Music star finds real Freedom as director

By CARIS BIZZACA

SYDNEY: After decades working on crowds on the stage, Australian musical theatre icon Peter Cousens has stepped behind the camera to direct Cuba Gooding Jr in Freedom.

A drama with a musical twist, it seemed the perfect match for Cousens, best known for playing major roles in The Phantom of the Opera, Les Misérables, West Side Story and Miss Saigon.

"Cousens says on one hand, Freedom is a period film about slavery trying to escape in the 1850s. But it also flashes back 100 years to the time of John Newton, the captain of a slave trader, who wrote the song Amazing Grace.

"For me, that was the excitement, to use kind of the skills that I had from my musical background and applying it to film," he says.

"Music and storytelling is what I've done for the last 35 years so to be able to have that opportunity to explore that on a film was pretty attractive." Aside from directing Freedom, Cousens also crafted the musical score and soundtrack.

But the talented Aussie wants to press the point – although there is music in Freedom, this is not a musical.

The music is more a metaphor for hope and Cousens says Freedom is in some ways the opposite of something like 12 Years A Slave (which was actually shot just after Freedom).

"This film is kind of the antithesis of 12 Years A Slave in that its final moments are very life-affirming and positive, (whereas) 12 Years A Slave you feel very kind of stressed," he says.

Before it was shot, Cousens was looking for the perfect person to star as escaping slave Samuel Woodward, when he thought of Gooding Jr.

"Like everything, you just got to ask the questions. You just got to put your hand up and make the phone calls," Cousens says. He did.

And it turned out Gooding Jr liked the story and could make 13 days of the 25-day shoot (he was coming off the back of filming The Butler).

"You can't really avoid feeling nervous in any situation where you're confronted by people's skills," Cousens says of directing the Academy Award winner. But he needn't have worried. He says Gooding Jr was very easy to work with and always up for a laugh. They even went out partying together when Cousens was in post-production in New York.

Although the cast stars US actors such as Gooding Jr and William Sadler (from Iron Man 3), there's also a few Aussie faces.

Another New York film veteran Tony Sheldon appears, as do Australians Anna Flims and Peter Firth, in a cameo alongside his daughter Daisy Cousins.

Despite being an American story, shot in the US, Cousens says this is very much an Australian film and one of the reasons it's releasing here first.

"We see it as an Australian film – made by Australians, financed by Australians, created by Australians, with a few Australian actors in it," he says.

"And so for us it made sense to bring it back here and share it with Australians first. Freedom will be released in limited Australian cinemas on August 21.

Downtown drinks up for charity

LONDON: Downtown Abbey stars have shrugged off a recent embarrassing blunder by posing for a charity photog- raph while clutching water bottles.

Show bosses were left red-faced last week when a modern-day water bottle was spotted in the background of a promotional photo of actors Hugh Bonneville and Laura Carmichael dressed in character for the period drama.

Now a new photo will help promote a charity campaign. The image features the cast dressed in modern clothes, looking suitably embarrassment and holding bottles of water.

A caption alongside the snap reads, "The cast of Downtown Abbey embraced 'water bottle-gate today.'"

The post on Twitter coincides a link to WaterAid UK, a safe water and sanitation charity.

Fans smell a fake in Britney's Perfume

By MELISSA JENKINS

Melbourne: Rising Australian star Sarah Snook investigated the emotional and spiritual side of being transgender as well as the physical elements to prepare for her role in the movie Predestination.

Predestination's character stars Predestination as a female and inadvertently turns into a male in the film directed by brothers Peter and Michael Spierig based on short story All You Zombies by Robert A. Heinlein.

Shot mostly in Australia, with a few Aussie faces, Predestination is the first full-length Hollywood film directed by Australian siblings Peter and Michael Spierig.

Actor Sarah Snook and Ethan Hawke star in Predestination.

Melbourne, the movie opens in Australia next Thursday.

"I did a lot of research into transgender (people), their physiology, how that changes the body, and also the emotional and spiritual side of things," Snook said.

"Also just researching just how it is to be someone who is really different and looking at how that kind of person operates in society.

"I'm working alongside co-star Ethan Hawke was fantastic.

"He is so passionate and energetic and enthusiastic about his work and you can see that in the choices that he makes about the films that he chooses to do," she said.

"I really appreciated working with someone like that.

"Snook recently finished filming Goodfellas, a new Australian comedy featuring a chicken farmer who gets his grandfather to help him train his dog to protect a cold chicken sanctuary.

"She has been working on ministries. The Secret River, based on Kate Grenville's novel and set in the 1800s.

Snook is also waiting on news from the US on whether or not the ABC will go ahead with Clementine, a series in which she has been cast as the lead.

Motley Crue crew member killed

LOS ANGELES: Motley Crue's final tour has been marred by a traffic accident involving a crew member hauling the band's equipment to a gig in Alabama.

One of the band's 18-wheeler trucks jackknifed just after dawn on Friday morning in Jefferson County, Alabama and collided with 47-year-old Wayne Marsh's vehicle.

Marsh died at the scene and the driver of Motley Crue's truck was taken to a local hospital but was not injured.

The group had to postpone a show in Detroit, Michigan, in 2012 after a truck carrying equipment flipped on a highway in Ohio, but Friday night's concert in Birmingham went on as scheduled.

The truck driver's name has not been released.

Gale reveals chic nursery for River

MELBOURNE: Australian supermodel Megan Gale has shared a glimpse of her son River's chic nursery.

Gale and partner Shaun Hampson welcomed River on May 15 this year.

She posted pictures of his nursery to Instagram yesterday, revealing a neutral colour palette, with a chic wooden wall hanging spelling out the letters of his name from Branch & Twine.

"Three months since giving birth and still nesting. Love River's @branchntwine wall hanger. Thanks for hanging it Daddy," River has a @branchntwine wall hanger.

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