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Indie PATHWAYS

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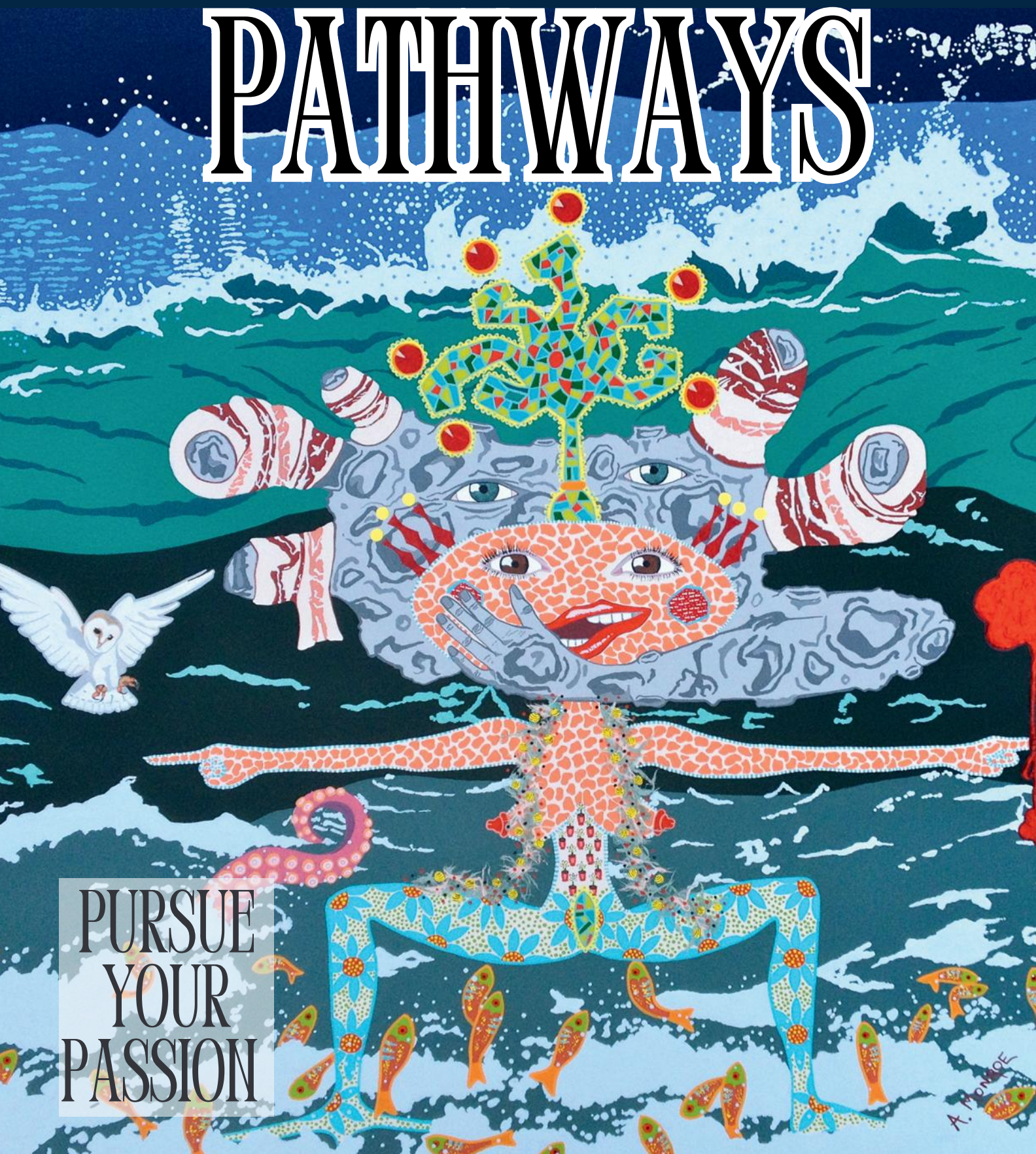


Inspiration

Welcome to Indie Pathways, a magazine dedicated to providing inspiration and guidance from independent artists to independent artists.

We believe that the stories of varied creators are more important than ever these days and aim for diversity, equity and inclusion in every issue.

We hope you are able to find inspiration in these pages to pursue your own art.

Laura Fortino-Zeni & Debra Stolberg
Editors in Chief

indiepathways.magcloud.com

Inside

COVER: SIRF AND TURF BY ANDREA MONROE

Andrea Monroe
SYMBOLIC SURREALISM

Known for her historic, narrative, and symbolic surrealism, this month's cover artist Andrea Monroe wants her work to "help the viewer create stories for themselves when viewing my art."

Monroe has always been drawn to the artistic lifestyle. "The phrase 'you're so talented' has been said to me since I was a child," she shares. "I never followed the mainstream in my life or work and was always drawn to a creative lifestyle. My being called an artist feels so privileged to me because I was not schooled to be one. I'm self-taught, but weirdly, I'm not humbled by this. Like the life I led, it's been all about my experiences and the way I've been able to share them."

However, like many artists, Monroe can be insecure about her work. "As a human being, I felt I never fit in to the norm," she says. "My friend always referred to me as 'a star peg in a round hole.' The images that come out of me feel like AI before AI came to being. It's like having a collective in my brain." Finding inspiration in nature and "the vastness of my brain," Monroe does sometimes struggle with creative blocks 'but my blocks are more self-imposed and stem around socializing." She also finds influence from some of the masters. "Classically, that would be Picasso, Clemente, Matisse, Kahlo, Kandinsky, and more."

The financially challenging lifestyle of an artist is not difficult for Monroe. As she says, "Being a left-brain-right-brain kinda person, I've been able to survive on modest incomes." However, she is now actively working to promote her art. "I'm finally working on getting my work out into the world and building my resume. Having worked in the film industry for so many years doing so many hours, I can now concentrate on submitting my work and being involved in the art community. I post on IG, keep my website updated, have joined 3 art orgs, and been juried into shows."

Hoping that her art provides viewers with “mostly a big smile,” Monroe adds, “I think visuals are educational blocks in humanity that help people to feel and discover something new about themselves and the world.”

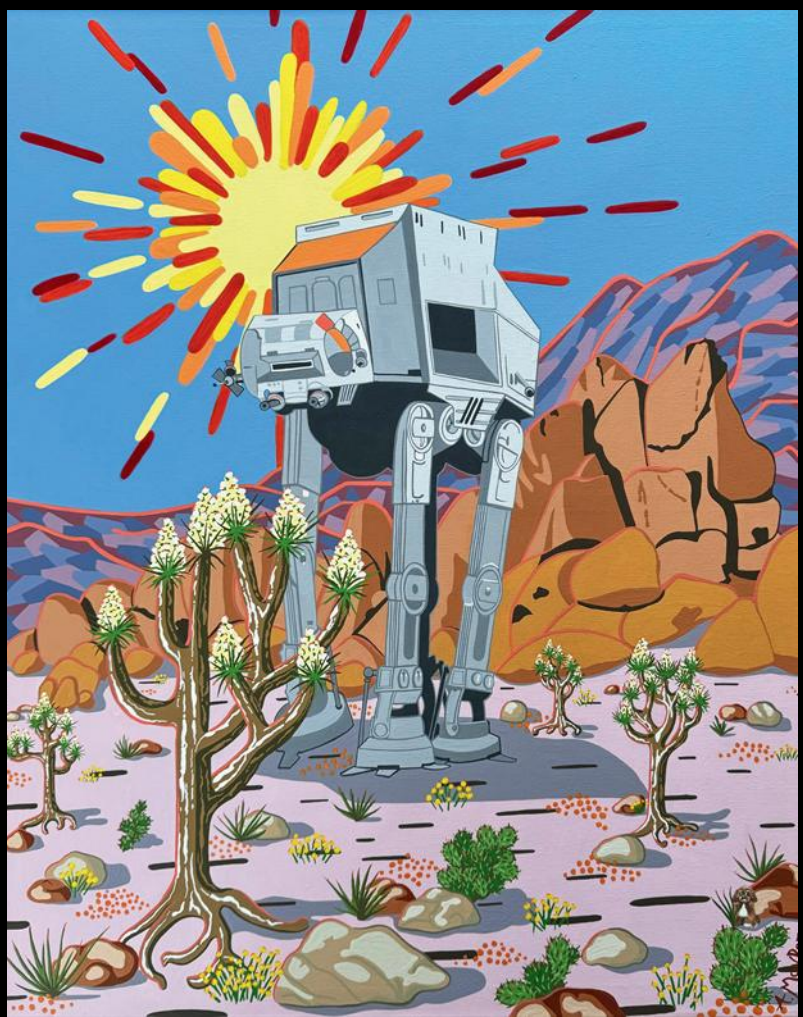
With that aim, Monroe shares more about the pieces featured in this article.

Found on our cover, “*Sirf and Turf* was one of several paintings I made during my emotional experience of my divorce,” shares Monroe. “Once I finished the series, I elevated each painting with a poem detailing the experience in said piece. *Sirf and Turf* depicts the strength I began to feel as I overcame the pain of the separation and was able to halt the deluge of grief even though weighed down by the person I was grieving.”

Opening the article on page 4 is *I Choose the Bear*. “Plagued by an artist intent on making ‘series,’ I chose bears,” Monroe says. “Originally, I named this painting *Bear Hug*, but after the onslaught of women choosing bears over men on recent social media, I renamed it appropriately. In a way, I think I revisited what drew me to paint the divorce series showing a woman of strength who has oneness with nature during turbulent times.”

On page 5, is *The Oiron and Her Pussy*. Monroe explains the genesis of the piece. “After my divorce, I reunited via email with an ex-boyfriend of many years ago. There's a reason for ex's and I gradually came to my senses about this one when he called me a "harlot." Well, that inspired a series I painted about women of the night from various cultural aspects. Oiron is a particular Japanese prostitute, but painting a Japanese woman who might end up being confused for Geisha, I decided to add the Pussy. Definitely, tongue in cheek.”

The Halversons Were Here is found on page 6. “My next series began when prompted to submit a piece of art about Northridge, CA's history for a local show,” says Monroe. “My research found that Northridge was once named Zelzah which meant ‘underwater spring.’ Further investigation revealed that the Halversons were one of the first settlers in the area who farmed alfalfa and oranges. I basically placed all that information on one canvas and fell in love with the juxtaposition of black and white history in my surreal landscape after which I painted similar stories of historical figures of LA: Doheny, Wilshire, Mulholland, Pico, and Will Rodgers.”



And finally, featured to the left, is *Kyle's ATAT*. As Monroe explains, “My son is a twenty-seven year old Star Wars fan who loves Joshua Tree. This was a birthday present for him.”

For Monroe the biggest challenge of being an artist is her self-confidence. “[It] holds me back from relationships,” she says. “I'm either overly quiet or overly defensive. So I tend to keep to myself.”

As part of this, Monroe shares advice for upcoming artists: “Keep at it. Don't hone in on the negative, especially if it's coming from you.”

Monroe hopes to continue to grow as an artist. “Since I'm "old" now, I'd be absolutely thrilled to just sell my pieces,” she shares. “A solo show would floor me to no end.”

To see Monroe’s work in person, June opening dates follow:
June 7, 2025 Gallery of Hermosa "Discovery" Juried Show
June 21, 2025 Huntington Beach Art Center "Power of Paint" Juried Show
June 22, 2025 Long Beach Creative Group Juried Show
July 11, 2025 Tryst (Torrance Art Museum) WPW Show

Mitch Lerner Following Inspiration and Curiosity

BY JORDAN TATE

Mitch Lerner knew early on that he wanted to perform. It wasn't a gradual realization or a pragmatic career decision—it was a moment. Absurd, vivid, and oddly profound: he was eight years old, on a rainy family vacation, doubled over in a hotel room, gasping for air between uncontrollable fits of laughter while watching *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective*. "It was one of those moments when everything just sort of lights up," Lerner recalls. "I was like—wait, this is a job? Adults get to do this for a living?"

It might sound ridiculous, but that initial jolt of inspiration stuck. The idea that you could make people feel something—laugh, cry, think, escape—by pretending? That was magic. That was power. And even though Lerner's understanding of the craft has evolved significantly since then, the core impulse remains unchanged.

Lerner's path into the performing arts world has been far from linear—and that's exactly how he likes it. After earning his undergraduate degree from Northwestern University, where he studied acting with a focus on Stanislavski's method, he moved to Los Angeles to explore the film and television industry. It was a formative period of experimentation, working jobs, booking smaller roles, and figuring out what kind of performer he wanted to be.

Photo by Sean Kara

In 2016, he made the leap to New York City to immerse himself in the Meisner technique at the William Esper Studio. "I was ready to strip things down. I'd gotten a little too in my head," he admits. "Meisner felt like a way back into the present moment." He initially signed up for a summer intensive but ended up staying for two years. New York, with its relentless energy and creative chaos, became home—unexpectedly—for the next seven years.

That time was creatively rich. He landed an off-Broadway play, worked on indie films, and began to make a name for himself in the local comedy scene. In 2018, he took the plunge into stand-up, drawn by the raw immediacy of it. “There’s nothing like stand-up. It’s terrifying and exhilarating all at once,” he says. 2019 was a high point—he bounced between New York and LA for projects, riding a wave of momentum.

Then the pandemic hit.

Like many artists, Lerner found himself rethinking, regrouping, and reevaluating. He eventually returned to LA in 2023, a little stunned to realize how much New York had shaped him. “I thought I’d do a two-year program and bounce. Seven years later, I’m like, ‘Whoops.’ But I wouldn’t change it.”

Ask Lerner what drives him, and the answer isn’t fame or accolades — it’s curiosity. He approaches performance like an anthropologist: fascinated by people, their contradictions, their inner worlds. “Acting gives you permission to really explore what makes us tick,” he says. “It’s not just about the moment on stage. It’s about breaking down the human experience and trying to live it truthfully—piece by piece.”

That pursuit of truth is central to his philosophy. Lerner describes his best performances as moments of deep presence—when preparation fades, and instinct takes over. “You do all this work, you internalize it, and then you just let it go. If everything’s humming, you’re not thinking anymore. You’re listening, reacting, being. That’s the sweet spot.”

Photo by Tyler Chase

He also views performance as a powerful tool for connection—not just between actors, but with the audience. “I think great performances give people permission to feel,” he says. “People walk around with so much bottled up. If I can help someone laugh, cry, or just feel something real—even for a second—that’s a win.”

Photo by Tyler Chase

And yes, sometimes that feeling comes from something as simple (and silly) as a well-timed fart joke. “Comedy doesn’t have to be noble to be necessary,” he laughs. “If someone’s having a terrible day and I can make them laugh—even if it’s cheap—that matters.”

When it comes to the roles that excite him most, Lerner gravitates toward complexity. “I love grey area characters. People who are charming but awful. Or good-hearted but off-putting. Selfish heroes, noble idiots, intelligent loafers.” He lights up when talking about dream roles, citing R.P. McMurphy from *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* and Doctor Astrov in *Uncle Vanya*. “Astrov is the one. That role’s a lifetime of exploration—his contradictions, regrets, humor, demons. I'd do a summer stock run of that and be happy.”

He’s also keen on characters who lack self-awareness—particularly in comedies. “There’s something inherently funny about someone who is completely blind to their own behavior. It’s such a rich vein.” These days, Lerner splits his time between industry work and independent projects. He’s been involved in numerous indie films and stage productions, many of which have come through personal connections or the vibrant LA creative community. “There’s a rawness to indie work that I love. You’re not dealing with layers of bureaucracy—it’s just people trying to make something meaningful.”

One of his latest projects is a short film he co-produced and starred in, titled *Clout Chasers*. It’s currently in post-production and set to hit the festival circuit. He partnered with longtime friend Joel, who wrote and directed the piece. “Producing was new territory, but really rewarding. It made me appreciate just how much has to go right behind the scenes for a story to work.”

Photos by Tyler Chase

He's also considering a longer-term move into producing, with early conversations underway about starting a production company. "We'll see," he says cautiously. "It's a weird time in the industry. But I'm open to helping bring more stories to life—especially from writers with something unique to say."

