

Paper Trail: Steve Lopez's Series on Skid Row Makes Its Big-Screen Debut

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Watching a movie about your life is odd under any circumstances, but what if your life involves putting other people under a microscope?



“It’s strange,” says the Los Angeles Times’s Steve Lopez of *The Soloist*, the film based on his series of columns about his life-changing friendship with the homeless classical musician Nathaniel Ayers. “I’m too wrapped up in the story to have any idea what to make of it. Still, there are so many things to like about it.”

Not bad for a movie Lopez never imagined would get made. While he was writing a book based on the series (*The Soloist: A Lost Dream, an unlikely Friendship, and the Redemptive Power of Music*, published in April by Putnam), he turned down several offers from producers.

“It was a struggle,” he says. “My conception was that they might try to tie everything up neatly.”

Then he met Gary Foster and Russ Krasnoff, who wanted to meet Ayers and visit Skid Row.

“That made a big impression on me.”

Beginning in 2005, Lopez (played by Robert Downey Jr.) spent three years writing about Ayers (played by Jamie Foxx), a former Julliard student who lived on the streets for decades battling with schizophrenia. Thanks to Lopez, he realized his dream of playing at Disney Hall.

While Lopez made sure that Ayers—now living at Lamp Community—got money out of the movie deal, he isn’t certain whether Ayers will see the film, which premieres Nov. 21. An early version of the soundtrack, though, may have swayed him. Lopez remembers Ayers’ widening grin and response when he first heard the music.

“Mr. Lopez, I think I may need to see this movie at least once.”