

St. Max student keeps everyone guessing with new film



By Brock Weir

Josh Conley likes to keep everyone guessing.

What, for instance, would happen if the most popular girl in school goes missing during the school's annual pep rally ? and the five most likely suspects all have water-tight alibis?

That is something Josh ponders in his new short film, *A Guessing Game*, which was unveiled Monday at Vaughan City Hall. Vaughan is the first stop in the showcase of York Region filmmakers in the annual Multimedia Film Festival of York Region, which works its way through all nine municipalities before landing back in Aurora on May 16.

A Grade 12 student at St. Maximilian Kolbe Catholic High School, Josh has always exhibited a rather creative streak, whether it was working with his dad creating stoplights in their garage to trying his hand at acting. At the age of 10 or 11, he decided to put his creative skills behind the camera, taking a camcorder and filming a skit with some of his schoolmates.

According to Josh, the transition from those early days working in the garage, to behind the camera to emulate the works of some of key influences such as David Fincher (*Fight Club*, *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*), happened naturally. There wasn't a single ?aha!? moment when he realised that this is what he wanted to do, but once bitten by the bug ? whenever that happened to be ? there was no turning back.

?In front of the camera is where I can express myself, but I was never really that great at acting,? he says with a chuckle. ?Behind the camera, I realised I could put my ideas into action and tell other people what I would like to see. I like taking something, twisting it, and manipulating it into something that tells a story, rather than just saying something on the spot and being in front of the camera.

?You can tell the exact story you want to tell.?

With a penchant for twisting something and manipulating it into place, it goes without saying that *A Guessing Game* has a twist ending, but to reveal it here would spoil the fun. That being said, Josh says he was very influenced by spy movies, comedies, and when the two converged, so much the better.

?I wanted to focus on mystery because that is something I hadn't done before, and I liked the idea of having a big twist at the end to a classical whodunit plot,? he says. ?Last year in our Grade 11 drama, we were all doing short plays as a final year project and we had to split into three groups, find a play on the internet, and then, within a few weeks, perform it in front of an audience. My teacher knew I was really interested in film, so I asked her if I could do a film instead of a play, she said yes and, not able to find a script or play online we actually wanted to do, we ended up writing it ourselves, inspired by Bryan Singer's *The Usual Suspects*.?

It was this same teacher, Ms. King, who encouraged the team to enter the film into the Multimedia Film Festival. Their entry, he says, represents an extensive team collaboration of people bringing their best to the table and making sure their best was reflected in the finished product.

In the lead-up to the first screening, he said they were very much looking forward to meeting everyone involved with the festival, seeing everyone else's films, and sharing a love of the medium with everyone there. It will be a great experience not just for the filmmakers themselves, he said, but for all people with an interest in film that goes well beyond the latest Hollywood blockbuster.

“All of our classmates came together to work and collaborate on this,” he says. “It is a symbol of if you work hard and bring everyone's skills together, you can make something that is really good. The point is to entertain, but for other kids my age, I hope to inspire them to make films and show that if you can get people together and work hard this is what you can do.

“Without my friends, including Jamie Knox, and all the people in our drama class, we wouldn't have been able to make it. They're the ones who made it happen.”

With a particular passion for directing and editing, Josh plans to begin working towards his degree in film studies at Ryerson University this fall.