Like most working actors, Lerner has juggled an eclectic mix of day jobs over the years: teacher, server, bartender, Uber driver, tutor. "I did Postmates for a week and crashed my car," he laughs. "That was right before I moved to New York." These days, he leans on copywriting and assistant work to keep things stable. Both offer flexibility and a creative outlet, even if they're not glamorous.

"It's honestly harder to find emotional balance than to make rent sometimes," he admits. "But copywriting lets me solve problems with words, and assisting gives me a way to help other artists. I've learned to find purpose in that."

One constant through it all is teaching. Lerner has always enjoyed tutoring and working with students. "Kids are honest. They'll call you out. And they ask great questions."

Lerner credits much of his growth to the blend of training he received—first at Northwestern, where he studied Stanislavski under teachers like Dan Cantor, and later at the William Esper Studio under Jennifer Monaco and Bruce McCarty.

"Northwestern taught me how to do the homework—build a backstory, analyze the script, understand given circumstances," he explains. "Esper taught me how to forget the homework and just listen." Initially skeptical of Meisner, he found it unexpectedly transformative. "It trains you to trust your gut. To be present. To stop performing and start reacting."

One formative moment came during a Q&A with Julia Louis-Dreyfus. When Lerner asked about her technique, she shrugged and said, "There's no right answer." That moment stuck with him. "It was so freeing. We're all just figuring it out as we go."

These days, Lerner no longer believes that acting alone can change the world—but he still believes in its power. "People need stories. They need laughter. They need catharsis," he says. "If I can help someone feel something—anything—I'm doing my job."

Photo by Tyler Chase

His current dream isn't a role or an award. It's stability. "I'd love to be working with people I admire, telling stories I believe in, and know that I have my next two gigs lined up," he says. "That, right now, would be the dream." And then, with a smile: "Though I'd still cut off a hand to be in Tarantino's next movie."

Lerner is currently appearing in "The Meeting" at the Hollywood Fringe Festival—a play about five artists secretly gathering in a dystopian society where art has been outlawed. He refers to it jokingly as a "light escapist comedy," but the themes resonate deeply: creative resistance, the role of art in crisis, and what it means to hold onto truth in a world built on lies.

He also appears in the recently released streaming series *C'est La Vie* as a "yuppie guru," a role he describes as "absurdly fun."

To young performers just starting out, Lerner offers grounded advice: "Learn a craft besides acting. Editing, lighting, camera, sound—something. Make yourself useful on set. The earlier you do it, the better."

Why? "Because you won't always be acting. But you can always be contributing. And if you help others make their art, it will come back to you."

In other words: stay curious, stay generous, and never stop pretending—especially when it matters most.

A DECADE OF STORYTELLING AND BEYOND

Bambu

BY JORDAN TATE

From the Bronx to Atlanta, filmmaker and writer Bambu has spent the last ten years crafting stories that challenge, inspire, and endure. As he reflects on a decade in the independent film scene, he shares his journey, philosophy, and hopes for the future of American cinema.

Bambu's cinematic journey began not in a studio or classroom, but in the living rooms of the Bronx and Harlem. Growing up, he and his family would create home videos—skits and dance routines that, while simple, planted the seeds of something greater. These early creative sessions weren't framed as "filmmaking" at the time, but for Bambu, they were essential building blocks for the storyteller he would become.

At age eleven, two films — *Pulp Fiction* and *JFK* — radically altered the way he saw the world and the medium of film. "Those movies didn't just entertain me," he recalls, "they shaped my understanding of story, of timing, of the power of perspective." From that point on, the desire to create stories through film never left him.

He defines a filmmaker as “a person who tells stories using visual media with sequential scenes.” But for Bambu, this is only the beginning. While he acknowledges the increasing accessibility of filmmaking due to digital tools and platforms, he’s quick to add that making a great film remains among the most demanding creative pursuits. “You can’t just dream about films and plan them forever. You have to make them. That’s how you learn.”

This ethos — learning through doing — has guided his path. His first formal attempt at filmmaking came in a high school class titled "Film as Literature," where he scripted a short as his final project. After a stint in the military, where he briefly stepped away from creative work, filmmaking found him again—this time through a neighbor, producer Nicole DeAngelo, who helped bring his first serious short, *Tony*, to life.

In 2015, Bambu officially began his professional journey as a filmmaker. Initially balancing it as a hobby alongside a stable career, he gradually transitioned to full-time creative work. Over time, he took on every role from writing and directing to editing, cinematography, and producing — a necessity in the independent film world. This hands-on experience now allows him to lead with confidence, understanding every moving part of a production.

Now in his tenth year, Bambu has written and directed a dozen short films. Several of these are listed on IMDb, and some of his work—both narrative shorts and edited projects—has found its way onto platforms like Amazon Prime, Tubi, and Peacock.

Though still focused on short-form storytelling, Bambu is preparing to take the next leap: his first feature-length film. Currently in the writing phase, the project is slated to begin production next year. His goal is not just to make a longer film, but to make one that matters — creatively and thematically.

"I've never been interested in making something just to say I did it. Every story has to justify itself. It has to ask something of the audience."

Bambu identifies first and foremost as a narrative filmmaker. His primary concern is story—structure, character, and meaning—not genre or commercial viability. He views filmmaking not as a product-oriented business, but as a deeply personal craft.

When asked about his creative inspiration, Bambu answers with conviction: the process itself.

“What inspires me creatively when making films is the process,” he says. “I truly love the process of making films—from the inception of the idea to the final cut in editing. This is important because I’ve worked very difficult, physically demanding jobs in my life. If I didn’t love the process as much as I love the results, I’m not sure I would still be a filmmaker.”

This deep appreciation for the journey over the destination is what sustains him through each project, regardless of its scale or budget.

As a director, Bambu’s focus is always on collaboration — particularly with his actors. His approach emphasizes trust, communication, and intuition.

“My approach to directing actors is to gain their trust,” he explains. “I think a director must connect with their actors in a manner that is almost metaphysical. Communication, patience, and trust are key factors. Every actor has a vision for their role and the film as a whole. I like to facilitate their vision without compromising the integrity of the film.”

He believes in rehearsal, but uses it strategically.

“I do like to rehearse actors, but not for too long,” he adds. “I think when an actor is over-rehearsed, they may be exhausted by the time they are supposed to be performance ready. Also, I do not want to have them do their best work in rehearsal. I like using rehearsal mostly for blocking and to get the actor in the right frame of mind to play their respective role.”

Every filmmaker faces challenges, and Bambu is no exception. One of his most difficult directing experiences occurred during the filming of *The Vagabond of Bonds Park*, a student project.

“I was told by a woman who owned a coffee shop that I could use her location,” he recalls. “On the day of the shoot, she went to New York City — with the key. I live in Atlanta.”

With no access to the location, Bambu had to rewrite and relocate the entire shoot on the fly.

“We ended up filming in a park. The film was vastly different than I envisioned, but it ended up working. You have to be flexible, especially in indie filmmaking. That’s where the real creativity shows up — when things don’t go according to plan.”

Budget limitations are another reality Bambu faces regularly. His response is to lead with clarity and collaboration.

“My creative process under budget constraints is to work closely with my team and to delegate roles accordingly,” he explains. “This ensures everyone knows their individual goals so that time and resources are not wasted.”

With extensive experience in microbudget filmmaking, Bambu offers this advice: “Build strong and lasting relationships. This will be your saving grace.”

These connections, he emphasizes, are often more valuable than any piece of equipment or line item in a budget.

Post-production is where many films are truly shaped, and Bambu approaches editing as a dialogue — not a dictatorship.

“When I work with an editor, I usually give a lot of notes,” he says. “But I also like to let them know that I trust them and give them the green light to have creative freedom as long as they maintain the integrity of the film.”

This balance of guidance and autonomy allows editors to do their best work. “There’s usually a lot of back and forth, and this can be tiring, but it’s worth it. That’s why building relationships with people you work with is essential.”

For Bambu, filmmaking isn't just about entertainment—it's about shaping culture.

"Films create myths," he says. "And myths shape who we are. They give us the symbols, the metaphors, and the values we pass down."

His ambition is to contribute to the American myth through literature and film, aiming to make "the American people, all of us, immortal."

Bambu recognizes the film industry is changing rapidly with social media, digital access, and now AI reshaping how films are made and seen.

“AI will change how films are made — probably dramatically — but it may also simplify the process and open up new creative tools,” he says. “The key will be staying grounded in story.”

He encourages filmmakers to adopt an entrepreneurial mindset, noting, “It’s easier now if you’re thinking like a studio head. It’s much harder if you’re trying to climb the traditional ladder.”

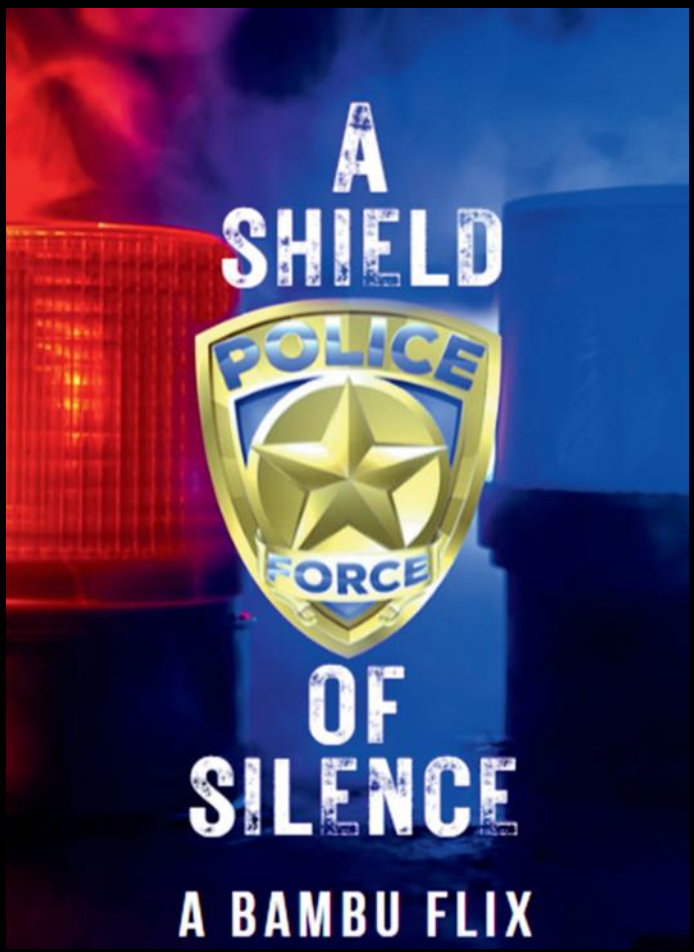
Currently, Bambu is preparing his debut novel for publication and developing his next short—a morally complex murder mystery in the style of Fritz Lang.

“It’s suspenseful, but it’s also personal — about justice, guilt, and complicity.”

For aspiring filmmakers, Bambu’s advice is straightforward: “Just make films. Start small. Make a two-minute film. Then make a five-minute film. Then a ten-minute film. If you can do that, you're on the right track.”

Experience, he believes, is the best teacher—and relationships are the best resource. And for a creative boost between projects, he recommends *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman,* a novel as unconventional and self-aware as the best independent films.

Ten years in, Bambu remains as passionate and driven as ever. His voice—uncompromising, thoughtful, and forward-looking—is one to watch as he continues to shape stories that matter, on screen and beyond.



FPS FLIX

Tony Savant On the Meisner Techique

BY JIM MACNERLAND

Tony Savant is first and foremost an actor who has expanded his role to Meisner acting teacher, writer, director and film festival director. Savant recalls the day he decided to pursue acting. On a return flight from his senior class trip he was accidentally separated from his group and seated next to an older gentleman who inquired what he wanted to do after high school. When Savant said “Law school” the man responded, “Don’t do it, kid.” The man was a lawyer, you see, and told Savant to pursue what he loves because he would regret it if he didn’t try. “I think that was the day I decided," says Savant.

After getting a theater degree at Penn State, the guidance counselor advised Savant to go to grad school and get an MFA. After doing the URTA auditions he had many acceptances that came with scholarships. Since he wanted to go to California and the program there was 2 years instead of 3 he chose Cal State, Long Beach. “Ironically, the person who gave me a scholarship to Rutgers was Bill Esper, who was a disciple of Sandy Meisner.”

While doing his master’s thesis on The Group Theatre, Savant came across the PBS documentary, *Sanford Meisner: The Theatre’s Best Kept Secret*? “As soon as I saw it, I said to myself that I wanted to study with this man.” Savant called the Neighborhood Playhouse in New York, “Figuring I’d be moving back east.” To his surprise Sandy was now teaching in L.A.. Unfortunately, Sandy’s class was full with a waiting list so they referred him to Playhouse West, an acting school in North Hollywood, where Sandy was teaching his private classes. “I audited Robert Carnegie’s class at Playhouse West. The rest is history.”

In the professional world of theater and film, people want a sure thing. Casting directors or directors don't say, "Oh, I don't care if this person fails at this part. Let's give them a shot." So, we need a place for us to explore, to consider, to practice on ideas that confront us. We need a safe place where we can help and support each other. A place, as Savant has said, where "you can try and fail."

"You know, it's all right to be wrong, but it's not all right not to try." ~ Sanford Meisner

Savant is the founder and director of Playhouse West-Philadelphia, a branch of Playhouse West which originated in Los Angeles and was founded by Robert Carnegie and Jeff Goldblum. "I joined Playhouse West in Los Angeles in 1987 as a student, and in 1990 became the first student asked to teach." He started teaching the Meisner Technique in the beginning of 1990 and then became the Artistic Director of the school a year or two later, and pretty much ran the school out there for about twenty-three years.

"In 2012, for personal reasons, I had to move away from Los Angeles. Bob Carnegie and Jeff Goldblum gave me the opportunity to open up a branch of the school. An official branch of Playhouse West in Philadelphia, and I took them up on it. Initially, I didn't even know what I was going to be doing when I had to move because my wife had gotten ill. But, I came out here determined to do what I was doing in LA, but even better. I mean, I always try to do everything as well as I can. I was determined to have the best acting school east of Los Angeles. To build a school and create the type of acting school and atmosphere that we had in Los Angeles and get a theater going."

"As for Meisner's approach, he was determined to teach actors how to function when acting." Meisner developed, over many years, an organized, step-by-step approach to learning how to act. "He could articulate a set of acting principles and set of acting habits fundamentally and said, 'Here's what all good actors do' and it, of course, begins with listening and losing self-consciousness. If you don't listen and you're self-conscious, you have no chance of doing something of quality."

How can actors lose self-consciousness? “Get the actor listening, genuinely listening, and get their attention off themselves, so they have a chance to lose self-consciousness. And then, of course, you practice it. You repeat it over and over and over again for months as a starting point, to get the fundamentals into you. Once good fundamental habits are established, the work leads them to scene work. In Meisner’s second year he addressed more advanced, complex acting problems.

“One issue with Sandy [Meisner] is, the program was very quick. Two years, really not even two years. It was like nine or ten months with time off in between. And it really didn’t address all the things an actor was going to face in the industry. And Sandy knew it, and he communicated that to his students. He would say, ‘you’re going to need other teachers, or you’re going to need to go off and continue to work. You need to keep working together. I’ve given you a way to practice, and now you must get together and keep practicing with each other.’” Meisner’s program covered two years, but he would say, “It takes twenty years to make an actor.”

“I think Bob Carnegie initially realized that [Meisner’s] was an incomplete approach. So, with Sandy’s knowledge and blessing, our studio was year round. Bob would tell me that Sandy liked that he was not an imitator, and that he should find his own way. So Playhouse West was a two to three year program, year round. We don’t take breaks, and it’s much more intensive study. We’re not only going to do all of Meisner’s work, we’re going to expand and add work that will help round out an actor’s craft and technique.”

Over the many years of teaching, Savant started developing other steps and, exercises. Having worked as an actor, having directed and done tons and tons of plays, acted in over twenty movies, been on many sets and auditioned a lot, Savant knew of the many challenges actors may face. “So, my goal was always, is there something we could invent to address these challenges of working as an actor. When you’re an advanced student, it’s not just about fundamentals anymore.” So Savant developed some exercises to add to the work. “I believe they’re essential.”

