

# Low-budget director has lofty aims

Filmmaker Sean Sutton talks to Athens Plus about his latest project, which he is currently shooting in the Greek capital

BY CHRISTINE STURMEY

In the midst of the apocalyptic landscape of riot-torn Athens, the feeling that all this cannot really be happening is quickly dispelled by the tickle of tear gas, the sight of a gutted and looted motorbike store and a cluster of burning garbage left in the wake of a destructive wave of rage and disillusionment.

Turning right onto a tranquil downtown square that world is left behind, as some neighborhoods of Athens escaped the rampage unscathed, the lives of residents touched only by the violence on their screens and a deep sense of sadness at a young boy's death coupled with growing insecurity over what tomorrow will bring.

I met English Athens-based actor-turned-director Sean James Sutton at a small bistro on the sleepy square to talk about his new project, a medium-length comedy drama titled "The Greek-American." The show, after all, must go on.

Frustrated by the actor's lot of having to wait around to be called to a job, and being of the type that doesn't let the grass grow under his feet, Sutton embarked on the project just eight months ago and is already halfway through shooting.

Based on a screenplay written by bona fide Greek American Steven Papadakis and J.T. Kinna, "The Greek-American" stars Sutton behind and in front of the camera. He is joined on the set by Lida Samouilidou, Paris Ayiomamitis, Phillip Marnellos and Emmanuela Bardas.

Sutton's character, Elliot Mason, is a wife-beating expat real estate agent married to a Greek woman, Maria (Samouilidou). Enter the larger-than-life Christos (Ayiomamitis), a Greek who went to the States and made a fortune selling hot dogs and who wants to put his beloved, and much younger, bride in a beautiful palace.

"The baddies are always the best," said Sutton, who has played a range



Sutton believes that his own background as an actor makes it easier for him to talk to his cast and to get a feel for what they will be doing next.

**Mind's image**  
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of different characters on television, on film and in commercials, including a weightlifting Santa, an English teacher, a Cockney business executive and a snobby waiter. The wife beating, he explained, came about while he was studying the role of Elliot. "This is what this guy would do. He's frustrated. He came to Greece because he had to, because of his daughter. He doesn't speak the language and his wife comes from a better social background than he does. This is his way to lash out at her, to take control."

Sutton is also enjoying his role as director, a yen he's had since boyhood, when his father, a painter, would take him and his brothers (one is an architect and the other a musician and composer who is also penning the score for

the film) out to paint landscapes. "My father would produce this beautiful thing, and my brother, the architect, would come up with something really well structured and executed. I would just draw these awful stick figures. The image was right there in my mind, but I couldn't get it onto paper."

Now, as a director, Sutton feels he is finally able to externalize the image in his mind. Sutton also has a keen head for business. Lacking the funds to start the film, he came up with the idea of pre-selling the DVD to boost cash flow. He also says that, for the time being, "The Greek-American" will be a medium-length film that he hopes to submit to festivals such as the Drama Short Film Festival and the Thessaloniki International Film Festival to drum up interest from producers and distributors.

"There are so many unexplored avenues in this film," he told Athens Plus. "There is enough to make a full-length feature and maybe even a television series: the theme of the Greek American, who idealizes his homeland, who knows it as this wonderful place his parents told him about; the expat with all his rage, who begins an affair with a young Eastern European beauty."

Though on the face of it, this doesn't sound like the stuff comedy is made of, Sutton promises there will be plenty of amusement juxtaposed with more dramatic moments, the purpose of which is, effectively, to highlight the main themes. Music will also play an important role. "I'm not a big fan of too much dialogue. I want to set up scenes that are pleasing to look at. I like to zoom into people's faces, to their eyes. Each scene needs to work like an independent tableau," said the director, tipping his hat at his visual artist's genes.

The bistro began to shut up shop, turning off the music and bringing down the metal shutters. We walked out to the tableau of Athens, wondering whether we would ever see a film about these days that shocked the country, that changed something in the fabric of our society.

## Reconstructing war-torn Europe at the HAU

The "Films of the Marshall Plan," an archive of 300 rare reels showcasing and promoting the European recovery plan launched by US Secretary of State George C. Marshall in the aftermath of World War II, is scheduled to be presented at the Hellenic American Union (HAU) on December 15 and 16, with the collaboration of the US Embassy in Athens and the US Consulate General in Thessaloniki.

Film producer and director Sandra Schulberg, an adjunct professor at Columbia University and daughter of Stuart Schulberg, one of the chiefs of the European Recovery Program, is slated

to speak in the HAU's auditorium on December 15 at 7 p.m. on "A Modern Look at the Films of the Marshall Plan."

Schulberg is head of the Selling Democracy project, an initiative that takes the films to various parts of the world in order to address modern-day international diplomatic practices in relation to the past.

The films, essentially propaganda material aimed at both Americans and Europeans, address issues such as postwar rehabilitation, the rehabilitation of civil society, the creation of infrastructure and the search for diplo-

matic rather than military solutions to conflicts.

In the 21-minute "Aquila," an early example of Italian Neorealism, music highlights an unemployed man's resorting to crime in order to feed his family.

"The Extraordinary Adventures of a Quart of Milk" is a humorous account lauding the development of pasteurization and refrigeration techniques. "The Island of Faith" shows the people of Walcheren Island in the Netherlands repairing the dikes that were destroyed in the war. "The Shoemaker and the Hatter" is an animated film

about two manufacturers' approaches to recovery, and "The Story of Koula" is about a young Greek boy who learns to love a difficult donkey – an allegory for the Greek agricultural aid program.

These are some of the films that will be screened at the event. Admission is free of charge for all screenings as well as the lecture.

Readers are advised to call the HAU (22 Massalias, Kolonaki, tel 210.368.0044) before attending any events in order to confirm that the recent rioting has not affected the program.

