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Steiner Studios To Debut With Mel Brooks' Producers Remake

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Pataki, Bloomberg Announce Tax Credits for NY-Made Films

BROOKLYN - A press conference at the almost-completed Steiner Studios here yesterday heralded a double blessing.

The first was the announcement of the first project at the 280,000-square-foot facility a remake of the Mel Brooks' 1968 classic 'The Producers,' using the songs from Brooks' recent hit Broadway play.

Brooks was very much on the scene, constantly interrupting other people's speeches with one-liners that prompted even Mayor Bloomberg to come up with a joke of his own.

The second was the announcement of two tax credits that will certainly help spur more film production in New York City.

One is the state's 'Empire State Film Production Credit Program,' which Governor Pataki signed into law at the end of the press conference. This will provide a tax credit of 10 percent to feature films and TV shows that spend 75 percent or more of their expenses within the state.

Mayor Bloomberg has proposed an additional tax credit, the 'Made in New York Incentive Program,' which would give a 5 percent refundable tax credit for qualifying projects that work on a New York stage.

What has spurred these projects, as well as the construction of the Steiner Studios themselves, is the continuing loss of movie projects to lower-priced Toronto and Vancouver.

Often, movies or TV shows will shoot exterior shots here, but indoor shots in Canada. This was decried by all the speakers yesterday.

'Vancouver and Toronto can pretend to be New York, but they're not,' said Pataki. 'Hollywood can pretend to be anything it wants, but it's not New York City.'

Anything Goes

Brooks recalled how he shot the original 'The Producers' in Greenwich Village, and how the decline of the film industry in the city broke his heart. He grew up in Williamsburg, a stone's throw from the Navy Yard.

'When I was 9 years old, my uncle, the cab driver, took me across the Williamsburg Bridge to see Cole Porter's 'Anything Goes' on Broadway, with Ethel Merman. I thought Ethel was just a little bit loud.

'Since then, I've been hooked on theater,' said the famed comedian and director, whose credits also include 'Blazing Saddles,' 'When Things Were Rotten' and 'The 12 Chairs.'

Brooks turned the Navy Yard into the Catskills--he's possibly one of the few people who could get away with addressing an audience as 'Jews and others.' When Bloomberg asked whether he could play Nathan Lane's part in the new 'Producers,' Brooks said, 'I think you're a little short for the part.'

As for Pataki, he said, 'I have other things in mind for him. How about John Wayne's biography?'

State Assembly Democratic leader Sheldon Silver, getting into the spirit of things, talked about how he was bar-mitzvahed at the Bialystoker synagogue on the Lower East Side. Brooks

suggested that he have a second bar mitzvah, but Bloomberg topped him by suggesting he have a second bris (ritual circumcision).

Douglas and son Doug Steiner, of the family that developed the studio, praised the state Assembly and Senate members, both Democrats and Republicans, for getting behind the studio project.

The borough's elected representatives were there in full force, including, surprising to some, Brooklyn Democratic leader Clarence Norman, who is currently under a legal cloud because of alleged financial improprieties.

Five Sound Stages; From the Ground Up

The Steiner Studios, opening soon on an enclosed 15-acre site, is on an enclosed, 15-acre site, with five fully-equipped sound studios equipped for start-to-finish production of major motion pictures, independent films, television, music videos and commercials.

It was built from the ground up, and the Steiners made sure to thank the many hardhat-wearing union representatives who were present at the ceremony.

After the ceremony, Douglas Steiner said the Steiner Studios aren't intended to compete with already-existing facilities such as Silvercup Studios and Kaufman-Astoria Studios, both in Queens.

'We're expanding the size of the pie,' he said.

Brooks told one interesting anecdote about why he wants to film in New York. 'For 'The 12 Chairs,' we filmed in Yugoslavia,' he said. 'I told one extra, 'When I tell you, ring this bell and yell out, 'It's closing time!'

'When we rolled the camera, the extra yelled, 'It's gogi bime!' I told him, 'People in New York won't know that 'gogi bime' means 'closing time!'