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ROMANTIC COMEDY FILMS AT PARK CAFÉ

by JOE FLOOD

Hollywood came to Capitol Hill recently. Visitors to Lincoln Park might have noticed that Park Café (106 13th St. SE) was covered by a thick black tarp. The cozy restaurant was a key location for an independent movie, *Table for Two*.

"Plug the daylight hole," is heard from inside the restaurant. A grip climbs a ladder and clips the tarp shut, blocking out the offending light. The scene being filmed is a romantic dinner, one which takes place at night.

Nearly a dozen extras sit at tables, sweating from the bright lights that hang overhead. Plates of fake food sit in front of them, including a tasty-looking gelato that refuses to melt. They've been sitting patiently for several hours.

Robyn K. Bennett, the director, charmingly appeals for their good will. "You guys are wonderful. I know it's hot, but please don't fan yourself once we're rolling. And don't look into the camera!"

Table for Two is her baby, a movie she's been thinking about for years while working as a producer for such clients as the Republican Party and West Point. The romantic comedy, written with Tyler Hamilton, is based upon people and situations she knows about. It's a love story, following two sets of couples, and is "about relationships, hateships, and romance," explains Robyn. All the action takes place on two dates in two restaurants at two tables for two.

The set is ready. "Everyone quiet!" Robyn yells. "This is a full-speed rehearsal!"

The soundman, earphones around his ears, monitoring the nearly silent, ambient noise of the room, says, "I hear the AC." The plug on the air-conditioner is yanked.

Robyn lets the silence settle through the room before shouting, "Action!"

The extras feign eating, clicking their plates and forks together while not actually touching the food on their plates. They murmur to

one another, smiling, careful not to make too much noise. An actor in a sweater weaves his way through the tables, comically running into the maitre'd near the front door. The camera, on a trolley across the room, tracks him through the scene.

"Cut! Excellent. One more time."

Robyn pulls the actor aside. "I'm not sure if I like the bump." They practice the choreography of running into the maitre'd, what it should look like, where it should occur, which direction the actor should face.

The crew has been working since dawn but they dutifully set up for one more take. Robyn, a tireless organizer, carefully folds one of the napkins on the tables. She's already rearranged the seating of the restaurant and moved some distracting artwork off the walls. Once more, the scene is repeated, a man stumbling through a restaurant. Again, the choreography of a man rushing, but not too fast, through a restaurant, bumping into, but not knocking down, the maitre'd.

Robyn is at last pleased with the rehearsal. Film is expensive and she's about to roll several feet of it. "This is it, this is for real!"

A production assistant steps in front of the camera and holds a card.

"Scene 7, Take 1."

"Action!"

The soft sounds of fake conversation start up. The actor rushes through the restaurant once more. The bump takes place with the maitre'd.

"Cut!"

They do four more takes of the same scene. Robyn is frazzled but happy. Filming would go on for four more days at Park Café, starting at 6 AM and ending after dark. The movie is set for December release.

For more information on *Table for Two*, visit www.inkfoot.com.