

FILM ANTHROPOLOGY

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Q&A with Glenn Camhi (dir) *THE BUNGLERS*

September 18, 2012 · by [Film Anthropology](#) · in [FILM FESTIVALS](#)



[THE BUNGLERS](#) is a movie that I happened to catch at this year's Manhattan Film Festival (2012). It is phenomenally funny with high production value. A medium length short, the film has pulled in a number of well deserved awards. The movie is directed by filmmaker Glenn Camhi. The movie stood out to me, not just for production value, but writing, acting and it just seemed to be a well organized indie film production all around. I'm not the only one who has noticed the film, after all, look at all the laurels on the one-sheet poster. At last count, 17 and probably more will be added by the end of 2012. Speaking of which, I'm happy to find out that *The Bunglers* will be closing the 2012 [Boston Film Festival](#) and so I thought it was time to do a Q&A with Glenn, on his background, the making of his film and what he went through to get the movie to the audience.

Production:

FilmAnthropology (FA): *That hardest part for most filmmakers is actually getting going, so if you can, please tell me how your project came to be and how long was it from conception, through development and after you were ready to shoot, what was the process and timeline for "getting your act together" and actually making it happen?*

Glenn Camhi (GC): The germ of THE BUNGLERS came to me, like most story ideas, while jogging to music. A Gipsy Kings song inspired the image of a beautiful flamenco dancer getting the best of two guys trying to shoot her, despite having nothing at hand but a pair of maracas and a cymbal. It made me laugh, and I tucked it away. A week later I heard Lena Horne's killer rendition of "It Had Better Be Tonight," and a vision of that same dancer appeared, this time trying to seduce one of the guys with the song. I couldn't figure out why she'd be doing that, but I had to know. Thus the story was born.

Once I sat down to write, it went fast. I'd been saving up to make a short for about 7 years, long before I had the idea. Just wanted to be ready to do it right. Directing features I've written is where I'm headed, so this short is my calling card.

It took a year total from script to screen. The longest periods were prep/crew gathering, and post. I wanted a top notch crew, so coordinating schedules with all their shows and movies took some doing. But it allowed my dynamite lead actress a couple months of flamenco training. Post took all summer, in large part because to save money I had to master the art and science of color grading and visual effects, neither of which I'd ever done. Great fun. Really just another stage of the writing process, to me.

The biggest challenge was finding our main location, a nightclub where most of the action goes down.

Due to some tricky negotiations, we only nailed it down 2 days before production! But it was perfect — a historic venue that had been closed a quarter century but was about to reopen the week after we shot. Best of all, its dimensions happened to fall within a few inches of the unusual nightclub I made up and had drawn in my animatic storyboards.

Apart from cast, getting my DP was the biggest step that got things rolling. I'd met the super-talented [Stephan Dalyai](#) before, and we hit it off with very similar taste in cinematography. He loved the script, and when I started telling him which color palettes and lenses I had in mind for the different characters, he was finishing my sentences with the same thoughts, even though none of it was in the script. We have a terrific working relationship.

For some strange reason, everyone around me had more confidence than I did early on, so finding suckers — er, talented cast and crew — to go along with and enhance my vision was surprisingly easy. I loved and would work with them again in a heartbeat. I couldn't have done it without my fellow producers [Kyle Fischer](#) and [Samm Barnes](#). Amazing people, on and off set. Even seasoned crew members said it was the most delightful set they'd worked on, which made me as happy as the final film itself.



FA: *How do you develop your characters and how involved are your actors in the development of the characters.*

GC: I do a lot of work developing my characters, working out their backstories and often writing faux interviews or conversations with them. I need to know where they came from, what music they listen to, what they do in their off time and obviously, what drives and inhibits them — and why.

But then I cast carefully, and trust my actors to take their characters and run with them. I offer my written backstories early on if they want them (*and they do*), but once they really dig in, it's their turn to discover who they really are.

I love working with actors who have solid improv chops. I encourage improvisation during some table reads, which can lead to rewrites. On set, I run what's written first, then often ask them to "play" with certain bits if they wish. I figure that by the time we're shooting, they've lived in their characters'

skins more deeply than I have and truth comes naturally. As diligently as I planned, many of my favorite moments in the film are bits I never envisioned. I'm open to anything that works better for the story than what I originally wrote alone at my desk — whether from the actors, the camera crew, or really anyone.



Glenn Camhi directing the incredibly talented lead actress Tyler McClain in the climatic shootout scene.

FA: Casting process – do you write for actors you already know/have a rapport with or do you audition for each character?

GC: I often have an actor in mind when writing, whether a star I'd never get but who helps me visualize the character, or an actor with whom I have a rapport or think I could cast. In the case of THE BUNGLERS, I wrote the two male leads (Danny and Luther) specifically for the brilliant [Stephen Kearin](#) and [Floyd VanBuskirk](#). I'd been fans of their stage work for years and have worked with them doing improv. Their characters are nothing like them, but I knew they'd knock it out of the park.

A wonderful actress I know was my muse when writing the lead female, *Isabella*, but she was unavailable. When [Tyler McClain](#) walked through the door during our open casting call, it took 10 seconds for my fellow producers and I to recognize she was our *Isabella*. She simply lit up the room. That night I listened to that Gipsy Kings song again and could only picture her in the role.



I had no one in mind for our villain, Joe Danzer. I asked a great actor I know, [Brian Lohmann](#), to help out with the initial table read so I could hear the script on its feet before polishing, and 2 lines in, I saw my Joe Danzer. At the end of the read, fortunately he asked me if I've cast the role yet and if he could have it.

Background and Education and Future Projects:

FA: Can you tell me about your experience at the AFI Conservatory? What did you take from it?

