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On Friday afternoon at the News Cafe in Pawtucket, femme fatale Helena Bogart, played by lead actress Darya Zabinski, left, lines up her shot as Detective Alan McDermott, played by writer, director and lead actor Scotty Stets, questions her during rehearsal for one of the scenes in their upcoming film noir murder mystery.

On the streets of the city, there's film noir in the air

Slice of Life

By **DAVID CASEY**
Times staff reporter

PAWTUCKET – Legendary director Michael Curtiz chose World War II-era Morocco for his 1942 film noir classic Casablanca. First-time Indie filmmaker Scotty Stets chose Fall River, Worcester, Providence and Pawtucket.

Stets, 35, a freelance journalist, musician and international Dracula expert, is currently editing "Cricket Snapper," the first installment of his ambitious debut trilogy. "The

And, like any conscientious independent filmmaker, Stets mined his home turf for locations, actors and inspiration.

The story is loosely based on the real-life tale of a New Hampshire man who presumably died of natural causes during a visit to a Quincy, Mass. dominatrix. To everyone's surprise, the dominatrix and her boyfriend reacted by dismembering the body and dumping it

SLICE: Pawtucket noir

in a landfill in Augusta, Maine. In Stets' screenplay, the sado-masochistic duo are murdered in the process, plunging small-time Police Detective Alan McDermott (Stets) into the duplicitous, Wellesian underworld of a fictional New England town called River Falls.

Stets first teamed-up with director of photography and fellow Northbridge, Mass. native Jerry Bagdasarian, a World War II veteran who worked on "The Twilight Zone" television series.

It was Bagdasarian who told Stets about the mysterious object that would become the first film's namesake. While its true identity and purpose are unknown, the Cricket Snapper is a critical piece of evidence in McDermott's shadowy investigation.

Stets found cast and crew members all over New England, including leading lady Darya Zabinski, a 21-year-old Russian-born actress who moved to Rhode Island when she was 9 years-old.

Zabinski plays the sister of the murdered dominatrix, a flawed but good-intentioned seductress who harbors some dark secrets of her own.

Zabinski, who can currently be seen in the Mill River Theatre's production of "Lend Me a Tenor," gives a powerful, dynamic performance as the trilogy's femme fatale, according to Stets.

"(Darya's) is a very intense, hard role," Stets said in a recent interview. "She's a virtuoso goddess at age 21. I am positive she's going places — I can't see it happening any other way."

Zabinski has acted in dozens of Lincoln High School and Rhode Island College



BUTCH ADAMS/The Times

Lead actress Darya Zabinski of Lincoln talks with director Scotty Stets during rehearsal for a scene from their upcoming film noir murder mystery to be shot in Pawtucket.

An aspiring comedic/dramatic actress, Zabinski says would rather play counter-type character roles, like Charlize Theron's portrayal of a homicidal ex-prostitute in 2003's "Monster."

"It's always been a dream of mine to get on Saturday Night Live," Zabinski said recently. "But for me, fame is just a bonus. I just want to do what I love and support myself doing it."

Zabinski met Stets through a mutual friend, Sparky "The Atomic Comic" Schneider.

Schneider, who plays a reporter in Stets' trilogy, has been featured on PBS' "Winter Day," film review, the San Diego Film Festival and was a contender in the hit reality series Last Comic Standing.

In the soundtrack department, Stets also tried to keep it local and original.

Prohibitively high copyright fees forced him to score the

was a local independent film, steeped in local atmosphere, style and culture.

Hot on the heels of a recent test screening, Stets is currently re-cutting Cricket Snapper for final release. He is still shooting — and casting — for the final film of the trilogy, several scenes of which take place in downtown Pawtucket.

After sinking \$15,000 of his own money into the film, Stets is determined to make a financial go of it.

Going straight to DVD, he acknowledged, might be the only way to accomplish that.

"If the distributor wants, I'll just go directly to video," said Stets. "Today, in indie film, that's where the money is. Please, buy it and chop it up to your heart's content."

"No director wants to see his baby cut-up, but that very well might happen. In the meantime,