



PHOTOS COURTESY JHMP

# LIGHTS. CAMERA. COLUMBUS.

## LOCAL FILMMAKERS BRING JEWISH HISTORY TO LIFE ON SCREEN

BY NOELL WOLFGAM EVANS

Two Bexley filmmakers have been hard at work on a project they hope will serve as an entertaining alternative Jewish history – and, soon, their five-year project will be released in theaters near and far.

*The Other Men in Black* is a movie attempting to depict both a single life and an entire belief system. Paige, a present-day college student, is re-evaluating who she is by trying to come to a better understanding of her heritage. She turns to her grandfather, Moshe, who attempts to help her by sharing historic stories of Hasidic Jewish culture, all of which parallel the life Paige has chosen – and the life that she thinks she wants.

A labor of love and a testament to the creative power available in Columbus, the film is part of an ambitious effort to create a ten-part docu-drama film series focusing on less-well-known elements of Jewish history, but the story behind the creative process and the birth and production of a film in Columbus, Ohio, is no less interesting.

Dr. Matthew Goldish and Todd Delman met in 2004 and discovered a mutual desire to produce a film chronicling Jewish history. Goldish, a renowned author and speaker, was also an aspiring screenwriter, and Delman had just finished *Zeev's Journey*, an animated short that quickly garnered positive chatter at several festivals. They combined forces and formed the Jewish History Media Project – and began work on their film.

Armed with a \$50,000 grant from the Nathan Cummings Foundation, and additional funding from The Ohio State University's College of Arts and Humanities, the

pair was ready to begin casting and staffing their project. Through a stroke of fortune, they came upon Phil Garrett, an Ohio native who had headed west for work in films. Landing at DreamWorks, he worked on *Madagascar*, *Shrek 2*, *A.I.*, and *Minority Report*, among other films. He had recently returned to Ohio, settling in Columbus to create a “better lifestyle.”

“He was a perfect fit,” said Delman. “He filled every gap we had.” Garrett signed on as Director/Editor, adding to the production's credibility.

“Phil opened up access to a whole world of creatives,” said Goldish. This included a number of people who had moved from the state, mainly production personnel, glad for an opportunity to return home to work.

The team desired to keep much of the acting talent local, although it was agreed that additional notoriety could be achieved through the casting of a “name” actor. Although Mandy Patinkin was initially considered, ultimately Golden Globe winning actor Fyvush Finkel (*Picket Fences*, *Boston Public*, *Nixon*) was cast in the role of Moshe, the grandfather telling the stories. After wrapping up work on the latest Coen Brothers' film, Finkel flew in to the Central Ohio set, joining a strong local cast, including Suzy Kohane, starring as Paige, and John Osbeck. By all accounts Finkel was “unbelievably generous and talented” and really “made his mark on the crew.”

Finkel was not the only “name” that was part of the project; underground reggae musician Matisyahu also filmed several segments.





(Left) Director Phil Garrett works with Golden Globe-winner Fyvush Finkel (*Picket Fences*, *Boston Public*) during filming in Columbus for *The Other Men in Black*. The film, written by Matt Goldish and Todd Gelman (Top) is a narrative about the Hasidic movement and its impact on Jewish Culture. (Bottom) Finkel and lead actress Suzy Kohane film a scene at the Wexner Center.

*The Other Men in Black* is a story within a story, with animated sequences providing visual milestones to accompany the narrative. To give those segments their look, the talents of local designer Iuri Lioi were called upon. Delman admitted to some anxiety regarding the animation when the process began, but now beams like a proud father.

"The characters we have look like something that came out of Disney," he said.

Although production continues, the team has started to look toward distribution and to think about film two in the series. The producers also plan to use a multimedia approach to marketing and promoting their film, even including a 'study guide' to accompany the final product. Not only does it help continue the experience after an audience has left the theatre, it's also a throwback to the days when Hollywood created film 'packages' for roadshow performances.

The team expects the film will be completed by December 2009 and on screens as early as 2010.

As the film works its way through post-production, Delman and Goldish can look back on their long path and realize now that it was a necessary one to take.

"It was worth the wait. With the resources we have and the talent available, I don't think we could have done this in any other city." Delman says.

At the very least, this will be a grand experiment in filmmaking partnerships in Central Ohio. A number of individuals and organizations through the years have attempted to create in Columbus a strong working film community. The results have been varied. That a complex production such as *The Other Men in Black* can be created in *this* economy in Central Ohio says as much about the tenacity of the three principles as it does about the continually changing perception around the country of Columbus' technical and artistic powers. ■

For updates, and to view clips from the film, visit <http://accad.osu.edu/meltoncenter/>

