

Phoenix
 Arizona Republic
 Thursday, May 20, 2004
 Her Majesty
 Feature
 Kathy Murillo
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 Color Photo

Mark J. Gordon

YOU KNOW HIM FROM: Well, you probably don't know him. But his first film is showing potential to be a hit. In fact, the newly opened movie has done so well the studio has decided to show it in more theaters.



WHAT HE IS HYPING: *Her Majesty*. He wrote

and directed this sweet comedy-drama set in 1953 New Zealand. It centers on a young girl who fantasizes about meeting Queen Elizabeth II. The girl's dream is threatened by her new friendship with a Maori native woman despised by the townspeople.

DID YOU KNOW? Gordon, 42, had never even visited New Zealand before writing or shooting the film, which has won six awards from various film festivals, including the New Zealand Film and TV Awards.



Photos by Silicon Valley Film Fund

Elizabeth (Sally Andrews) ascends a dais to meet her adored sovereign (Rachel E. Wallis) in a glorious Westminster Abbey daydream in *Her Majesty*.

Royal 'Majesty' grew around queen's visit inspiration

Q **UESTION:** How did you come up with the concept?
A **NSWER:** I really wanted to do a story that was set in New Zealand.

I was fascinated with the country's culture and the people. A combination of things happened. I got interested in independent film, and I thought it would be a challenge to write in another culture from the point of view of a young girl. But I never made it to New Zealand prior to shooting. But I thought, "I can do this." I researched it and talked to a lot of people. I went to the New Zealand Consulate here in Los Angeles and I did some reading. I found two interesting things. One was a pamphlet on marching girls, and the next moment I opened a book that said how in 1953, Queen Elizabeth came to New Zealand. So that became the core of the story for me.

Q: I read that you actually released this film in 2001, but re-released it because of the popularity of *Whale Rider*. Is that the case?

A: That is a mistake — 2001 is the year of the first film festival it played at. So the movie Web sites list that



date, and then people think that is when it was released. The whole *Whale Rider* connection, that was completely wrong. That was so frustrating to hear, because that person who wrote that didn't take the time to check out the facts. May 7, 2004, was our U.S. theatrical release.

Q: The plot involves a young Queen Elizabeth. Has she seen the film? If so, what did she think of it?

A: I know she has seen the trailer. Through somebody that we met at the Edinburgh Film Festival (in Scotland), we got them a print of the film through the queen's equerry; they took it with them to one of the castles where the family goes to on holiday. We heard the queen didn't have time to watch the film, but she did see the trailer. Apparently, she said she



The casting of Andrews was a piece of luck, Mark J. Gordon says: "She was perfectly imperfect, a great kid."

'Majesty' director plans another period piece

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thought it looked like a nice film. Hopefully, at some point she will see the whole movie.

Q: How did you go about casting Sally Andrews, the actress who plays the lead?

A: We got lucky. We wanted a New Zealander, so we did a nationwide casting call. We had almost 400 girls that we looked at. It was luck that we found Sally; she auditioned, but had never been in front of a camera before. She had only done some community theater. There was this honesty about her. She was perfectly imperfect, a great kid. She is not that dissimilar from the movie, which made her believable. At first the producer pointed out some kids from the Disney Channel, but they were all too affected. With this girl, you just

believed she had hopes and dreams and could break your heart. These days she is in school. I talked to her the other day and she said she is trying to get in drama class next quarter. I told her, "You should be teaching drama class!"

Q: What is your next project?

A: I'm doing a film called *Paper Son*. It is set in China, on Angel Island and in San Francisco in 1913. It's another historical period piece. There is a Chinese woman trying to get her two sons into the United States through the Angel Island immigration station. Again, like *Her Majesty*, it takes a kernel of something that is historical and weaves a story around it.

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