



<https://www.filmandtvnow.com/interview-special-gerald-webb-tack/>

With Film and TV Production hanging in the balance, it is always inspiring to hear of somebody's own initiative and inventiveness winning through to create something that will certainly endure and demonstrate their clear and evident talent.

The brand-new short \$TACK\$ takes a familiar style of filmmaking to create a very funny pay-off. Additionally, it is amazing how something was conceived so quickly.

Film And TV Now was delighted to speak with director Gerald Webb about the project – and he also shared some pointers about how to create and make films during these challenging times.

FILM AND TV NOW: This is a very ingenious short which takes the tradition of a gang warfare narrative and subverts it to deliver a very honest and real message at the end, both in the short and the song DROPPING DEUCES. How long did it take to put together?

GERALD WEBB: We had to be super quick because I was pretty sure a mandatory quarantine was going to be ordered any day. Basically, from conception to completion of principle photography was a 63-hour window. I got the idea for the story around 11pm on Saturday night and quickly wrote the script.

Slept for 4 hours, the whole time my brain churning with ideas. I woke up at 5am, did a round of revisions to the script and sent it to Mark Christopher Lawrence to read. By 10am he got back to me and asked, "when are we shooting?" Over the next few hours I made calls and put our mini crew in place starting with the DP, Thomas Hennessy.

Next were calls to an amazing cast of actors, all of who I had worked with previously. Monday was spent confirming our location, securing props, craft services, remotely viewing wardrobe photos etc. We shot that Tuesday night. We wrapped at 2am Wednesday morning and L.A. went into quarantine 46 hours later.

We slowed down a bit for post-production which took 5.5 weeks with everyone working part time and remotely from home.



FTVN: During the end credits there is a caption that talks of how the crew worked within key COVID-19 Health and Safety guidelines. Given the state of production at the moment as it has effectively been shut down, although there are reports that production has resumed with stringent conditions, what pointers could you give other filmmakers and people who want to make films in this period of enforced lockdown?

GW: I was fanatical about having hand sanitizer readily available, access to hand washing, pre-cleaning all common touch surfaces etc. I went thorough and cleaned our entire location myself a few hours before our call time than had crew members clean doorknobs, elevator buttons etc every hour or so. All of our crafty was individually wrapped food and snacks. Lunch was individually packaged meals.



Mark Christopher Lawrence said when he got to the building, he hit the elevator button and was dismayed to find out it was wet. Then a second later he realized it was probably Lysol from the smell!

On **\$STACKS** we actually had a star name cast member who called me the day before we were filming and said he had woken up feel out of sorts but had hoped it would pass. Unfortunately, as the day went on he developed a slight cough and while he felt he could get through the shoot, I had to make the responsible choice to recast in order to protect him and the entire cast and crew.

The good news is he fine and it wasn't Covid related and our cast and crew were all kept safe.

For other filmmakers, here are some things I'd suggest:

1. **You take it seriously. Make sure everyone on your crew takes it seriously. If anyone doesn't replace them.**
2. **Have a formal set of health and safety guidelines. Make sure each cast and crew member get a copy and acknowledges they will follow the guidelines.**
3. **Have a dedicated sanitizing crew member(s) whose sole job is to keep common areas super sanitized and to remind people to practice good use of PPE.**
4. **Only have individually packaged food and crafty items on site. No buffet style meals or snacks.**
5. **Every hour rotate your cast and crew for quick trips to wash their hands.**
6. **Plan for delays due to implementing and maintaining Covid preventive practices.**
7. **Err on the side of caution and always make the tough decisions in favor of safety. This sounds easy but I guarantee your resolve will be tested sooner than you think.**
8. **As much as possible segregate your team members and limit the size of interacting groups as a way to limit as much potential cross contamination as you can between set, base camp, etc.**

This list will continue to grow.

FTVN: Tell us about your cast.

GW: I think their performance speak for themselves.

The Emmy winning Diahnna Nicole Baxter who plays bosschick Magdalena is just plain fierce. She and I played husband and wife in the feature **A HOUSE IS NOT A HOME** and had the most real and raw argument on screen I've ever been a part of. Crew members came running to set thinking we had an actual fight! She was my first choice for Magdalena and didn't disappoint.

