

## USC School of Cinematic Arts

### *School of Cinematic Arts News*

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## In Stride

# Alumnus Russell Brown Hits His Pace With *Race You To The Bottom*

By James Tella

Writing about films and making movies, writer/director Russell Brown '97 is living his dream. Now, 10 years after graduating from USC with a B.A. in critical studies, the creator and co-editor of the entertainment and political online critical magazine [The Simon.com](http://TheSimon.com) is getting ready for a whole new experience with the Los Angeles release of his first feature film [\*Race You To The Bottom\*](http://RaceYouToTheBottom.com) on March 30.

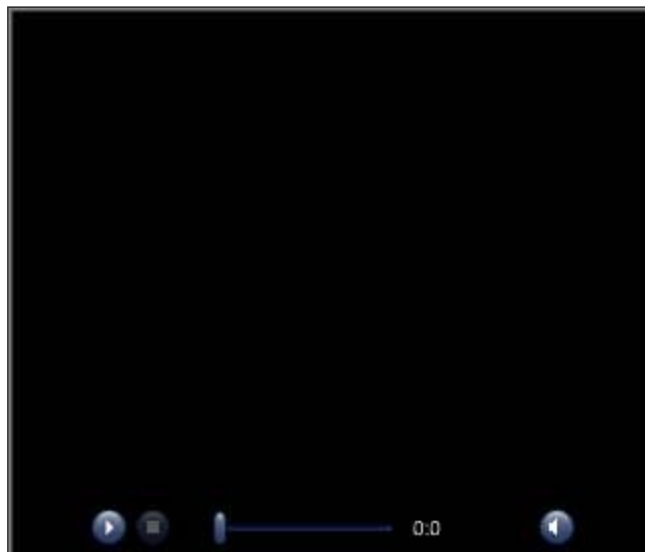


Director Russell Brown (center) with Cole Williams and Amber

"I never really had a plan for the kind of films I wanted to make," said Brown, whose independent movie centers around a complicated and heated love affair between a straight woman and her gay best friend.

"What's happening, though, is what I always thought would be the best-case scenario for a film with no movie stars, a tiny budget, and a somewhat edgy fringy subject matter with a limited appeal."

Shot on a tight 20-day schedule between locations in Los Angeles and Napa Valley in the fall of 2003, *Race You To The Bottom* was inspired by a series of conversations on what characterizes the dynamic of a 20-something straight woman and her equally young gay confidant during a road trip from L.A. to San Francisco.



A scene from Brown's film.

*Benson, stars of Race You To The Bottom.*

“I was struck by the potential for exploring the sensual and romantic interaction rarely depicted in ‘gay-themed’ feature films. In a way, the two characters sleeping together is almost irrelevant,”

Brown added. “They may be playing at a love affair, but it’s how much they depend on each other, and this sort of fantastical relationship that they’ve set up for themselves, that’s key.”

Screened at numerous festivals around the country, where Brown was pleased with the reaction from audiences and critics,

*Race You To The Bottom* played the Outfest LA Gay & Lesbian Film Festival in 2005 and won Best Actress for its star Amber Benson (*Buffy, The Vampire Slayer*), in addition to being bought by the Regent Entertainment Group.

“Opinions are so subjective, and I just hope it does well,” commented the California native who admitted it was scary showing up on his first day of filming and assuming authority of the cast and crew. “The cardinal sin is to be boring, you have to keep everything entertaining.”

Working in the industry since he graduated, Brown started his weekly online magazine eight years ago, while holding down positions ranging from an assistant at Paramount, to development executive for *Saturday Night Live*, to time spent at Ziskin Productions for fellow USC alumna Laura Ziskin '73. During his USC tenure, Brown worked as an intern at Mandalay Entertainment Group, where, says the writer/director, he heard the words from Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Peter Guber that still ring true today.



*Behind the camera in Napa Valley.*

USC?

“Be patient with the machines,” he laughs. “Because they will drive you crazy.”



*Brown (left) on location in Napa with Cole Williams.*

“Never think about getting to the end of the race, just think about the next hurdle,” Brown recalled. “I follow that advice all the time. Everything I do will always lead somewhere.”

For now, that road leads to the movie’s West Coast premiere followed by an April debut in New York City.

“I write about whatever I want and make films about whatever I want,” Brown said. “It really couldn’t be better.”

With his second feature *The Bluetooth Virgin* starring Karen Black recently wrapped, what words of advice does the director have for those filmmakers still at