

## Former MET player screening film at Utopia Film Festival

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By Ron Cassie

A few years after leaving the Navy and starting a successful computer consulting business, Trent went to see his first professional play.

"It was 'Fiddler on the Roof' and my girlfriend took me to see it at The Weinberg because her sister was in it," Trent said. "I had never even been to a play before and I cried. It was so emotional. I felt as if I was in a tunnel and they were doing it just for me. It changed my life.

"I told my girlfriend afterwards, 'That what I want to do, I want to act'."

Thirteen years ago this month, the former Fort Ritchie Navy computer specialist with no previous theater experience — then 27-years-old — took his first acting class in Frederick.

"Oct. 2, 1995 — I'll never forget the date," said Trent. "The Maryland Ensemble Theater hadn't even formed yet and the class, taught by Tad Janes, was held in a park building."

And now, after studying improv in Chicago at the renowned Second City theater, among other places, and more recently, enrolling in the Film Studies program at Los Angeles City College, Trent returns to Frederick this week to screen two film shorts, "Hungry" and "The Smelly Janitor," that he's written, directed and acted in.

"Hungry," a clever, silent but current, five-minute black and white homage to Charlie Chaplin, will be shown at the 4th annual Utopia Film Festival in Greenbelt, on Saturday, Oct. 25, at 3:30 p.m. as part of their 90-minute film short presentation.

On Sunday, the Maryland Ensemble Theater on West Patrick Street will show both of the films at a free event, open to the public at 1 p.m., with Trent introducing both shorts and holding an informal Q & A afterwards.

"I'm thrilled to be coming to Frederick," Trent said, adding he got a strong early foundation in acting at the MET. He's also looking forward to catching the theater's production of Henrik Ibsen's "A Doll's House" while in town.

The three-day Greenbelt festival opens Friday evening with "A Home in Utopia," a feature documentary looking back at a unique experiment to build a cooperative apartment house owned by 1930s factory workers and immigrants in New York. Sunday, the festival concludes with "On the Trail of Jack Thorp," a story of a late 1800s song



Trent on the set of "Hungry."



collector who made a 1500-mile horseback journey through New Mexico and Texas in search of authentic cowboy songs.

Including the shorts, the 4th annual Utopia Film Festival ([www.utopiafestival.org](http://www.utopiafestival.org)) will screen nearly 60 films, including the D.C.-area premieres of "RFK," a documentary of the assassination of Robert F. Kennedy Jr., and "American Gothic," a feature documentary on small-town America as seen through the eyes of Eldon, Iowa, the inspiration for Grant Wood's famous painting. The films are shown at seven different venues around Greenbelt with "Hungry" and the film short presentation showing at the Greenbelt Community Center, where Trent will also take part in a director Q & A after the session.

"Hungry," an official selection at four film festivals, including the 2008 Nonviolence International Film Festival in Ontario won honorable mention awards at two California student film festivals and earned Best Silent Film honors at the 2008 Bayou City Inspirational Film Festival.

In "Hungry," Trent pulls material from his own struggles and his appreciation of the simplicity and kindness of Chaplin's films. He utilizes the writing and directing skills he's developing through film school as well as his considerable comedic acting ability.

"I know what's it like to live on leftover spaghetti and to look around my apartment for something to eat and have to eat whatever you find. You have to write about what you know and in that way, I'm like the character in the opening scene who's looking for loose change to go to the market," Trent says, "I used to drive a BMW and have money, but that's gone now. But, as in the film, I believe no matter how hard things are, you can always share."

Trent, who mentions Philip Seymour Hoffman, Paul Giamatti and John C. Riley as his favorite character actors, still teaches computer classes and does consulting work to make ends meet. However, he doesn't regret letting go of his once-thriving business to pursue his acting.

"My wallet was happy, but not my heart," he said.

During an extended year and a half trip to South Korea in 2005 and 2006, where he taught computer science and English, Trent discovered the martial arts, lost 50 pounds and said he found a peace within himself that he hadn't known previously. When he returned home, realizing he still maintained a passion for acting, he decided he should try and make his own break in Hollywood by going to film school.

"Knocking on doors and going to auditions is hard. You walk in and there are 20 other fat white guys practicing the same few lines that you are," Trent said. "I also realized there were things I wanted to say, and not just repeat someone else's words." Growing up in Valdosta, GA, Trent said he was raised in a difficult household and typically played the class clown in school to get attention. A disinterested student, he joined the Navy at 17 soon after graduation.



"I really can't believe where I am right now. I never thought I'd be back in school trying to earn a college degree. I'm loving it. I'm scheduled to finish my A.A. degree this spring and then I'm hoping to go to U.S.C. or U.C.L.A."

Meanwhile, he has two other short scripts he's written that's he's hoping to shoot soon.

"Being a misfit and coming from poor circumstances, making money had always been important to me, but what I want to do now is put a smile on people's face — not that I'm adverse to drama," Trent said, laughing a little bit. "When you watch a good play or good movie there are these perfect moments when people are totally absorbed, not thinking about their bills, or their problems, their sick uncle or their landlord — and that's what I want to give people — that kind of happiness."