

Clint Eastwood gets it done

With two major films coming up in the next months and more projects contemplated beyond that, 79-year-old Clint Eastwood shows no signs of slowing down, with a movie-making philosophy that he sums up as: Move it fast, get it done

By Frank Barron

Everyone's favourite 79-year-old actor-producer-director is a busy man these days. And that's not just busy for his age – Clint Eastwood is busy by anyone's standards.

Eastwood's latest projects are *Hereafter*, now in pre-production, and *Invictus*, set in South Africa. And Eastwood has plans beyond that.

The first up, *Invictus*, which comes to theatres Dec. 11, has received early Oscar buzz even before its release, for obvious reasons. Any major project directed by Eastwood these days gets serious attention; the film is based on a real-life tale involving beloved South African leader Nelson Mandela; and its stars, Matt Damon and Morgan Freeman, are top drawer.

The film is the true story of Mandela joining forces with the captain of South Africa's national rugby team in 1995 to help unite the country. Eastwood's friend and frequent collaborator Freeman plays Mandela. Damon plays Francois Pienaar, the captain of the team, which went on to play for the World Cup.

Keeping it in the family, Eastwood also directed his son Scott in *Invictus*, shot in South Africa.

"The world needs this kind of story nowadays," Eastwood told a GQ interviewer. "It's just...everybody's so screwed up. It seems like our country's in kind of a morbid mood, because of the recession or whatever."

Eastwood and Freeman memorably teamed up in 2004's *Million Dollar Baby*, which won the Best Picture Oscar, earned Eastwood an Academy Award for Best Director and also notched Freeman a Best Supporting Actor statue.

Fans of the stoic Eastwood can expect the same no-nonsense storytelling from him in *Invictus* that he's presented in his other films, suggests Freeman. He told Toronto's *Now Magazine* recently, "He just shoots the same way every time. He

shot the same way when we did *Unforgiven*. He shot the same way in *Million Dollar Baby*. He told me one time that when he worked with Sergio Leone, he learned a lot about filmmaking, and one of the things was ‘Move it fast, get it done.’”

Cast and crew always praise Eastwood, since he knows all sides of the business, and can work with anyone.

Under his direction, Sean Penn and Tim Robbins won Oscars for acting. Nominated for her work in *Mystic River*, actress Marcia Gay Harden points out, “His directing style is direct. He tells his stories in a straight manner, and he has a sense of integrity and morality in his work, with a passion for movie-making. He never yells ‘action’ on the set. He just whispers ‘go ahead.’ He’s quiet, and he does his show with much dignity and ease.”

She adds, “Anyone who has ever worked with him has a professional relationship with him. We have admiration for his directing, his integrity, and mostly, his humility.”

For *Invictus*, Eastwood gave Freeman plenty of time to absorb Mandela’s style. Freeman told CBC Radio’s Jian Ghomeshi that the Mandela role was intimidating, but with lots of lead-up time to prepare, when it got to production, he was comfortable.

“I am thinking, oh man, I don’t do accents,” said the 72-year-old, who in 2003 played God in the Jim Carrey comedy *Bruce Almighty*. “In order to play Mandela you are going to have to at least try to sound like him. That was my concern.

“So here I am, I am going to be playing one of the world’s leading icons. I will need dignity and gravitas. Am I going to be able to pull that off? But when it got time to go on, it just all fell into place. I had been watching him on tapes and videos and paid close attention to what he did and it all just fell into place.”

For years, Eastwood ran his Malpaso Production company out of an office at Warner Bros. Studios. Because of his longtime association with the studio, he became the executive producer of *You Must Remember This: The Story of Warner Bros.*, a long-form documentary for the PBS network.

It makes no difference to Eastwood whether a project is for a major motion picture or a television project, as long as the script is right.

“My theory in directing actors is not to insert the ego. Having come up in that side of the business, I’m very sympathetic to the securities that are necessary, and the insecurities that are unnecessary to make a good performance. I let the actor bring

a lot to the table. When they bring a lot to the table, that's fine. And when they bring something that's not quite so good, I make adjustments to it.

“You set a working environment for the actor, and then they feel good about themselves.”

After *Invictus* and *Hereafter*, the next possible film for the coming year is based on the life of Dave Brubeck, noted jazzman. Eastwood, a jazz aficionado, previously did a loving tribute to the late Charlie Parker with the film *Bird*. An accomplished musician, he has also composed the themes for *Bridges of Madison County*, *Million Dollar Baby* and *Unforgiven*, the western in which he also starred and directed, winning an Oscar. In all, Eastwood has garnered four Oscars.

With each effort, he leaves his home in Carmel, Calif., to head for Hollywood to help in the advertising, publicity and promotion of the films. Eastwood was once the mayor of the picturesque ocean-side town he calls home, and only leaves when he has to. Many say that's what keeps him down-to-earth, unlike many other egotistical Hollywood stars.

There's a story about one time Paramount Pictures ran half-page ads for one of his films. At the same time, the studio ran full-page ads for another star's movie. Eastwood called the publicity department and congratulated them for plugging the full-page ads, but reminded them, softly, that they had only given his film half that much space. No complaining, just a gentle reminder. The next week the studio put out full-page ads for his film. “That was Clint,” said the studio's publicity director. “He never raised his voice. Just called to say thanks.”

Eastwood has been playing it strong and laconic for over 50 years. A native Californian, born in San Francisco, Eastwood moved to Los Angeles where he dropped out of college and got into show business. During this time he played bit parts in B films and television, with his big breakthrough coming on the long-running *Rawhide* series, playing the rough, tough cowhand Rowdy Yates from 1959 to 1965.

Although not the leading man, he made the show his own.

“Those were the good old days,” he recalls, softly. “I am proud to have been part of that western community, because that's where I started, and it's what got me on the road in my profession. Even though I went off to Spain, with Italian directors and crews, in my heart I knew it was still a genre that was Americana.”

As Eastwood approaches his 80th birthday next year, he has lots of reasons to celebrate. And his many fans are grateful that he continues to make movies of quality and variety at an age when many of his peers have faded into obscurity.

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