

# Actor Michael Eklund plays damaged bartender in Calgarian's indie thriller, serial killer for Hollywood

BY ERIC VOLMERS, CALGARY HERALD MARCH 6, 2013 5:04 PM

Presented By:



Michael Eklund in *Ferocious*. Courtesy, Chaos

Michael Eklund is no doubt being sincere when he says he approaches all his characters with the same devotion and gusto, no matter what size film they inhabit.

But that doesn't mean the levels of effort required to land roles doesn't vary depending on the size of the budget.

For the psychological thriller *Ferocious*, shot quickly last winter in Eklund's hometown of Saskatoon, the process was fairly easy. Calgary writer-director Robert Cuffley wrote the part of the weak-willed and desperate bartender Eric with Eklund in mind. But he also told the actor he was free to choose another role if he didn't want that one.

This is a far cry from the Herculean efforts required to nab the highly coveted part of serial killer Michael Foster in *The Call*, a Hollywood shocker that also stars Halle Berry and Abigail Breslin.

Eklund went to creepy lengths to convince producers he was right for the part, spending a night in a

Vancouver hotel room deep in character.

“There were a lot of hurdles I had to jump through,” says Eklund, on the line from Los Angeles. “It ended with me getting a couple friends together from Vancouver. I went and bought a video camera, borrowed a bunch of lights and shot my audition in the seediest motel I could find in Vancouver overnight. I filmed myself living in this hotel room for the whole night, being this character. I have good friends who are geniuses at editing film. They edited my audition and put sound design and music to it and made it look like a little mini-movie. We sent that in. It was the audition tape that I made that sealed the deal.”

The Call opens wide on March 15 following a fairly extensive promotional blitz by TriStar Pictures.

Ferocious opens in select cities this Friday before spreading to other parts of the country, a more modest release perhaps, but still quite a rare and impressive feat for a low-budget, independent Canadian film.

So while, on the surface, the two are very different films, Eklund insists that the differences fade once it's time to get to work.

“Money doesn't necessarily make a better film,” Eklund says. “It depends where they distribute it. For me, the work is always the same, whether it's a big-budget movie like The Call or a smaller movie like Ferocious. The craft of what I do doesn't change, no matter how much money we have on the film, I still have the same job to do. I approach everything from the work point of view, so I don't feel much difference between action and cut. It's on the downtimes that you notice there may be more money on a movie because you may have a trailer to go to or you may not.”

There were no trailers to go to for Ferocious, but that only heightened the friendly feel of the set. Cuffley and Eklund worked together in the director's 2007 thriller Walk All Over Me. He had also worked with Amanda Crew, who described the atmosphere during the shoot as being like summer camp, and Katie Boland before. Co-star Kim Coates is a fellow Saskatoon boy.

Which is not to say that the resulting film is particularly friendly. It's a dark, twisting thriller, albeit not without its odd flashes of black humour.

Crew plays a famous actress returning to an unnamed hometown to confront a piece of nasty business from her past. The plot involves a sex tape and creepy nightclub owner (Coates), who becomes the menacing centre of a night of violence and murder. Eklund plays the nightclub's jittery and not-so-bright bartender, who is still emotionally scarred by a past relationship with Crew's starlet. Boland plays a flaky star-struck fan who tries to help her favourite actress out of a jam, often with disastrous results. Most of the action takes place in a dark, empty bar.

While Cuffley wrote the part of Eric specifically for Eklund, he didn't tell him that until after the actor read the script. He told him to choose whichever role spoke to him most.

“Eric is a darker character with a lot of humour and a lot of sadness and a lot of humanity, which is

what I look for in my character,” Eklund says.

“He’s not a bad guy, he’s more of the guy that got left behind and he had a lot of heartache. Robert knows I like playing characters with internal problems. So when I see a character like that it jumps out on me and I get all excited like a kid to figure him out.”

Figuring out exactly what makes killer Michael Foster tick in *The Call* was a bit of a darker task. As with most serial killer movies, motivation is no doubt part of the mystery of the big-budget film, which is certainly the highest-profile project Eklund has had a major role in.

Born in Sweden, Eklund came to Canada at the age of six. He eventually studied drama in Saskatoon before heading to Vancouver to kick-start his career. He earned a reputation for versatility, starring in everything from *A Beachcombers Christmas* in 2004 to the 2009 comedy-western *Gunless*, to guest shots on cult TV shows such as *Fringe*, *Smallville* and *Supernatural*.

As his efforts to land his role in *The Call* reveal, Eklund is a bit of a method actor who likes to get into the head of his characters, even when that head belongs to a disturbing serial killer.

The film revolves around the efforts of a 911 operator played by Halle Berry to help save a teenager (Abigail Breslin) who has been abducted by Eklund’s character. It’s a role that has not been easy to shake, even after the cameras stopped rolling.

But Eklund admits there’s limits to method acting when you are on a set. Initially, both he and Breslin went the method route, trying to stay away from each other between scenes so as not to become too friendly.

“After a couple days on set I think we both felt it was OK that we were ourselves around each other because we needed to build that trust,” he said.

“It’s different every time. Each role is completely different. I would say, on *The Call*, I was staying in the role as much as I could. But I’d break out of it when I needed to for the sake of other people.”

**PREVIEW:** *Ferocious* opens Friday at the Globe at 7 and 9:10 p.m. Producer Carolyn McMaster and actor Kim Coates will be in attendance for a Q&A.

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