

F. Gary Gray building career like legos

Special to Sentinel-Voice
NEW YORK — F. Gary Gray feels like he's worked with his best set of Legos yet.

The 29-year-old director says one of his earliest displays of creativity came from "a big suitcase full of Lego building blocks" and he likens filmmaking to working with them.

"You take what you have and you make what you can with it," he says. "Same thing with Legos. You have a vision. And you say, 'OK, I'm going to build this truck. And I may not necessarily have all the pieces, but I'm going to do my best to build what I envision with the resources I have'."

After working with a mere \$2 million budget for "Friday," his hilarious 1995 feature debut that grossed about \$30 million, then about \$9 million for "Set It Off," which made \$13 million in its first week alone, Gray received about \$50 million to make his newest movie, "The Negotiator," starring Samuel L. Jackson and Kevin Spacey.

"Legos are getting better and better," Gray says.

More money didn't mean more pressure for Gray. The only pressure he admits to is wanting to deliver what the audience expects from actors of Jackson's and Spacey's caliber — "and that's something really smart."

What pressure he does feel is vented on dirt bikes and motorcycles, which is why he has a hook jutting from his thumb. He broke the digit in a riding accident and he needed a pin temporarily implanted. Success is no surprise to Gray, a young man who's had his eye on the prize since age 15 when

he decided he wanted to become a director.

Before he turned 20 he was freelancing as a TV news cameraman, making \$250 a day while getting his footage on Fox, CNN, E! and BET. He saved enough money to finance a short film, which led to directing music videos.

Among them: Coolio's "Fantastic Voyage," TLC's "Waterfalls," Dr. Dre's "Keep Their Heads Ringin'" and Ice Cube's "It Was a Good Day," one of Rolling Stone magazine's top 100 all-time videos. Also, Gray received a Grammy nomination for directing Stevie Wonder and Babyface's "How Come, How Long."

Born in Manhattan while his parents were vacationing from Illinois, and raised in South Central Los Angeles after they split up when he was 2, Gray returned to Illinois to live with his father and attend high school in Highland Park.

"I remember moving in that day and we had a long talk and he says, 'I love you and I really want you to be the best you can be. And more than treating this like a father-son relationship, I want to treat this like we're roommates,'" Gray recalls.

That experience gave him the freedom to discover himself a lot earlier than his peers where able to.

"I was an adult maybe a lot earlier than the average person. Some say that's good; some say maybe that's not so good. But it's really worked for me," Gray says.

"I think the reason why I'm here today is because I took the time early to identify what I like ... It's been 14 years of interest and work and hands-

on training in this industry and in television that has helped me get to this point."

Gray's first movie focused on two homeboys (Ice Cube and Chris Tucker) whose attempts to chill on a porch keep getting interrupted; his second dealt with four women (including Queen Latifah and Jada Pinkett Smith) who form a bank-robbing gang to defy what they see as oppression. "The Negotiator" is driven by the plight of a man (Jackson) simply trying to prove himself innocent.

"And that alone can stand on its own. We didn't need any race cards to pull or any type of political messages or points to make," Gray says. "Because I think there's an arena for that."

Gray says he could list Martin Scorsese, Akira Kurosawa and Orson Welles as influences on his work, but that would be too facile and cliched. He's reminded that he's on record as citing Michael Jordan as a role model.

"If you can look at someone who is the absolute best at what they do, who strives to be the best, and works day and night

to dominate the art that they're involved in, of course they're an inspiration."

Working hard can be traced back to that encouragement he received as a youngster and his mother's purchase of those Legos.

"She did what she could to give me what I wanted as a kid. You know, we were poor so it wasn't like we had a lot of resources either. But she always would tell me, 'You can have anything you want.'"

"I remember I used to always draw really big, long limousines. I mean the longest limousines, with 50 windows across, 14 tires, things like that. And she used to always say, 'One day you'll be able to ride in those limousines and have a limousine of your own.' And it always stuck with me."

One of his first rides in a limo came in San Francisco while he was promoting "Friday." And he thought back to what his mother said as he rode across the Golden Gate Bridge. "It felt good to know that ... if you stay focused you can do pretty much anything you want."

CLASSIFIEDS

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CITY OF NORTH LAS VEGAS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COORDINATOR

Compensation — \$41,574-\$60,491 (DOQ)
(Plus Benefits)

The City of North Las Vegas is accepting applications for the appointed position of Economic Development Coordinator. Knowledge of the principles, practices and administration of municipal economic growth, in order to perform duties at a level generally acquired through completion of B.A. degree in a related field, or equivalent years of training and experience and at least 4 yrs. professional, responsible work exp. in Economic Development/Redevelopment. Must possess a valid NV Class C driver's license at time of hire and maintain a satisfactory motor vehicle record. Analytical abilities and interpersonal skills necessary.

Applications will be distributed beginning 8:00 a.m., Tuesday, August 11, 1998 and will continue until position is filled. (Resumes without an application and faxed materials not accepted):

APPLY: CITY OF NORTH LAS VEGAS
HUMAN RESOURCES DEPARTMENT
2200 Civic Center Drive
North Las Vegas, Nevada 89030
(702) 633-1500

Monday - Friday; 8 AM - 5:45 PM

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Published: Las Vegas Sentinel-Voice — August 6, 1998

CLASSIFIEDS

EMPLOYMENT

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY BOARD OF CLARK COUNTY COORDINATOR III

The Economic Opportunity Board of Clark County is recruiting for Coordinator III for the Adult/Senior Services Division, Senior Center component. Applicants must demonstrate a minimum of three years work experience in an administrative or supervisory capacity. The ideal candidate may have college degree(s) in Business or Public Administration with emphasis in management and experience related to senior activities in a social service type agency. Must be able to interpret Federal, State and Local regulations and procedures, prepare project feasibility data and other necessary communications and correspondence relative to the functions of the division. Able to assist the Center Director in all phases of program start up, volunteer recruitment, class scheduling and day to day management and coordination of program activities in anticipation of the new Senior Center to open October 15, 1998.

