

JARRED COATES

CREATIVITY WITH A PURPOSE



Jarred Coates, partner in both Hollywood Trucks and *Scene* magazine and owner of Red Entertainment Group, took an unconventional route to his current career. Like many others at Celtic Media Centre, he is a Baton Rouge native. He graduated from Trafton Academy (now the Dunham School) in 1988 and received a degree in general studies from LSU in 1992.

While at LSU, he met Rusty Domingue, a former LSU football player who was then leading a Christian student group. Coates' experience with Domingue's group – including travels to Russia, Uganda, Peru, and Rwanda to serve on missions – had a lasting, profound influence on his life. After graduating from LSU, he taught at Baton Rouge's Christian Life Academy and, ultimately, served as a pastor in Memphis, Tenn., for three years and worked with inmates in Monroe, La., for three years.

Always on the back burner was an interest in telling stories on film. His experiences led him in 2003 to pursue a film degree at Full Sail, a highly regarded film school in Orlando, Fla. For his final project, Coates produced and directed the film *City of Refuge*. The film's title refers to an

Old Testament place of refuge for those who had committed major transgressions, had repented, and who were seeking refuge from the vengeance of those against whom they had transgressed. Coates used the concept to tell the story of one such transgressor in modern times who found that the refuge he sought was not in the "city of refuge" itself. This project won Coates the highest award that Full Sail offers, the Course Director's Award for Film Production, as well as the Salutatorian Award and the Advanced Achievement Award.

Since returning to Baton Rouge, Coates, through his company Red Entertainment, has produced a number of commercial and corporate videos, documentaries, and films. Among his recent work is the feature film, *Inventing Adam*, a romantic comedy filmed mostly on location in St. Francisville, La. Another is a project for *Vanity Fair* featuring Robert Pattinson that Coates coordinated with celebrated photographer Annie Leibovitz.

The work he most enjoys however, is making family-oriented movies. During summer 2012, he was a producer and unit production manager for *Christmas Angel*, a film featuring Della Reese, in Hammond, La. (See more about the making of *Christmas Angel* on the following page.) "If I had the money to do whatever I wanted," he commented, "I would make family films full time."

Budgets are always an issue, but his connections in the film industry help Coates to negotiate with companies to bring down the cost of his productions. He stressed that this

strategy works at all levels in the industry. "Networking is an important facet of this industry," he explained. "Everybody works together, sometimes working for less than they would normally charge because they're between big projects. For young people trying to break into the film industry, that's the best strategy: Work for free or for very little on your first project so people get to know you. If you do a good job, you'll continue to get work. The more connections you make, the more work you'll have. The more experience you have, the more money you'll make. That's the way the industry works."



Jarred Coates | Photo by Nick Arnold/Check the Gate Production

Coates also serves on the Baton Rouge Film Commission Advisory Board, helping to put into place policies that benefit both the community and the industry. In fact, he is a strong advocate for giving back to the community, perhaps a reflection of the Christian faith that informs all of his work. He has helped to establish internships, job placements, and "shadow" programs through connections with area schools, including St. Joseph's Academy, Zachary High, and Baton Rouge Community College.

Though his path to this particular career followed an unusual course, Jarred Coates brings all of his experiences and high ideals full circle back to his hometown, thanks to a growing film industry right here in his own backyard.

“While *Scene* appeals to any reader interested in entertainment, each issue is carefully crafted to appeal to entertainment professionals as well,” Haley commented. “Combined with strategically targeted circulation, we’re able to reach a unique demographic for our advertisers that includes decision makers in both Louisiana and Los Angeles.”

As editor-in-chief, Haley has interviewed a number of top film stars. Among the well-known entertainers that *Scene* magazine has featured, one of the most memorable was Matthew McConaughey. “He was amazing. He tracked us down,” Haley recalled. “While filming *Killer Joe* on the lot at Second Line Stages in New Orleans, he saw an issue of *Scene* magazine and began calling us himself. We didn’t believe it was him. He left a voicemail, and we thought it was fake. He started texting us and we still thought it was one of our office neighbors at Second Line playing a joke on us. Finally, we agreed to meet with him for an interview, and I called his publicist to see if it was actually him. It was. And he gave the most open, heartfelt interview. He genuinely loves making movies here. Since that time last year, he has shot *The Paperboy* here and will soon shoot the new HBO television series *True Detective* here as well.”

Experiences such as that one are among the reasons Haley is happy that he was able to remain in Louisiana and still pursue his dreams. He also sees the industry as a way to keep future talented young people from leaving the state. “When I was in high school, and then at LSU, I routinely heard about ‘brain drain,’ young minds leaving Louisiana for jobs elsewhere,” Haley said. “And make no mistake, I was preparing myself to leave for Los Angeles. Now, entertainment means employment.”

For Haley himself, the industry is about more than employment; it’s also about continuing to learn and grow, yet another aspect that future graduates will surely embrace. “My professional guide has always been to look for the place where I can learn the most, and I have already learned so much from professionals working at the top of their game,” he concluded. “What other job would allow me to call up a successful producer and set a meeting to pick his brain about how to make great movies?”



MAKING MOVIES ON LOCATION IN SOUTH LOUISIANA

By Brenda Macon | Photo by Nick Arnold, Check the Gate Productions

Louisiana locations are becoming popular with film production companies for a variety of reasons: the state’s unique culture and landscape, attractive tax incentives, and the hospitality of the people, to name just a few.

During spring and summer 2012, Hammond, La., was the site for several movie productions, including Check the Gate Productions’ film *Christmas Angel*. This family-oriented film features Della Reese, Teri Polo, and Kevin Sorbo in principal roles, but also includes a number of Louisiana actors, many of them children. Not only does the production employ the talents of Louisiana actors but it also has the imprint of several talented Louisiana residents behind the camera.

Producer and local casting director Lisa Arnold, who owns Check the Gate Productions and who has a number of films to her credit, resides in Covington, La. Her son, Nick Arnold, who is a May 2012 LSU communications studies graduate, worked for Check the Gate this summer to coordinate the 150 or so extras for the film. Another LSU graduate, Jarred Coates (see page 37), as producer and unit production manager for the film and owner of Red Entertainment, brought his considerable talents and experience to bear in helping to create just the right atmosphere for filming. Additionally, local residents provided meals and lodging and technical support for the cast and crew.

Lisa Arnold, who is originally from Georgia, has become an advocate for filming in Louisiana. Previously, she produced the film *Letting Go* on location in Hammond and had wanted to film another of her projects, *This Is Our Time*, here. The company that backed the latter film ultimately decided to shoot the film in Los Angeles and India, but Arnold continued to press for Louisiana as the location for *Christmas Angel*.

“The people in this state are so accommodating,” she explained. “For *Christmas Angel*, we were able to create the look of an all-American small town right in the heart of Hammond. The mayor, local businesses, and everyone in the area have been very helpful and friendly. I would come back any time.”

Having productions such as this one in the area continues to provide opportunities for LSU students and alumni to develop their own careers in the film and entertainment industry right here in Louisiana.

Above photo: Jarred Coates with actor Kevin Sorbo on the set of *Christmas Angel*.