One such exercise is to tell a story non-verbally, a step he added after the work using Edgar Lee Masters’ *Spoon River Anthology*. “The Spoon River exercise, working on speeches and interpretation, is very tough, very demanding work,” explains Savant, and was the last exercise actors did in Meisner’s class. “From what I was able to observe, which was limited, but mostly what I heard from Bob, is that the students in Sandy’s classes at this point didn’t get to do that many speeches. At this step, you didn’t work every day in Sandy’s class.” He explained how Meisner introduced concepts, “giving actors a little taste of the concept.”

“He would say, ‘Okay, do you get the concept? Good. Let’s move on to another one.’ He didn’t wait for everybody to get each step. He introduced something and students did the step for a certain amount of time, a certain number of weeks. And then he was moving on.” At Playhouse West the approach was: “We’ll introduce the concept, but now let’s work on it until you get it. You had a little more time and a better chance to grasp things, to succeed or fail at it. I think, perhaps, it’s a better approach.”

“The Spoon River work is learning about telling stories, interpretation, and making specific choices about that, and learning how to really work on a speech,” says Savant. “That’s all verbal. We’re telling stories verbally and when you’re working on scenes you’re telling stories verbally.” But actors also need to work on the moments where there is no dialogue. “There’s so many plays, so many scenes over the years, where students would bring in a scene and in the middle of the scene there’d be a section where someone leaves or even just a nonverbal (moment) and half the time students would skip them.” He would inquire. “why aren’t you doing that part?” The students thought since no one is talking he didn’t want to see it. “But it’s telling the story.”

So Savant has added a step, working on non-verbal scenes. First, the students write a non-verbal scene themselves. “When you write one yourself, now you’re responsible. You’re so much more responsible for understanding why that’s there… I give them criteria for it. What they have to accomplish in the scene. It’s scripted and they give me the script, and I look and see are they performing all these actions? But are they doing it like it’s an improvisation? I don’t want to see them following stage directions. I want them to live it out and make me believe that there was no plan. Yet, there is a plan. They gave me the plan. But, can you render the plan spontaneously, and does it tell a story?”

Once Savant feels confident with the students' capabilities, they bring a nonverbal scene from an actual scripted piece and do the same approach. The third step is to write a nonverbal scene between an actor and a partner. “There’s a lot of times where there’s a nonverbal scene between two people interacting. It’s telling a story. Something’s happening. There’s conflict, but no one speaks.” Finally they bring in nonverbal scenes from an actual script that have more than one person in them. “I always tell people to fill in between the lines. You don’t just act the black. The best stuff in a scene is in the white. It’s about what you’re not saying.” Meisner said, “An ounce of behavior is worth a pound of words.”

Meisner had introduced Nursery Rhymes to his approach. This is an exercise where an actor picks a Mother Goose rhyme and, using an “as if”, prepares two to three different variations on the poem without changing the words. Each variation must convey a true character, and the emotion and behavior must tell the story. “Sandy didn’t do them all the time. He only did them with groups that he thought could handle them because they’re really hard.” Because of the challenges, an actor won’t always experience them in class at Playhouse West.

Tony Savant with Kim Savant in a still from Red

Savant no longer teaches Nursery Rhymes, stating, “Everything that Nursery Rhymes is meant to teach, I now take care of with Short Scenes. Everyone loves the short scenes and it teaches the same thing, in fact it teaches it better.”

Savant’s Short Scenes exercise involves interpreting a scene, addressing the whole idea about what it means to make choices, like when auditioning. He writes a short scene, one that is often ambiguous, as far as the dialogue is concerned, so it might be interpreted in different ways. “You’ve got this dialogue, and this conversation could be about salad dressing, but it’s really not about salad dressing. The conversation is really about divorce. Or it could be a conversation about going on a trip, but it’s really not about going on a trip. It’s about betrayal, or about the suspicion of betrayal. I don’t want you to play the words, I want you to find the subtext underneath these words. What is this conversation really about? The words might suggest we are talking about how nice dinner was and how the asparagus was good and the salmon was perfect and what was that wine? But what is the conversation really about?”

Savant may give them some information about what’s really going on. Like was tonight the first night the couple talked about divorce just before the meal? Sometimes, after students worked on a scene with one partner, he surprises them and has them do the scene with a different partner. “In some ways, they’re basically preparing an audition. It’s an important addition to the work. It’s an important step that really helps the students learn how to make choices about material, how to make a strong choice, an interesting choice, a choice that fits the text, yet doesn’t make it about the words. You have to be a quick study. You have to be creative.”

Savant wants his actors to succeed. To learn to make choices in auditions that help them stand out but without being weird. “Sometimes people make a way-out choice that’s just totally crazy and not justified by the text. Class and school is a place where you’ve got permission to fail. I’d rather them fail and do that in class and be told, ‘no, that’s not good’, rather than do it in one of their self tapes and send it out to Universal studios or some casting director.” Savant is considering publishing his over 100 short scenes, hopefully, within the next year.

Tony and Kim Savant at the PWFFPhilidelphia

In acting, developing a believable character is key. Savant uses Lajos Egri’s three-dimensional character guide from Egri’s book, *The Art of Dramatic Writing*, in his acting classes, as he uses it in his screenwriting course, as the basis for a character development exercise. Egri’s guide emphasizes the physiology, sociology and psychology of a character. “I did this in L.A., too, but I’ve developed it much more out here (Philadelphia), it’s more specific now.” Students have a month to develop a three-dimensional character and create a whole backstory and autobiography.

“I tell them to pick a character that’s not exactly like them. I want them to do a characterization; change their look, change the way they walk, talk, move, gesture, and fill that out.” After a month developing the character, the actors come in as a group and he interviews them. He asks them everything and anything about their lives and they should be able to answer. “I want to know who their best friend was in elementary school, and where they went to elementary school? What their grandfather did for a living. If they have brothers and sisters and all about them? All their relationships in life? How much money did their father make? Literally anything that I could ask about their life. They have to know about that character.”

Once they do the character interviews, the actors do a series of improvisations where they come up with an unresolved conflict their character would have with someone else, and then they improvise a conversation and try to resolve it. The students pick a partner, and every two weeks they switch partners. “One week you work on your character and another week you get to create a whole new character that your partner gives you.” Savant acknowledges this is very hard, specific and demanding work. But “the students freaking love it.”

At the end of all this thought, work and investigation the actors write a scene for their character. “I’ve had students then go off and make movies based on their character or write plays.” Savant believes that “actors aren’t necessarily given the chance to test themselves and what they’re capable of doing. You have to have a place to try and fail.”

While Savant was teaching at Playhouse West in Los Angeles, fellow classmate and staff member, Scott Trost, put together the first film festival. “It was just a little event, not a very serious affair. They brought in basically what amounts to a big screen TV and showed four or five movies. Most of them weren’t even finished back then. Everything was on film. No one was shooting on digital back then. Most of them were half done films, works in progress. The second year was much of the same. “But I popped in and watched a while, and there was something to it. It dawned on me immediately: We’re not taking advantage of this.” For the third year, Trost put out the word for volunteers to give ideas of what can be done with the Film Festival. Tony volunteered. “Here’s what I think we could do with the film festival. We should show films and we should do Q & A’s with the filmmakers. And we should get people from the industry to come in and speak, and take advantage of our resources and really turn it into an educational and inspirational event.”

While attending other film festivals, Tony had seen filmmakers on the panels and everybody trying to outdo each other. “How hard can we make it seem? I guess that was their way of scoring points with people, like they did the impossible. And I’m thinking, that’s the wrong message. You should be trying to help people make films and tell people it is possible. My goal always was, we’re going to have these panels, and I’m going to interview people and do Q&As, and I’m going to champion the people’s films.

We know we didn't always show great films, but they are our guests and I want to showcase them and their work. I want to put them in a position of honor and respect. Let them talk about how they made their movies and what they went through, so that other people can be inspired and educated. And we're not going to make it all about the budget, like at other festivals. I don't want to hear that it was impossible. I want to hear why it was possible. The goal was to get these filmmakers onstage, and give them a positive experience. That's why people love our film festival."

Playhouse West Philadelphia celebrates its 10th anniversary

That year the Playhouse West Film Festival started on a Saturday morning and ran all day Saturday and Sunday. There were panels of writers, panels of filmmakers and 12 films were shown. Tickets were sold and it was turned into a fundraiser for the school. It was an overwhelming success and very popular with the students. The next year a Veterans Center in Burbank was rented and the Festival expanded, opening on a Friday night. Of the 30 or so submissions, about 18 films were shown.

"It was like the Golden Globes at the vet center. People sitting around large, round tables. People eating and drinking all weekend. We showed one of my films, *Letter from Home*. We screened Henry Barial's film, *Some Body*, which later became the first fully digital feature film to screen at Sundance. Again, it was wildly successful, but once again, we could only get in about one hundred fifty students... We sold out quickly. We couldn't get everybody in. After one year we went, 'You know what? Maybe we need to find a bigger place." So the festival moved to the Gay and Lesbian Center in Hollywood. There they had guests like John Landis and Gary Marshall. After two years the Festival moved to the Los Angeles Film School, where the guests were Sydney Pollack and James Caan. The two hundred and fifty seats available were all sold out in two days.

"The film festival got really, really popular, very, very fast. Submissions came in from Scott Caan and James Franco. And we premiered Mark Rydell's film, *James Dean*, before it was shown on TV. Playhouse West member, James Franco, won the Golden Globe the next year for his portrayal of Dean. Representatives from Apple came and spoke about Final Cut Pro. Sony and Canon came and spoke about their new digital film cameras. And every year more and more films were added."

"We kept getting more submissions," says Savant and the films submitted "got a lot more competitive every year. The films kept getting better because people learned from the previous year. People who were rejected one year, and they were heartbroken over that and probably a little bit pissed. But then next year they would submit something, and it's a little bit better. Some people would get rejected four or five years in a row and then suddenly, 'Wow!' Now they're making decent movies. It was just a period of tremendous growth at Playhouse West and within the Playhouse West community. And then they kicked us out [of LA Film School], because someone else had taken over the school."

The group landed at the historic El Portal Theatre, a 350 seat venue in North Hollywood. There were no online sales at first, tickets were sold by hand, yet, they would sell out. “Sometimes we’d sell the first 200 tickets within a few hours. It was so popular. It just ballooned. Oh, man, what a great event. A phenomenal, phenomenal event. It’s one of the things I’m so proud of.”

“I wanted to redo that here [in Philadelphia]. We were a smaller school. Out here, the first couple of years, I didn’t have my own space, so I was just renting this one small space above a casting office. So, I had to go out and rent spaces [for the festival].” One year it was at a performing arts school, another a 250 seat theatre in Manayunk, a neighborhood in Philadelphia, where Savant premiered his film *Red*. “But, now, we just do it at our theater. We have ninety-seven seats. Not everybody in the school can come unfortunately. We do have an online live stream version of it. People can pay and see it online. It might be getting to the point where I do have to look for a bigger space. It’s just so expensive and it’s a fundraiser. When you go to a bigger space, then you have to ask for more money. You have to make the tickets more expensive.”

Years ago in L.A., an Academy Award-nominated cinematographer, “who was at one of our Film Festivals, he said to me afterward, ‘I’ve been to film festivals all over the world. I’ve been to the biggest, most prestigious film festivals all over the world. Your film festival was the most positive experience I ever had at a film festival.’ When he told me that, I knew we were doing something right. ‘Your festival is different. I felt a community. I felt like this was one big family.’ And that’s what me and Bob used to talk about every year. This is our family reunion. We might be a dysfunctional family at times, like all families, we don’t all agree about everything. We have our disagreements. We have our idiosyncrasies and eccentricities, and we don’t get along all the time, but we have this one time a year where we can get together and just have fun, like a big, happy family and celebrate each other and the work. We get to hang out with people we don’t usually hang out with and it should be fun. It shouldn’t be a drag.”

“When a new filmmaker who just made their first film is at the festival, I always ask what inspired you to make this film? When I hear, ‘I came to last year’s film festival’, that’s the best feeling in the world.” Many students who attend make it a life goal to get a film into the festival. “That is the best and that’s what it’s all about. That is the spirit of the Film Festival.”

For Savant, he hopes the Film Festival and his classes “educate our current students and filmmaking community, how to make better films and use the resources that they have to make the best films that they possibly can”. He wants students to be able to go out and make their way in this business, and he says, “The best way for an actor or writer or director to get into our industry is to make their own stuff, not wait for someone to hire you. If you’re making your own stuff, you’re getting better at what you’re doing. When somebody does hire you, you’re better at what you do. You’re not just a professional student who only exists in the world of the classroom.”

Savant encourages students to make films. “If you’re sitting out there and you’re going, man, I could at least do that, then go do it. Don’t talk about it. There’s so many people who talk about making a film and then they don’t do it. Nowadays, you can make a film really, really cheap. With an iPhone, right? This is a whole movie studio. There’s no excuse anymore.”

When starting in this business, actors' roles can be small and they often work inconsistently which doesn't allow for growth. Savant believes, "You need a place to continue to grow. At least for a while, so that you can keep working until you're doing so much work or getting to do enough projects where you can have a place to grow. Because otherwise, every day you're either getting a little better or a little worse. If you don't have a place to get better, then I guess you're going to get worse." Savant believes that this is true for himself as well. "I have to hold myself to the same standard. If I'm not constantly trying to get better as a teacher, then what am I doing? I guess I'm getting worse."

Savant points to actors like Gary Sinise and Tim Robbins who started their own theater companies in order to keep directing, writing and performing. And even though he believes Playhouse West provides that, he doesn't want people to just be professional students. "I do encourage people to get themselves out there. At some point you have to. You have to start trying to make inroads into the industry. You have to get an agent. You have to try to get a manager. You have to audition. Playhouse West should give them everything that they need to be confident to do that."

Savant's advice for new actors, "First, you better love it. If you don't, do something else. Second, be patient. This business is a marathon, not a sprint. Don't quit. It's going to be tough. You also have to take a chance on yourself. Be willing to bet the pot on yourself. You will eventually need others to take a chance on you, but if you are not all in on yourself, how can you ask others to bet on you? Then, and most importantly, your mission in life must be this: to become the kind of actor everyone would be dying to work with. If you are not interested in that then please, go do something else."

Tony Savant is the founding director of Playhouse West Philadelphia. He is an acclaimed writer and director, having written and directed the highly acclaimed and award-winning play, Welcome Home, Soldier, which ran for twenty-five years. His films include the award-winning Red, and he is known for his films, The Bryds and the Bees, Buddy and Letter from Home. The 12th Annual Playhouse West Film Festival Philadelphia, founded by Savant, takes place Aug 22-24, 2025. Use the QR code for tickets and other information.

Tony Savant being interviewed with Wolfgang Bodison at the Playhouse West Film Festival in Los Angeles

Fabian Farina

From Actor to Independent Filmmaker – A Journey of Creative Control and Compelling Storytelling

BY JORDAN TATE

In the ever-evolving world of independent cinema, where passion often outweighs budget and perseverance trumps convenience, Fabian Farina has emerged as a distinctive voice. His path into filmmaking was not a straight one, but rather a detour born from frustration, refined by vision, and driven by a relentless desire to tell stories that matter. An actor turned filmmaker, Farina exemplifies what it means to seize creative control and craft compelling narratives on his own terms.

Farina's artistic journey began in front of the camera. Raised in South Philadelphia but born in Argentina, he cultivated a love for storytelling early on—first through music, and eventually through acting. But as he gained experience in the industry, he began to recognize a common thread: he was often cast in stereotypical roles—tough guys, mafia figures, menacing characters. While he excelled in those portrayals, Farina knew his range extended far beyond what he was being offered. "I felt boxed in," he recalls. "I wanted to explore more nuanced characters, more emotional depth. But I realized that if I wanted those roles, I'd have to write them myself."

