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Production company works with young Peck

Debra Gruszecki

By Debra Gruszecki

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He studied the cello, played varsity lacrosse and memorized the classic lines his grandfather, Gregory Peck, delivered on the silver screen in Academy Award-winning movies.

But it wasn't until Ethan Gregory Peck manned the rail of the USS Wasp - as it sailed into a New York City port for Fleet Week over Memorial Day - wearing "Cracker Jack" dress whites and a buzz haircut that his family background and aspirations as an actor came together.

The young Peck, who stars in the major motion picture "Adopt a Sailor" by WonderStar Productions of Palm Springs, also is the son of a Vietnam vet who serves as a community liaison for USVets.

Peck didn't wax patriotic in off-camera moments, but the film ultimately will: It is scripted in a way that has its two other characters, one played by actress Bebe Neuwirth, calling Peck simply "Sailor," a young guy from Arkansas with no name but solid ideals.

Written and co-directed by noted playwright Charles Evered of the University of California's Riverside and Palm Desert campus, "Adopt a Sailor" is a story about a dysfunctional New York couple who inadvertently takes in that sailor for a day during Fleet Week.

In the course of their visit, all their lives are changed.

"It is less about patriotism than it is about all the things we have in common," Evered said.

"Philosophy and political affiliation drop away when three people who are very different become human beings to one another."

They become "family" for a night. And, in a flash, he leaves and goes off to war.

Kim Waltrip of Palm Desert, a co-owner of WonderStar and a producer of the film with Sherry Halperin of La Quinta, said the second male actor will be announced within days.

Once cast, the remaining segments will be filmed at a Palm Desert home in August. The home is being transformed to look like the inside of a New York City apartment. Its location has not been disclosed.

Evered said Peck was chosen for the role in an audition that followed the review of more than 100 head shots, some of TV stars and others of noted theater kids.

"We were always cognizant that he is his own person. We're clear about that," Evered said.

"But having started to work with him, in my estimation, he has a natural star quality that isn't far removed from his grandfather.

"For a 21-year-old, he's calm, collected, grounded. There's something about his delivery that is simple and truthful. In a sense, it reminds me of his grandfather. He has a soulfulness in him."

And the script struck a chord with the Navy as well.

Waltrip said the reception the U.S. Navy gave to the film crew in New York was exceptional. The crew was flown in a Chinook helicopter 25 miles out to sea to board the USS Wasp for its cruise into port.

Peck anonymously was planted among the other sailors and "became one of them," Waltrip said. "The scene of him bolting out onto the deck to man the rails is incredible."

"We had the full cooperation of the Navy," said Evered, a Navy Reserve lieutenant, who noted that 1 percent of "Adopt a Sailor" proceeds will be donated to the Fisher House Foundation.

A Fisher House is "a home away from home" for families of patients receiving medical care at major military and VA medical centers.

Glance: Casting about

Performers who have donated their services by appearing in public readings or performances of "Adopt a Sailor" in the past:

Len Cariou, Scott Cohen, Tom Costello, Wendy Rolfe Evered, Josh Fardon, Neil Patrick Harris, Amy Irving, Anne Jackson, Matthew Modine, Bebe Neuwirth, Michael Nouri, Luke Perry, Amy Povich, Josh Radnor, Liev Schreiber, Brian Slaten, Greg Spradlin, Eli Wallach and Sam Waterston.

About Charles Evered, the writer

·His work has been featured in The New York Times, NBC's Weekend Today Show, Sports Illustrated, BBC World, NPR and ESPN'S "Cold Pizza."

·Has written screenplays for Dreamworks, Universal and Paramount Pictures.

·Collaborated with Liev Schreiber on the screenplay adaptation of "The Size of the World."

·Assistant professor in the theater department at the University of California, Riverside and Palm Desert. He divides his time between California and Princeton, N.J.

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