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SIMON PEGG THANDI NEWTON HANKAZARIA



**RUN
FATBOY
RUN**



PICTUREHOUSE AND ENTERTAINMENT FILMS PRESENT A NATIONAL ENTERTAINMENT PRODUCTION "RUN FAT BOY RUN" SIMON PEGG THANDI NEWTON HANK AZARIA
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JACQUE BARBARA GREATHEX JOE CATLY LERO JESS NEE GREEN DANIELA GALAND WOL POTTWES MARTHA COLLEMAN JESS JOSEPH INFANTOLINO ALEXA L. FUSSEL
ROBERT JONES SARAH COOPER MICHAEL VAN BLACK MICHAEL VAN BLACK SIMON PEGG DAVID SCHAFER

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PRODUCTION NOTES

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

RUN, FAT BOY, RUN originated from the prolific comedic imagination of Chicago-born writer-actor-director Michael Ian Black, well known to audiences for his work in MTV's THE STATE, Comedy Central's RENO 911!, and the films WET HOT AMERICAN SUMMER and THE TEN. The script then came to the attention of David Schwimmer, who was looking for potential material for his big-screen directorial debut. "I'd read so, so many scripts, but this was the first one which made me laugh out loud all the way through and which genuinely moved me," says Schwimmer.

Though the script was originally set in New York City, around that metropolis's famed marathon, once the London-based Material Entertainment—a newly formed joint venture between New Line Cinema and UK distributor Entertainment Film Distributors—became determined to make the film, RUN, FAT BOY, RUN was transplanted to Britain.

"We're based in the UK and are keen to bring something to the party in terms of subject matter, talent, or location that differentiates our films in some way," explains Producer Robert Jones. "Relocating this particular script to London seemed to suite the material very well."

The result is a story that found itself in translation: a modern-day romance in the tradition of ABOUT A BOY, HIGH FIDELITY, and FOUR WEDDINGS AND A FUNERAL set on the streets of London, featuring an international team of comedy all-stars including Simon Pegg from SHAUN OF THE DEAD and HOT FUZZ, Hank Azaria from THE SIMPSONS and HUFF, acclaimed actress Thandie Newton, and cameos from THE OFFICE'S co-creator Stephen Merchant and LITTLE BRITAIN'S David Walliams.

"When the producers suggested Simon Pegg as the lead, I was thrilled. And everything kind of fell into place from there," says Schwimmer. "We were able to get so much great talent from London, now it's hard for me to imagine the film being set anywhere else."

BRITISH PASSPORT

Once the decision was made to relocate the story from New York to London, the producers knew they needed an exceptional comedy writer to ground the story, characters, and yuks in their new locale. Fortunately, in Simon Pegg, they were graced with a leading man who is also an expert comedy scribe, having co-written SHAUN OF THE DEAD, HOT FUZZ and the hit British television series SPACED.

"It was a very good first draft," says Pegg, "and a joy to work on because it was all pretty much already there. We had to go over it very carefully but it was basically just a question of culturally pulling it over here and changing a few other bits and bobs." Pegg laughs as he explains how he used the rewrite to set the film in his favorite part of London: "I specifically set it in North London and the locations manager pushed it slightly east. This time last year I

was on the Isle of Man, so I'm very happy to be working on my doorstep. This is my manor, it's great."

The final script was everything the filmmakers hoped to accomplish. "God knows how much Simon sweats at home, but he makes it all look very easy," says Jones. "Michael's original script had huge heart and a lot of laughs and Simon added more humor, more emotion, and gave the characters their British passport."

LONDON CALLING

"In many ways this is an incredibly ambitious film," says Jones. "Location after location. We were determined to capture the capital in all its glory."