Position is full time. Annual starting salary \$22,622 D.O.Q. with benefits, medical, retirement and Cafeteria 125 Plan. Resumes will be accepted until 4:00 p.m., Monday, August 10, 1998, at EOB Human Resources Dept., 2228 Comstock Dr., No. Las Vegas, NV 89030.

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Published Las Vegas Sentinel-Voice — August 6, 1998

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY BOARD OF CLARK COUNTY FAMILY SERVICE WORKER I

The Economic Opportunity Board of Clark County is recruiting for Family Service Worker I for the Head Start program. High School Diploma or GED equivalent, ability and sensitivity to relate to a broad cross-section of the community, particularly low income residents and members of minority groups. Able to obtain a childcare/food handler health card from Clark County Health Department, and a child care work permit (Sheriff's card - FBI check). Must have a valid Nevada Driver's license, and reliable transportation available for use during working hours, liability insurance and be EOB insurable. Must have the ability and willingness to be trained to interview prospective Head Start applicants to determine eligibility. Must be able to identify families in need and make the appropriate referrals and follow-ups to community agencies and staff, as well as keeping families fully advised of Head Start Program activities. Persons with AA or BA in social work are encouraged to apply. Position requires 40 hours per week, 43 weeks annually @ \$8.06 hourly D.O.Q. Bi-lingual (English/Spanish) preferred.

Resumes will be accepted until 4:00 p.m., Friday, August 7, 1998, at EOB Human Resources Department, 2228 Comstock Drive, North Las Vegas, NV 89030.

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Published Las Vegas Sentinel-Voice — August 6, 1998

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY BOARD OF CLARK COUNTY EOB BOARD SEAT OPEN

The Economic Opportunity Board is accepting applications from Businesses and Organizations interested in a seat on its Board of Directors. Applications will be received until 5:00 p.m., Tuesday, August 18, 1998. To request an application form and/or further information, contact EOB Administration at 647-2010.

Published Las Vegas Sentinel-Voice — August 6, 1998

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY BOARD OF CLARK COUNTY HOME VISITOR

The Economic Opportunity Board of Clark County is recruiting for Home Visitors for the Child & Family Services Division, Early Head Start Program. This position conducts weekly home visits, and two (2) group socialization's per month, maintaining a client caseload of ten (10) Early Head Start Families. Must have a High School Diploma, or G.E.D. Equivalent, two years experience working with infants and toddlers, and able to complete infant/toddler CDA requirements within the first year of employment. Must be able to procure child care/food handler card from the Clark County Health Department, and a child care work permit (Sheriff's Card — FBI fingerprint check). Eight (8) positions available, full time, at Starting Salary of \$18,099 Annual DOQ with full benefits. Bi-Lingual (English/Spanish) preferred.

Resumes will be accepted until 4:00 PM, Monday, August 17, 1998, at EOB Human Resources Department, 2228 Comstock Dr., No. Las Vegas, NV 89030.

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Published Las Vegas Sentinel-Voice — August 6, 1998

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY BOARD OF CLARK COUNTY MAINTENANCE TECHNICIAN I

The Economic Opportunity Board of Clark County is recruiting for two Technicians I Maintenance for the Child & Family Services Division — Head Start. Responsibilities will include but not limited to, maintenance & repair of physical structures, grounds, and other miscellaneous areas of agency operated facilities. Qualified applicant must have High School Diploma or G.E.D. equivalent and able to procure child care health card from Clark County Health Department, child care work permit (Sheriff's Card-FBI check), valid Nevada Driver License and DMV printout. Position requires the aptitude to perform minor building repairs, i.e. plumbing & electrical and will be contingent upon good references. Starting salary \$15,628 D.O.Q. Position is full time with benefits. Medical, Retirement and Cafeteria 125 plans.

Resumes will be accepted until 4:00 p.m., Tuesday, August 11, 1998, at EOB Human Resources Dept., 2228 Comstock Dr., No. Las Vegas, NV 89030.

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Panther

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Bonner praised the movement's shift to looking inward at the community. "It's encouraging to recognize that we are now willing to take the next step forward. Empowerment can never be reached as long as people living in glass houses continue to throw stones," he said.

And what does Bonner think of the connection between the original Black Panther Party and this newer version? "They are worlds apart ... no comparison," he responded.

Horne

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Horne has always wanted to act. He began acting in high school by enrolling in the accredited Barbazon Drama School in Bridgeport, Conn. Later, he became interested in being a stand-up comedian. He performed at the Comedy Corner Club in Dallas for a year before moving to Los Angeles where he performed at numerous clubs including the Comedy Act, Regency West Theaters and the popular Laugh Factory on Sunset Boulevard.

A year later, he decided to return to acting. He appeared in several national commercials including a McDonalds' spot in which he starred opposite Academy Award winner Cuba Gooding Jr., and a Levi's 501 commercial directed by film director Spike Lee.

Then he jumped into sports promotion. He returned to acting briefly, appearing opposite Eddie Murphy, Richard Pryor and Lela Rochon in *Harlem Nights*. Murphy and actor-director Robert Townsend encouraged him to continue pursuing acting.