Mark Christopher Lawrence is the most under used talent in L.A. He's been a series regular on 4 or 5 shows and has been in classic movies like Fear of a Black Hat, Pursuit of Happyness and his stand-up clips get millions of views. Most people see him as a great comedic actor but I think he's an even better dramatic actor. The power dynamic between him and Diahnna was exactly what I saw when writing. Their performances real give the feel of a long and complicated history in every moment they are on screen together.

Calvin Winbush plays Ty and just has a great natural feel and casualness in his performances. His stillness and grounding really helped ramp up the tension in the film.

Tarnue Massaquoi and I took acting classes together years ago. As Reub he brought an intensity that really raised the stakes right from the start of the film. You sense his worry and it can't help but make you wonder and worry yourself.

Jadarrel Belser quietly matched Tarnue's intensity. His no-nonsense, everything is cool- unless you screw it up, demeanor also really pushed the tension for the audience. With one word, you knew he was all about business.

Jamie Burton-Oare brought a raw and unrefined quality to the character of Jordan. That rawness was a wildcard and also kept the audience on edge. She and I played husband and wife in a play 7 or 8 years ago.

FTVN: Tell us about your production team.

GW: We had a skeleton production team for two reasons:

1. We shot this on a pocket change budget with almost everyone volunteering their time because they believed in the project. For which I am forever grateful.
2. We wrapped shooting just 46 hours prior to L.A. County's "Safer at Home" quarantine decree going into effect. We wanted to be responsible by limiting our total crew size and some people that normally would have jumped in had already gone into isolation.



Let's be clear this was a bunch of very talented people who generously loaned me their time and talent to collectively create **\$TACK\$**. Besides me, the crew consisted of the DP (Thomas Hennessy), the 1st AC/focus puller/still photographer (Kasee Shambora), the one man grip electric team and camera assistant (Curtis Davis), the sound mixer (Alex Hutchinson), catering set up, lock downs, etc. were handled by an associate producer (Meredith Thomas) and we had one production assistant (Yolanda Edme).

Offsite in Buffalo, NY the production coordinator (Sam Qualiana) helped prep the call sheet and other details in our super quick pre-production. With the exception of Yolanda, I've worked with every one of these crew members numerous times but usually with all of us filling other positions. Notice: no 1st ad, no 2nd ad, a 1 man G&E team, 2 man Camera team, no vanities etc. Everyone was pulling double and triple duty.

For post we added several members, who all worked remotely: editor and post supervisor (Jeff Murphy), the composer and VFX artist (Knappy) in Delaware and the music video editor (Ken Prieto) and Public Relations by Catherine Lyn Scott for London Flair Public Relations.

It was the first time I chose to direct a film (not counting b-unit directing on a few previous movies), one key thing for me was to make sure working on **\$TACK\$** was also an opportunity for each of the crew members that

graciously offered to help me out. For example, Thomas the DP loves the crime genre but rarely gets to DP that type of shot. Curtis generally works as a 1st AC but is transitioning to grip work and welcomed the opportunity to switch positions on **\$TACK\$**.

FTVN: The music plays a vital part in the film. Tell us about your working relationship with Knappy.

GW: Knappy and I go back 20+ years. We've worked on countless projects together during that time. Long ago we were in a rap group together called 1 A.D., I was a groomsman at his wedding and he did the score for our film **A HOUSE IS NOT A HOME**.

He's a great music producer and his remixes for major artists have topped the Billboard dance charts. Because of our long history, it's really easy to communicate my artistic thoughts to Knappy. I also know he's going to elevate what I communicate to him and ultimately make the project better. It's really rewarding to be able to work with old friends and give them an opportunity to shine and showcase their work.

In the end I benefitted more than I gave! Knappy did a great job on the score and on the song **DROPPING DEUCES**. He also did the visual effects for the film. And if you didn't think there were any VFX in the film, it's because Knappy did such a great job with them.

FTVN: The film is getting an online premiere on YouTube and other platforms. What are your hopes for the short and song in terms of your objectives and where you want it to play?

GW: I've already won. **\$TACK\$** came out better than I could have ever hoped my first project as director and writer would turn out. It's a film I can show anyone and be proud of it. I just wanted to get it out there during this critical time in our history for audiences, people and our society to hopefully be impacted by. I'm open and curious as to how far and wide it could reach, only time will tell.



It will definitely have a festival life whenever we can have film festivals again. I also hope it will open doors to more projects as a director possibly opportunities with some of network and studio's director development programs.

