THE ENTERTAINER'S HANDBOOK

I Am Entertainment

INSIDE THE FILM & MUSIC BIZ WITH...

Award Winning Actress
McKENZIE WESTMORE
(Passions, All My Children)

Record Exec & Manager
BIG BILLY CLARK
(Keke Palmer, Musicolio)

Award Winning Coach
MARGIE HABER
(Brad Pitt, Halle Berry)

Casting Director
MICHAEL TESTA
(Cold Case, Make It or Break It)

Indie Rock Band
BUILDING ROME
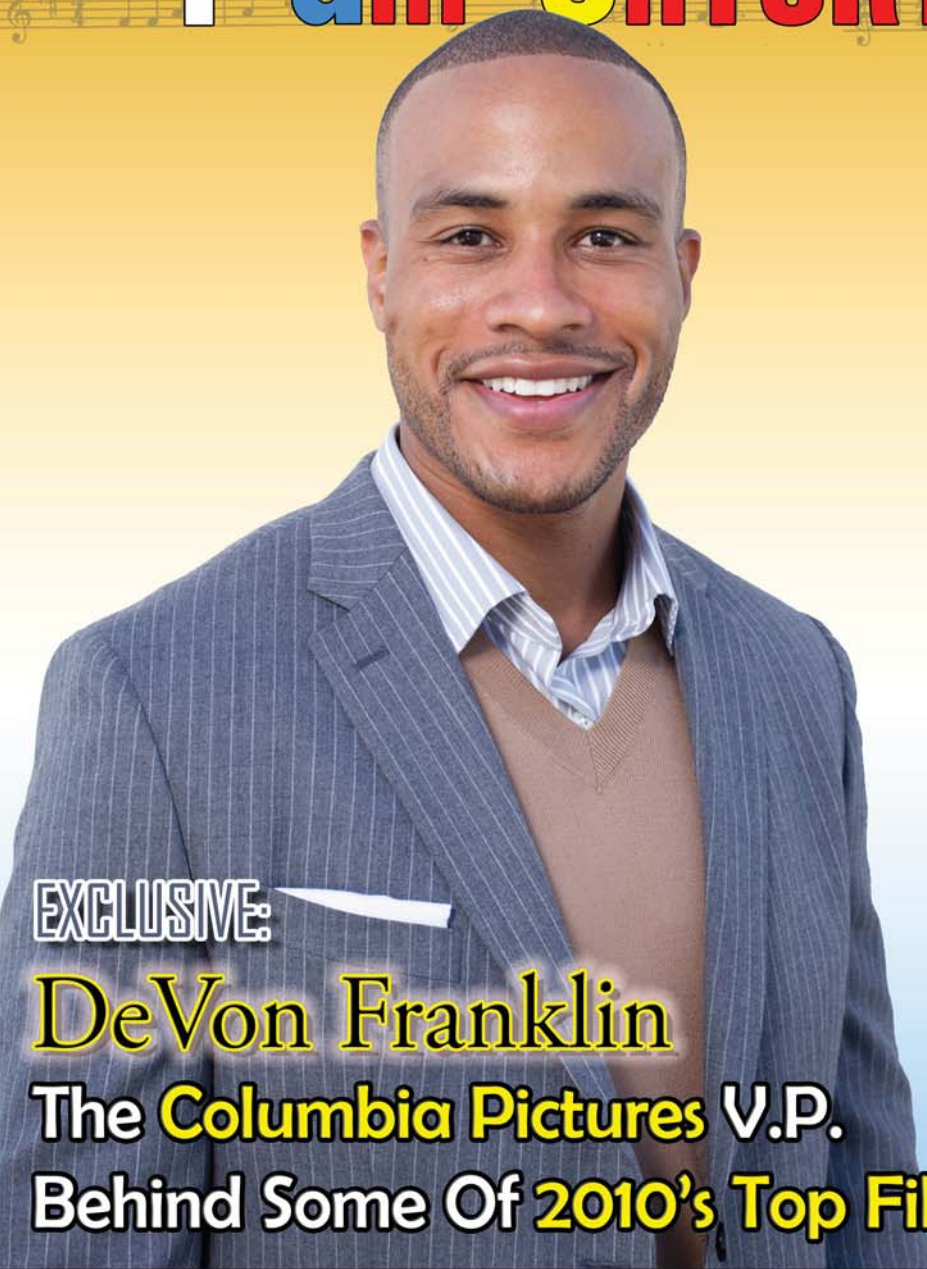
EXCLUSIVE:
DeVon Franklin
The Columbia Pictures V.P. Behind Some Of 2010's Top Films

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

| JEROME SPENCE | BOB & DELLA | TIM VANDESTEEG | NICOLE & BLYE | JOHN KURLANDER | ANGELA STRANGE | CHRIS HUNTLEY | SHAWN LEMONE |

CHRIS HUNTLEY

VP of Write Brothers Inc. & Co-Creator of "The Dramatic Theory of Story Telling"

EXPLAINS HOW TO WRITE A SCREENPLAY, AND WHAT SOFTWARE TO USE WHEN DOING SO

Chris Huntley is an Academy Award-winning software developer and the Vice President of Write Brothers Inc. As the co-creator of the 'Dramatica' theory of story and Dramatica Pro software, Chris has established himself as an industry leader in the area of screenwriting.

IAE visited Chris at the Burbank offices of Write Brothers Inc. to discuss screenwriting and the importance of understanding story structure.

IAE: Please tell us where you are from and what inspired you to get into the film biz?

