationship to you, and your marriage, at the center of his life. You should also attempt to compromise, adjust and accept that his mother is now part of your family.

A marriage counselor could help the two of you to discuss this dynamic and make the necessary adjustments.

Dear Amy: You asked for feedback concerning

the letter from "Left Out Liberal," who disagreed with her husband's politics.

I see no difference in this scenario and people with different religious backgrounds. The only solution is to let each believe what they want philosophically and act accordingly, but on the important issues in life that directly affect the couple, such as child-rearing, buying a home, budgeting, career paths, etc., couples should communicate and come to a consensus.

I wouldn't ask my wife to change her religious views or her political way of thinking. I never ask her how she's voting. I wouldn't want her to be something she's not and vice versa. — Happy With Differences

Dear Happy: Many people responding to this letter equate political and religious views. If you don't ask your wife how she's voting, it sounds as if you keep the peace by not discussing politics. This particular year, I agree with this approach.

Write to Ask Amy, Chicago Tribune, TT500, 435 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, IL 60611, or email askamy@tribpub.com.

MISS MANNERS

Judith Martin

Customer care often lacking

THOUGHTS FROM MISS MANNERS: After 10 minutes of guessing among ambiguous voice mail menu choices, a caller is connected with someone who cannot solve his problem — and who insists on putting him back into voice mail. Neither of them knows that the computer is systematically (and unfeelingly) routing people with billing questions to Children's Clothing.

A customer who gets to the front of the checkout line and finds the clerk on the phone is angry that he is not being served. She is unaware that the clerk is required to do double duty answering the company telephone.

An airline passenger who asks a question of the person behind the desk at the gate is annoyed to be told that he will have to wait for a different employee who might know the answer. He has not realized that the person at the computer is a pilot, not a gate agent.

The employees are just as frustrated as the customers: "If this guy wanted a giraffe onesie for his daughter, I could help him. But why is he yelling at me about a billing problem?"

"I'm wearing a company headset and answered the phone by saying, 'Enor-

mous Corporate Chain, how may I help you?' Isn't it obvious that I am waiting on another customer, not chatting with my boyfriend?"

"I'm a pilot with 20 years of experience, and I'm wearing my hat. I'm using this computer to get a flight plan so I can fly this passenger quickly and safely to his next destination. Why does he expect me to know how many points he needs to qualify for Agate Geode Status?"

Who was at fault? Everyone.

Someone not present at the blupup has created a situation in which misunderstanding is certain to occur. The checkout person, the sales clerk and the pilot have been made to look rude by a badly programmed voice mail system, an unfortunate assignment of duties and the placement of a computer.

So the customer has taken offense and turned aggressive. And the employee has responded in kind.

They have Miss Manners' sympathy, if not her approbation. But as everyone has misbehaved, everyone can help Miss Manners clean up the mess.

Send questions to Miss Manners at her website, missmanners.com.

HOROSCOPES

Nancy Black

Cancer, don't jump to conclusions

Today's Birthday: Discover a year of taking stock, sharing appreciations and clarifying visions. Work changes this spring flow into blooming romance.

To get the advantage, check the day's rating: 10 is the easiest day, 0 the most challenging.

Scorpio (Oct. 23-Nov. 21) (7) Home and family demand more attention today and tomorrow. Enjoy domestic arts together, like baking and gardening.

Sagittarius (Nov. 22-Dec. 21) (8) Use your creative arts today and tomorrow. Use persuasive language. Don't push too hard. Track results as you go.

Capricorn (Dec. 22-Jan. 19) (9) Gather your resources together over the next few days. Review budgets and contemplate costs. Seek and find efficiencies.

Aquarius (Jan. 20-Feb. 18) (9) You're especially powerful and confident today and tomorrow. Move to forward a personal dream. Dress for the part you want.

Pisces (Feb. 19-March 20) (6) Find a peaceful, private place to rest and think over the next two days. Review plans and toss out the superfluous. Consider consequences.

Aries (March 21-April

19) (7) Friends are a big help over the next two days. Work, play and celebrate your accomplishments together. Apply discipline to your game.

Taurus (April 20-May 20) (8) Career opportunities are showing up. Expect more responsibility today and tomorrow. Act quickly, but don't spend recklessly. Watch your step.

Gemini (May 21-June 20) (7) The next two days are good for travel. Investigate possibilities and explore options. Get busy writing.

Cancer (June 21-July 22) (8) Watch where you're going. Move quickly, without stepping in anything nasty. Don't jump to conclusions.

Leo (July 23-Aug. 22) (8) Partnership provides workability over the next two days. Negotiate your way through minor adjustments. Share comfort food and responsibilities.

Virgo (Aug. 23-Sept. 22) (8) Things are moving fast. Balance work and health today and tomorrow. Reduce stress and build energy with good food, exercise and rest.

Libra (Sept. 23-Oct. 22) (8) Indulge your passions for the next few days. Play your favorite games, sports and hobbies. Hang with your favorite people.

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