Equally satisfying as a romantic comedy and an idyllic, architecturally dazzling London travelogue, the RUN, FAT BOY, RUN shoot encompassed some 52 different locations in 37 days, unobtrusively capturing such heady spots as Waterloo Bridge, St. Paul's Cathedral, and the Millennium Bridge. Despite the production's relatively low budget, the filmmakers were keen to take advantage of all the opportunities Britain's capital city has to offer, to cover as much ground as possible (a marathon is 26 miles, after all), and make the film feel as authentic to the region as possible.

"I've never done a job with so much paperwork in my life," laughs location manager Ben Greenacre. "I had my own location coordinator who has been working flat out as many hours a day as the people on-set, just dealing with paperwork." That said, Greenacre is quick to note how much support the production received throughout the city, including some of London's major tourist attractions: "We shot outside the Lord Mayor's building at Tower Bridge. That was a big site, but people have been very kind to us and very organized wherever we went."

If it seemed like an unusual decision to shoot a mostly exterior-based U.K. production during the gloomy months of November and December, the shoot was lucky to avoid most adverse weather conditions. And, as the production progressed, it became apparent that London itself was becoming something of a lead character in the film. "We talked about films that create a real sense of vibrancy and community and we went looking for an area where you could really get a feel for people," Jones explains. "We wanted somewhere where you could feel a bit more of a close-knit community and some energy in the street and we found that in and around Columbia Road and Shoreditch."

The strength of the material, combined with the involvement of Schwimmer and Pegg and the attractive location shoot drew some top technical talent to the film. Among those are Academy Award®-nominated director of photography Richard Greatrex (SHAKESPEARE IN LOVE), who had worked with Schwimmer, Pegg, and producer Sarah Curtis on previous film shoots. "Not only is he creative and clever but he's also extremely fast, which was obviously wonderful for us in

terms of getting us in and out of high-traffic locations quickly,” praises Curtis of their D.P. Rounding out the crew are production designer Sophie Becher and costume designer Annie Hardinge. Becher had worked with Schwimmer and Pegg on their buddy comedy *BIG NOTHING*, and Hardinge developed a strong relationship with Pegg over several productions, including *HOT FUZZ*.

Great screen comedy never rests solely on the shoulders of a strong script or inspired playing: it is also rooted in the flair of a film’s technical talent. Curtis highlights one of her favorite scenes from *RUN, FAT BOY, RUN*, used as the film’s hilarious teaser, which she credits to Hardinge: “Dennis stumbles out of his flat for his first run in the morning and he’s put his gear together through whatever he’s been able to find. It’s a lovely, funny moment. It’s just a ‘reveal’ but you think: ‘Perfect!, that’s what a man looks like who doesn’t have any running gear and has decided to go running for the first time.’ It’s a real talent, I think, to design costumes that can get a laugh, and not an easy laugh.”

TRAGEDY, PLUS TIME, PLUS RUNNING SHOES

“It’s sort of a sad story,” says BAFTA-winning actress Thandie Newton, who portrays Libby, the steadfast woman left waiting at the altar by Dennis. “But that’s comedy—tragedy plus time.”

If *RUN, FAT BOY, RUN* began its life as a broadly funny romantic comedy, from the moment Schwimmer and Pegg took on the adaptation, the production became determined to explore a greater depth of emotionality by establishing real, strong, believable characters. The result is the latest in a new model of romantic comedy, recently dubbed the “slacker-striver romance” by David Denby in *The New Yorker*, which includes films like *HIGH FIDELITY*, *ABOUT A BOY*, *FEVER PITCH*, and *KNOCKED UP*, in which a resolutely immature young(ish) man must leave childish ways behind and prove his worth to a woman more successful and ambitious than himself.

“I think all good comedy comes from character,” says Jones. “You can cite films that are surface funny but I think in a sense they can only do that for so long. If you want an audience to be invested in laughing, they have to be invested in the characters.”

