

“Dance Flick”™ testing talents of next Wayans generation; Jewel stands by her man Ty backstage as

by Marilyn Beck & Stacy Jenel Smi

Damien Dante Wayans is delighted “ and nervous “ about the fact that Paramount pushed the release date of "Dance Flick," his directorial debut movie, up from August to Memorial Day Weekend, May 22.

That's clearly a major vote of confidence from the studio for the comedy that skewers the teen musicals of the last few years, from "Step Up" to "High School Musical," to "Drumline" and beyond. The actor-writer-director notes, "It's the weekend that can be a gift or a curse because a lot of other big movies are coming out. I call it a recession movie “ with all that's going on in the world, relax for 90 minutes and let the Wayans Brothers make you laugh."

Speaking of things that can be a gift or a curse, how about directing your first film surrounded by family members “ in front of and behind the cameras? Damien co-wrote and produced "Dance Flick" along with cousin Craig and uncles Keenen, Shawn and Marlon Wayans. It seems possible that such established creative types could steamroll right over a novice moviemaker without even trying.

Damien laughs. "You are preaching to the choir! A lot of people assumed that because my uncle Keenen has directed for a number of years, that he directed this too, not his little nephew," says Damien, whose mother is Wayans' sister Nadia. He adds, "I love their wisdom. I didn't go to school to learn writing and directing. I asked my family."

Even so, being younger does have its advantages. "I don't want to call my family old farts or anything, but my energy on set is completely different. It was my first movie, so I was like, 'Let's go! Let's go!' I'd go out and show 'em the dance move I wanted. I love my uncle, but he ain't gonna dance for you."

Now the family has a new production component. Damien's recently announced Second Generation Entertainment, led by himself and cousins Craig and Damon Jr.: "We want to make comedy geared to a young adult audience, hit 'em over the head with more movies, TV shows and animation."

STANDING BY HER MAN: Jewel Kilcher had to cut her time on "Dancing with the Stars" short due to injury, but the singer is standing by her man, Ty Murray, as the cowboy continues to improve his dancing. "She's with me every step of the way. She's at every show. She comes and checks out our rehearsals from time to time. She'll give me critiques and then give me foot rubs, which are pretty badly needed, because it kills your feet," says Murray, who notes it's part of the advantages of being married.

The couple certainly surprised people last year when they walked down the aisle because both had said they were content just being together. "We've been committed to each other for 11 years. People would always ask

when we were going to get married. It seemed like everybody else was a lot more worried about it than we were," he tells us. "I don't know why everybody wants to rush into marriage. I think it's important to become really good friends first. Now that we're married, to us, it's not really any different, but I think we are getting to the time in our lives where we want to start thinking about having a family."

For now, though, all of Murray's focus is on dancing. "It's not something that someone like me can fake my way through. Every dance so far has been a struggle," admits the retired professional bull rider. "I feel like I've improved, but I've never felt like I've done great. Nothing about this comes very naturally to me. You can come in as an athlete, someone who has body control and awareness, but this can make you feel really inadequate and uncoordinated. Luckily, people have really gotten behind me and I feel like I'm carrying the flag for the rest of the cowboys."

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: Brian Austin Green tells us he's loving all of the action scenes he's getting to do in "Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles," but at some point he would like to make that leap into film. However, the former "90210" star knows as much as anyone that it's not an easy feat. "It's really interesting how difficult it is for television actors to transition into film. Yet, musicians cross over into film all the time. It's really weird the directions that it works," notes Green, who also tried to pursue music early on in his career. "It's the same with music. It's tough for an actor to cross over into music, but musicians can transition into acting and it seems like they're given much more of a chance. I don't really understand how it all works."

A GOOD TURN: "Castle" star Nathan Fillion is not only handsome, talented and chock-full of charisma, he's also a community-conscious guy — as evidenced by his role as co-founder of the non-profit organization Kids Need to Read (KNTR) with "Softwire Chronicles" author PJ Haarsma. "PJ is really the initiator," Fillion says. He recalls that when the writer was first rising to prominence, "He funded his own book tour and went out to talk to schools — and found it amazing how in this country and Canada even, so many school libraries had so few books on the shelves. These kids would be all primed to read, and there was nothing there for them. It was horrible; it was awful. He and I started doing things together using our collective clout to make things happen." KNTR has since gotten books into schools from Seattle to New Orleans and beyond, sponsored reading events, and grown into an active reading promotion entity. "I was around in the beginning; now I'm more the poster boy for the thing," says Fillion. "PJ has used his ingenuity, contacts and time and heavily invested in this, getting books to school libraries across the country."

With reports by Stephanie DuBois and Emily Feimster.

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