



CHARLOTTE AT A CROSSROADS

New film explores four possible futures of Charlotte, LGBT community included

by Matt Comer, Q-Notes staff

Surrounded by the sights, sounds and smells of a NoDa coffee shop, Charlotteans Mitzi Corrigan and Stephen Friedrich sip coffee and talk about their experiences acting in "Crossroads Charlotte: The Movie."

"It is nice to see the performing arts used in a way to serve the Charlotte area," Friedrich says. At 18, Friedrich is a homeschooled senior ready to embark on his journey to college, hoping to enroll in the University of North Carolina School of the Arts in Winston-Salem. In the film, he plays the high school-aged character "Sam," who is openly gay to classmates and friends, but closeted to his mother.

He and Corrigan, who plays Sam's mother Julie, were just two of dozens of Charlotte citizens chosen to act in the film, a project of Crossroads Charlotte. The community initiative began in 2001, after the Queen City participated in a survey of 40 cities, in which it was revealed while the city had high levels of faith-based involvement and philanthropy, it

"Crossroads Charlotte: The Movie."

The film includes four short vignettes, each depicting a possible future for the City of Charlotte. The stories run from grim and bleak to upbeat and optimistic.

"I don't think this is a town that always honors the power of the arts as much as it should," says Corrigan, who's casting company, C&J Casting, volunteered to choose the cast for the film. "To actually say, 'Let's hand over some of this grant money to the arts to make our case,' is a great honor. People are visual and to show the stories in a visual way makes a stronger impact."

The film touches on almost every major issue a city the size of Charlotte might face. From gang violence and homelessness, to world class sporting events and booming business development, the film, while short, leaves almost nothing out, including discussions of LGBT issues.

In the film, Corrigan and Friedrich's characters explore a variety of issues — sexual orientation, single parenting, racism and privilege. Julie, a corporate, Uptown executive, works late nights, often leaving

community distrust.

In a scene, Julie and Sam are readying themselves for work and school, debating whether Sam should go to private school.

"It just doesn't seem safe there anymore," Julie says of Sam's school.

"Why? Because not everyone is white like us?" Sam shoots back.

Corrigan says she believes the character Julie is representative of many people who aren't always aware of how racism and stereotypes cloud their judgments.

"I don't think she's aware," Corrigan says. "A lot of people are prejudiced in that way. They try to justify their reasons to be and for clumping people into categories and stereotypes."

Friedrich says the film isn't just representative of Charlotte, but all of America and agrees that Julie represents the racist attitudes that linger in communities of privilege.

"People will use any excuse to be biased," he says.

Friedrich, who is straight, says he strove to portray Sam as a normal teenager, not a stereotypically gay one. In fact, viewers don't know of Sam's

sexual orientation until close to the end of the film.

"Something that rubs me the wrong



Mitzi Corrigan (Julie) and Stephen Friedrich (Sam) say the City of Charlotte must move past its old bigotries and prejudices in order to move forward.

Photo Credit: Matt Comer

way is when straight people play gay characters and they push it over the top," he says. "I don't know and I've never met a gay person who is like 'Oh my gawd' all the time."

In the last vignette, "Eye to Eye," Sam and his classmates are discussing diversity as their teacher announces his decision to run for city council.

"Try being gay in the South," Sam says. "My mom does not even know I'm gay."

Friedrich says having friends and family who are openly gay helped him to bring perspective to his role in the film.

"I had a friend who recently came out to me," he says, adding that he knows just how difficult the coming out process can be. "When people come out they totally have to put their heart out on the table and be willing to let it be crushed by anybody."

Corrigan says Friedrich's role in the film is a positive sign.

"Sam is very open to his class, which actually is a positive statement because, of course, not all schools are like that," she says. "I think it is becoming possible that kids in high school now can be so supported by the whole group. I don't know how realistic that it is, but it is possibly more realistic now than ever before."

In that last scene, viewers see Julie walking through the high school's hall.

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'My mom does not even know I'm gay.'

Photo Credit: Movie still, Crossroads Charlotte

ranked next to last in levels of social and interracial trust.

In response to the data, the Foundation for the Carolinas organized a meeting of 20 community leaders in 2004 to discuss the causes of distrust, especially between people of different races and ethnicities. As the group of leaders grappled with the issues, they found that the best way to engage community members was through the telling of stories. Thus was born

Sam to fend for himself at home.

In one of the four vignettes, "The Beat Goes On," life in Charlotte continues pretty much the way it always has. The economy is strong, but still relies on banking and finance. Under the surface of a seemingly vibrant city lies racial tensions and

