

Berry, Chestnut expound on 'The Call' roles —and more

Contributed by KIMBERLY GRANT (Special to South Florida Times)

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In *The Call*, 911 operator Jordan, played by Halle Berry, tries to assist a teenage girl Casey (Abigail Breslin) in fleeing from deranged serial killer Michael (Michael Eklund). Officer Phillips (Morris Chestnut) follows Jordan's leads to help catch a predator.

Screenwriter Richard D'Ovidio, with story help from Nicole D'Ovidio and Jon Bokenkamp, decided to let the ladies have all the fun in this suspenseful caper, as Jordan uses all of the tricks in the rulebook to help Casey.

Lending support to Casey's cause, David Otunga (Jennifer Hudson's fiancé and father of her son) makes a surprisingly refreshing turn as Officer Devans.

Chestnut and Berry recently sat down to give South Florida Times readers some dish on their roles in *The Call* (opening in theaters March 14), and more.

CHALLENGES

"The hard part for me," said Berry, "was to try to stay connected to Morris' and Abigail's characters."

Within director Brad Anderson's shooting schedule, she had to spend an entire day reading 21 pages of dialogue, rattling off in quick succession 911-operator jargon, that would be cut and edited to fit the film for audiences' viewing pleasure.

In film terms, that means Berry performed for 21 minutes straight with no breaks; not an easy feat for any actor.

Berry likened the experience to being in a play, which is an aspect of the craft she has not explored — yet.

As for not being able to see her co-stars for most of the film, she said, "That was my constant challenge; to stay on such an emotional level (as Jordan), so that I would be on the same level as they were. I used that feeling of frustration and of being stuck to fuel my character."

IN CHARACTER

For Chestnut, his character's scenes were smoother than his preparation for the role, for which he went on ride-alongs with real Los Angeles police officers to get the feel for what it's like to be an officer in a squad car. He likened his experience to a wider understanding of the intent of each person an officer comes across, whether good or bad.

With two talented, veteran actors in the midst, it was hard to talk only about the film. Berry and Chestnut graciously shared their thoughts on the industry today and what aspiring actors should keep in mind.

"I love the idea of being a part of a movie that was so empowering for women," Berry said. "We don't often get to play roles like this, where ordinary people become heroic and do something extraordinary," said the Oscar-winning actress, known for being picky about the roles she chooses.

Elaborating about her role in *The Call* and why she decided to bring life to Jordan, she said, "It was a good opportunity to do something that I could really be proud of and there's a lot of meat on the bone for me to work with."

SAGE ADVICE

Regarding movie making in general, "The hard part is having everyone contribute from their own perspective and come together and have that one idea," Chestnut added. "Everyone has the same goal and the same vision for that movie. Hopefully, everyone ends up on the same page and is successful."

Chestnut, who will soon reprise his role in *The Best Man 2*, and Berry obviously know a thing or two about success. So what's their advice for aspiring actors of color?

"They have to stay the course," said Chestnut, who admittedly doesn't like being in front of the camera and would like to see himself doing more producing and directing.

"Only do it if you really love it. This is a hard knock life," added Berry, who has plans to work on a short film/documentary about women getting older and embracing their natural beauty. "It's not easy. There's a lot of competition and today, with social media, there's a lot of bashing, negativity, cruelty, and meanness. You have to have thick skin and know who you are."

It was Berry who, while giving aspiring thespians advice, summed up Jordan's driving force to help *The Call*'s Casey in her most important hour of need:

"You have to be strong in your character and you really have to want to do this more than anything."

*Pictured above is Halle Berry.

