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Bross' Velvet Steamroller readies multi-feature slate, greater local presence



Velvet Steamroller president
 Jonathan Bross

Jonathan Bross plans a growing Chicago presence for his five-month old production company Velvet Steamroller. The company has a slate of up to six films for next year, at least one of which has a strong likelihood of shooting here.

Bross, who specialized in turning around troubled companies for Arthur Anderson and was a finance exec at Hilco Capital and Chillmark Partners, is one of three Chicago-based principals in the company. Most operations are run from the Los Angeles office.

"The idea is to develop this as a Chicago-based company, but you need to have a presence in Los Angeles to have an awareness of the deals that are being made and to have connections within the community," said Bross.

He founded the company with his sister and fellow Northwestern University alum, L.A.-based VP Lisette Bross.

"Being able to view things from outside and challenge existing assumptions about the way things are done is an advantage for us," Jonathan Bross said. "When I say I'm from Chicago, people are inclined to believe I actually say what I mean."

Bross and his wife, CFO Sophie Bross work out of their home in Chicago. Steve Bulzoni, VP/distribution, former senior VP at York Entertainment, works out of his Deerfield home.

"I want to be part of rebuilding the Chicago film community," Jonathan Bross said. Whether to actually shoot here is a "project-by-project decision."

Velvet Steamroller is developing the \$5 million horror pic "10,000 Doors" with Chicago company SerpentWise Films. "Because we're working with a Chicago producer, it makes it a lot easier to bring it back to Illinois, but we haven't made a decision," Bross said.



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The company's first feature is "2001 Maniacs," Tim Sullivan's remake of Herschell Gordon Lewis' cult classic "Two Thousand Maniacs." Robert Englund ("A Nightmare on Elm Street") stars in this story of young Yankees under assault by the undead denizens of a Georgia town that were massacred in the Civil War. It's being sold under the tagline "The South Will Rise Again."



Robert Englund in Velvet Steamroller's "2001 Maniacs"

Production partner GreeneStreet Films' horror division Raw Nerve sold the picture in 15 territories at the American Film Market. Bross said conversations with domestic distributors have left him "cautiously optimistic about getting theatrical in 2005. We think we really have a winner."

Velvet Steamroller also produced "Shining Through the Rain," the new album by R&B legend Percy Sledge ("When a Man Loves a Woman").

Bross intends to stay focused on features as Velvet Steamroller's primary business, but has his eyes open for more potential music ventures.

"The music industry is undergoing a lot of change at the moment," he said. "There's a tendency with my background to see opportunity in the chaos. We'll identify the opportunity as it emerges."

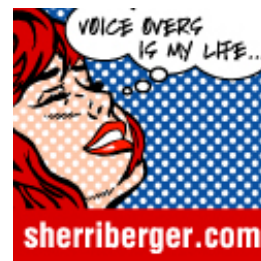
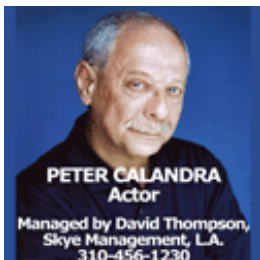
Next up is VP/Creative Brett Nemeroff's hip-hop doc "There's A God on the Mic," now in post and slated for completion by the end of the year. Velvet Steamroller is exploring an urban-targeted theatrical run to precede the video release.

The company is actively developing several other features for next year, including at least one more horror pic, and the family drama "Spike's."

Velvet Steamroller's production office is at 1149 N. Gower St., Suite 102C, Los Angeles. Call 323/785-2215 or see www.velvetsteamroller.com.

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