

A circus on the big screen



Cirque du Soleil's dramatics have been captured in new 3D film *Worlds Away*. But how do you make a film with no plot? **Rob Garratt** asks director **Andrew Adamson**

Andrew Adamson had more than his fair share of reservations when he was asked to direct a film based on Cirque du Soleil's live Las Vegas shows. Best known for directing the first two *Shrek* movies, and the first two films in the *Narnia* series, Adamson knows what goes into crafting a blockbuster. And trying to turn clips of a circus stage show into a cinema hit wasn't top of his to-do list.

'They asked me what I thought of doing a 3D film based on the Las

International Film Festival, where a day later a very large audience does go to see his surreal film's regional premiere. 'It became a really interesting challenge, and that's why I like making films: you go to interesting places and do interesting things.'

The 'interesting place' here was Las Vegas, where renowned Canadian theatre brand Cirque du Soleil currently hosts seven of its dramatic live shows. Adamson, a 46-year-old New Zealand native, assembled his

stunts, with the romance of a love story set to Beatles songs. It's certainly a left turn for a director best known for making kids laugh at CGI slapstick.

'I finished *Prince Caspian* [in 2008] and I'd done a series of bigger and bigger films, and I found myself re-evaluating [my career],' explains Adamson. 'I fell into [filmmaking] and enjoyed it, but I found myself asking why. I realised it's actually the process. I count myself in the fortunate position of not just going, "what's next?," but "why would I make it?". There are a lot of scripts where you say, "I would see that film, but why would I spend three years making it?"'

Adamson's first foray into the third dimension was assisted by the best: James Cameron, director of the best-grossing film ever, *Avatar*: and now the 3D in *Worlds Away* is being favourably compared to that sci-fi mega-film.

As executive producer, Cameron was on hand to lend all sorts of technical wizardry. 'We bonded immediately,' says Adamson. 'We're both geeks, so that helped. James has spent a long time figuring out how to shoot in 3D, what kind of cameras to use in what situations, and it allowed me to get up to speed very, very quickly. For him it was a challenge to come in and shoot, without having the responsibility or the time involved with finishing the film.'

To give the movie any kind of narrative thread, it was necessary to

cast a single actress in the lead role, who was then tasked with learning all the shows on which the film was based. The producers approached Erica Linz, an acrobat rather than an actress with no other film credits, but a ten-year veteran of the Cirque team. The daughter of a juggler (father) and a clown (mother), Linz literally 'ran away to join circus', flying out to audition in Vegas the day after she finished high school. 'I think it's the most terrifying thing any daughter can do,' Linz tells us. 'I was performing in Las Vegas two months after graduating. My parents had to deal with the fact I was doing something perilously dangerous, in "sin city". Fortunately it all worked out.'

Linz's character, Mia, has just four words of dialogue in the entire film. It's a reminder for Adamson of how different this is to his previous work. But the director is confident he doesn't need a plot to touch an audience. 'It's a lot about spectacle,' he adds. 'It was about creating a story that sometimes had a narrative pull, sometimes an emotional pull, and other times just to be of, and be in, a moment. Sometimes it was just about letting the audience sit in an emotional state, which is no different to what you do in a conventional film.'

Cirque du Soleil: Worlds Away is released on Thursday December 27. Read our review on the opposite page.

'They asked me what I thought of doing a 3D film based on the Las Vegas shows. I said it sounded like a terrible idea'

Vegas shows,' remembers Adamson, 'I said it sounded like a terrible idea. Why would you do that?' [Laughs]

But then he got to thinking. 'So I thought: if I think of Cirque as a dream, and allow a dreamlike reality, I can make a surreal film. Would an audience go to see a surreal film?' he muses. He's speaking to us at Dubai

script by filming set pieces from each of the shows in jaw-dropping 3D, splicing the scenes into a vague narrative that has less than a dozen words of dialogue. After 18 months in the editing suite a film emerged that is neither a documentary nor a conventional plot-based story. Instead it's a sensory showcase of dramatic

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