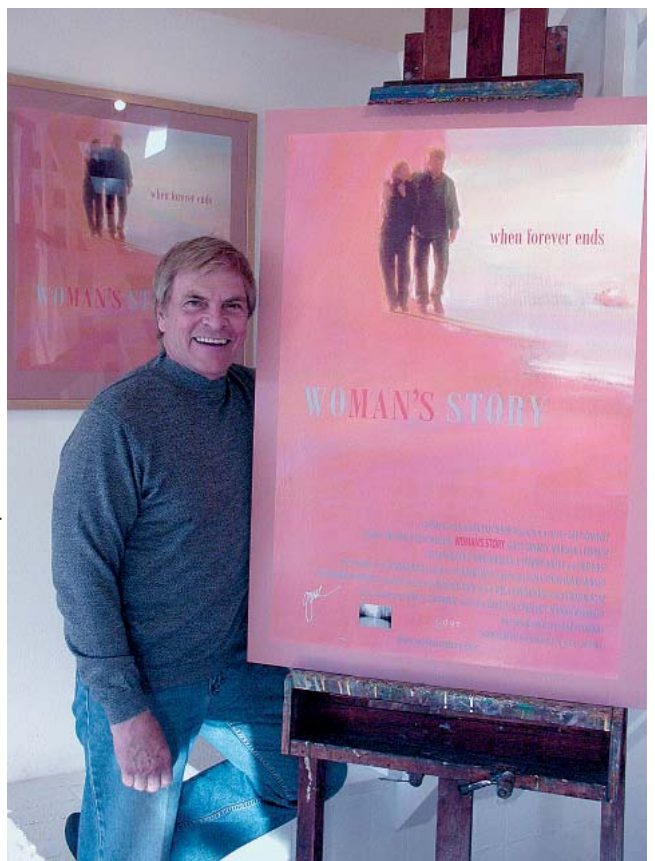


Wine Is One of the Many Arts Celebrated in Woman's Story

Story & Photo by Katy Budge

Hollywood often refers to people as “triple threats” -- those who combine some mix of acting, directing, writing, and/or producing their own properties. However, there aren't many people who can combine all four and add several more to the list. Gary Conway of Carmody McKnight Vineyards and Winery in Paso Robles is one such person.

A veteran actor, writer, and/or director of over 300 movies and television shows such as “Land of the Giants”, “Burke's Law”, *The Farmer*, and *American Ninja*, Conway is also an accomplished painter, violinist, architect, author, and wine-grower. He brought all those talents to the table in the making of *Woman's Story*, a beautiful and mature film that deals with personal relationships, the family, and social threats to the human condition.



“This film touches upon the most important themes of our times,” said Conway. “The central theme of *Woman's Story* is that the family structure no longer really exists. I came from an immigrant family (Italian and Irish), and those kinds of connections just don't exist anymore ... In our greed-based society, there is no room for the family, for that kind of love and support system. We are comfortable referring to ourselves as a ‘consumer-based society’, but we don't ever say ‘family-based’. Americans should really start coming to terms with that.”

In terms of the creative process, Conway “has been working on this film my entire life,” citing his ethnic background, the significant role of women in his life, and his early immersion in and celebration of the arts. In a more linear timeline, the film took about six or seven years to bring to fruition -- a time frame that Conway likening to planting a vineyard and getting a bottle of wine from it, “so I'm used to the cycle.”

Indeed, wine works as metaphor in *Woman's Story* on several levels, including its rather unusual method of distribution. The movie is being shown in several cities throughout the country at special limited screenings. These events not only showcase the film, including seminars and appearances by Conway and some of the other actors, but also serve as fundraisers for local arts organizations. (Screenings in Paso Robles on February 11, 13, and 15, 2005 will benefit the San Luis Obispo Art Center Scholarship Fund.)

For Conway, this approach was “basically copying what we do at the winery. You make a decision to do quantity or quality. I wasn't interested in how many tickets we sell or how many theatres we're in; just as with a boutique winery you're not looking at growing 12 tons to the acre – we do two tons.”

Conway described this “pre-distribution” of *Woman's Story* as akin to “how films were released before the 1980s. The theory is that a film should be exposed to audiences over a period of time. I wanted to deal with the film the way we deal with our wine. You can't just come out and say you're a boutique winery and say you're about quality; you have to prove yourself, to explain, to educate, to get people to stop and appreciate your wine. We want people to approach the film the same way. The idea is to take the time, to see it, to talk about it. Art isn't a fast food; there's a beauty to slow.”

Wine is also visually and thematically represented throughout the film. One of the main characters (played by Marshall Borden) is a playwright and wine aficionado, explained Conway, “and every time he meets (the Kent McCord character), he introduces wine to him, and they begin talking about many other things. Wine is definitely connected to the story, and there are wine labels all over the place.”

When asked if his own label, Carmody McKnight, received any prominent product placement, Conway reluctantly admitted, “yes, and that is in fact a little embarrassing to me. I brought a lot of local wines with me, but during this one scene – being the perfectionist that I am – I wanted a label that was the same color as the scene. That ended up being my label, and those who know our label will recognize it.”

This attention to detail and color will surprise no one already familiar with Conway's paintings, such as the vibrant interpretations of the vineyards and landscapes of Paso Robles included in his book, *Art of the Vineyard*. As the writer/director of *Woman's Story*, he approached each scene “as a white canvas, not to be filled with clutter. I wanted the close-ups to be portraits, and the long shots to portray the environment and the architecture as paintings. I also wanted to make it a point within the story to have all the arts represented in the plot, the structure, the characters, and the themes. I wanted to celebrate all the arts – painting, photography, drawing, sculpture, architecture, music, theater, dance, food, and wine.”

Woman's Story was written and directed by Gary Conway; and stars Erin Gray, Kent McCord, Gary Conway, and Marshall Borden. For more information about the film, log onto www.womansstory.com. For information about the February screenings in Paso Robles, call (805) 238-9392, (800) 282-0730, or check the event listings in the back of this magazine.