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Direct opposites Filmmaker moves from Hollywood to South Bend, pits evil against good in thriller



Debra Stanley, left, and Steve Chung prepare for a scene at J&W BBQ during the filming of Peter O'Keefe's independent film "Infidel," which is being screened Wednesday at the Vickers Theatre in Three Oaks. Photos provided

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On screen

Peter O'Keefe's "Infidel" will be screened at 7 p.m. Wednesday at The Vickers Theatre, 6 N. Elm St., Three Oaks. A question-and-answer session will follow the film. Admission is free. For more information, call (269) 756-3544, or visit www.vickerstheatre.com.

It's rare that a working screenwriter leaves California to make films in Indiana, but seven years ago, that's exactly what Peter O'Keefe did.

"I was burning out," the Detroit native says. "Someone would option a script, and it would go through this two- to four-year process. Then it would fall apart, and the movie wouldn't get made. I finally realized I had to find another way to tell my stories."

So, in 1999, when his soon-to-be wife, Lesley Walker, accepted a teaching position at Indiana University South Bend, O'Keefe traded a career penning episodic television and direct-to-video movies for a digital video camera and a South Bend address.

It's a move that's starting to pay off.

The writer-director's latest film, "Infidel," which premiered Saturday at IUSB, is getting some local attention.

The film will be screened Wednesday at The Vickers Theatre in Three Oaks and again later this month as part of the fifth annual Independent Video and Filmmakers Festival at IUSB.

"Infidel" is the third short film O'Keefe has completed since coming to South Bend.

"Lulu Takes a Lover" premiered in July 2001 at the San Francisco

Digital Underground Film Festival, and "Bad Advice" premiéred in December 2002 at the Indianapolis Underground Film Festival.

His fourth film, "Race Memory," is currently in postproduction.

"Infidel" stars Debra M. Stanley as Ruby, a street preacher who encounters Kirby (Doug Lamoreux) sitting at the counter of a greasy rib joint.

Ruby is convinced that she has been chosen by God to bring this solitary stranger to Jesus. What she doesn't realize, however, is that Kirby and his partner, Owen (Ron Wells), are hired killers staking out the restaurant for the arrival of their victim.

Both Ruby and Kirby are determined to carry out their mission, no matter what it takes.

"I kept thinking about two guys sitting at a counter and why they were there," O'Keefe says. "I knew Debbie (Stanley), and I wondered how I could put her into that scenario."

That scenario is the backbone of this gritty urban portrayal of two people with opposite views of the world.

Despite a few redundant scenes and patches of dialogue that weigh down the 56-minute film, O'Keefe has created an interesting and intense character study that builds to a violent climax.

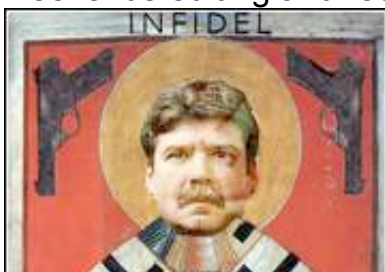
"I like throwing direct opposites together," O'Keefe says, "and I've always been fascinated by obsessive characters."

Using a volunteer crew and a predominantly local cast, "Infidel" was shot during five weekends in February and March of 2004 in South Bend.

Like many independent films, however, the project stalled when the money ran out.

"We spent almost a year making no progress on it," O'Keefe says. "I needed an editor who could do some effects. And do it for free."

Chicago editor David Blum came onboard last year, and the duo spent weekends editing and recording sound elements. The film received a \$1,000 Indiana Arts Commission grant, and O'Keefe estimates another \$5,000 was spent out-of-pocket. A drop in the bucket to the money he saw doled out for films during his decade in Los Angeles.



"When you're working on a film of your own,



you have to be creative and innovative," O'Keefe says. "You have to keep everyone interested and involved, and that's hard to do when you're not getting paid. It's a grueling but rewarding process."

At least for now, he wouldn't want it any other way.

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