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Culture Film & Television

Merion Station Actor on a Role

OCTOBER 23, 2013

By: Greg Salisbury



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Rob Steinberg (standing) on the set of the film, *12 Years a Slave*.

Slave is one of the biggest of his 24-year career.

Steinberg was in town for the Philadelphia premiere of the film at the 22nd annual Philadelphia Film Festival on Oct. 19 at the Kimmel Center. Steinberg shares billing with, among others, Chiwetel Ejiofor, Michael Fassbender and Brad Pitt.

Rob Steinberg has discovered there is a downside to being involved in one of the most critically acclaimed and anticipated films of the year. “I’m having trouble keeping the days straight right now — I’ve been to three premieres on three coasts in the last week,” he explains.

He may have been a little confused as to which day it was during a recent phone interview, but the 54-year-old native of Merion Station is fully aware that his role in *12 Years a*

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Steinberg plays the pivotal role of Cephas Parker, a store owner in Saratoga, N.Y., the hometown of Solomon Northup, the film's protagonist.

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“Cephas Parker is based on a real person,” Steinberg explains. “He was friends with Solomon,” who is played by Ejiofor.

Parker was involved in the events that turned Northup from a freeman fiddle player with a wife, children and a home into a kidnapped slave subjected to brutality that went far beyond even the graphic representations in the film, which is based on Northup's 1853 autobiography, *Twelve Years a Slave*.

Steinberg currently has another film in release, *Grace Unplugged*, and he has been involved in more than 60 other productions, as an actor, producer, writer or a combination of all three.

Not a bad resume, especially when considering he never planned to go into acting. Until he was involved in a serious car accident in 1986, Steinberg was happily and successfully involved in the music business.

“My mom likes to blame the head injury” on the change of career, he jokes. “After a near-death experience, you have a lot of time to reflect and think about the things that are important. I thought maybe I could transfer that into the craft of acting.”

Steinberg has achieved his recent success in a geographically contrarian fashion: A few years ago, he decided to move from Los Angeles to New Orleans, which he has felt drawn to since his days as an undergraduate at Tulane University, which he attended upon graduating from Lower Merion High School. He threw himself into the culture of the Crescent City, which meant getting more involved with the local Jewish community: The former member of Adatah Israel joined a local synagogue and has emceed events like the city's Chabad Chanukah and a Hadassah fundraising event called Bra-Veaux.

Ironically, since his move, he says he has never worked more. In addition to the two feature films, Steinberg is also shooting the last season of the HBO series, *Treme*, which is set in New Orleans.

“I went there to do some writing and maybe find a new way for myself. But then, everybody wanted to work with me — the complete opposite of L.A., where no one wanted to work with me!”

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