Says Newton, whose dramatic turns include Paul Haggis’s Academy Award®-winning *CRASH*, Jonathan Demme’s *BELOVED*, and Bernardo Bertolucci’s *BESIEGED*, “I think David wanted to base it in reality so that the emotion—and included in that is laughter—comes from a place where you really care about these people and believe what they’re going through. I’ve come to realize that comedy is like earnestly-played, believable drama.”

PEGGED FOR STARDOM

“*RUN, FAT BOY, RUN* opens with a man running out on his pregnant fiancée on their wedding day,” says Jones. “That’s a pretty risky move for a lead character and there aren’t many actors

who could pull it off. If you lose the audience at that point it's going to be tough to win them back.”

Needless to say, the filmmakers needed an actor with just the right combination of qualities to make Dennis a likeable, empathetic figure, despite some of his more unattractive actions. Director David Schwimmer, who had recently worked with Pegg on the feature *BIG NOTHING*, was thrilled with the idea of casting the actor as his lead. “Simon has fantastic appeal because he’s got this everyman kind of quality about him that’s immensely likeable and relatable. I really admire his ability to go seamlessly from a very light moment to a very grounded, dramatic or emotional moment.”

If Pegg showed satirically brilliant chops in director Edgar Wright’s British imports—the rom-com-zom *SHAUN OF THE DEAD*, and the recent school-of-Bruckheimer spoof *HOT FUZZ—RUN, FAT BOY, RUN* marks his emergence as a full-fledged leading everyman.

Although the role of Libby may at first seem something of a departure for Newton, Pegg is quick to commend the actress for the warmth and humor she brought to the role, “She’s loads of fun and very down-to-earth; she’s a hoot.” Producer Jones, too, has nothing but praise for Newton’s contribution: “In a funny way, this film shows us a side of Thandie that hasn’t been seen as much as her work in more serious dramatic fare. She’s naturally very witty, and brings a real warmth to the role.”

For the role of Whit, Dennis’s smarmy romantic rival, the filmmakers cast Hank Azaria, celebrated for his work on television’s *HUFF*, Broadway’s *SPAMALOT*, and perhaps best-known for his vocal performances of a cornucopia of Springfield residents on *THE SIMPSONS*. “I’m a huge *SIMPSONS* fan and very aware of Hank from everything he’s done,” says Pegg. “He was up for it, read the script, liked it, and we worked a bit on Whit together to come up with a characterization he was happy with.” Says Azaria, who brings a sly, high-flying master-of-the-universe zeal to the role, “I thought the script was great and it seemed like a fun thing to do. Shooting this has been a nice little tour of London.” For that tour of London, Azaria & Co. needed look no further than one of the production’s most dramatic locations: Whit’s penthouse apartment, a tower of glass and steel 31 floors above the center of London, a convulsive bit of real estate porn that tells you everything you need to know about Whit and is the setting for one of the picture’s key plot hinges.

Complementing a cast bench already deep with comedic talent, the role of Dennis’s best friend, Gordon, was filled by accomplished comic actor Dylan Moran. Moran, who was memorably disemboweled by zombies in Pegg’s *SHAUN OF THE DEAD*, was keen to work with the writer-actor again on his new comedy. “I really love Dylan as a comedian,” says Pegg. “He’s got a brilliant turn of phrase, a wonderful sort of lyricalness to his comedy which is inspiring and inspired. It’s always a joy to work with him.”

Perhaps the most unexpected comic turn came from the youngest member of the cast: seven-year-old newcomer Matthew Fenton, who plays Jake, Dennis and Libby's son. "Matthew's so natural and unfiltered and wonderfully responsive," says Schwimmer, praising the work of the non-professional young actor. "He really listens and takes direction well. Some of the best lines in the movie he came up with himself! He's an amazing young actor."

Agrees Newton of her pint-sized co-star: "You just fall madly in love with Matthew. He's this little imp, and incredibly thoughtful and sensible, but still just crazy delightful and all the wonderful things about childhood."

