



Hans Gutknecht Staff Photographer

David B. Sharp, left, and sons Spencer and Aaron took three years to create their own comedy, "Sveener and the Shmiel."

FAMILY MAKES MOVIE TOGETHER

\$75,000 project to play at fest

By Bob Strauss
Staff Writer

Looking to bridge the gap between family and career that widened during his two decades as a special-effects artist, David B. Sharp has fulfilled his dream of making a feature film with his sons Aaron and Spencer.

"Sveener and the Shmiel," a dark comedy some describe as a cross between David Lynch and the Farrelly Brothers, helped the recovered workaholic bond with his boys.

It showcases the director's prodigious DIY skills ("Sveener" boasts 130 effects shots, on a budget that Sharp and his wife and executive producer, Marlene Moore, estimate at around \$75,000), gave a bunch of high school and college students valuable filmmaking experience, and certainly stands as an uncompromised personal and artistic expression.

"It was the best three years of my life," said David, who shot principle photography in the summer of 2005. He then went to work on the effects and post-production in the family's Granada Hills home, which he turned into something of a mini-studio with sound recording and editing rooms, a walk-in closet-sized telecine operation and woodworking and machine shops in the converted garage.

"I got to hang out with the kids," he said. "Aaron did a great job as the star of the movie, and Spencer worked on the effects and editing and did a lot of artwork for the film."

Aaron, 25 — whose severely depressed Sveener gets joy only by controlling his younger, perhaps not-as-mentally-challenged-as-he-seems brother Shmiel (played by Aaron's Chapman University film school buddy Gavin Woodward) — agrees that making the movie was a life-changing experience.

"Definitely, working on the film brought us together in a lot of ways," says Aaron, whose indie rock band, Saint Motel, also contributed five of the

movie's many original songs. "And, sometimes, it tore us apart."

"Obviously, making a film can be a turbulent and difficult process. You have to work with a lot of people, and a lot of money and effort and time is on the line. But in the end, the proof is in the pudding and it really gave us a chance to collaborate on a stand-alone piece of art."

An avid model-maker since his Toluca Lake childhood, David did miniature work and visual effects on a variety of films including "Die Hard With a Vengeance," "Mission: Impossible II," "The Passion of the Christ" and several "Muppet" movies.

"All I was doing was working," David said of his two-decade career.

"It was the best three years of my life. I got to hang out with the kids."

— DAVID SHARP, special-effects artist

"The kids have a joke to this day: 'I'm taking a shower and going to bed,' because that's what I'd say after working 16, 17 hours a day."

Though he loved the work, David had had enough by 2001. He agreed to do carpooling and such while Marlene went back to work at the ad agency she'd founded.

Some of Spencer's classmates who David schlepped to Santa Susana High School in Simi Valley wound up crewing on "Sveener" during their summer vacation, as did students from Aaron's film school.

"A lot of them lived far away, so we basically had a tent city in the backyard and the living room," David said. "Every night there were just bodies everywhere. Before she went to work, Marlene would fix breakfast for everybody. Then various moms of kids would show up with lunch, catering for us."

Going the youthful volunteer route

required a good deal of teaching and patience, and feeding the cast and crew. The Sharps figure most of their two grocery bags' worth of production receipts are for food.

Kids and family notwithstanding, "Sveener" is the darkest of comedies, replete with repellant characters, an elaborate suicide tower the brothers are building and even a strange subplot that may or may not involve a botched abortion.

"Sveener and the Shmiel" plays the Dances With Films festival at the Sunset 5 in West Hollywood Thursday at 7:15 p.m. (go to www.danceswithfilms.com for tickets and information).

Maybe it'll depend on your childhood. As for theirs, the Sharp boys say that Dad has nothing to feel guilty about.

"I don't really feel like my father was missing when I was a child," says Spencer, who currently studies and teaches at Valley Art Institute in Woodland Hills. "As I have gotten older, I've grown to admire my father and his work habits and his skills. I feel very blessed to have had the childhood that I had and the family that I have."

"Growing up, I probably felt that he wasn't around very much," adds Aaron, whose band plays The Viper Room on the Sunset Strip on Friday.

"But in retrospect, it doesn't really feel that way. Now I realize that I've gained a variety of skills from working with David, on a lot of sets and in a lot of model shops. I'm privileged in that regard, and in also being able to travel all over the world to live in different countries where he worked."

"So I agree with Spencer; I'm blessed to have such a diverse and artistic family."

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Online: For information on the Dances With Films festival, see www.danceswithfilms.com.

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SVEENER and the SHMIEL

DAVID B. SHARP PRODUCTIONS PRESENTS "SVEENER AND THE SHMIEL" STARRING AARON SHARP AND GAVIN WOODWARD WITH CHRIS WOODS AND DEMIRA TSIIOULOS
WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY DAVID B. SHARP
CASTING BY TERRY WOODS
COSTUME DESIGNER: SARAH SHARPE
PRODUCTION DESIGNER: DAVID B. SHARP
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: MARLENE MOORE AND DAVID B. SHARP
PRODUCED BY SARAH SHARPE
EDITED BY DAVID B. SHARP
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