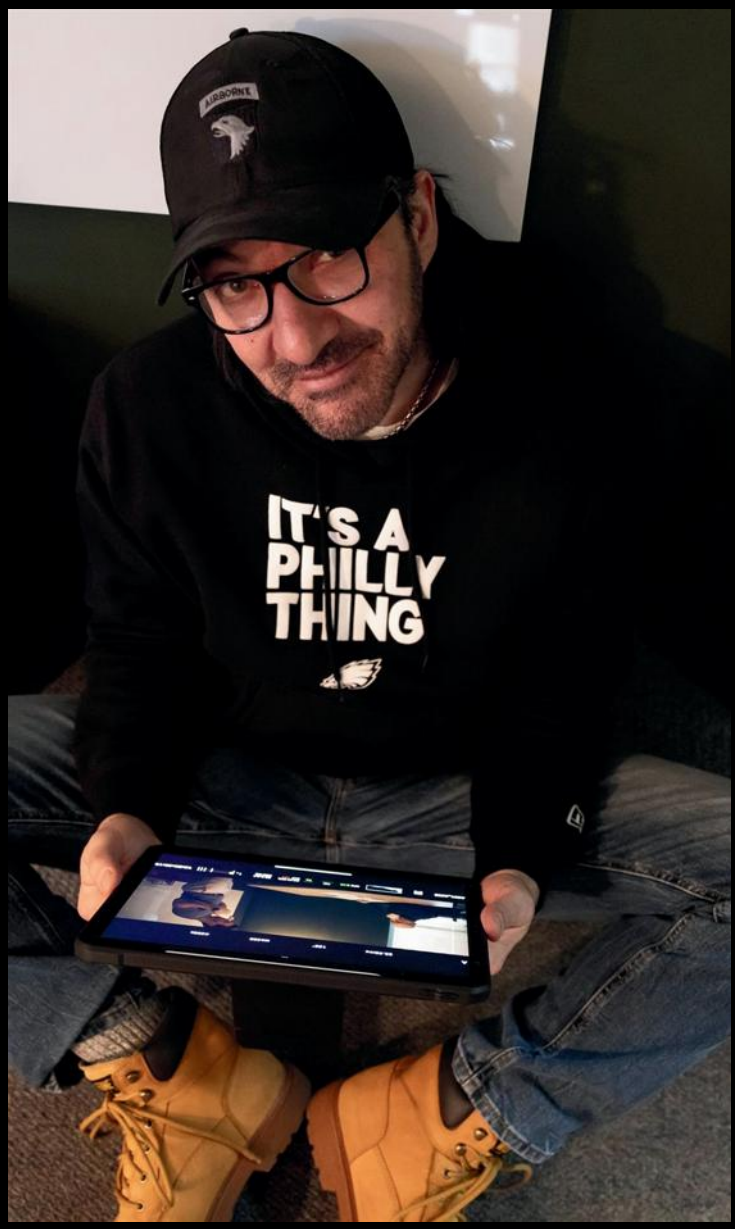
That revelation became a turning point. He began writing scripts, initially just as a means of creating the roles he longed to play. What started as a workaround quickly became a calling. The more he wrote, the more he fell in love with the process of building worlds, shaping dialogue, and guiding characters through complex emotional arcs. And as he began producing his own content, Farina discovered something even more empowering: directing.

In 2014, alongside his childhood friend and creative partner Mariano Mattie, Farina co-founded Four Olives Productions. The company was born out of necessity but matured into a full-fledged production powerhouse. What began with minimal resources and boundless ambition has since produced four feature films and nine short films, with a fifth feature in post-production and another currently in development.

Farina emphasizes that Four Olives Productions is not just a brand—it's a deeply collaborative ecosystem. "We do it all," he says. From pre-production logistics—like scouting locations, casting, wardrobe, scheduling, and writing shot lists—to on-set directing, acting, and running camera, Farina and Mattie are hands-on every step of the way. Post-production is no exception; the pair handle editing, sound design, color grading, and even scoring. Their commitment to quality and control is a defining aspect of their process.

This full-circle involvement is not just a matter of efficiency—it's an artistic choice. "Filmmaking is visual storytelling," Farina says. "Every decision—camera angle, lighting, the way an actor delivers a line—contributes to the emotional truth of a scene. And when you're involved in every part of that, you're better equipped to protect the story."

Over the past decade, Four Olives Productions has created a diverse body of work. Many of Farina's short films begin as proofs of concept or festival submissions and eventually grow into full-length features. One of the most notable examples of this is the *Sacrum Vindicate* trilogy—a gripping action-thriller series that evolved from a short film into a three-part feature narrative.



The first two installments, *SV* and *SVII,* are already streaming on Amazon Prime and Tubi. The third and final chapter is currently in post-production, capping off a trilogy that has defined much of Farina's recent work. The series also introduced audiences to Nathaniel Nucci, a recurring character Farina refers to as one of his favorites.

While Farina's preferred genre leans toward action and thriller—"I like to keep audiences on edge," he says—his portfolio also includes forays into romance, drama, and psychological horror. His upcoming film, *Evelyn,* represents an exciting departure into sci-fi horror, telling the story of a geneticist whose AI-driven gene manipulation experiment leads to the birth of a dangerously intelligent daughter. The film's logline alone sends chills:

"When a geneticist secretly enhances his unborn daughter using AI-generated gene manipulation to save her life, he creates a child far more intelligent—and dangerous—than he ever imagined, leading to a chilling series of events."

Farina's storytelling approach is both deliberate and instinctive. A student of cinema, he studies film structure, cinematography, and emotional pacing obsessively, believing that a successful scene relies not just on good writing but on how that writing is shot. He considers camera placement, lighting choices, and actor blocking critical elements in the emotional impact of a moment.

"Understanding what sells a scene is essential," Farina says. "Is it a close-up? A wide shot? A two-person frame or a solo angle? These choices create meaning. And if you make the wrong one, you can lose the audience."

Preparation is a central tenet of his process. Farina spends weeks—sometimes months—breaking down each scene before stepping on set. He details what's needed for each moment, both logistically and emotionally. Still, he emphasizes the importance of flexibility and collaboration. Some of the most powerful scenes in his films have come from spontaneous changes driven by input from actors, cinematographers, and crew members. In one memorable instance, the entire ending of a film was reimagined on set—an impromptu decision that not only strengthened the film but inspired a sequel that ultimately surpassed the original.

Farina also has a knack for subverting audience expectations. "I love steering viewers in one direction and then flipping everything in the final act," he says. This technique, combined with a strong narrative foundation, has become a signature of his storytelling style.

To date, all of Four Olives Productions' films have been self-funded, a testament to Farina's unwavering commitment to his craft. While self-financing allows for complete creative control, he acknowledges the challenges: limited resources, logistical strain, and the occasional temptation to wait for ideal circumstances. But Farina doesn't wait. "Waiting is my weakness," he admits. "If I want to make a film, I find a way to make it happen."

Looking forward, Farina is actively seeking external producers and funding partners to help scale future projects. He's also open to working with other writers, provided there is a clear, unified vision for how the story will be told—visually, tonally, and structurally.

Farina's view of filmmaking extends beyond entertainment. He sees film as a vital artistic and social tool. "Film plays a crucial role in society," he explains. "It fosters creativity, promotes empathy, and helps us connect across different cultures and experiences. It's not just art—it's a mirror of our values, our challenges, and our dreams."

In addition to its cultural impact, he notes the economic and educational benefits of filmmaking. "It creates jobs, raises awareness, and inspires action. A single film can shift public perception, highlight injustice, or simply help someone feel seen."

Farina's message to emerging filmmakers is direct and empowering: "Just do it." He insists that perfection isn't the goal — growth is. Your first film might be rough. Your second, a bit better. But experience builds skill, confidence, and a clearer sense of direction.

"Don't wait for permission. Don't let fear stop you. Make something — anything. Learn from your mistakes. And most importantly, trust yourself."

With more than a decade in the industry, Farina has carved out a unique space in independent cinema. He combines the grit of a self-taught artist with the sophistication of a seasoned storyteller. His projects are as much a tribute to his roots as they are a declaration of where he's headed.

From his debut feature *One Night* — a film he wrote, produced, and starred in, now streaming on Amazon Prime — to his latest ambitious ventures like *Evelyn* and the *Sacrum Vindicate* trilogy, Fabian Farina continues to prove that authentic storytelling, relentless preparation, and bold creativity can thrive even without Hollywood budgets.

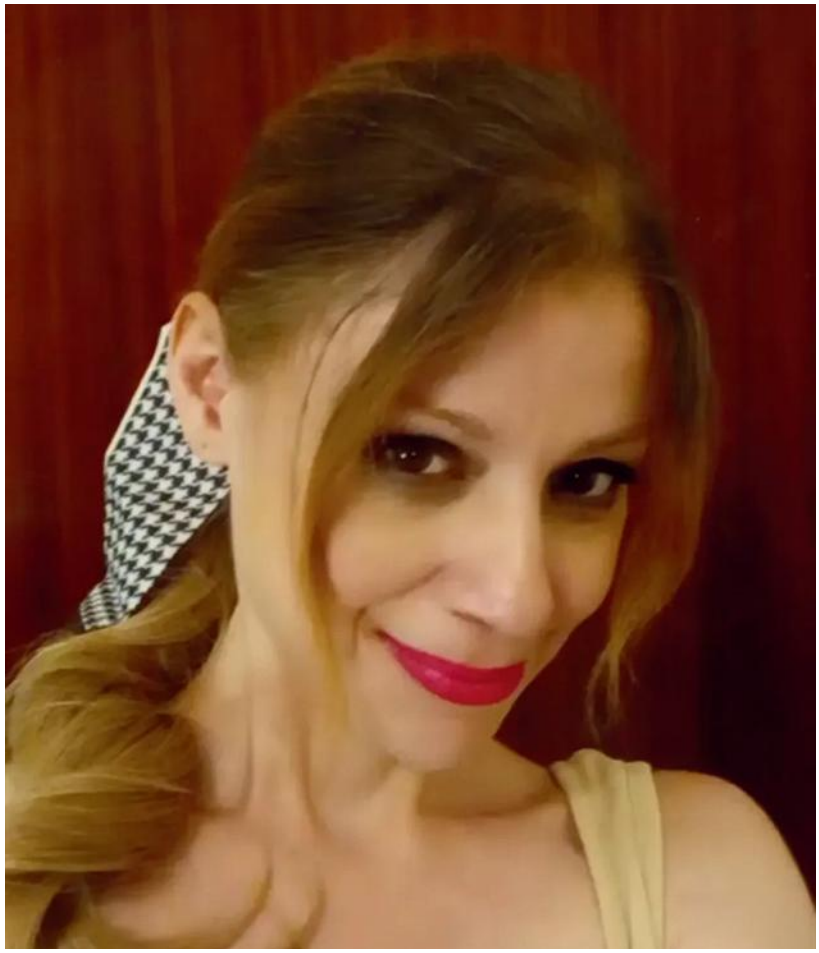
As he puts it, "Filmmaking isn't about how much you have—it's about how much you're willing to give."

And Farina gives it all.

Jordan Tate A Journey Through the World of Storytelling

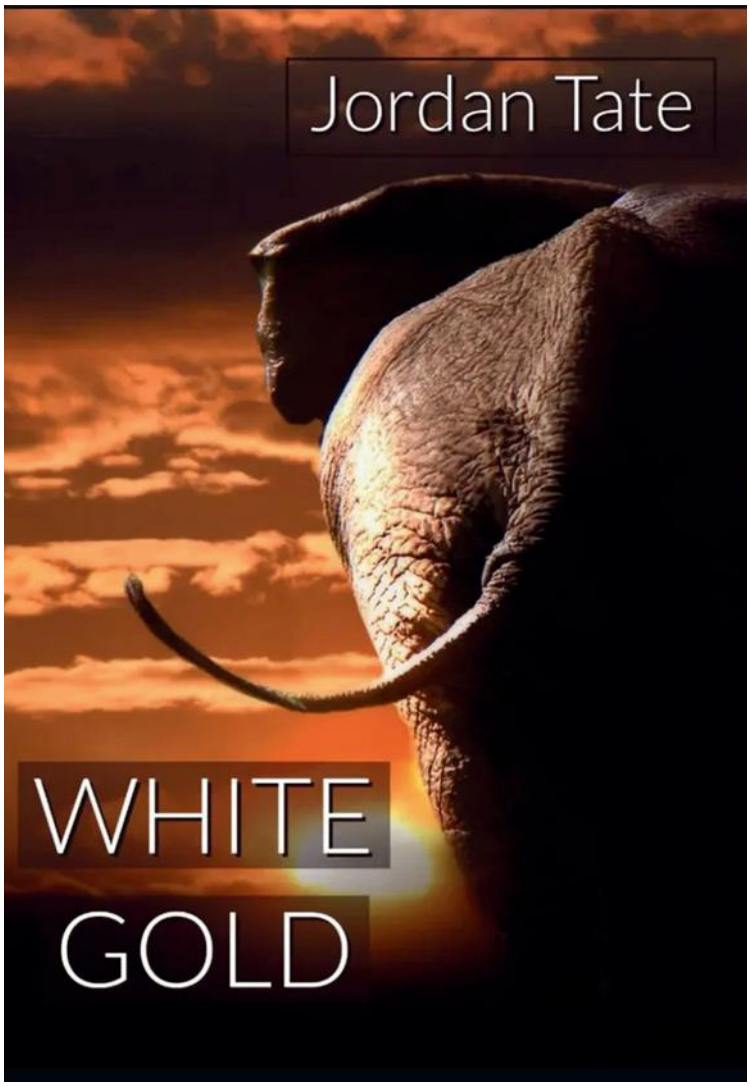
BY JIM MACNERLAND

"Art introduces beauty into a world where society has generated considerable ugliness." Jordan Tate



The experiences of life are the foundation of art. The more we partake the stronger the foundation and the more amazing the structure. Writer Jordan Tate credits real life as the greatest influence to her writing. Having led a rather varied life; collaborated with a private investigator, been a ghost writer, a script doctor, translator, proof reader, consultant, novelist and screenwriter, she has a lot to draw from. Real life tends to bring ideas to you "on a platter. I write thrillers, and I've encountered some strange cases and characters in my real life, worthy of the best stories. They all end up on my pages one way or another." She said that "ideas sometimes come to me in disarray, but I like to work from an established plan so as not to get scattered. It's all about organization."

As the stories evolve in her mind "One story leads to another. A meeting, a painting, a landscapre, an idea comes to me, and I develop it. The characters then accompany me, and once a story is born in my mind, I need to finish it. I write in notebooks that stay by my bed, or take notes on my phone. I then transcribe it onto my computer." She writes at night, in the morning and even takes notes when walking in the street. Writer's block is handled "by walking, by going out, by seeing my friends. Again, life gives ideas. You have to stay active and not believe in this writer's block; inspiration comes by writing, even bad ideas! One word leads to another."



Jordan started writing screenplays in 1999. This was the moment she saw herself as a writer, but from a young age she began to envision stories in her mind. “My father, an avid movie enthusiast, recorded numerous American films on VHS, including the 1976 version of *King Kong*, which ignited my passion for storytelling. At the age of 6, this film left a profound emotional impression on me, prompting me to create my own narratives, sequels to my beloved movies, and reenact scenes with my friends at school.”

As a screenwriter she mainly wrote thriller screenplays, “then I started writing horror anthologies of short stories, I got carried away and wrote longer stories that progressively turned into novels.” She hopes to one day “be able to retire by writing only novels, and, above all, I hope to encourage people to think, because all my writings convey messages in one way or another.” Her favorite part of writing is the research. Her least favorite are rewrites and proofreading because they are “often exhausting before a book is released.”

Her favorite writers are Stephen King, Oscar Wilde, Bram Stoker, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Victor Hugo. She doesn’t like to talk about mentors. “I value my independence and I don’t think anyone can exert that level of influence on me. Nevertheless, following the release of “Titanic”, which is among my favorite films and profoundly affected me emotionally, my father presented me with a copy of James Cameron’s screenplay. After watching *Titanic*, I was curious about what a screenplay looked like. Seeing what a document that facilitated the creation of such a remarkable work that resonated with millions read like.” Her writing has also been significantly shaped by the influences of Alfred Hitchcock, Tim Burton, Christopher Nolan, Brian DePalma, and her favorite director Dario Argento.

“One period in my career that truly stands out was undoubtedly the lockdown. While it was challenging for many, for me as a writer it was incredibly productive. The imposed isolation allowed me to fully immerse myself in my craft, resulting in the completion of several significant projects. I wrote my anthology, *Black Mass*, my novel *White Gold* and another novel titled *Snow White*, a dark and twisted adaptation of the classic “Snow White” fairy tale. I also finished another anthology, *Women and Blood,* during that time. It really solidified my belief that isolation can be a powerful catalyst for writers, especially for someone like me who enjoys a very active social life. The lack of distractions provided the perfect environment to connect with my stories and characters on a deeper level, allowing the narratives to truly take shape.”

