

EDITORS/WINTER EDITION

Two At Us 2 Make DGA Mark

*Editors Elisa Bonora and David Brooks
keep directors' visions intact.*

BY MILLIE TAKAKI



From left: Weyerhaeuser's "Love Note," directed by DGA nominee Thom Higgins and cut by David Brooks; Baked Lay's "Antonio," directed by DGA nominee Robert Black and cut by Elisa Bonora.

Us 2 Editorial, the Venice, Calif.-based house launched in 1993 by editor Elisa Bonora and executive producer D.J. Dole, scored a pair of nominated spots—Baked Lay's "Antonio" from BBDO New York and Weyerhaeuser's "Love Note" via Charlotte, N.C. agency Price/McNabb—in this year's Directors Guild of America (DGA) competition for best commercial director of 1997.

From the standpoint of collaborating with directors, the two ads are both different and similar, the difference being historical. Prior to "Antonio," which debuted on the 1997 Super Bowl telecast, Bonora had no history of working with director Robert Black of bicoastal Headquarters. "Love Note," on the other hand, was one in a long list of projects cut by Us 2 staffer David Brooks for

director Thom Higgins over the past four years. (Higgins recently left Dektor Higgins & Associates in Hollywood for bicoastal RSA USA [SHOOT, 2/20, p. 1].)

However, the parallel between "Antonio" and "Love Note" surfaces in the orientation of editors Bonora and Brooks to the respective assignments. "At the very least, we [at Us 2] try to reflect the director's vision—even if it's just a director's cut," relates Bonora, who prior to forming Us 2 served as in-house editor for director Joe Pytko at PYTKA in Venice for two years. "My background in Europe and later working with Joe made it second nature for me to try to be protective of the director's vision."

Upon launching Us 2, Bonora then had to balance that perspective with her agency clients' perspectives. "It kind of puts me in the middle but it's

a challenge," she observes. "The client and agency have the last word—which is as it should be. But still I like to organize my schedule so that I have a day or two to work with the director; to realize his vision and my ideas so that they can be seen by the agency."

Certainly Brooks is attuned to Higgins' vision. They first met at BFCS in London some 20 years ago. "I was 17 at the time and Thom was directing spots there," recalls Brooks, whose father is noted director Bob Brooks, the "B" in BFCS, a U.K. house that had a since-closed U.S. operation.

Over the years, Higgins continued to build a directorial career while David Brooks began assessing what his professional pursuit should be. Brooks started freelance editing in 1983 for London clients. He then moved to L.A. and broke into market-

ing consultancy, shifting over to spot production manager and later line producing through the late 1980s and into the early '90s. But Brooks ultimately gravitated back to editing, getting a big break in '93 with Soul

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Us 2

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Asylum's "Runaway Train" music video directed by Tony Kaye of Tony Kaye Films (now Tony Kaye & Partners) in West Hollywood and London. The clip created a buzz and soon Brooks was getting opportunities to cut videos and spots. He reunited with Higgins at Dektor Higgins on a director's cut in early '94, the first of many collaborations. Freelancer Brooks then joined Us 2 in mid-'95.

"The chemistry was just right between Thom and me," says Brooks. "And he's helped me grow. In a way a lot of my stuff had been very much against the grain of what my dad was known for—comedy and storytelling. But Thom brought me into that arena and I in turn was able to bring kind of an MTV visual editing edge to that brand of classical advertising. That's reflected in the DGA work."

Brooks also turned out director's cuts for Higgins' other two DGA-nominated spots—Ford's "Generations" and Oreo's "Basketball." And at press time, Brooks was in the midst of cutting a Higgins-directed package of Pacific Bell commercials for DMB&B, St. Louis. "It's been very rewarding to get to know Thom personally and understand his sensibilities," shares Brooks.

At the same time, Brooks values the other extreme—helping first-time directors break into filmmaking. Back in 1994, he did that with a then directorial unknown, Spike Jonze, on a Philips Digital assignment. Jonze—who's with bicoastal/international Satellite Films—directed some second-unit work on that job, which Brooks cut into short pieces that later complemented a couple of music videos to comprise the director's initial reel. Most recently, Brooks cut a Tears For Fears video helmed by Mark Joseph, an established New York-based still photographer making his film directing debut. And Brooks also edited a spec PSA for another newcomer, director Marshall Vernet, who's on the verge of signing with an undisclosed commercial shop.

"I like the mix between generations of filmmakers—some-

one like Higgins and a bunch of new guys," explains Brooks. "To bring newcomers along, to contribute to their work and reap the benefits of their untamed energy is exciting. At times it can be catastrophic, but the flip side is that anything's possible."

Bonora is also well-versed in teaming with young, up-and-coming directors, some of whom have gone on to attain significant industry stature. She first established herself as an editor in South Africa and then her native Italy, building an editorial reel for her planned return to the U.S. (She had earlier studied for a year at USC Film School in Los Angeles.) While in Milan, Bonora cut a spot for Autotelefon SIP, an Italian car phone company, which earned a Bronze Lion at Cannes in 1990. The comedic commercial was one of many she worked on with director Anthony Hoffman, who hails from South Africa. Hoffman is now a well-known director with bicoastal/international Propaganda Films.

Settling Stateside

In summer 1990 Bonora came to the U.S., joining Red Car in Hollywood, where she got the chance to cut for her idol, Pytka. A year later Bonora moved to PYTKA as its in-house editor.

Since opening Us 2, Bonora has cut for assorted directors, including recent endeavors for Hoffman; Tony Kaye; Larry Shiu of Metro Pictures in Marina del Rey, Calif.; Kinka Usher of House Of Usher Films, Santa Monica (the latest Campbell's Soup package out of BBDO New York); and David Cornell of Headquarters. She believes the relationship with the latter company led to her getting the opportunity to work with Black on "Antonio."

As for the future, Bonora hopes other such opportunities emerge for Us 2 cutters—namely herself, Brooks and David Lee. She notes that the company is in the market for a fourth editor but other than that wants to maintain "the comfortable feel the editors have for each other and the directors and clients we work with." Bonora describes Us 2's involvement in the DGA-nominated spots as being "a great honor." ■



Elisa Bonora and David Brooks.



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