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## 'Brothers' to 'Others' director spreads wings

**On his second movie voyage, Charlotte's John Schwert is captaining a larger ship.**

By Lawrence Toppman  
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Cinematographer Ken Wilson (left) and director John Schwert discuss a camera setup during the Charlotte shoot for "In/Significant Others," which opens Charlotte Film Festival.

### More Information

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Film festival: Monday-Sunday at EpiCentre Theaters and Regal's Park Terrace Cinemas; [www.charlottefilmfestival.org](http://www.charlottefilmfestival.org); 704-644-8650.

"In/Significant Others" and other Fourth Ward projects: [www.4wproductions.com](http://www.4wproductions.com).

When we last heard from John Schwert, he had directed "Among Brothers," about a killer the police know to be guilty but can't arrest.

Four years later, Schwert of Charlotte has re-emerged with... a movie about a killer the police know to be guilty but cannot arrest.

And many other things.

Those last four words make quite a difference. They're the reason "In/Significant Others" was invited to more events: Schwert is at the Boston Film Festival as you read this, and his drama opens the Charlotte Film Festival on Monday night.

They're the reason he drew a better-known male lead to his second feature (Burgess Jenkins, a "One Tree Hill" regular) and a raft of strong local actors.

The first film was a more straightforward mystery about the unsolved death of a coed. The second is about the more complicated mysteries of the heart: how we use spouses, lovers, friends and co-workers to get what we need, at the cost of lost love or perhaps a life.

A returning Iraq war vet (Jenkins) literally triggers the action, killing the man he believed had raped his wife.

But she had told him so because she thought the victim raped her best friend, and she wanted justice. That act sends tremors through a web linking drug dealers and addicts, a successful stand-up comic and his struggling brother, the vet's unstable wife and a public-access TV host whose cruel interrogations make him dangerous.

Schwert, who is also the main screenwriter (with David Mulholland), realized more of his vision this time around:

"I was prepared to the teeth. Eighty percent of film is pre-production work. If you do it right, production is just knocking down what you'd set up to do every day."

What he learned most on the second voyage, he says, was how to captain a larger crew: 30 technicians, as many actors with speaking parts, and a hundred daily decisions to make.

"You need the maturity to lead in a way that doesn't offend people. In the years since 'Brothers,' my temperament changed. I'm 33, so a lot of it was emotional maturity. Nobody got yelled at or fired off the set. If you don't yell at people, they don't yell at anyone else.

"You also want to surround yourself with people who keep you in check, who will tell you that you can't decide to blow up a house on a whim." (He credits "right-hand man" Jason King, co-producer with him.)

### **Self-financed film**

Of course, some elements of the filmmaking *didn't* change. Though "Others" was a SAG indie, meaning Screen Actors Guild performers could work at lower rates, Schwert again financed much of it himself.

"I'm in debt," he says, with an easy laugh. "Well, so what? I guess I'll always be in debt."

Or maybe not. His Fourth Ward Productions, which operates in Charlotte and L.A., shoots commercials and corporate films and consults with filmmakers. Schwert says he's hearing from people who have finished their first cut and want advice, as well as those who are assembling budgets and pitch packets for investors.

### **Looking to 2010**

He hopes increased N.C. tax incentives will bring business to many companies, his included, in 2010. In the meantime, he's trying to raise money for his small-town drama "Southbound Crossing" and seeking distribution for "Others" – a tricky task for a movie that falls outside of all the obvious

marketing slots.

"We take a long time to tell you what the film is about, manipulating you with video snippets that (make) you curious," he says. "We don't have a typical three-act structure or a hero you can root for right away.

"But real people aren't like the ones in bigger films, where everyone is prepared and deliberate. In life, nobody really knows what he's doing."



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