Although, Covid in a sense focused her writing she saw “a dramatic shift in the landscape of both novel writing and screenwriting, accelerated by the changes COVID-19 brought to the entertainment industry. Novel writing, while still valuing traditional publishing, has seen the rise of independent authors finding success through self-publishing and online platforms. The barrier to entry has lowered, but the competition for readership has intensified, demanding greater marketing savvy from authors. Screenwriting, on the other hand, has experienced a boom in streaming services, creating a higher demand for diverse stories and voices. However, the industry also became more risk-averse post COVID, with studios often prioritizing established franchises and familiar narratives. This can make it harder for original screenplays from emerging writers to break through, despite the increased volume of production. The pandemic also highlighted the importance of flexibility and remote collaboration, changing how writers’ rooms operate and influencing the types of stories being told, often reflecting themes of isolation, connection and resilience.”

“The world of novels and screenwriting, like many industries, hasn’t fully recovered from the seismic shifts brought about by the pandemic. One of the biggest challenges I face is navigating the evolving landscape of audience consumption. Streaming services have exploded, offering more content than ever before, but this also means increased competition for attention and discoverability. Traditional publishing houses are adapting, but the rise of self publishing and independent platforms has further fragmented the market. Understanding where to focus my energy, whether it’s pursuing traditional routes, exploring alternative publishing models or tailoring stories for specific streaming platforms, requires a constant learning curve and a willingness to adapt. Finding the right balance between creative vision and commercial viability in this ever-changing environment is a persistent struggle.”

Tate generally works on her own projects, but has worked a lot for producers and independent filmmakers in a screenwriter, translator or proofreader capacity. She has also done research for studios and rewritten screenplays. She gets most of her work through referrals and gets her work seen through book fairs, meetings, the internet, networking and talking to people. She told us that she loves talking to people. She said that finding work is easier now "because I have connections and I'm being recommended by people who have worked with me before, but on the other hand harder" because of all the changes that have occurred since COVID. If she couldn't be a writer, she would still focus on real life. She would center it on investigations in some capacity. Her dream job would be either a novelist or an investigative journalist. "I have a natural inclination for investigation." She is also passionate about assisting both people and animals.

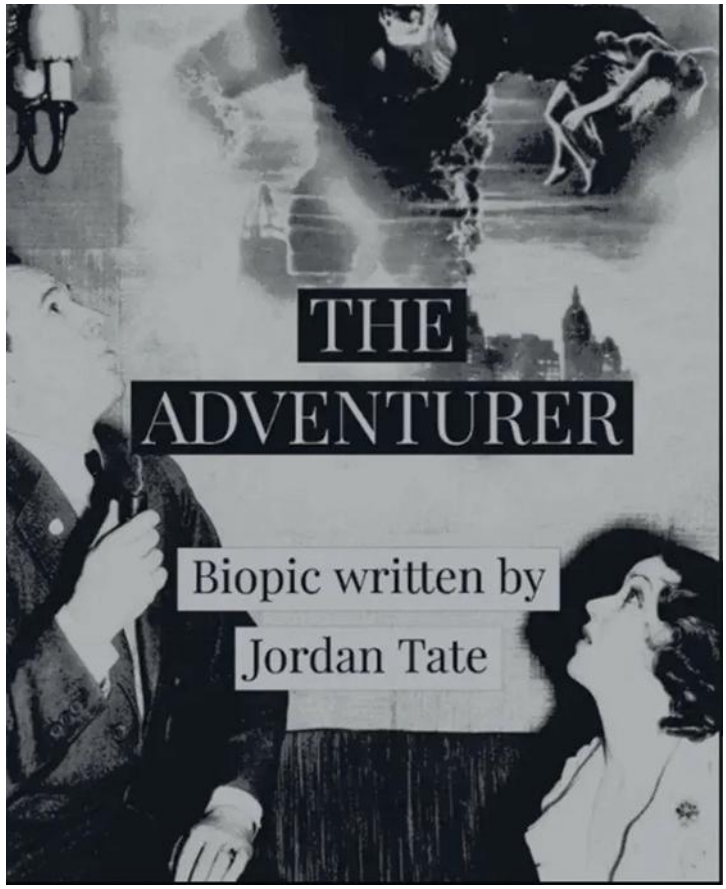
In her novel *White Gold*, she writes the story of Della and Nick, a couple that an all-consuming passion brought together and who risk everything to fight ivory trafficking and protect the existence of elephants in Africa. In Nairobi, renowned geographer Bradley Riche is violently murdered in the house he shared with his wife Helen for more than 20 years. Their only daughter, Della, a zoologist in New York City, does not believe the local police thesis that it was a botched burglary. Nicholas Farkas, an ardent animal rights activist, photographer for the National Geographic and friend of Bradley seems to hold the key to the enigma: Della soon discovers that the two men were working together to dismantle several ivory trafficking networks and that her father was about to publish an article implicating a new hub of this trade. Soon the couple put their lives in jeopardy to protect the elephants from the massacre they face every day, continue Bradley's work and dismantle the networks at the head of the carnage. Della and Nicholas are helped, among others, by a group of female rangers.

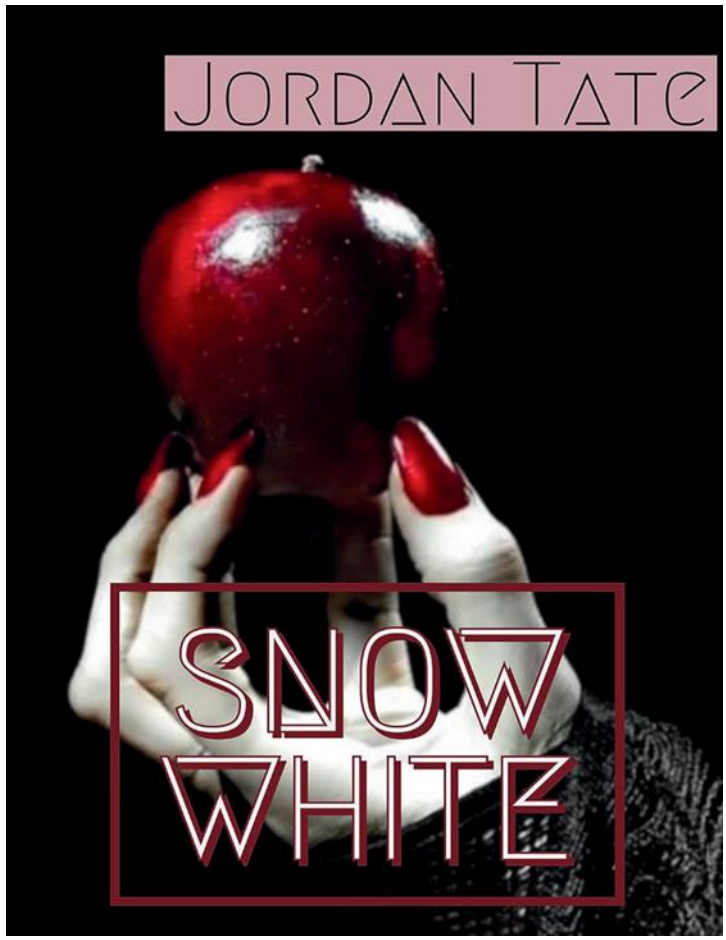
She is also currently developing a novel that takes place in a psychiatric hospital, which is scheduled for release in 2026. Additionally, she believes she can publish a collection of short stories by the end of this year.

Writing is who she is, it's in her soul, but, she said, "one of the biggest misconceptions about writers is that we're all naturally gifted and effortlessly churn out perfect prose. Actually, writing is a craft honed through dedication, practice, and often, a lot of painful revisions. Another common myth is that writers are inherently introverted hermits, shunning social interaction. While some writers might enjoy solitude for focused work, many are actually quite sociable and draw inspiration from the world around them. Furthermore, the idea that writers are always lost in fantastical daydreams and unable to function in the "real world" is a damaging stereotype. Writers are just as capable of navigating daily life as anyone else, and their keen observation skills often make them more attuned to the nuances of the world.

Finally, the belief that writing is a lucrative profession is far from the truth. Most writers struggle to make a living from their craft, and often rely on other sources of income to support themselves." But, her advice to first time writers is "Never let anyone tell you that you can't do it or that writing is unrealistic." Real life is all around us and can be the greatest influence and inspiration to writers. We just have to be open to experiencing it.

Jordan Tate is a prolific screenwriter and author who specializes in thriller, fantasy horror, and narratives inspired by real events. She is also a writer for Indie Pathways and you can find her work on our pages. In addition, she has multiple films in various stages of development and production in the USA and Europe, alongside several book projects she is actively pursuing. Her novel, *White Gold* is available on Amazon.





Patricia Fortlage

Breakfast in Baroque A Contemporary Still Life

SUBTLE ACTIVISM AND STILL LIFES

Patricia Fortlage is a documentary and fine art photographer, who focuses on impact as well as aesthetics in her work. “There is subtle activism in my art,” she explains. “My goal is to create work that moves people, work that inspires change, especially for women and girls. There are a multitude of studies that have proven that if you invest in women and girls, entire communities will be raised. I have spent the bulk of my documentary work partnering with organizations doing just that. Even now, with my fine art work, even though it may not be focused on women specifically, I hope to move the viewer in a way that gets them thinking about their own place in the world.”

Since a young age, Fortlage has always been extremely creative. She recalls, “When I was young, it took on a more MacGyver type quality….always looking for solutions to problems, whatever they might be. And I have always loved the art of photography because it feels like a motivating balance of left-brain logic and right-brain creativity to me. I didn't really start working in the field, however, until almost two decades ago. And even then, I didn't consider myself an artist. I considered myself a worker-bee supporting some really great organizations doing some really incredible things. It wasn't until people started approaching me about purchasing some of my images and many comments about my skills in working with light that I realized I was an artist.”

There is a surprising juxtaposition in Fortlage’s artistic influences. “Believe it or not, some of my biggest artistic influences have been photojournalists like Lynsey Addario and Stephanie Sinclair. Not only are they sharing the happenings of the world with us, but their images are packed with artistic merit. And to think they accomplish this within a split second in time, that is true talent and artistry. Other artistic influences have been some of the Dutch masters of the 17th century, which I have spoken about before. Artists such as Clara Peeters, Willem Kalf, Rachel Ruysch. The textures and details, for example, in Clara Peeters' banquet pieces are unequaled.”

Fortlage's latest work, featured in this article, is still lifes. As she says, "I have been giving a lot of thought lately to the fleeting nature of life. And I have always loved how still lifes stop me in my tracks. Even in the stillness, impermanence reigns. There is no escaping it. We must choose to enjoy its beauty in this very moment; there may be no others. I think a lot of the Dutch masters of the 17th century and their representation of life and decay through still life paintings. They inspire me to live life fully knowing very well how precious it is. And they have inspired me to now embark on my own artistic representations."

The series was born out of necessity for Fortlage. "I had been working on a documentary and conceptual photographic series about life for women like myself with chronic diseases and disabilities; it was very heavy stuff," she shares. "Consequently, I started to find myself wanting to make art for the sake of art, just as a way to get out of my head (and my research). I had done a few still life scenarios for the health project and really loved the composition and the lighting. It relit an old passion of mine which was still life work... and I have always been extremely inspired by the Dutch masters of the 17th century. Hence this new series was born."

Fortlage has developed her career through continually learning about herself and what is important to her. She adds, "There is always a necessary financial component, of course. I must sustain myself. Originally, I took jobs in developing countries where organizations were doing great work towards addressing poverty and disease, especially if they were focused on women. Then a little over a decade ago, I became gravely ill. I was diagnosed with a neuromuscular disease called Myasthenia Gravis and for a while getting my arms around my new reality became my full-time job. Once I figured out a balance for myself, I started taking on work closer to home. That led to one of my largest and most poignant projects to date. It spawned a series titled, *Lemonade - My Chronic Illness Story*, which sheds light on the duality that is medical care for women in this country today."

Inspiration comes to Fortlage from many different spaces. "Sometimes it will be through learning about yet another injustice towards women, but lately I have been focussed more on my fine art work. I might watch an avant-garde fashion show and be mesmerized by the textures, or it may simply be a shadow that hits me while walking down the street. I get a great deal of inspiration by viewing the work of other artists. I just never know when inspiration will hit!"

Autumn's Melancholy

Despite finding inspiration everywhere, Fortlage does experience creative blocks. “I do a fair amount of writing with my Lemonade series and that can really trip me up at times,” she says. She shares her method for working through the blocks – “Mostly, I set the work aside knowing that the block will eventually lift. Or sometimes I will try to come at the work from a different angle. That often helps.”

Beyond creative blocks, Fortlage does find there are bigger obstacles for artists. “Truthfully, the biggest challenge is remaining solvent financially. There is a great deal of ebb and flow in the market which is affected by so many different things going on in the economy and also how secure consumers feel. There is also the challenge of staying relevant as an artist. Not every concept or idea is a hit, or maybe it just isn't the right timing. There are many ups and downs and figuring ways to ride that roller coaster successfully is its own challenge.”

Golden Roots

Fortlage has some business advice for artists to help deal with the financial challenges. “I think it is important to determine your revenue streams and lay out a road map to keeping those as lucrative as possible. It takes a fair amount of organization to understand and manage your business, but at the end of the day, if your art is what sustains you financially, you must work it as just that, a business as much as an artistic practice.”

Even with the financial challenges, Fortlage believes that art is essential for society. “I think art is sustenance for our souls. We need the beauty, we need the escape, we need the inspiration. It taps into a different part of our brain which provides a break from the daily grind of making a living. I believe it acts as a reset and helps us step back and reevaluate what is truly important in our lives.”

Fortlage is currently working on two new series. “One is the documentary and conceptual photographic project I mentioned before, *Lemonade - My Chronic Illness Story,*” she shares. “The other is a still life fine art series titled, Impermanence.”

With her work, Fortlage hopes to impact her audience in a positive way. “My hope is that audiences will be inspired to look at how they themselves move in the world, maybe give them a glimpse of something they hadn't considered before.”

In addition to the excellent business tips on revenue streams, Fortlage has other words to offer artists.”My advice: back yourself,” she says. “No one can do what you do and in the way you do it. You have something to get out of yourself. Your art is an expression of that. Our culture is littered with rules and expectations and dismissals, all of which are manmade. Some formed recently. Some installed millennia ago. All arbitrary. The world needs YOU. Not some shell of you. Or some replica of some made up ideal. Be the lead in your own authentic story.”

Fortlage promotes her work through several different channels. “First and foremost, I have a website that contains all of my work thus far,” she shares. “I also post regularly on socials, I write blogs on Substack, I send out regular newsletters, and I submit special announcements to publications. I also spend time in galleries and museums and be sure to introduce myself there. Occasionally I will submit to calls for art if it is a gallery, museum, or specific curator or jurist that I would like to get my work in front of.”

Abundance

Where Fruit Waits

For Fortlage, she does have her own dream project goals. “Right now, my dream outcome for my art would be to get a publisher to pick up my Lemonade project. The medical system is absolutely punishing towards women. We need to change that and I believe my writing would not only help women feel seen, but it would empower them to take back ownership and start controlling how the system serves them. I think it would also educate doctors better about the realities of patient care from the perspective of the patient, especially women.”

To experience Fortlage’s work, she has several suggestions. “First and foremost, one can always experience my work through my website www.patriciafortlage.com. It is always kept up-to-date. As for in person experiences, right now I have work in a number of gallery shows: Opulent Mobility at Brand Library and Art Gallery in Glendale, CA, Made in California at Brea Gallery in Brea, CA, 13th Biennial Ontario Open at Ontario Museum of History and Art in Ontario CA, 100 Years - 100 Images Spring Session at Pasadena Museum of History and Art in Pasadena, CA.”

Fortlage will also be showing in a few other shows coming up over the next couple of months: Summer Salon at Art Share L.A. in Los Angeles, CA, Brand 53 Works on Paper at Brand Library and Art Gallery in Glendale, CA, and 100 Years - 100 Images Summer Session at Pasadena Museum of History and Art in Pasadena, CA.

