

DEEPER: Former dance instructor studied film in New York

Continued from D5

who spent the later years of her life in San Antonio but also a new place to call home. The director discovered actress Cyndi Williams at the Austin Playhouse in 2005.

The voiceover work for 2006's "Pola Negri" would mark the beginning of a professional relationship that eventually led to Kotowski and Williams to partner on the psycho-sexual thriller "Deeper and Deeper."

The locally filmed movie debuted last year in Los Angeles at the Polish Film Festival and screens Monday at the Violet Crown Cinema.

Written by Williams, who co-stars, the movie focuses on a young man (David Lago of "The Young and the Restless") who becomes entangled in a web of obsession with his mysterious and hyper-sexualized neighbor and his overbearing landlord.

The thriller is the third feature from Kotowski, following 2008's "Esther's Diary." He came to filmmaking after a career in dance. Growing up in the small town of Olsztyn in northeast Poland, he did not have much access to the cinema. But televised images of a dancing Gene Kelly in "Singin' in the Rain" inspired the young Kotowski to take up dance.

Kotowski eventually headed to London to study at the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing and would shuttle back and forth between England and Poland — teaching in Poland to raise enough money to return to England to take more classes.

"Everything that I was doing in my life, I knew I was doing because I was investing in myself and I wanted to have a better life and go to America," Kotowski said recently by phone while in Poland.

His passion for dance led Kotowski to New York City, where he trained and taught ballroom and Latin dance at Manhattan's Dance Sport for Paul Pellicoro, who instructed Al Pacino in the ways of the tango for "Scent of a Woman."

A move to the dance studio of Eugene Louis Faccuito, known in dance circles simply as Luigi, would change Kotowski's life.

Stars such as Liza Minnelli, whom Kotowski had adored in his youth, filled Luigi's musical theater classes. "There's something magical about



BRIGHT SHINING CITY PRODUCTIONS

Polish filmmaker Mariusz Kotowski, founder of Austin's Bright Shining City production company, splits his time between Texas and California.

'Deeper and Deeper' screening

When: 6:30 p.m. Monday
Where: Violet Crown Cinema, 434 W. Second St.
Cost: \$7
Information: austix.com
After-party: A Night of Sultry Seduction Through Song with live music from "Deeper and Deeper"
When: 8 p.m. Monday
Where: Lamberts, 401 W. Second St.
Cost: Free

people who accomplish such achievement. I love stars. I want to work with stars," Kotowski said.

That revelation, Kotowski said, led him to enroll in classes at New York University's film school. In researching Negri, Kotowski met Hayley Mills and Eli Wallach and became enthralled with the history of Hollywood.

After moving to Austin in 2005, Kotowski established Bright Shining City, the pro-

duction company behind his movies. Kotowski praises Austin for its filmmaking talent but says the lack of an established studio and strong distribution has forced him to split his time between California and Texas.

"I just love the people from Austin. They have so much heart. They love to make movies," Kotowski said. "Sometimes I'm worried because the industry in Austin doesn't take seriously business, and movie business is business. It's not just independent people making movies; it's business. And I think in Austin we don't have a leader who will be the businessman for filmmakers."

Kotowski credits his career to a long list of teachers and

mentors that now includes Hollywood screenwriting coach Robert McKee, under whom the filmmaker has studied screenwriting for the past two years.

"I'm in the process, and I'm learning more about myself as a director," Kotowski said. "Right now I'm reaching the point where I feel I am a director. I know which story I want to do and which stories are important for me to tell."

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DIRECTOR ■ 'DEEPER AND DEEPER'

Immigrant's interest in film tapped by stint at dance studio

By Matthew Odam

AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

Mild winters. Jobs in the tech industry. Proximity to the Hill Country. Endless Tex-Mex food.

You could compile a list of dozens of reasons for ending up in Austin before you arrived at "deceased Polish silent-film star."

While spending time in San Antonio researching his first film, "Pola Negri: Life Is a Dream in Cinema," Polish-born director Mariusz Kotowski visited Austin in search of a narrator for his documentary.

Kotowski found not only voice talent for his film about the Polish actress

See DEEPER, D5

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