

'Fools Rush In' brings true-life romance to the big screen

By Carol Cling
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Silver-screen romances have silver-lining endings, no matter how many clouds roll by.

"Fools Rush In," for example.

A made-in-Vegas love story about a rich Eastern WASP and a Latina casino worker who fall in love, get married and get pregnant — but not necessarily in that order — "Fools" is inspired by the relationship of producer Doug Draizin and co-producer Anna-Maria Davis, a Las Vegas native who grew up in Boulder City.

Yet their real-life tale has a far more bitter-sweet ending than the one featured in "Fools Rush In," which is scheduled to wrap up more than a month of location shooting in Southern Nevada this week.

That's because the movie hearkens back to happier times for Draizin and Davis, whose professional collaboration continues despite a recent divorce.

"We have a great relationship and three beautiful kids," notes Draizin, who also served as a producer on the spoofy "Spy Hard," currently in release.

(The kids — 11-year-old Ryan, 9-year-old Amelia and Regina, who will be 6 in July — have been in Southern Nevada with their parents since pre-production began in March, attending local schools, spending time with Davis' family and appearing as extras in the movie.)

"Making 'Spy Hard' was a lot of fun,"

Draizin says. "But there's not one ounce of reality in it. Any time reality snuck into the movie, we got rid of it. But this is 100 percent, U.S. real."

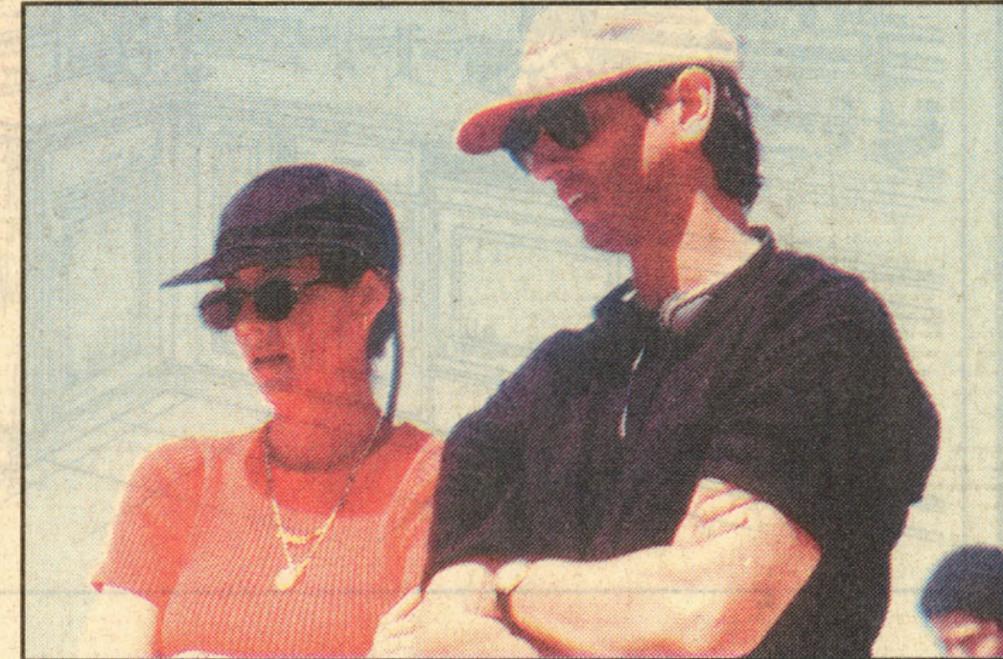
And, as such, more than a little poignant to watch, as scenes from Draizin and Davis' collective past find their way onto film.

"It's a little weird," agrees Davis in a separate interview on the set of the movie, as stars Matthew Perry (TV's "Friends") and Salma Hayek ("Desperado") shoot a smoochy morning-after-the-wedding-night scene in a Caesars Palace luxury suite overlooking the Strip.

"Certain times I have to walk away," Davis acknowledges. "It's very emotional in some places."

Being back on her home turf in Southern Nevada heightens the emotional impact,

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Producers Anna-Maria Davis, left, and Doug Draizin watch the filming of "Fools Rush In," at Valley of Fire State Park. The movie was inspired by their own love relationship.

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especially when filming at places near and dear to her — including Hoover Dam, where her father worked on electrical crews for 30 years.