Sebastian Khan Learning the Craft from Every Angle

BY LAURA FORTINO-ZENI

Photo by Dominic Phan

Sebastian Khan is a student filmmaker, director, producer and even sometimes actor. I first met Khan when he was a student at Waldorf School of Orange County where my children were also attending. He volunteered to help on set for another student's film for which I was a mentor and producer. Khan is outgoing, energetic, hardworking and excited to be in any artistic process so I wanted to continue to work with him. Recently he was an associate producer on my web series, *C'est La Vie*, which led me to ask him to be my co-host for the series podcast. I chose to interview him as I knew he would have some excellent experiences to share for other beginning filmmakers.

Khan actually began his career in film as an actor. Many kids from Waldorf took classes and performed at Arts & Learning Conservatory in Costa Mesa which stages musical theatre productions, so I asked about his transition to directing and film. “I initially wanted to be an actor primarily in live theater on stage, Broadway," said Khan. "I applied to 21 BFA programs for musical theater and I got into 19 of them, which was absolutely amazing. Then I realized in the 11th hour that the reason I was getting into musical theater was to help people feel. Something that I still admire and love about live theater is the ability to make your audience feel emotion or feel a certain way. I wanted to do that. I wanted to help people and help people feel and all that good stuff on a much larger scale. I realized that film has a much more significant influence over the masses. That was when I decided to go down the film route.”

Khan realized that film was much more accessible than live theatre. “Not everybody can afford to go to live theater. Not everybody has the opportunity to have live theater near them. But often, even in a small town, they have a movie theater. They often have streaming, or a way to get a movie. Even back in the old days when I was young, you could go to a Blockbuster every day. Now, you can watch a movie on your Apple Watch and I think that that's it. Everyone has a television in their pocket and I would argue that it has the most influence over the world. If you can create a story or create a film that can be shown, obviously in a movie theater in a proper setting or on a TV, but also on a computer or even on a phone, it's something that is so accessible wherever you are in the world. You know. And you can bring it with you.”

Kahn loved being an actor and loves actors. Since he knew the filmmaking role that was most involved with actors is the director, he pivoted his interest to directing. Khan's first experience directing was in 2021. It was a musical theatre production of "Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief." Later, in 2023, he directed his first short film.

At Chapman University, where he is heading into his final year of film school, he has had an opportunity to do both directing and producing - another filmmaking role that interests him. I asked him to share about his recent experiences. "I just wrapped up my Junior thesis film. We call that our advanced production or AP. They are eight minute short films. You have a budget of $2500 and three days to shoot it. An 8 minute short is about 9 pages. I was the producer on my AP not the director. I also recently directed a short film. That was just an independent short film that was about the relationship with lust and just like being human and what it means to admit you are lustful and what that would look like in all these different facets. That was the theme I wanted to explore for a little bit and we explored for 5 minutes."

Khan already has plans to keep working through the summer. "I've got three different shorts in pre-production right now as we speak. A beautiful one that's actually written by my brother and is a big passion project for him and I. We will be shooting this summer and it kind of plays with the idea of divorce, but not from the parents perspective, from the children's perspective. It really doesn't highlight divorce or paint divorce in the negative but it just shows what siblings have to deal with and it follows two siblings so I'm very excited about that. And actually at 10 o'clock tonight, I have a final rehearsal with my actors for a short that I'm shooting tomorrow. A one day shoot that I will be directing tomorrow," he says excitedly even though this interview is being done around 6 pm. Khan is very enthusiastic about his work and it shows in his commitment and time spent in his craft.

Is the two minute short for school? Khan chuckles, "Part of it is for school. For school I have to shoot one scene….so I decided I would like to elaborate on that and shoot something more substantial. From an actor's perspective there is no incentive to help me out just for one scene, but if I can provide the actors with a good moment for their reel, I'm going to do that. So we decided to make a little short, part of which will be for class, but the majority of which is for my actors or myself."

Khan developed the short in a very interesting way. “We were given a script," he explains. "It is actually a scene from *Bottle Rocket* and it was written by Wes Anderson. We decided to write our own little version with the original scene in the middle and we are book ending it with a really fun scene that brings us into that scene and then a scene that follows the scene that I was given from *Bottle Rocket*.”

Are they wanting you to come at it from a Wes Anderson point of view? “That was my exact first question to my professor was ‘Do you want me to just watch the short and shoot it word for word, cut for cut?’ My professor was like ‘Absolutely not. If you haven't seen it, I implore you *not* to watch it. We're just using the script as a jumping off point and please have full freedom.’ Fortunately for this assignment I have not seen *Bottle Rocket* so I have no idea what takes place in terms of Anderson's point of view.”

Do the other things you shoot at school use writers? “There are primarily four classes so those classes consist of big projects or small projects. What I'm directing tomorrow is considered one of the smaller projects. For that, I'll write it or I can team up with somebody who's written something or find a script. But for the bigger projects, like for the AP for example, we are asked to find a writer and work with a writer. Part of that is just learning what it takes to work with a writer and that dynamic between a director, writer and a producer and the rewrites and the draft and the wants and the likes and the dislikes and being able to communicate that. For the bigger stuff, the writer is also a student. For our senior thesis, we can either write it ourselves or find a writer.”

What makes you as a director decide that something needs to be re-written? “For me, whether it requires a rewrite or not comes down to the feeling. If it's supporting that overarching theme that we want to convey or the story we want to tell. Does it support that or does it not.”

When directing or producing, do you prefer to develop from an idea or use something that's already written, like the piece that the teacher assigned? “I’ve done both. Primarily, I like working from the get go with the writer to write the idea. But my producer brain is always thinking how producible is this?”

What do you mean by producible? “Let’s say I’ve got a 10 page script and it has seven locations and one of those locations is a supermarket and the other is a restaurant by the water on the roof. I wonder how applicable it is to find that restaurant by the water on the roof. I can probably find one, but how likely are they to say yes we can have the entire roof to shoot on at the exact time that we want. I start thinking about those logistics. Does the story have to be at this restaurant on the roof at sunset by the water or can you just rewrite that scene a little bit to take place at the kitchen table or in the kitchen while they're making dinner together?” **Can we flip a car?** “Exactly, because if I have to flip a car, to my producer side that sounds like a whole lot of paperwork and red tape that we’re going to have to go through and I do not like that all that but if it’s necessary, I’m all for it.”

You said you took on the producer role of your AP, so why not the director role? “I wanted to save my directorial freedom for my senior thesis. Now, of course there’s the whole politics of everything too, right? You have to…the entertainment industry is playing the game and I just decided that it was probably in my best interest to produce my AP and to direct my thesis. Being a transfer student, I really wanted to do both and so I prefer to direct my senior thesis because it’s bigger and better.”

What did you learn as a producer? “Curating that environment on set is really important to me, especially coming from that acting background. We've talked about making sure our actors feel comfortable, safe, you know, making sure that they don't feel like they're being ignored by any means. I think that 100 percent happens on a student film. Everyone’s so obsessed with what it looks like they forget that acting is truly vulnerable work. Having too many hands in the kitchen dilutes that vulnerability. It gets harder and harder as an actor to bring those walls down if that's what the script asks for. So you’re curating that vibe, for the lack of a better word, on set so finding that balance. The other realization was that producers do so much more work than people understand and producers get zero credit. All the credit goes to directors. The producer is bringing on everyone on the crew, making sure to figure out our times, making sure our DP gets the equipment that he or she wants, making sure our production design has enough funds -- figuring out how to make the movie happen. That's not the director doing all that, the producer is.”

Do you have a favorite genre? “I’m very much drawn towards drama, coming of age, slice of life. Things that have a very clear important message. The message doesn’t have to be a big huge take away, it could just be little things like the theme that the movie is dealing with.”

What's an example of something you love? "The movie that made me realize that movies can help me feel and help others feel is a 'little film,'" Khan says jokingly, "called *Interstellar* by Christopher Nolan. I'm a huge fan of Christopher Nolan. Obviously I said coming-of-age, slice of life, I don't know how much of a reality deep space wormhole travel is to you but, to me, it's not very much my slice of life, but the themes of family and the struggle and obviously the acting performance from that film is what set it apart for me and made me realize 'whoa, I really want to do that.' I don't have kids. I've never been to space. I don't know what it means to be alone light years away from the next human being but I feel like I could understand because of that performance by Matthew McConaughey."

What's next for you? "I am looking at a couple different things. I'm trying to weigh my pros and cons with graduate school and if I wanna go down that path, or if I'm looking to go down the path of the studio system or independent filmmaking. I think right now it's about networking and networking horizontally versus vertically and what that means. I think this industry is definitely a fun one but a hard one. You gotta play the game and know how the game works, hence film school or firsthand experience in the industry. I think. for me, looking at what comes next, I am a little up in the air in the sense that I am actively making the decision whether I want to go to graduate school or not. Why I would go to graduate school is to find roots in another part of the world within the film community and figure that out but, on the other hand, you can do that just by being in the industry. I think if I don't go that route, I'll be moving to LA, probably just kind of keep doing what I'm doing."

What do you think your biggest challenge is to get into the industry and get work after school? "I think there's a reality check that most people my age are gonna have to have, including myself probably, and that would be not expecting the glamorous Hollywood job coming out of school. I think there's an aspect of hard work that I think gets lost when people go to film school, because film school gets to be e really fun and you get to practice your craft and your art with relatively no consequence.

When, in reality, Hollywood is a business. Understanding business is very important and it's not fun and games to everybody. Yes, it's art but there's a dollar sign connected to that art and that dollar sign is actually more important than art itself especially at a much larger level. I think there's a reality that people are gonna have to have when they realize, whoa, it's way more difficult to get my movie made in Hollywood. I think for me, as of right now, I've been really enjoying learning the business side. Like I was saying, the business of the business. So going the classic studio route and starting somewhere and growing and learning as you go as of right now is where my mind is leaning. There is a huge part of me that would like to work at one of the legacy studios and learn from the inside out what it takes to make a movie at a studio level."

Hear more about Khan's experiences behind the scenes for *C'est La Vie* on the show's official podcast via the QR code to the right.

Julie Foy
Out of the Comfort Zone Into the Oscars

BY JIM MACNERLAND

The road to success in the film world and to the Oscars is not followed. It is constructed anew everyday by those who perservere. It is not a straight road. There will be turns, dead ends, and challenges that may wear a person down, but as Julie Foy says, “I would say, crack on and do it, because that’s a really good feeling, isn’t it? It’s really good to take yourself out of a comfort zone. You just never know what might happen.”

Foy is a 2018 Academy Award winning producer for her film *The Silent Child*. A film about a profoundly deaf five-year-old child whose world is opened up by a social worker, but then shut down once the child moves on to regular school. With Christopher Overton directing, Rachel Shenton acting and writing, and Foy and Rebecca Harris as producers, a core team was created. “When I say the four, obviously, you have your core team but you can't do anything without loads and loads of people. A team and a tribe. That's why you're called a tribe and a team. You should be. It's a collaboration.”

Thirty-one years earlier, Foy began constructing her road.

Born in Bolton, United Kingdom, Foy grew up in a working-class neighborhood. When she was around 13, she saw an ad in the local newspaper for an audition at the only theater in town. “So, after school I got on a bus, and, instead of going home, I went into and auditioned for a musical at the Octagon Theater in Bolton.” She got the lead in the musical. One night, unbeknownst to her, there was a producer, director and writer from the BBC in the audience. They were searching all over the country to cast only one part for a girl. After three or four auditions Joy was cast in *Jossy’s Giants*, a children’s show about a kids’ football [soccer] team. “It really became, probably, one of the most popular children’s TV programs ever made.”

After she finished her “O” levels, Foy went to the College of Performing Arts in Salford, just outside of Manchester. She was about 17. She worked at McDonalds to get enough money to pay for her books. “I didn’t get any grants. I didn’t get any money from any family members and I used to get the bus every day to Drama College. And then at 17, I at auditioned for *Coronation Street.”* [A British soap opera that has run since 1960.] She got the part, but then couldn’t stay at Drama School and act in *Coronation Street*. She chose *Coronation Street*. “It was one of those parts on and off, so I’d come in for a few months, and then go out, and then come back in again. So, I’d say a couple years on and off.”

She started doing a lot of theater all over the country “because I really wanted to hone my craft as an actress. I really wanted to make sure if I could go on stage and be a stage actor. Sometimes you could be doing a film and you might only do one page the whole day. On stage you might be playing a character that’s on stage for over two hours. You can’t mess up. You can’t go again. It gives you confidence in a good way. It makes you fearless. Some actors, and they will say themselves, that they can’t do stage, because it’s too scary. It scares them too much.”

She continued to act in television and film, but then also started directing some things. Her great friend, playwright and actress, Rachel Halliwell asked if Foy could direct Rachel in a play and Foy started directing. “I started getting better and good at a few other things, because we all know what happens as an actress, don’t we, that you get to a certain age and everything dries up. You’re suddenly deemed as old and prehistoric and then I found myself producing film.”

The Silent Child was Foy’s first foray into producing. It was also the others’ first foray in their different areas, Christopher Overton, directing, Rachel Shenton, writing, and Rebecca Harris, producing. “And the strangest thing in the world was that we went on to win the Oscar.”

A year before they started shooting, they began to raise funds. They had friends, fellow actors and an Indiegogo account. People would donate five to ten pounds and we tried to raise more and more pennies. Oliver (Ol) Parker, a writer and director, was very helpful. He gave a hundred pounds [$134 U.S], “because he loves to help.” Michael Smiley, a very successful actor was a big donor. “And anything we could think of. We did the usual cake stalls and quizzes. We’d do quizzes in pubs. So, people would pay a few quid to join. We’d do all the questions and I’d be the quiz master.” From all this 10,000 pounds was raised [$13, 458 U.S.]. And production began.

The average cost for a ten-minute film in the United Kingdom runs from 7,000 pounds to 15,000 pounds. *The Silent Child* was twenty minutes. “We didn’t pay ourselves. We weren’t earning any money at all from *The Silent Child*. We didn’t receive a wage while we were shooting.” They had to pay their crew, pay for food, pay insurance and “the thing that eats the money is the locations.” Interiors were shot at a large house in the Midlands in Stoke on Trent because the characters were well off. “It was kind of in the middle of nowhere.” Because the young girl who played the lead character in the film was profoundly deaf, her family was there to look after her and to be all together. Being very upfront with the woman who owned the house, they had decided to have the crew stay in the house and that was absolutely fine. “It was an ideal situation for us. An ideal way of doing it to keep it contained.” Parker would have a look at the script and make suggestions for rewrites and tweaks. There were some scenes with Christopher Overton the director and Rachel Shenton that weren’t necessary which allowed Christopher to focus more on the directing and cut the shooting schedule.

“We started all of this at the end of 2016. We filmed parts, sort of bits and bobs. We did things like the montages. All those kind of things where you see the characters sort of out and about with the ducks and such. The majority of the stuff in the big house was filmed in January 2017.” Shooting in the house took two days of prep and five days of actual shooting. “Which is more than you would normally shoot. But we were working with a small child.” The whole time at the large house was seven days for a twenty minute film, plus the time spent on the second unit work. Then came the post-production, the editing, the color grading, the sound design, etc. “And then we headed off into the short film festival circuit. It’s such a shock to filmmakers when you realize how much it costs just to submit into a film festival.” Foy, Christopher, Rachel and Rebecca all went and brought along Maisie Sly, the actor playing the titled character, and her father, “not knowing at all what to expect.”

Flickers Rhode Island International Film Festival is an Oscar qualifying festival for live action, animated and documentary short films. Winning or placing in certain categories can fulfill the Academy Awards prerequisites and allow a filmmaker to bypass the initial submission stage for an Oscar nomination. Films are submitted from over 60 countries. The competition is fierce. On August 13, 2017, *The Silent Child* won for Best Live Action short at the Rhode Island International Film Festival. “We were then qualified for an Oscar, qualified for consideration, but there was still a long way to go, but I think it was round about that point that we started to think, oh, crikey! This little film is starting to have little legs, and people were sitting up and taking notice. When you hear those kinds of words, it’s extraordinary, because you don’t really understand what that means. You never for one minute think that you’re ever going to go and be there.”

