

on the street



Niagara Falls native Michael Sparaga (centre) is the writer/producer of the indie superhero flick 'Sidekick', premiering this month in Toronto. It's directed by Blake Van de Graaf (left) and stars Daniel Baldwin (right).

Photo:
Special to the
Review



Film Focuses on Sidekick

BY JOHN LAW
REVIEW STAFF WRITER

A lesson in moviemaking misery, courtesy of Niagara Falls' own Michael Sparaga: Eight years ago, after filming his offbeat crime comedy 'Variety' at a vacant Lundy's Lane grocery store, it was picked up by a Toronto distributor who had a few requests. He liked the flick, but felt it needed some nudity. And, uh, kickboxing.

"We completely and totally refused," says the A.N. Myer grad. "The kickboxing was strange, but for me to ask my indie actress to

come back (and get naked)..."

The film still sits on a shelf, lacking martial arts and bare breasts.

"It was really one of those nightmare situations," said Sparaga. "That sort of kicked the crap out of me for awhile as far as wanting to produce."

He kept busy writing over the years, developing children's shows and polishing off scripts. One of them was about a depressed comic store nerd who discovers his friend has some telekinetic talents.

What if, he thought, he could just be the sidekick for the city's new superhero?

Sparaga, a superhero nut ("every DVD I own ends with the word 'man'"), felt the

time was right to make movies again. After a long drought of comic-related movies, theatres are swarming with them lately.

"I took all of what I know about these movies and tried to twist it a little bit," he says, on the line from his Toronto production company Victory Man Productions.

"To take a guy who doesn't want to be a hero ... he's so shy, he wants to be the sidekick."

The film, aptly titled 'Sidekick', was filmed in Toronto over 10 weekends in the spring of 2004.

While filming, Daniel Baldwin was in town shooting 'Anonymous Rex' for the Sci-Fi Channel. A big fan of Baldwin from his 'Homicide' days, Sparaga pitched him the role of 'Sidekick's' geeky comic store owner. To his shock, Baldwin agreed.

The film also stars young Canadian actors David Ingram, Perry Mucci and Mackenzie Lush.

The script and cast fell into place, but Sparaga faced a huge problem with special effects. Despite being a modest, \$250,000 indie flick, it was still a superhero movie, and needed some pizzazz.

"This is a genre that usually falls well outside the indie market," he says. "You just can't provide the visceral thrills on a shoestring budget that 'Spider-Man' can do."

Luckily Sparaga found an eager young effects crew willing to do it for virtually no money.

"I can't believe what they were able to pull off," he says.

Ultimately, Sparaga made a movie comic book fans will relate to. He says it follows the lead of M. Night Shayamalan's 'Unbreakable', asking what it means to be a hero without two hours of fights and CGI effects.

"Just because I don't have that budget doesn't mean I don't have a hero story to tell."

After a fundraiser screening June 13 at Toronto's Isabel Bader Theatre (93 Charles Street West), Sparaga has fingers crossed 'Sidekick' will be picked up by the Toronto International Film Festival in September.

"It's like the 'Scream' of superhero movies," he says. "It's a movie that has a lot of love (for superheroes), and it's always taken seriously. It is a comedy, but never played for comedy."

"It's funny because people are funny."

To view the film's teaser trailer, visit www.sidekickmovie.com.