“I have to keep pinching myself,” Davis says. “I’ve been in every part of that dam with my father.”

For director Andy Tennant (“It Takes Two”), the movie’s link between fact and fiction sometimes seems “bizarre.”

“What’s bizarre is that I keep being reminded it’s their lives,” he says. “I see it in their faces, when they see dailies” — footage of the previous day’s scenes — the power of which sometimes prompts Draizin and Davis to leave the screening room.

Not that “Fools Rush In” represents a literal account of their relationship.

“When we did the rewrites, it became two characters. It had to,” director Tennant says. “It’s nice for them — and for me. I’m the objective guy. I’m just trying to make a movie.”

That’s all Draizin and Davis set out to do, when “Fools Rush In” first began its lengthy journey to the screen back in 1991.

Draizin was at Columbia Pictures, pitching a variety of outlandish story ideas, when studio executives asked him, “Do you have anything real?”

Draizin’s response: “Yeah, my life.”

More specifically, his marriage — prompted by Davis’ pregnancy six weeks after the couple met and complicated by their world-apart backgrounds.

Draizin, a Jewish New Yorker who had moved to Southern California to pursue a show-business career, “had no idea” where Davis was from when they became involved.

That is, until Davis — who had gone to Southern California to complete her studies at the Fashion Institute of Design and Merchandising after 1½ years at the University of Nevada, Reno — took Draizin home to Boulder City to meet her German-English father and her mother, whose roots reach back to a 400-year-old hacienda in Mexico.

To Davis, “Fools Rush In” represents a chance to escape the stereotypes that usually govern Hispanic characters. “They’re a middle-class family,” she explains. “They’re like any other family — the best part about us is our families, our culture.”

Various writers tried their hand at scripting the movie, which was initially set in Southern California — except for a whirlwind Las Vegas wedding.

But “it just didn’t ever really

work," Davis admits.

Part of the problem, in Draizin's view: Everybody was being too serious.

"It was originally told and written more in dramatic form," he recalls. "Inherently, the story is real, so you don't have to overdramatize it — you can give yourself relief by doing the comedy."

Shifting to a comedic tone also makes the characters' cultural differences easier to accept, according to Davis.

In the movie, "We've really tried to break barriers," she says. "Through comedy, it's not as hard for people to accept" the relationship between Perry's snobbish Alex Whitman and Hayek's Isabel Fuentes, despite the differences in their backgrounds.

Shifting the movie to Southern Nevada also streamlined the plot — and gave the movie an unusual Las Vegas perspective, the filmmakers say.

"The way we utilize the town, the shots of Vegas" from Sunrise Mountain and other off-Strip locations — "you know you're in Vegas," and not in a Southern California suburb doubling for Southern Nevada, Draizin says. "The way we incorporate little things about Vegas — you get a sense of 'Wow, they're here.'"

Besides, Davis points out, "Vegas has never been represented for its positive aspects" in most movies about the town.

"What we're really trying to show is that life in Las Vegas is pretty normal," she says. "I think people are going to be shocked."

Tennant, for one, was.

He signed to direct "Fools Rush In" the day after he saw the downbeat "Leaving Las Vegas" — and vowed that he "would never shoot a movie in Las Vegas." (Ironically, "Leaving Las Vegas" Oscar-winning star, Nicolas Cage, wanted to do "Fools Rush In" after the success of "Honeymoon in Vegas," but the script wasn't right, Draizin recalls.)

Now that Tennant's here, living with his wife and children in Green Valley while on location, the director expresses surprise at the "real sense of community" he's found in Southern Nevada.

What's more, "Las Vegas is not

as depressing as I thought it would be in the daytime," Tennant says. "I really like the sky — I love the mountains and the sunsets." And, with the movie's frequent nighttime shooting schedule, "I've seen quite a few sunrises, too."

That perception reflects the viewpoint of Hayek's character, who's a photographer dedicated to capturing the beauty of Southern Nevada's desert landscape.

"This is her world — the main character's argument is that there's a lot more to Nevada than Las Vegas," Tennant explains.

Most recent Las Vegas movies "haven't gotten off the Strip," Draizin argues. "It's all dark, all

cold, and very unromantic. This will show the romantic side of Las Vegas.”

After all, Tennant points out, “Wherever you fall in love, that town becomes Paris to you. In this movie, we’re turning Las Vegas into Paris, because to most people the most romantic city in the world is where they found their mate.”