A Pioneering Canadian Winery Is the Ultimate Underdog in This Cinematic Ad

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It’s a Canadian wine with an Irish name made by an Austrian and an Italian. There must be a good origin story here.

In fact, there is, and a long-form ad from indie agency Bensimon Byrne uses all the trappings of a Hollywood biopic to tout the Niagara-based Inniskillin winery and its uphill battle as a challenger brand. The result is a sweeping mini-movie, part period piece and part biopic, featuring a couple of underdogs, their unlikely dream, major road blocks and, finally, critical acclaim.

The 60-second spot, dubbed “The Original Start-Up,” introduces its characters as fish-out-of-water entrepreneurs trying to put their company and Canada on the map for quality wine. Co-founders Donald Ziraldo (the marketer) and Karl Kaiser (the vintner) knew the odds were stacked against them when they launched the brand in the early ‘70s into a world that

recognized only a few geographical regions as true players.

After five years of setbacks and hardships, they won a prestigious tasting competition against a category hotshot, a French Beaujolais.

“It deserves the style of a Hollywood movie trailer because you couldn’t have written a better plot for a movie,” says Joseph Bonnici, Bensimon Byrne’s partner and ecd, who notes that the goal was to evoke “strong feelings of both time and place.”

“Every detail from the locations and styling to the wardrobe and makeup was authentic,” he says.

The cinematic ad, from Oscar-nominated documentary director Hubert Davis, will have a big-screen presence, fittingly, in Canadian theaters. A version will also air on TV.

Inniskillin, part of the Arterra Wines Canada family, “is a world class wine that just happens to be Canadian. That concept is difficult to grasp for many people,” Bonnici says, with the work intending to show that “Inniskillin is essentially responsible for the birth of the modern wine industry in Canada.”

The campaign marks another pairing of Bensimon Byrne and Davis, who shot last year’s 3-minute anti-bullying PSA, “Boys Don’t Cry,” for Canadian social-advocacy group White Ribbon.

In other notable work, the agency and its sibling PR firm Narrative have collaborated with HIV/AIDS treatment center Casey House in downtown Toronto, opening a pop-up spa in fall 2018 where the massage therapists were HIV-positive. That experiential activation, aimed at tearing down stigma and encouraging compassion, came on the heels of 2017’s pop-up bistro, June’s Eatery, staffed by HIV-positive employees.

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