

Local Talent Crowds ‘Out of State’ Film Set

By Kris D’Lorenzo Photo: Tim Lamorte Rivertowns Enterprise
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A Gothic Romance is taking place this summer at a Victoria home in Hastings, where its owner is directing her first feature film, “Out of State – A Gothic Romance.”

Victoria Bugbee, an award winning playwright, videographer and visual artist, is also the film’s producer and co-screenwriter, and has recruited local talent for the project. Her daughter, Tess Warren, a 2012 Hastings High School graduate, plays Becky, best friend to main character, Elsa (Sarah Moliski), Avery Ryder Turner, who plays furniture restorer, Emery Garth, attended Dobbs Ferry’s Springhurst Elementary and Middle School, Caroline Winterson, playing Marcia Garth, mother of Emery and Tab Garth, was a longtime Hastings resident; and co-producer Cherie Fortis, a long-time Dobbs Ferry resident, splits her time between the village and Florida. Moliski and James Nester, who plays obsessive pianist Tab Garth, are the only performers without a Rivertowns connection. Moliski is from East Hampton, Long island, and Nester is from Bethlehem, Pa. – though Bugbee met Nester through her nephew.

Hastings residents may remember Bugbee from her play “The Gas Station Project,” which RiverArts presented at Overseas Auto Body on Warburton Avenue in 2007. (Bugbee was a RiverArts board member for three years.) Bugbee was a recipient of a New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship in playwriting and was commissioned by Lincoln Center to create a new play for its Out of Doors series. She worked for 25 years on film and video projects for several production companies, including Manhattan-based B Productions, owned by Bill Marpet, also a Hastings resident and with Andy Biskin.

Bugbee’s original co-writer on “Out of State” was literally family; her distant cousin Charles Bugbee, who died in 1992 of a brain tumor at age 35. He was a sound mixer on Broadway for Andrew Lloyd Webber, among others, and his first film “Just Off the Coast,” won Best Feature Film in 1992 at the San Sebastian Film Festival in Spain.

“We’re making the film for Charlie,” Bugbee told the Enterprise. “He’s been our upstairs producer. Everything I need, he finds. Charlie is our angel.”

Bugbee, 64, continued writing the script, a quirky tale about 18-year old Elsa, whose businessman father is stranded in the Middle East. Because her mother is dead, he sends Elsa out of state to a small Pennsylvania town to live with oddball step-relatives Marcia Garth and her two sons.

The Garths are virtual recluses, and both sons fall for Elsa. The film opens with Elsa being chauffeured through a cemetery to her out-of-state relatives. Bugbee explained, “It’s a classic tale where an outsider comes into this strange, almost foreboding family, where everybody’s sort of shut down, and she’s a bit shut down, because her mother passed away.” She added, “It’s a Gothic romance, but much lighter than film noir. It’s

dark, but it has a sense of humor. You'll see people peeking around doors, everybody's watching somebody else.

Elsa has her own quirks: It's the 1990's but she is obsessed with 1970's clothes like her mother's and wears funky outfits, rendering her a misfit at school. That plot element is taken from Bugbee's personal experience when her family moved from Manhattan to Hastings 19 years ago. She said the local children were afraid of her two – Georgia, now 30 and a New York City schoolteacher, and Dylan, 27, a professional photographer in Lake Tahoe, Nev. Tess, a recent SUNY-New Paltz graduate, was only a few years old at the time.

Another idea in the film is taken from Bugbee's youth. She grew up in a big old house in Catasauqua, in Pennsylvania Dutch country. After 10 years of Catholic school, two years of public school, and a year at the University of Cordoba in Argentina, she returned to her home state to attend Kutztown University. Studying with avant-garde artists there inspired her to become involved in performance art and theater.

"My parents said I could make a film in the house," she explained. "I had issues with parental control: How much do you control your kids? How much do you let them go? I thought it would be great to have a family that never leaves their house, and their mother was the most controlling person in the world. They're shut-ins so ultimately sheltered, it's like the worst kind of helicopter parent."

That storyline, Bugbee believes, is why the low-budget film will appeal to teen and young adult audience. "I also think parents will like it because of the weirdness of the mother," she added. "It's almost a cautionary tale about parenting. It will probably get a PG-13 rating. It's not a horror movie; it's really an art-house film. There's a beauty about it."

She attributes that beauty to director of photography Ilya Shnitser's painterly visual sense. "Everyday I'm saying 'Now you're giving me Millais, now you're giving me Caravaggio, oh good, this is great; this is Vermeer, this is Rembrandt.' He's a master of lighting." Also contributing to the look of the film are editor Jason Kessler, who has 98 scenes to work with, and costume designer Kim Druce (Sava), a Hastings friend. Composer Joe Deihl rounds out the creative team.

Shooting began in mid-June. Bugbee expects it to wrap before the end of August, and is running an IndieGoGo crowdfunding campaign to reach her \$100,000 budget target. She plans a New York City premiere, and "maybe a special screening in Hastings," she said, "since it's all taking place in my house and my yard." After that, the film will be headed for the festival circuit as Bugbee seeks a distributor.

"This is all-consuming," Bugbee said. "I feel like I'm back in college, with many all-nighters. We're wearing many hats, it's a very small crew. Everybody's jumped in."

Bugbee's husband, George Warren, 66, a project manager for Broadway's Shubert Theatre, is involved in the filming by default; their home is host to a revolving, actual cast of characters. Earlier this week cameras and lighting equipment crowded the kitchen, an antique bric-a-brac cabinet and piano with candelabras filled another room, various props and vintage clothing were scattered everywhere, three dogs and two cats made impromptu appearances, and two cast members were in residence. "That's why my husband calls it "The Grand Hotel," Bugbee joked.

A trailer for "Out of State" can be seen at <https://vimeo.com/165040616>.