GC: I went to AFI for screenwriting. Best thing I got out of it was the visiting filmmaker series. Unlike the usual PR stops that writers, directors and producers do when press is around, they gave us utterly candid reports of their entire process. For example, the brilliant [Ed Zwick](#) showed us scenes he'd severed from his then-latest great film that he knew were godawful and would never again see the light of day — just to show us that even when you're at the top of your game you can make big mistakes during writing or production phases, but that a good filmmaker recognizes what works and what doesn't in the editing bay. It was most reassuring.

FA: What's your next project and what will you do the same and/or differently from this – or: what did you learn from making THE BUNGLERS that will motivate you to do something different on your next project?

GC: Either of two features is up next, whichever anyone wants to back me on first! Both are similar to THE BUNGLERS in that they're comedies with some action, but they differ notably in story and tone. One's crazy dark, but with a sweet love story at its core (*actually, a couple love stories*), the other is more straightforward comedy with a satirical edge. After those, I have a semi-futuristic balls-to-the-wall action pic I'd love to do.



Two things I'll do differently: I won't schedule a 10-day shoot for 6 days! And I'll devote more time to prep with my department heads. We were rushed for budgetary reasons. I'm big on efficiency, but not so big on rushing.

One thing I'll do the same that I never thought I'd do: produce. Loved it. Hadn't known my brain works that way.

Festival Submission Process:

FA: *What was your experience with film festivals before making this film?*

GC: I'd only been to some festival screenings prior, never taken the time to do a whole festival before. Stupid, really. They're a blast.

FA: *Did you find getting *The Bunglers* into the festival circuit to be difficult, expensive, stressful or the complete opposite?*

GC: I wasn't sure we'd get into any festivals, given that most programmers prefer shorts under 10 or 15 minutes so they can pack more into a 90 minute block. It's unfortunate, though it makes some sense. Moreover, it's especially hard for a longish comedy, since most festivals that will program longer shorts tend to reserve those slots for films they feel are "meatier." Not always, but usually.

I knew this going in, but as much as I want people to see and enjoy *THE BUNGLERS*, I didn't make it primarily for festivals. This was the story that excited me enough to shoot. I wanted to tell a story with multiple twists, believable romance and shifting character relationships, which you just can't do in 5-10 minutes. I prefer comedy that stems from character. The biggest laughs and applause *THE BUNGLERS* gets is during a silent, stationary 18-second shot of 2 characters merely looking at each other. It works because we've gotten to know their characters sufficiently. I've seen some fantastic, clever short shorts, but I tend to prefer those that take the time to delve more into character and story, with some breathing room.

I was pleasantly surprised when the acceptance emails started coming in... and even more so when we started winning major awards. Especially after a handful of early rejections. I did find we got more traction with festivals once we got a little notice. I wish I'd strategized more accordingly.

It's expensive and stressful, but the stress is far outweighed by the unparalleled joy of getting to sit in a theater listening to a packed house of strangers laugh, gasp and clap in all the right places — plus a few you hadn't anticipated.

FA: *What surprised you about the festival submission system?*

GC: Mainly that it's a full time job! Just researching the approximately 1.4 billion festivals out there to discern which are worthwhile and good potential fits, and accept films of your length/type, and don't conflict with other festival's premiere requirements, yet don't have completion date deadlines that disqualify you from next year, etc., is a job. My spreadsheets had spreadsheets.

Then there's the constant redesign of all your promotional materials as you get screenings and awards. You become a one-stop graphic design house, PR firm, web guru and post office supporter.

I was deeply disappointed to discover some major festivals rely on selection viewers who have nothing whatsoever to do with filmmaking. One Academy-accredited festival I won't name uses a law student, a political science professor, a couple folks who've worked on corporate videos, and someone who blogs about her diets and would love to write a screenplay someday. Seriously. How woefully disrespectful of our hard work and submission fees.

But most festivals care, and do it right.

FA: *What festivals stood out for you so far, as being on par with your expectations or above your expectations?*

GC: I could say something great about each of them so far. All the festival directors I've met and spoken with are wonderfully passionate about what they do, and just want to help the filmmakers and to bring new films to eager audiences. Love them.

The folks at the Action On Film Int'l Film Festival stood out for going out of their way to help promote films and filmmakers — even the shorts, which not all fests do. They do local tv interviews with filmmakers weeks before the fest, which they edit and give you to use. And if you win an award, they do a live reporter interview with you fresh off the podium, which they also give you. (The interview, not the podium.) Del Weston really makes you feel welcome, from the moment they receive your submission to long after the festival's over.

The Central Florida Film Festival was also wonderfully organized. As you arrive at the official hotel, you're knee deep in the festival: a flatscreen tv in the lobby is playing trailers for the features and shorts 24 hours a day, there are social/networking events every night, and posters advertising films are constantly projected onscreen between screenings. Bob and Ginger Cook are ever-present and there to help.

I especially love the fests that do Q&As for shorts. Few do. It's wonderful for both the filmmakers and the audiences. I've gotten something major out of every one I've done and seen.

FA: *What's next for THE BUNGLERS?*

GC: The great Boston Film Festival is up next: Sept 20-24. I'm so honored that my film is playing on closing night — one of just three shorts to do so. Plus, it's my onetime hometown, so I'm excited as hell to go back. Also this weekend is a festival we were invited to on the spot without submitting, when the festival director saw us at Action On Film: the Movieville Int'l. Film Festival in Sarasota, FL.



Then it's the [Ft. Lauderdale Int'l. Film Festival](#) in October (Florida, that's fest #3, we love you too!), and Costa Rica Int'l. Film Festival in November. That's our 10th festival, not including a few we were finalists with but didn't screen at. And we're still waiting to hear from a few more.

All screening details at <http://www.thebunglersmovie.com/screenings>.