

Roger Friedman's

## SHOWBIZ★411

HOLLYWOOD TO THE HUDSON

# Polite Canadians, Rude Publicist Make “Klondike” Red Carpet Memorable

by [Paula Schwartz](#) - January 20, 2014 11:09 am



“That’s ridiculous!” Tim Blake Nelson fumed about Joel and Ethan Coen’s Oscar snubs for “Inside Llewyn Davis,” Thursday night at the premiere of “Klondike,” the Discovery Channel’s first scripted mini-series. “It was hands down the best movie of the year.”

The V.I.P. screening of “Klondike” took place at the Best Buy Theater on 44th Street, and the lavish afterparty – with dancing saloon girls, top-drawer liquor and Klondike bars for dessert – was across the street at the Discovery Center, which was recreated to look like the frontier town of Dawson, where most of the adventure story takes place. (The series airs on three consecutive nights beginning tonight.)

“Klondike” stars Richard Madden (“Game of Thrones”) as Bill Haskell, a college grad who sets out with his best friend Byron Epstein (Augustus Prew of “Borgias” and “Kick-Ass 2”) to the wilds of the Canada Yukon to find their fortune during in the 1980’s Klondike Gold Rush. These guys don’t know what they’re getting into. They try to cross dangerous mountains sheeted in ice, and to survive desperate, treacherous characters out to hustle or kill them. (The series is based on the fact-based book by Charlotte Gray, “Gold Diggers: Striking it Rich in the Klondike.”)

Abbie Cornish, who is a natural blonde, is unrecognizable in the role of dark-haired Belinda Mulrooney, a tough-talking, successful Dawson businesswoman. Other cast members are Sam Shepard, Conor Leslie, Ian Hart, Johnny Simmons (as Jack London) and Tim Roth.

The cinematography is beautiful, with sweeping landscapes, and snow-covered mountains. And although it's still a standard adventure yarn as far as Westerns go, the action scenes are nifty and the production values are high. My favorite scene is in the wilds where the hero is surrounded by wolves, the four-legged kind. (In the theater, there was an adorable stuffed animal wolf on each seat.)

Earlier on the red carpet, Nelson, who was at the premiere with his very nice and attractive wife and cute kids, told me he took the role of Joe Meeker, a man of few words but deep loyalty, after he learned screenwriter Paul Scheuring ("Prison Break"), producer Ridley Scott and director Simon Cellan Jones ("Treme") were all involved.

He added, "I love shooting in Canada, particularly you had to shoot this in Canada. I suppose we could have shot in Alaska, but it was the perfect place to shoot it, so you didn't have the usual negatives about Canada, which it's shot for the U.S. and ends up looking generic and unspecific and doesn't ultimately have that detail and credibility that movies really need to strive for, but in this case, where we were looked like the Klondike."

As for working in the Canadian cold, Nelson said, "It was a big budget. They gave us jackets and foot warmers. That was fine. Nobody has anything to complain about."

The "Oh Brother, Where Art Thou?" actor-director had kind words for Sam Shepard. "We were best buddies on this. We went out almost every night. He's a great guy. He has humility to match his intelligence and that's quite rare."

Cornish, who wore long dangling diamond earrings, and whose blonde's tresses were styled into a low chignon, told me that working in the harsh weather conditions made everything more realistic. "It was fantastic. It was frozen over with ice. We really did all the dog sledding, and we really rode all the horses. What I felt was that the space and the elements started to inform us on a much more deeper level of what these characters went through and the incredible achievements they made in an environment like that. It changed us for sure from the first day."

By the way, it was the most polite and laid back red carpet I've ever been on since most of the press were Canadians and said "sorry" every few seconds. Most of their questions were about shooting in Canada.

"I have a massive soft spot for Canada," Cornish said, thereby winning over the entire Canadian press corps. She added, "I shot 'Sucker Punch' in Vancouver and obviously 'RoboCop' in Toronto, and this one in Calgary, Canada. As an Australian, I can say we're very similar, right? And I think it was the perfect setting for it because it gave us space and it gave us the environment that we needed for the film. We shot everything outdoors. Nothing was on the stage or it was never make believe. It was all real and I think when you watch the show you can feel that, and I think as actors you thrive off that and I think it pulls things out of you that you don't even know you have within you."

I asked about her look in "Klondike," how her big, black hair and leather garb – very dominatrix - helped her get into the role.

"For me, because I have blond hair, to put on a wig that is dark and with this long hair, you're stepping into this other characters in so many ways in regards to their clothes, in regards to the way they look.

There were small things that the make up ladies did, you know, very small things that you don't really notice, but they changed the shape of my eyes a little bit and darkened my eyebrows and as soon as that wig went on, I was Belinda." Cornish added, "So much came from inside, but all of those things give you the reassurance that it will register quite easily on the outside."

Red carpets are always a little wacky but a head scratcher was why was Jerry Springer suddenly there doing interviews, while Richard Madden – the handsome actor just got killed off in last seasons "Game of Thrones" – was kept from talking to the press?

Even Springer seemed a little puzzled why he was there. But it turns out he's on a new crime show on Investigation Discovery Channel about "the greatest crimes of the last 20-30 years. We look into it and look into the backstory and where they are now, the ones that survived." He says these people are even scarier than the ones on his tabloid trash show. "At least the ones on our show haven't committed crimes, they're just dysfunctional."

At the party I started to ask Richard Madden, who was at the premiere with his parents and who is next up in the Cate Blanchett starer "Cinderella," how rough it got shooting in Alberta. He started to reply when he was pulled away by the Discovery Channel publicist, who said, "I'm sorry. He's done. I promised him drinks."

The charming Madden turned around and said plaintively, "I'm sorry." He stayed at the party with his parents until midnight.