“After we won Rhode Island, obviously that was really good for us, because then the whisperings: ‘If you win Rhode Island, there’s a very good chance you might progress further.’”

After the Rhode Island win they were approached by various public relations (PR) people, like Catherine Lynn Scott, who founded London Flair PR, a highly awarded PR company with offices in London and Los Angeles. The group looked up her fees. “That’s ridiculous. Well, who do we know? Could we do it on our own?” Scott, having shepherded many films through the Oscar process, convinced them of the value of a PR company. They agreed on London Flair getting a fee plus a back end percentage. The team each put an equal amount in for the fee. “And that’s kind of a really big deal. This is getting a bit serious. And then you go in the room and you sign off on things. It is a huge learning process.

“The short film industry is bonkers. What an eye opener it was to see the amount of publicity that people put in for a short film. And then it’s ‘I’m going to get you on this and this, and then the PR push starts and it’s crazy.”

From the November submission deadline “They kind of whittle it down, and you don’t know what’s really going on behind the scenes. All you know is when you get the next email from the Academy – ‘You have now progressed to the next stage.’ Then it gets down to 10 and then they have it to 5 and those are the ones that are announced globally. That everyone watches.”

And now the nominees for Best Live Action Short Film are...

“It’s extraordinary. The whole event is. I’m a working class Northerner in that place with all those extraordinary people that you grew up with watching their films. And there they are. I know everyone says that, but it’s true. It really is true.”

Foy is an old T-Shirt and trainers type of person. She doesn’t like going out in dresses or high heels, “but it’s a once in a lifetime. It’s the Oscars.”

Since the Oscars aren’t a T-shirt and trainers type of event, Foy was worried. She had seen short film people from other countries before that looked like they had not been styled and so she was relieved when a stylist reached out to them in order to add it on her CV. She had her contacts and knew where to hire dresses and shoes. Rachel Shenton got gifted a dress and Christopher Overton got gifted a suit. “It’s a different world, you know. And when you see the pictures…”

And the Oscar goes to…

On March 4, 2018, at the 90th Academy Awards, *The Silent Child* won for Best Live Action Short Film.

“It really was one of those very lucky things, and kind of where you find your tribe. And there’s a connection there with another person. Who you’ve worked with, with not very many pennies. And you think, how on earth did we do that? And you know you’ve done something you’re dead proud of. I’ve got some wonderful friends in Los Angeles that I made and I met from 2018. We check in with each other. You kind of find your tribe, don’t you. You find your team. We’ve gone in different directions from being in *The Silent Child,* but that’s okay. That was going to happen. I want to make different things from what they want to make. That’s what happens, isn’t it? I think we have to look back and look at that as a magical time. It doesn’t mean that you’re always going to stay together, because you want different things. You want to work with different people, as well. I really hope that I remain…I want to really be someone who’s still hopeful and fearless and kind and pays it forward.”

And Foy continues to construct her road.

Julie Foy continues to produce short and feature films. She is currently in Post-Production on the feature film *The Date* and continues to have a very successful festival run with a short film entitled *Chimera* and is working on a feature length script based on that short film. She continues to act on stage and screen and is thankful everyday for her tribe.

Stephen Olson A Late Blooming Passion for Writing

Stephen Joseph Olson didn't set out to be a writer, and he certainly didn't expect it to become a defining chapter of his life. The Little Theatre in San Luis Obispo, California, where Olson was living, held "No Shame Theatre" once a month, which allowed anyone to present anything from poetry to dance. Olson began writing monologues and performing them on stage. "When the theatre manager complimented my first monologue and performance," Olson says, "I was hooked."

What followed was a creative surge fueled by audience feedback and his own growing passion. "I just kept writing a new piece each month. The audience's encouragement was an adrenaline rush that I had to keep getting."

Olson's portfolio now spans more than 370 scripts for stage and film—an extraordinary number for someone who began writing actively in his late fifties. "It is something I started late in life," Olson says. "Although I have always had an interest in film and the theatre, I did not pursue that interest earnestly until late in life."

Most of his work has come through short play festivals and virtual theatre productions. "Because I am affiliated with many virtual spaces and short play festivals, most of my work is short form scripts," Olson explains. "My scripts are initiated by these festivals when they set a theme or other parameters that have to be in the script. I do not focus on a specific genre. For me the story comes first and it develops into the genre that it has to be."

Olson is candid about his origins as a writer. "As a student throughout high school, I was a terrible student and it never would have occurred to me to even consider that I possessed the skills to write." But like many modern writers, Olson found his foundation through self-education. "There is so much out there now where you can pick up knowledge on script writing that for me it was just a matter of research. I also relied on some books. The one book that helped me the most was The Screenwriter's Bible. I learned the foundation of screenwriting from it."

Unlike others who try to write to fit the current trends, Olson writes solely for himself. “I have focused on my own projects, as I am too old to wait for acceptance to the inner sanctum of industry studios.” Financially independent, he’s able to write without pressure: “I am lucky to be retired and have enough money to live on, so I can now pursue what makes me happy.”

Despite his prolific output, Olson notes a prevailing misconception about writers. “That one production is all a writer needs to be financially set for life.” He adds that accepting rejection remains one of his biggest challenges.

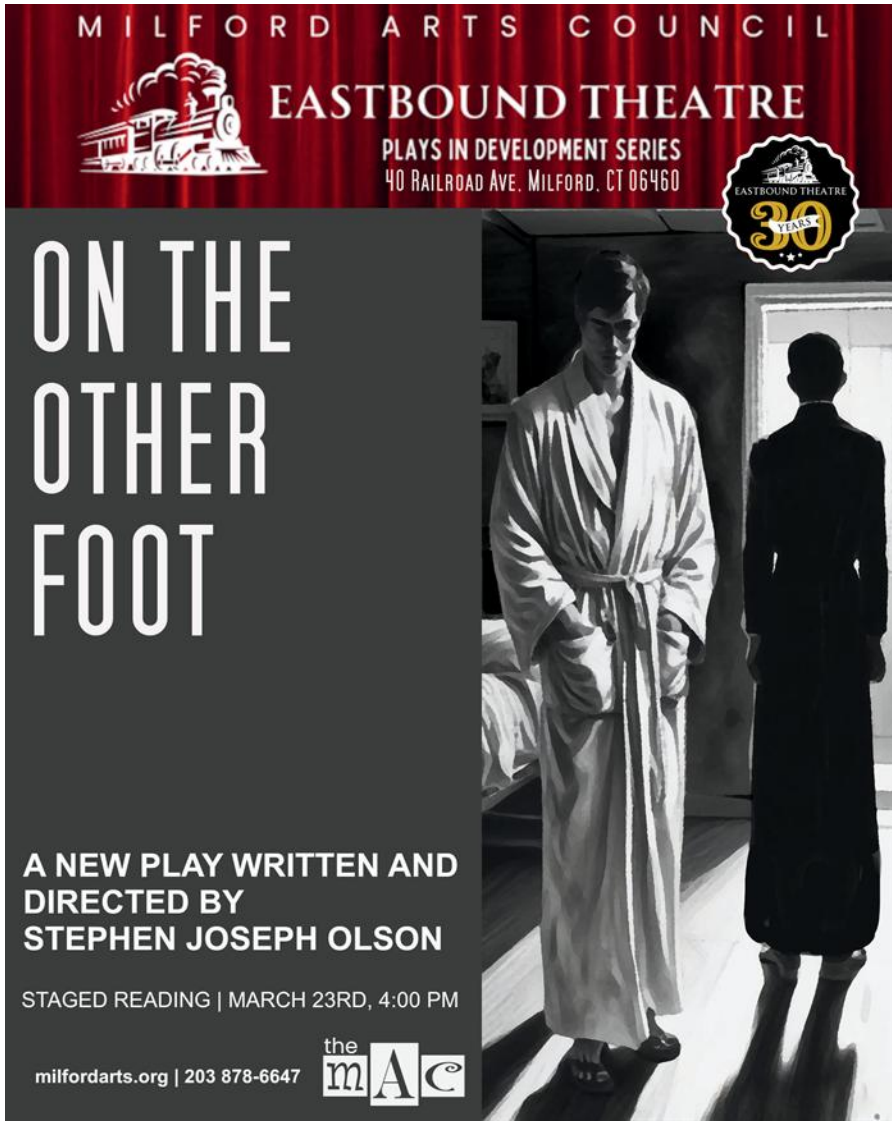
Olson’s writing process is grounded in intuition and character. “There is usually a spark of an idea or thought. I start with why I want to tell the story. I begin with how the story should start, then how it should end, then I have to decide how to get from A to B. Then I figure out what characters I need to tell the story, then I just listen to the characters and write down whatever they say.”

His favorite part of writing? “Being part of an unfolding story.” His least favorite? “Spelling.”

Asked what makes a story great, Olson is clear: “For me, it has to have a reason for being told. I want the audience to take something away with them at the end of the performance.” And the greatest influence on his work? “Being an introverted observer and listener.”

Recognition for Olson's work has come through festivals across the country. From 2018 to 2021, he was a writer in residence at Actor Workout Studio in North Hollywood. "Several of my short plays were produced as live stage performances. One of my plays won the Director's choice in 2019." That play, *The Booth*, later won Best Short Drama at the Legacy Theatre's festival in Connecticut. Another piece, *The Breakup King*, "won best screenplay, best director, and best female actress in the Amazing Theatre's short play festival in 2020."

Still, Olson says his proudest work is *Letters of Merci.* "I am still trying to find the theatre company that would be willing to handle the controversial theme and take it on."



His dream job is simple and direct: "Writer." And his advice to new writers reflects his own journey: "Don't wait to start. Don't wait for permission. Use whatever you have available to create what you must desire."

For Olson, the arts are essential. "The arts are the foundation for civilization." As for how the world of writing has changed, he doesn't mince words: "I think the next four years will be the test of civilization."

He continues to pursue new projects, including a screenplay adaptation of a novel: "I have transferred a writer's novel into a screenplay, which he is pursuing the possibility of having it produced."

When asked what he hopes to achieve in his writing career, Olson replies with equal parts ambition and honesty: "A play on Broadway or a Pulitzer."

And yes, after all these years, he finally says it with confidence: "I am a writer."

Watch a performance of his play *The Booth* through the QR code or by visiting https://youtu.be/BuEqlz1GHpU

The Industry

Micro-Economics: Is Bite-Sized Episodic TV the Future?

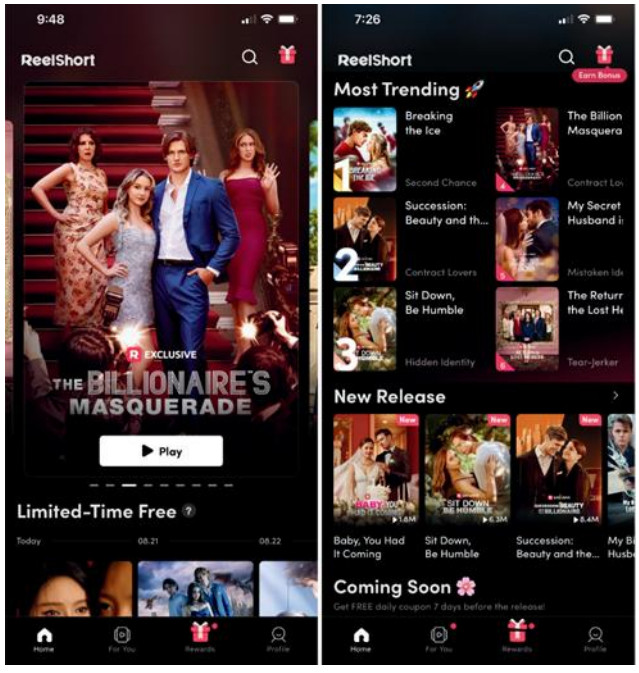
BY LAURENCE GINGOLD

Major social disruptions usually carry in their wake many social transformations, both big and little, and our recent COVID lockdown was a game changer to say the least. As I've documented in previous columns, the lockdowns produced big changes in viewing habits and venue preferences that will probably be with us for the foreseeable future. Turns out, it may have also birthed a new challenge to the narrative structures that have been the industry standard from the genesis of both cinema and television.

At first reflection, what seemed to shift with the epidemic was venue-preference, and pricing. As the pandemic receded from view, we became obsessive about measuring audience share: what was the overall number, and where did it go? Back to the theaters, or did it stay at home? Content, ever increasing in volume, had to adjust to this new reality, because, in the end, it seemed like the changes we were dealing with were structural, and not creative. But then, a funny thing happened on the way to the app store - a new genre and distribution model courtesy of our not-so friendly competitors in China suddenly seized the attention of viewers there. That detonation has now been felt all over the globe.

Welcome to the potentially paradigm-shifting experience that is the Microdrama, the new streaming experience where a full-length feature film is splintered into anywhere from 60 to 120 Tik Tok-sized bites of drama that have been shot by and star mostly no-names within the industry.

According to Xu Fan of China Daily, since starting in 2020, "the Microdrama market in China has has generated annual revenue of $6.91 billion, surpassing the annual box office revenue of the film industry. China's Microdrama market is now projected to reach $14 billion by 2027. The global Microdrama market (excluding China) was estimated at over $1.5 billion in 2024, with expectations to double by 2025." With the global streaming market (again, minus China) valued at a healthy $108 billion, micro-dramas are still very much in the rear view mirror, but catch-up can happen quickly: all that would be needed is for a major star, or stars, to cross-over, and visibility could go through the roof.



The *In*dustry: Micro-Economics (CONT)

The creative numbers are also staggering, as Xu Fan relates how “over 3,000 Microdramas were produced or planned globally in 2024, with more than 700 already online. 16,100 new micro drama-related companies registered in China in 2024, an 80% increase from 2023 and so far in Q1 2025, Latin America and Southeast Asia account for the largest share of global Microdrama app downloads at 27% and 24% respectively, demonstrating significant growth in these regions.”

What’s driving the trend? A few things, short attention span for one, the ubiquity and accessibility of smart phones, a culture of “smart phone first” whereby most of us ingest content for the first time on our handheld devices. And lastly, consumption habits that have been conditioned over a decade of ogling short-form videos on social media sites like Tik Tok, Instagram and YouTube.

Despite the lesser overall quality (compared to what’s found on your name brand streamers), Microdramas in five short years seem to have captured enough attention around the globe to compete - somewhat - with the big powers in Hollywood. These brief, emotionally potent narrative nuggets deliver high octane energy with their fast dialogue, at times overwrought acting style, and abundant cliffhangers. While never imitating the fast-cutting frenetic style of Tik Tok, one can certainly feel its influence.

So, when it comes to viewing and posting, what are the options? Basically, to start viewing, you’ll need to download any one of the following apps: DramaBox, ShortMax, Microdrama, ReelShort, and FlickReels. The overall quality is consistent, if a notch or two below the standards we’ve become accustomed to on most major streaming platforms. All Microdramas have been filmed in a 9:16 aspect ratio, oriented vertically (portrait mode), specifically designed for viewing on smartphones and mobile devices. Some viewers, used to traditional horizontal filming (16:9 widescreen) which one sees on most theater screens and televisions, may need a short period of adjustment to get used to this new style. But most people should find within an episode or two that the vertical viewing experience really harmonizes well

The *In*dustry: Micro-Economics (CONT)

with the content, as one comes face to face with dialogue-heavy stories that feature very few wide shots, settling most of the time for close-ups and two shots which utilize well the smart phone's limited real estate. The first 3-5 episodes of a show will almost always be free of charge, resorting to a subscription or pay-per episode model after that.

As far as submitting goes, it's nowhere near as selective as Cannes or Sundance, but that doesn't mean these Microdrama platforms don't exercise some level of quality control - so be warned, they don't take everyone. As racy and handheld as some of the series are, there are standards with respect to both content and execution, so, match ambition to resources, and always demand the best from your cast and crew. Almost all submissions have to be made through either Film Freeway or private YouTube and Vimeo links. The good news is, once you've found your niche, and you're through to the site, the chances for monetization are quite good. A $50,000 investment (or less, depending on how resourceful you are), that is well executed and has pretty good word of mouth, can yield $1-2 million in revenue within a few months. This is by no means the common experience for creators, but it's not as infrequent as you may think. Muvi is also a very useful platform, with plenty of links and articles to help you get your drama off the ground, and even create your own app for distribution.

