

DAYBREAK



< Coachella gets new headliners
The Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival has found its replacement for former headliner Kanye West on April 17 and 24: Swedish House Mafia and the Weeknd. West pulled out of the festival earlier this week amid a spate of personal issues.

'Halo' went from game to TV show **Page B2**

Single-shot film

WATERFORD'S ALEX MOLINA STARS IN AND PRODUCES A MOVIE CHOSEN FOR CINEQUEST FILM FEST

By KRISTINA DORSEY
Day Staff Writer

During the pandemic, Waterford's Alex Molina left New York City — where he was pursuing life as a stage actor — for what he anticipated would be a two-month road trip that would bring him back around to the Northeast.

Once he got to Los Angeles, though, he decided to stay.

"Obviously, there are bonuses like the ocean and learning how to surf and (I have) a good amount of friends out here," Molina says.

But mainly it was the fact that his pal Sean Perry, who had moved from NYC to L.A., pitched a movie project to him.

Now, that movie, titled "Dash," is done — and has been chosen for the Cinequest Film & Creativity Festival, which USA Today once called "the best film festival in the country."

Because of the pandemic, Cinequest made this year's festival a mix of virtual and in-person events. Molina and Perry will attend in person in August in Silicon Valley, but "Dash" is also available online through April 17. Visit <https://creatics.org/cinejoy/>. The "Dash" team will hold a virtual screening party at 9 p.m. Eastern Standard Time tonight; visit <https://creatics.org/cinejoy/screening-parties/join>.

"It's very exciting and overwhelming and fun and crazy — all those things," Molina says.

Perry and Molina were both producers for "Dash," which Perry wrote and directed and Molina stars in.

It's a single-shot piece that all takes place inside a car. The end result runs an hour and 45 minutes.

Molina, whose day jobs are tutoring and catering, says that making the movie was a daunting experience that was kind of magical when it all came together.

"From the start, we realized that we were trying to tell a story with very limited resources. We knew we didn't have a ton of money, and we didn't know a ton of people in Los Angeles. Within these constraints, (we had to) try to get creative and try to tell an engaging story. Every challenge that came along felt like the project was going to fall apart, but somehow we were able to keep on pushing through," he says.

They couldn't have a crew because they couldn't afford one, he recalls. That's what led them to decide on the one-take format. They mounted a camera that's eight inches tall and al-



Alex Molina stars in "Dash."

DASHFEATUREFILM.COM



Alex Molina

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most two feet long on the hood of the car. All the action takes place in that single frame. The hope was, Molina says, that it "would make the audience feel like they're stuck in the car with the story and are feeling all the tension."

Molina — who focused on playing football in high school and college before trying acting — plays the protagonist, a rideshare driver who is living a double life. He is a well-intentioned person who nevertheless lies to people to protect himself and to keep others happy. He gets into a bind where he needs quick cash to maintain his double life — and decides to sell drugs to do it. As you might expect, everything starts to fall apart.

All in the timing

Doing a production in one take means a lot of planning. Molina and Perry began by writing down the timing for each scene; "Dash" involves picking up and dropping off about 10 people over the course of the movie. If a scene were two minutes, they would determine what general area they'd need to be driving in, and they would then choose a section to test out. They would drive the possible route over and over to get an average time and see if that matched with the number of minutes it took to read the scene.

They had to decide, too, whether the drop-off and pick-up spots told the story accurately. If it were a moody character getting in and out of the vehicle, for instance, they would

try to find a dark, moody locale.

The car used in the film is borrowed from New London native Billy Satti, who now lives in California and works in a school district there. He and Molina met briefly when Molina was a University of Connecticut student and Satti was still in high school; they became friends when they were both living in New York City. Satti let them use his Hyundai Elantra for "Dash."

For the March 2021 shoot, Molina was driving Satti's car, which is where all the scenes take place. When Perry wasn't acting (he had a role as a way to keep costs down), he was in the lead car ahead of the Elantra, as were the sound designer, stage manager and producer. They had video and audio feeds so they could monitor how the filming was going. Molina wore an earpiece so he could hear any instructions they might give him — to defrost the back window, for instance. (They took the windshield wipers off so Molina wouldn't accidentally hit the switch that starts those and ruin the take.)

In addition to those two vehicles, two others acted as shuttles to pick up and drop off actors where they needed to be.

"Every day was great. The more we got invested in the project, the more we learned — 'This is going to be cool, this is going to work.' And then every other day, we'd be like, 'This is the worst project in the world. I don't

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Molina: Acting, driving and problem-solving on new movie

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know why we're wasting our time!" Molina says with a laugh.

After about 10 days of rehearsal, they dove into filming. They allowed themselves three chances to get it right; they couldn't try any more than that because the cost would have been too high, Molina says. (The budget ceiling for "Dash" was around \$7,000.)

The pressure was on to make sure everything went smoothly and that, say, an hour into shooting, you're not the one who flubs something.

"That pressure — oh, man, that made my heart pound out of my chest like you would not believe," Molina says. "Only having three tries, and there's so many unplanned variables, even though we tried and planned so much — you have to kind of just cross your fingers and hope."

Avoiding the red light

One particularly perilous moment came when Molina saw a red light coming up, and he knew that, if he had to stop for the light, the timing for the filming would never get back on track. But he had no way to communicate to the lead car that they needed to do a U-turn before the intersection to keep things on schedule. This was on the second night of shooting, after failing to get a fin-



"Dash" movie poster

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ished product on the first night.

"Anxiety is just pumping through my veins, and I'm acting, too, so I'm keeping it cool and acting with Sean,

and I'm trying to problem solve. What are we going to do? Only thing I can do is flash my high beams to get their attention (in the lead car), hit my left

blinker and cross my fingers. So I kept doing that repeatedly as I'm acting in the scene. ... All of a sudden, (the lead car) pulls that U-turn right before going through the intersection. Inside, I'm screaming and I'm so happy. But my face is deadpan because I can't break the character," Molina says.

From football to acting

During his high school and college years in Connecticut, Molina wasn't known as an actor but rather as a football player. He was a wide receiver at Waterford High School and the University of Connecticut. After graduating from UConn in 2010, he was working as a personal trainer when he decided to audition for a play with Chelsea Players in Norwich. He nabbed that role in David Lindsay-Abaire's "A Devil Inside" and followed it up with a Flock Theatre production of "Little Women."

He then played pro football in Denmark for two seasons before becoming more serious about acting. He moved back to the U.S. and attended Harvard University's American Repertory Theater Institute for Advanced Theater Training.

In his recent years in New York City, catering was his "survival job to make ends meet" as he auditioned for acting roles. He was in the chil-

dren's musical "The Light Princess" off-Broadway. He did some regional shows as well.

Just before the pandemic hit, he was involved in a new musical, Aaron Morill's "Love and Yogurt." The hope was that the off-Broadway development/showcase production would lead to a bigger run. And while the showcase in New York City did take place, theaters then shut down because of COVID. The show is still in development, now called "Food Fighters," but Molina obviously won't be involved since he's in L.A.

Looking ahead

Molina calls "Dash" the start of his independent producing career, under the banner of Molina and Perry's newly created SPAM Pictures. He says he was fortunate to be partnered with the Pennsylvania-raised Perry, who has been making movies most of his life.

"Right now, because I'm a producer on this film as well (as an actor), it's trying to find a way to get this film into more people's homes and (in front of) more people's eyeballs, so I've been working on trying to establish myself as a producer and do that type of work," he says.

Molina says he would, though, love to also get to work in the theater again.