Dropping Deuce was really an after-thought. As we were waiting for edits and revisions, Knappy sent over a beat he thought might work over the credit sequence. I listened to it on loop and got the idea for a crazy rap song. I started writing to the beat and thought my ability to rap had disappeared!

The track was about 130 beats per minute and I just couldn't rap fast enough. I took a break (and almost gave up) to look at a tutorial for creating specialty shots with a gimbal and came across a music video that was completely shot on the pocket Osmo gimbal. I loved the beat from the song and it was much slower at 90ish beats per minute.

I started writing dropping deuces over that beat and the verse just flowed out effortlessly. I recorded a rough vocal and sent it to Knappy who then produced the beat for Dropping Deuces which is a much better fit what I was able to write. The song is built for the internet for people to have a quick chuckle at and hopefully share with their friends so add it to your Spotify playlists!

FTVN: How long did it take to shoot?

GW: Our one shoot day was 7.5 hours from call time to wrap.

FTVN: The film does have the basis for a feature length parody in the tradition of **I'M GONNA GIT YOU SUCKA'** which parodied the Blaxploitation films like **SHAFT** and **COFFY**. Is this something you would like to do as a follow-on feature if all gets back to a more reasonable way of production?

GW: **I'M GONNA GIT YOU SUCKA'** is one of my favorites. There are scenes in that movie that are flat out hysterical and there is definitely some Antonio Fargas inspiration in the **DROPPING DEUCES** music video performance! I'm flattered by the comparison though I feel like the films are fundamentally different from one another. At its core, **\$STACK\$** is a drama while **I'M GONNA GIT YOU SUCKA'** is a comedy. Their similarity is that they both make strong social statements.

But I do have an idea for a spoof movie that involves hip hop, poking fun at classic urban films with some major modern twists. It's not really a feature length version of **\$STACK\$** but Hector, Magdalena and the gang would definitely make an appearance.

I've also thought about doing four other short films and packaging them with **\$STACK\$** and the **DROPPING DEUCES** video as stand-alone episodes in a variety style web series. At least two of the episodes would be animated including one retelling a true a greatly exaggerated story of my cousin getting a well-deserved whooping in the 1980s called The Ballad of Stephanie Parks and the second retelling a crank call I made imitating Ving Rhames to a writer friend.



FTVN: Given that films and television are even more important in terms of helping people and keeping them entertained through lock-down, what are the most important things for you when you are creating work like this short and the music video?

GW: In the past I've worked on a lot of formulaic projects like Christmas films, sci-fi films, MOW thrillers etc. all of which have a place as an escape for audiences. But as a director the most important thing for me is: what is the base message behind the project and how can I guide, mentor, compel or even manipulate the audience to see, feel, experience and hopefully embrace that central message.

\$STACK\$, at its core, is a film that allows me to hold a mirror up to every viewer and every member of our society offering them the opportunity to see the best and the worst in themselves.

Making films is not easy so I want something that on a base level compels me to keep pushing through the tough times and to continue striving for ways to have it connect for the audience. Our world learns so much through art. I have a sincere reverence for the gateway art can be to communication and understanding on an interpersonal level as well as on a grand scale.

To me that is the director's most sacred duty and partly why I was scared of directing for so long.

FTVN: Overall, how are you and your production team coping with the lock-down in general?

GW: Everyone is restless and worried about their finances, health and when we can all get back to normal. But overall, they all seem in fairly good spirits. My sleep was completely jacked up for two months and just recently got back to normal.

Having **\$TACK\$** to work on actually kept me busy and a bit distracted in a good way during this quarantine. In a way I feel exhausted from all of the work on the film but at the same time I've been cooped up at home for two months and just want to get back to work, see some friends and go to a restaurant after wrap.

Most of the team has done something to keep busy but I can sense a tenseness and worry eating at most of them.

FTVN: Finally, what are you most proud of about the film?

GW: I'm proud of everyone's contributions to the film. From the actors to the DP to the editor and Knappy, everyone across the board. They all really did a fantastic job and the film greatly benefitted from each of their contributions.

In addition, I'm happy that the underlying message I intended for the film is connecting with audiences. It's hard to get people to watch short films but when we can get someone to watch **\$TACK\$** they are all taken by the drama and unexpected consequences of the film. I think that's the whole point.

John Higgins

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