CH: I'm originally from Southern California, but spent most of my life in Northern California, with a brief stint in Tampa, Florida when I was about 5 years old. I attended high school in Chicago, and I always wanted to make films. I thought I was going to have to attend college at CalTech because my grandfather, father, and uncle all went to CalTech. So when I spoke to my parents about it, they asked, "Why would you want to go to CalTech?" So I told them that I thought I had to go there because of family tradition. They knew I didn't like science so they asked me what I wanted to do for a living and I said film. So they said okay, then go do that.

IAE: So what college did you attend and how did you get started in the actual film biz?

CH: I attended USC's film program. While I was there, many of the people who were in USC's program were working on the first 'Star Wars' movie so I got to see the movie before it came out. So after film school, in the 80s, I got a job at a place called "Graphic Films" which was the place that did IMAX films. I was able to get my then roommate who's now my business partner, Stephen Greenfield, a job there. During our time there, we realized that working for "the man" (laughs) wasn't for us. So we put together a proposal in late 1981, and presented it to Steve's father, who in turn gave us $20,000 to start our company in March of 1982. Our first pro-

gram was called 'Scriptor,' which was a program for script formatting. Mind you, this was right at the beginning of the invention of the PC, so it was very different from today because Windows didn't exist. Also, most writers didn't have computers so we had to educate them about the need for them to own a computer, as well as the software. It was tough convincing them, to say the least (laughs). About three years after releasing 'Scriptor' in 1983, we released a program called 'Movie Magic,' which was a program for film budgeting and scheduling. Movie Magic was very successful. Both programs are still the dominant software in the market today for screenwriting and film accounting. In 1995 we won an Academy Award for 'Scriptor.'

IAE: Please explain what the 'Dramatica' theory is and how it came about?

CH: My writing partner, Melanie Anne Phillips, and I came up with this theory of how stories work. It took a very long time to develop, and in 1991, Melanie and I approached Steve and told him that we felt we were at a concrete enough place with the theory that it would make a great piece of software. In 1994 we finally released 'Dramatica,' but the current version is from 1999. Our software products are built to last, but we are in the process of updating the 'Dramatica' software now.

As for the Dramatica the theory, as mentioned previously it's about how stories work. It covers the underlying dramtics that hold a story together, and explains why stories work the way they do. But more importantly, Dramatica theory shows the connections between characters, plot, theme, and genre. The basis of the theory is that stories are models of human psychology. Characters represent motivation to solve inequities (problems). Plot represents the method of going about solving the problem. Theme represents the standards of evaluation; am I doing better or am I doing worse, is this good or bad. Genre is the overall purpose of trying to solve the problem. Are you trying to create some degree

of seriousness, comedy, or are you trying to educate? Those are all the big elements of a story. That's why people put such a focus on genre, because it tells me where my mood should be after I watch it. I'll either be happy, sad, afraid, confident, or educated after I see this movie.

There are so many other more detailed things, but what I just gave you is the basics of what the theory is about. But the software is just a way of implementing those abstract concepts into your story as a writer.

IAE: What would you say is the most common mistake most writers make in structuring their stories?

CH: I see many problems, but one of the biggest problems I see most writers make is that their characters don't grow throughout the story. There's a myth in story writing that says, "Your main character needs to transform into something else." I call it a myth because it's partially wrong and partially right. In every story you want a character to transform, but the thing is, it doesn't always have to be the main character who makes the transformation. You can have the impact character transform, or the antagonist, while the main character remains steadfast. Many Bible stories are like that, where you have all these people who just stayed the course, while those around them changed or transformed. Many writers, because of different story paradigms, don't allow for that. So not having a character grow to the point where they can transform is a big problem.

IAE: For the aspiring writer who has an idea for a script and thinks it's going to be the biggest blockbuster ever, which of your software would you recommend them to start with in order to get going on that big idea?

CH: First off, writers write, so you need to start writing it out on paper first. Forget about structure and formatting, just get it out into visible words, because I guarantee you that by the time you're finished getting it out on paper you're going to end up with a whole different story (laughs). Hopefully in doing that, you'll find out where you are in that idea. Then get away from it for 3 weeks and come back to it with a clear head, because you'll probably look at it and say "What in the world was I doing?" (laughs)

After the 3 weeks, if you come back to it and you still want to move forward with the story, and you have some sort of understanding of your craft and

structure, then use 'Screenwriter.' That will put it into format for you, but that's all it does. It just allows you to word process as quickly as you can without having to think about the format. But if you need to develop the story further, then 'Dramatica' is the one you should use. If you're an insane outliner, then 'Outline 4D' is perfect for you.

Also, READ! If you're a writer, you're going to want other people to read your work, so you should read also. Besides, if you're working on a comedy, then you should have some sense of how professional comedy writers put together their material.

IAE: If you could change anything about the business of film, what would it be and why?

CH: My original thought was, I'd like to get rid of the business side of it (laughs), because that's the part I hate. But that's not practical. What I would change is where the writer is in the power structure. I'd give the writer a lot more say in the process, and make them an equal partner with the directors and the other "above the line" creative people; as opposed to being the "slave."

What's interesting is, a screenwriter does not get paid overtime. Everyone who isn't above the line gets paid overtime, and while the writer is considered to be above the line, they certainly don't get treated that way. So if I could make anything more equitable, it would be to give writers their fair share of say at the filmmaking table.

> "One of the biggest problems I see most writers make is that their characters don't grow throughout the story. "