

WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN YOU'RE MARRYING THE FAMILY

Cast of 'Leap 4 Your Life' reunites for audacious wedding comedy

Sabrina Furminger — Westender



A tense and hilarious moment in *Marrying the Family*. The indie comedy premieres at VIFF. — Contributed photo

There are dozens of reasons why some newly engaged couples run away and elope, and avoiding family drama is one of the biggies.

The idea of bringing together two effed-up families to run the gauntlet of heightened emotions and expectations can be more than many brides- and grooms-to-be are able to bear.

But where some see the potential for emotional scarring, others – like the team behind *Marrying the Family* – see comedy gold.

The locally made feature-length laugh-fest premieres this week at the 35th Vancouver International Film Festival. Written by and starring Taylor Hill (who also wrote and starred in *Leap 4 Your Life*, the dance competition mockumentary that won VIFF's #MustSeeBC in 2013) and featuring a long list of Vancouver actors – including Adam DiMarco, Nicole Oliver, Nicholas Carella, Dave Collette, Julia Benson, and Anne Marie DeLuise – *Marrying the Family* follows in the tradition of classic comedies that begin with a heartfelt proposal, detour down a bumpy road, and end up somewhere delightful and unexpected, says director Peter Benson in a recent phone interview.

Weddings and indie filmmaking have a lot in common, according to Benson. “It all starts with this beautiful idea: ‘Let’s get married; it’ll be great!’ Or ‘let’s make a movie; it will be great!’ In both cases, all you think about is the magic, or the good things that will happen,” says Benson, who also co-stars in the film as the groom’s douchey brother.

“But the reality is that planning a wedding and indie filmmaking are both like firefighting. Once you decide to do it, you’re just putting out fires and hoping that there’s still a standing structure at the end of the day.”

That rah-rah, “let’s make a movie” spirit was evident when Reel People visited the *Marrying the Family* set back in May 2015.

The location: a private residence in North Vancouver belonging to a friend of Barbara Hill, *Marrying the Family*'s producer (and Taylor's mother).

The scene: the bride and groom's equally dysfunctional families meet for the first time, and engage in a highly charged game of get-to-know-you charades.

Carella's character is wearing cat ears and a bushy tale; he's the bride's brother, a proud furry, and competing with Benson's douchey bro for MVP in this awkward game of charades.

Oliver – a veteran actress well-known in the animated sphere for voicing characters on *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic* and *Littlest Pet Shop* – is the embodiment of the uptight, HBIC, mother-of-the-bride as she surveys the boisterous group with disdain. DeLuise's lawyer character (portraying the new girlfriend of the groom's father; the ex-wife sits a few feet away) has one eye on her phone and the other on the group, barely concealing her boredom.

The building tension fills the living room, as does the hilarity.

As with much of the award-winning *Leap 4 Your Life*, there's an improv feel to the action. And while some of the charade shenanigans are clearly coming to these master actors in the moment (obvious from the fact that the clues change from take to take), the movie is very much from the mind and pen of Hill, says Benson.

"Taylor has incredible insight into people and characters and the little nuggets that make them all funny, even if they're not aware of it," says Benson, who wrote, directed, and acted in 2014's *What an Idiot*. "She comes up with funny situations and great characters and always throws a little surprise into every scene."

Filming took place in 2015 over 12 days. They shot on weekends, and whenever they could get the cast and crew together – which, as the industry got busier, was increasingly difficult to do.

But, much like a wedding, *Marrying the Family* was a passion project, and thus well worth any discomfort, says Benson. "Lots of things happen, but instead of just freaking out about it, it's something to go, 'okay, what can we do to make this moment even better?' And I think that's the attitude you have to take with both planning a wedding and making an independent film."

Eagle-eyed film lovers will note plenty of cast crossover between *Leap 4 Your Life*, *What an Idiot*, and *Marrying the Family*; Hill, DiMarco, Collette, and the Bensons appear in all three films, while many of the other actors logged roles in at least two.

These crossovers did not occur by accident, says Benson. "I think we've really found, in the tradition of great comedy troupes, a group of people who really groove together and gel," says Benson.

"It's a trusting space."

Marrying the Family also stars Alistair Abell, Mark Acheson, Lindsay Collins, Matty Finochio, Mary Black, Viv Leacock, Loretta Walsh, and Jill Morrison.

Marrying the Family will have its world premiere at the Rio on Oct. 2. It will be preceded by the premiere of Ben Ratner's *Ganjy*, a short film inspired by the night that Ratner and actor Aleks Paunovic met Muhammad Ali.

VIFF runs Sept. 29-Oct. 14. For tickets and the full schedule, visit VIFF.org.

MORE FROM PETER BENSON

On what he said when screenwriter Taylor Hill asked him to direct her new film: “We had such a good time doing *Leap 4 Your Life* that when Taylor came to me and mentioned that she had a new script and would I be interested in maybe directing it, I jumped on board before I even read it. I was excited to work with her again, and her mom. We had such a good time. *Leap* was one of those magical experiences where everything – well, I shouldn’t say that everything just went right, because as with all indie films, post-production with no money is a different story; it’s more of a horror movie! – but the shooting of it was so much fun. [With *Marrying the Family*], I love the ensemble of actors that she has put together, and we did a table read and the script was really funny and as somebody who’s been married before and knows the chaos of weddings and everybody who gets involved, it just seemed like a really fun project to jump on board with.”

On the special qualities his cast brings to their *Marrying the Family* roles: “First and foremost, **Taylor [Hill]** is such a wonderful actor. She’s so real and beautiful and funny and charming and you root for her, and she gives these real performances. **Adam [DiMarco]** is a star waiting to pop; I’m really hoping he pops in the next six months so we can get this movie out there. I’m just waiting for it. I know it will happen. I noticed him in *Leap*, and he had a one-day, one scene part and made me laugh every time I watched it. And then you have someone like **Nicole [Oliver]** who just owns her work and is a force. She’s so aware of what’s going on, and also so able to throw it away and be loose and connected to whoever she’s talking to, which is a really tricky balance. And of course my wife **Julia [Benson]**, who I love it when she plays slightly flighty, and she’s just this fun character. That character could have been seen as the bitchy character. I think it could have dropped into a stereotype, and I think she went the other way with it, and made her charming and light, which I thought was such a brilliant choice, and obviously we have so much fun working together, and so it was fun that we got paired up again.”

On what it means to him that *Marrying the Family* is premiering at VIFF: “From day one, it was really our goal. Once a film’s made, you have no control over where it’s going to go, but we had such a great experience at VIFF with *Leap 4 Your Life* that we really wanted to try to relive it with *Marrying the Family*, so we were just over the moon to find out we were accepted. I think people think if you make a film in Vancouver, you’re automatically in VIFF, but as the filmmakers will tell you, there are just so many great filmmakers in Vancouver right now. It’s very competitive and challenging, and so it was a huge honour and we’re super grateful. There’s something special about getting that hometown crowd, and we’re playing at the Rio, which is such a fun theatre. And we’re playing with Ben Ratner’s film beforehand – it’s a very different tone, but someone who everyone really admires, and great actors in his film, so what a great venue and great opportunity to bring the whole community together, and for us, that’s as good as it gets. Watching a comedy with the hometown crowd is the best experience.”