RUN, FAT BOY, RUN is also graced with cameos from a number of British comedy all-stars including LITTLE BRITAIN'S David Walliams and Stephen Merchant, co-creator of THE OFFICE and co-writer and co-star of EXTRAS.

"I was asked by Simon to do three lines in another of his films and he was obviously very pleased with that, as he's asked me once again to come along to do a few lines," jokes Merchant. "My hope is that if I can do a few lines with him in a few more films, perhaps one day he'll allow me to do an entire scene." On closer perusal of the script, however, the towering Merchant grows amusingly dissatisfied, "I was rather disappointed to find that there is a character described as 'lanky nerd.' I felt I really should have been a shoo-in for that but I'm merely playing 'man.'"

This group of actors combined to generate the perfect atmosphere to realize the script's full comic potential. "I'm very lucky," says Schwimmer. "We have some ridiculously funny actors in this; and the film's got heart, too, thanks to Thandie and Simon's soulful performances."

BRITISH HEART & SOLE

In very subtle ways, RUN, FAT BOY, RUN begins with smaller, two-character scenes between Dennis and Libby, then gradually expands to encompass larger, more impressive views of London, as the story extends to focus on the city's marathon.

From Buster Keaton in SEVEN CHANCES to Harold Lloyd in THE FRESHMAN to Woody Allen at the end of MANHATTAN, comic greats have often found themselves running in their films to prove their romantic worth. Schwimmer summarizes Dennis's transformation from schlub to sprinter as it applies to RUN, FAT BOY, RUN: "The marathon becomes a metaphor for Dennis becoming a man and leaving adolescence; for coming into himself—having confidence in himself again, reclaiming his self-worth."

It was Schwimmer who was insistent on maintaining the picture's delicate balance between the comic and underlying dramatic elements of the story, and the cast is quick to commend his efforts. "David is very intuitive and very helpful," says Pegg. "He'll often come up and say

something you hadn't thought of and it will enable you to do the scene better, so it's really handy to have a director who knows what it is to be an actor."

Adds Newton: "He's a real visualist as well as being completely in touch with the characters. His attention to detail is amazing. You play a scene a few times and he'll come and give you a note that summarizes exactly what the character is thinking about or her motivation, in a sentence."

"I've worked with some directors who are terrific with actors, and others who just don't have the right vocabulary or sensitivity," explains Schwimmer. "There's no one way to speak to an actor, because every actor has his or her own process. The key thing is to listen to them and establish trust. My job is to create an environment in which they feel safe to play, to experiment--even to fail, and for it to be okay. I also try to give actors objectives; keep them active, remind them what they want--right now--in this moment."

If Schwimmer proved expert at rooting out the motivation of every scene, every beat, it was equally important to him to generate good vibes on the set. "It's important to me to have fun and make sure everyone else is having a good time," the director says. "I wanted to have the time of my life and made it very clear to the producers and everyone on the crew that the work process and tone of the set was really important to me. I worked with a director once who screamed at a prop assistant in front of everyone--a really ugly moment. This is just so unproductive--and worse sucks all the comedy and good will out of the rest of the crew and your actors. Who feels funny after that?"

Schwimmer warrants praise from his producers, too, for his technical and visual command. "David has a great instinct for actors and a great instinct for comedy," says Jones. "But, equally important, his visual sense and connection to the more technical aspects of filmmaking are very much in evidence. He gives equal attention and weight to all the departments, is extremely well prepared and capable of thinking on his feet."

The fact that Schwimmer isn't a London native also allowed him to envision each new location with a fresh perspective. Newton, who is based in the north of the city, welcomes the opportunity to re-discover different aspects of the city through her director's eyes. "I think that's the great thing about having a director who's not from a place where the film is set," says Newton. "They can almost introduce you to somewhere you thought you knew so well and take for granted."

Says Jones of Schwimmer's clean, unobtrusive visual palette, "Sometimes it takes an outsider to come here and look at a place in a way Londoners don't."