

Archon's Bronx Paradise Review

Today, Columbus Day 2009, moving out of the Bronx is considered a great “step-up” in life.

Today, Columbus Day 2009 marks the 34th anniversary of my family’s moving to the Bronx when I was 10-years old. I was raised in the Inwood section of Manhattan, just 4 miles away from where I would spend the next quarter century of my life fighting for my life.

The Bronx was neither Inwood, nor Riverdale or places I was familiar with; it was a far different place, culturally from anywhere I would travel in life.

25-years of facing down the unadulterated aggression of one’s neighbors, the local drug-dealers, Italian Mafiosi, various ethnic gangs, wannabees, and of course the Police make for a particular way of life that I have found hard to explain to my elite clientele in Larchmont, New York, Greenwich, and Stamford Connecticut, or Alpine, New Jersey, though 4 words have summed it up well: ONLY THE STRONG SURVIVE.

Wayne Gurman’s BRONX PARADISE provides the best example of that “slice of life” we Bronx residents, apparently, have all lived in one way shape or form.

I had the privilege of viewing Gurman’s Bronx Paradise predecessor, the 30-minute short BOTTOM FEEDER approximately one year ago and my immediate response was “this guy gets it!”

So, when I heard that Bottom Feeder had been expanded to a feature length film, had its title changed to” *Bronx Paradise*” and was being directed by Bronx film-making legend Bill Lappe, I set my sites on getting an interview with the Bronx’s own *Big Kahuna* and his creative partners.

Bill Lappe, a retired NYPD Detective and 9/11 survivor is no stranger to the savagery of the Bronx streets; he was born and raised here and as an adult walked a beat as a Cop in the South Bronx’ 40th Precinct for 20-years witnessing every depravity man has unleashed upon his brother.

Lappe lives here still, raising his family in the Bronx and since his retirement from the Police Department he has dedicated himself to reestablishing American filmmaking’s roots in his beloved borough.

Lappe is flanked by his creative partners Wayne Gurman, the anti-hero protagonist of Bronx Paradise and noted author and educator James McSherry.

I quickly realize I am located between the rock two hard faces.

Wayne Gurman is easily my mirror image, not-so-darkly, possibly the very reason I was able to relate so closely to his Bottom Feeder tale.

Gurman a clean-headed, stogie smoking pugilist has stepped forward to represent *all of us* as the” Bronx personified” with his autobiographical feature.

“Working with Bill Lappe has completed my redemption” Gurman freely admits as we laugh at the fact that not so long ago Lappe would be chasing us down in his former role as a NYPD Detective. “Like a lot of Bronx kids I had my own run-ins with the law, but I’ve learned my lesson, besides film making is a lot safer a profession than engaging in illegal activity.”

Lappe admits there might have been trust issues at first, being that he and Gurman came from two different perspectives of law enforcement, but their common Bronx heritage put former differences aside resulting in an amazing artistic collaboration.

“Some people may be offended by what they see in this movie, but it’s a real slice of life not just in the Bronx, but *any* city anywhere”, says McSherry.

“The movie doesn’t offend *me*. Besides, there are a lot of positive lessons in this film. Bronx Paradise is a movie about survival, family, honor; it’s about being strong and getting off your ass when you’ve been knocked to the mat”.

McSherry does his best to instill these very same values in future generations of Bronx residents as a teacher in Herbert H. Lehman High School.

“This movie works because both Bill and Wayne represent that creative Yin and Yang that best showcases true life.”

“All I wanted to represent with the story was true life” Gurman interjects. “We might have embellished the tale for the screen, but 70% of the action in the movie is absolutely authentic to true life”.

“Keep in mind,” Gurman adds, “I have never shot or killed anyone in real life, I don’t believe in that kind of violence, I feel it creates a very bad Karma for those involved. Some of the characters in the film were people that lived that type of life and they are either in jail now or they’re dead”.

The Bronx triumvirate is certainly no stranger to the violent ways of New York City’s Highlands and they have certainly learned how to best deal with the right-hook that life often throws at us all, and now they’ve been able to capture that “*day in the life of the Bronx*” perfectly for all to see and cringe.

Like the classic films *The Wanderers* and *The Idol Maker*, BRONX PARADISE is a true to life Bronx tale that is destined for collector and cult status. Not only will the borough’s proud cinephiles have another film to add to their collections but now the rest of America has an effective travel guide for those that might consider visiting our beloved Bronx.

As I concluded my evening with the creative hard-cases I couldn’t help but recollect a moment in the film where Gurman explains one of life’s many lessons to his son “*You are who you hang out with.*”

If that is true, this Bronx collaborative compliments each other in the best of ways as they prove literal The Bronx motto ONLY THE STRONG SURVIVE.