

Movie about cancer that makes you laugh

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VANCOUVER (CP) — Montreal filmmaker Giles Walker has accomplished the impossible — or at least close to it.

Walker, best known for innovative work with the National Film Board, has made a movie about cancer that makes you laugh.

Princes in Exile is based on Mark Schreiber's poignant yet funny 1981 novel about a 17-year-old boy with a brain tumour who goes to a summer camp for kids with cancer.

The \$2.7 million film, to be broadcast Nov. 11 on CBC, stars local actor Zachary Ansley and Stacie Mistysyn (Caitlin on the TV series Degrassi High) plus an impressive ensemble cast from Toronto and Montreal.

It recently won the best screenplay award at the Montreal World Film Festival and now is making the rounds at the Vancouver International Film Festival.

“For me the best way to direct comedy is not to let people know it's funny ... cause it changes the quality of the performance,” said Walker, 44, sitting alongside Ansley in a suite at the Hotel Vancouver.

SUBTLE CRAFT

Walker's subtle craft comes to the fore during one of the film's funniest moments. Ansley, aptly dressed in a black hat and long coat and carrying a brief case, takes a younger “possessed” camper out to the woods to exorcise him.

Walker calls it a perfect example of what he means.

“It's played absolutely straight but it's a bizarre situation.”

The role of cancer-stricken teenager Ryan Rafferty — whose two goals are to publish his journal and lose his virginity — came along at the right time for the 18-year-old Ansley.

“I was anxious to get a summer job,” said Ansley with a laugh before getting serious.

“There's a lot of emotions that Ryan goes through during the film, some are sophisticated, some not so much, but I probably wouldn't have been (ready) two years previous. That maturation time was definitely necessary.”