

# The Cleveland Connection

## The Tao of Goodman

### Filmmaking Sisters Cope with Highs, Lows of Success

Joanna Connors

This article originally appeared in the *Plain Dealer* on Sunday, August 20, 2000.

The last time we caught up with them, the Goodman sisters of Shaker Heights—Jenniphir, Greer and Dana—were undergoing the psychological stress test known as the Sundance Film Festival.

Their first feature film, the charming and unusually smart romantic comedy “The Tao of Steve,” was in competition, and the sisters were learning firsthand the reason the famous stress-indicator list includes positive life events, such as a new job or marriage, as well as negative ones, such as getting fired or divorced.

As far as the sensitive human nervous system is concerned, having a hit movie at the world’s most prestigious independent film festival is not all that far removed from going through the death of a family member. Up or down—it’s all heavy labor for the poor psyche. “Sundance was the highest of emotional highs, and the lowest,” said Greer, the middle sister, sitting over a glass of iced coffee one afternoon last week in a cafe near the Cedar Lee Theatre. Her sisters, taking tiny little bites of a piece of chocolate cake they were sharing, nodded in agreement.

The highs came from the audiences, who gave them standing ovations and hung around in the theaters long after the film was over to tell the sisters and their colleagues, actor Donal Logue and cowriter Duncan North, just how much they loved them and their movie.

The lows came from the distributors, who were still suffering from the burns they got last year and the year before, when they paid ludicrously high sums for films such as “Happy, Texas.” This year the distributors were playing it safe and not going after many films at the festival—including, it appeared, “The Tao of Steve.”

“Every day we waited for the phone to ring, and it was silent,” Greer said. “It was like waiting for the prom date to call, and he never called.”

The story had a happy ending: The week after Sundance wrapped up, Sony Classics outbid two other companies for the distribution rights to “Tao.” The distributor is opening it across the country this month, after sending Greer, Jenniphir, Logue and North to several other festivals in the spring, and on an exhausting—and, yes, stressful—eight-city press tour this summer.

The Goodmans wound up their travels in the Cleveland area, where they grew up but no longer live. Jenniphir, 38, who co-wrote and directed the movie, lives in Santa Fe (where “The Tao of Steve” was shot) with their 3-year-old daughter, Emerson. Greer, 35, who co-wrote and stars in the movie, and Dana, 26, who has a smaller but pivotal role, settled in New York City to pursue their acting careers.

They were back in their hometown for the local premiere last week of “The Tao of Steve,” a Cleveland Film Society benefit event that their proud parents (Nancy Dickenson, mother to Jenniphir and Greer; Marilyn Goodman, mother to Dana; and Richard Goodman, father to all three) were celebrating with the kind of joy and family-and friends gatherings usually reserved for weddings or graduations.

Unlike most fathers of the bride, however, Richard Goodman was also helping arrange his daughters’ press interview schedule.

“Our dad is better than any press agent,” Dana said, as her sisters shook their heads in amused wonder. “He’s been calling us all, like, four times a day for weeks.”

#### Enthusiastic reviews

Goodman isn’t the only one who’s excited about the movie, which opens commercially at the Cedar Lee this Friday. When the film opened in the big-city markets two weeks ago, most of the reviews were almost as enthusiastic as Dad.

Roger Ebert raved about it on his TV show, saying he “loved” it

Kevin Thomas, one of the critics for the Los Angeles Times, called it “sparkling and irresistible,” and said the film was “a terrific debut for Jenniphir Goodman.” And, in the Boston Globe, critic Jay Carr wrote, “Greer Goodman is a dynamite combination—savvy, sexy and kind—and Jenniphir Goodman reminds us as too few filmmakers do, that sentient can be sexy, too.”

Like the Sundance audiences, the critics fell hard for the story of a Santa Fe slacker, Dex (Logue), a part-time kindergarten teacher who has a Buddha belly and a philosophical outlook to go along with it.