The big question going forward is, what will the Microdrama landscape look like outside of China? It's already big there, and getting bigger, but cultural habits don't necessarily transfer easily to other places, where entrenched viewing preferences can be hard to change. Remember, like Tik Tok, ReelShort and a lot of its competitors come from China, where country-specific conditions have fashioned the aesthetic preferences of the consumer. That being said, for the time being, the market is here and growing, and could certainly use a bump in quality, so, by all means, start micro-shooting!

FilmFreeway

MUVI

Creative Writing

THE GAMDRIGON

THE SECRET HISTORIES OF THE DOGO

By Bambu

Sing, O' Griot, the story of a man with no future, and still, it is he, who spilled so much blood upon the soil of our country, that the roots of fledgling bushes found nourishment, and the entire forest of the Wayasunda grew in vain. It is he, the one who took Yam and Honey, and fashioned it into Fire and Blood. It is he, the one who striped the Zebra and mounted them for war; and yes, it is he, the one who was to marry and settle in a tent of buffalo hide along the Naru river, but as it came to be, his peace was disturbed, and soon the world would know his plight. In these times, the golden-horned doe roamed the lands, the spotted robin nested the trees, and every Spring was greeted by the fall of the manna.

And Gamdrigo loved Nygora.

She was the daughter of the Shaman, Mari Gbara of Tanzu Vale, where the grass rose higher than a boy's shoulder and the moon kissed the hills with honeyed light. Nygora, the maiden whose skin gleamed like the back of a moonlit gazelle's flank, whose laughter brought the drum to a halt out of sheer reverence. Gamdrigo first saw her at the Festival of Spears, when she danced in the Circle of Virgins with cowry shells braided into her hair. He said then—though none believed him—that she would be his wife.

Gamdrigo, son of Kabbo the Lusk, grandson of a nobody, dared to dream. At twenty-one Suns, he was neither famous nor feared. He hunted small beasts, broke wild colts, and drank too much palm wine beneath the elders' gaze. But when he saw Nygora, now grown and crowned in grace, he became a man. He hunted a lion alone, carved a coat from its felt, strung its teeth into a necklace, and placed it in her hands. She answered his offering with a single smile, and it was as if all the stars gave witness.

By the next moon's turn, drums beat in two villages: once for their betrothal, and again for the blessing of union. The tents were woven from blue buffalo hide, the elders sang of fertile wombs, and Gamdrigo—he who had never owned even a goat—was gifted twelve zebra colts and a ring of ivory gilded in gold. Nygora's smile that night was wide enough to shake the gods from their sky-pillars.

And one night, beneath a sky swollen with stars, in the hush of the buffalo-hide tent, Gamdrigo took Nygora into his arms. Her breath was sweet as manna, her skin warm as the hues of dusk upon still waters. In that moment, there was no shame, no hunger, no pain—only the slow and sacred rhythm of love, as if the stars aligned and bent low to cradle their union. But peace, like fruit left too long on the vine, spoils quickly in the sun.

They came in the hour before dawn, the Hurango—shadow riders from the north, their feet silent, their hearts foul with dark magic. They were led by Sombali, son of a Sorcerer, so naturally, they came without warning. The drums did not sound. The wind gave no cry. The zebras stirred in their pens, but the people still slept.

Then, came the screams of iron. Flames licked the sky. Villagers awoke to the smell of burning reeds and the whisper of spells cast in tongues no elder dared recall. Warriors fell with eyes still closed. Children vanished into smoke. A darkness—not night, but something deeper—fell upon Tanzu Vale.

Gamdrigo rose half-dressed, clutching a spear he forgot to sharpen. He reached for Nygora as shadows swarmed the tent. But before his shout could leave his lips, three Hurango warriors burst through the hide flap. They struck him hard across the skull with a studded iron rod, sending him crashing to the earth. As the blood welled in his mouth, he saw Nygora clawing toward him, screaming his name. They ripped her from his arms—his fingers still laced in her hair—dragging her into the smoke. Her scream vanished into the dark.

They left him bleeding in the dust, face pressed to the soil he once promised to till. His last breath before the blackness came was her name—whispered like prayer, like thunder held in the throat.

When Gamdrigo awoke days later, he was wrapped in goat hide and half-buried beneath ash and memory. He wandered, limping, to the river's edge, and there, the women who remained told him what had become of the world. The Hurango had not stopped. Village after village fell in smoke and silence. The children of the Kando plains. The fisher clans of Lake Orubo. Even the skywatchers of Umba Hill. All broken, all scattered. And with each tale, something within him hardened.

He did not mourn long. Mourning was a gift for those who still had something to live for. Instead, he mounted one of the twelve zebra colts gifted at his wedding, and rode. From mountain crest to desert edge, he summoned the great tribes—the Ranjara, the Talmago, the Bearers of the Green Scarab. He called them not to council, but to *Yugojabra*.

It was an ancient rite, older than the Tales of Sarabana. Beneath a tree that bled red sap, the warriors gathered barefoot in a spiral of salt and ash. Gamdrigo stood bare-chested, painted in the blood of oxen, and with a cup of palm wine in one hand and the horn of the golden doe in the other, he pierced his shoulder and poured his own blood upon the earth. Then he sang—not words, but tones of grief and promise, as the fire grew wild and the spirits focused their ears.

There, among the gathered clans, Gamdrigo spoke of vengeance—not for himself alone, but for every stolen wife, every burned cradle. He vowed to raid the Hurango fortress. And of the plunder, he asked for nothing. "Let my portion feed your children," he said. "Only give me Sombali. And let his blood trickle between my fingers."

And when Gamdrigo did slay his foe—an event less glorious than he had prayed for—he found his wife, Nygora, with child. The men who followed him looked upon her with shame. But Gamdrigo only dropped to his knees and kissed her belly. The love that poured from him overwhelmed them all, and there, in that moment, the tribes came together under the banner of the Dogo. From that day forth, Gamdrigo led the riders in every battle.

Project Watch

My Little Miracles

Andrea A. Jackson is the filmmaker behind *My Little Miracles*, the story of her family's personal journey through the NICU (Neonative Intensive Care Unit) after her twins were born at 24 weeks. It's a tribute to survival, hope, and the medical staff that gives these babies a fighting chance. The overarching themes of *My Little Miracles* include hope, love, dedication, the fight for survival, human connection, and best practices in neonatal care.

Jackson has a background in acting and has been a SAG-AFTRA member for several years, appearing in a variety of projects. She is most proud of her work on the award-winning web series *Covid Divorce*, which Jackson co-created with a friend. "It was truly a labor of love, and I poured everything into it — writing, producing, directing, editing, and acting," she shares. "Taking on so many roles taught me a lot, but the biggest lesson was learning to trust my own storytelling voice. I was honored to receive an Award of Merit for acting and an Award of Recognition for the series."

The *My Little Miracles* project is so compelling to Jackson as it is her story. "As a filmmaker, mother, and survivor of the NICU journey, I bring an authenticity that no outside storyteller could replicate. This isn't just a film. It's my lived experience transformed into something powerful and healing for others."

The story in *My Little Miracles* is told through candid footage of the Jackson family's journey, with heartfelt interviews. It's an honest, intimate look at life inside the NICU and the people who make survival possible. Jackson elaborates, "What makes this project unique is that it's coming from someone who's actually lived it. It's our real experience, told through raw footage of our family and honest conversations. It gives people a window into a world they might not otherwise see. It's emotional, it's messy, and it's full of heart."

"This project is deeply influenced by my own journey as a NICU parent and the emotional rollercoaster that came with it," Jackson adds. "It's shaped by my experience as a mother walking along with the medical staff to advocate for my daughters. I wanted to give thanks to those who work tirelessly to give these babies a chance at survival and, most importantly, to help parents navigate the rollercoaster of the NICU. More than anything, it's driven by a desire to turn pain into purpose and to share a story of survival and hope."

Jackson believes that *My Little Miracles* is an important project because so many families are silently going through this experience, feeling overwhelmed, scared, and alone. Premature births are more common than people think, but the NICU world still feels hidden. “In sharing our story, my hope is that it helps raise awareness, builds empathy, and lets families know they're not alone. Certain pathways in life are devastating to walk through, and you know when you have survived them, it's your job to share your story with the world to help others. That is the film for me.”

Even though the idea for the project began with Jackson’s own experience, it took a while to take form. “Being a storyteller, I always knew deep down I would share this story. I just didn't know in what format that would be. Then, when the pandemic hit, and I was once again reminded of how fragile life is, I started to think about what legacy I wanted to leave behind and what kind of stories I wanted to share to help others. I decided to get a camera and film a proof of concept. That was a beautiful time because I was figuring out and learning so many new skills. Once I walked away with that first footage, I was super proud. It taught me a valuable lesson about not waiting until everything is perfect to create.”

In addition to the proof of concept that gives a glimpse of the story Jackson wants to tell, she has also learned how to create a pitch deck, which is an ever-evolving process. As she explains, “I teamed up with a fiscal sponsor, which has been extremely helpful to me as an independent filmmaker. I am now about to launch my first crowdfunding campaign to raise funds for the film.”

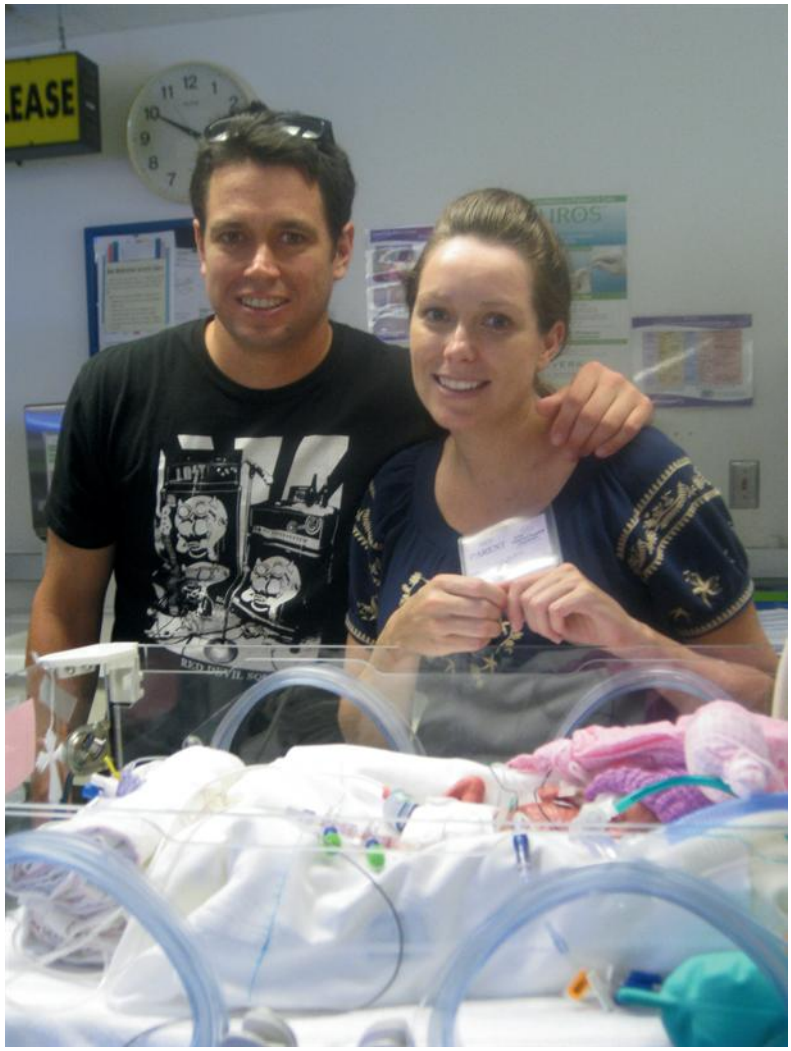
One difficulty Jackson has faced in this project has not been the actual filmmaking process, it has been reliving the trauma associated with her family’s NICU experience. She shares, “When filming the proof of concept, I opened the box where I kept all my daughter's belongings from the hospital, and as I read my journals from that time, the tears kept flowing. After I finished editing the proof of concept, I cried for days. I was surprised by how much emotion came up. I actually put the project on hold for a while after that and dove into my other project. Now I'm back and more ready than ever to share this story with the world. The beautiful thing is that as I create to heal with this story, I am also healing parts of myself.”

Although Jackson adds, there have been some struggles in the filming process as well. “The strangest part of the experience was having to film myself and ask myself interview questions during Covid,” she says. “I handled everything myself, from setting up the camera to coming up with the questions, filming, and editing. Although it was awkward, it was also surprisingly empowering. The most memorable aspect has been the feedback I've received from those who have seen the proof of concept. Their responses have been incredibly encouraging and supportive, which makes me truly appreciate the importance of this story and the impact it will have.”

As Jackson starts her funding journey, she realizes, “It has been a huge learning curve, although I am grateful to be doing it. I think that with anything, it's confusing at first to understand all the different ways you can crowdfund and get familiar with all the different platforms, etc. I also had to work on my limiting beliefs around money. At the end of the day, having a strong personal mission statement has been really helpful. I want to reach and help as many people as possible with this film, and let's face it, making a movie is expensive, so crowdfunding will help make that happen. Another big takeaway is that there are many ways people can support your project, even if they can't do it financially. Support in any way is so helpful to filmmakers, even if it's a share on social media.”

Understanding the possible budget constraints, Jackson has stayed flexible with the scope of the project. She shares, “I have adjusted my budget by creating two tiers. The first tier includes my dream interviews with experts and pioneers in the field of best practices for preemie care. The second tier is a smaller, more streamlined version that focuses on what is necessary to get the film made and released. I am staying flexible because, while I have ambitious creative goals, I am determined that budget constraints will not prevent this story from being told. One way or another, it will find its way out into the world.”

However, funding will not change how Jackson envisions My Little Miracles. “I am staying true to my artistic vision for this story, and I am not concerned with the commercial viability,” she states. “I am more concerned with the impact this film will create. At my core, I believe who this story is meant for, it will reach, and my job is to go out there and create it.”



Of course, if an unlimited budget was possible, Jackson knows how she would proceed. “Honestly, if money weren’t an issue, I would be doing things a lot differently right now. I’d outsource all the technical and website work, bring on a social media manager to help build momentum, and probably work with an accountability coach to help keep me organized and on track. Having support in those areas would free up more time and energy to focus on telling the story and shaping the creative vision.”

For now, Jackson is currently exploring a variety of distribution models — from film festivals and strategic partnerships to community events and conferences. “I’ve found myself in some inspiring rooms where the traditional pathways are being reimagined and it’s clear the industry is going through seismic shifts. Staying open, adaptable, and willing to pivot is important.”

As to what she has learned along the way, Jackson has some final thoughts. “I’ve realized that not knowing how to do something shouldn’t stop me from taking action. Along the way, I’ve discovered that there are so many incredible people out there who genuinely want to help you share your story. Surrounding myself with supportive individuals has been a game changer, and I’ve learned to trust that everything is unfolding exactly as it should. This might sound cliché, but I genuinely believe that even in the hardest circumstances, what’s happening to you is, in some way, happening for you. If I hadn’t walked the painful path of my girls being born so early, I wouldn't be here, using that experience to help other families. My purpose has become something greater than myself.”

For more information about My Little Miracles including tax deductible donation information, proof of concept and other info for the movie, visit https://andreaajackson.com/my-little-miracles or click on the QR code.

Giving Back

INSTRUMENTAL GIVING

The catastrophic 2025 Southern California wildfires killed at least 30 people, forced more than 200,000 to evacuate, destroyed more than 18,000 homes and structures, and burned over 57,000 acres of land in total. When 5D Spectrum founder De Ivett saw so many people struggling after the fires including many of her closest friends and clients, she wanted to do something about it. Supporting GoFundMe campaigns was just the beginning…

Working with long-time friend and client Brandon Jay, 5D Spectrum launched the Altadena Musicians website in preparation for the NAMM 2025 show and an opportunity to connect with the music industry as a whole. Meetings with Reberb.com, Fender and members of the NAMM Foundation and many manufacturers of musical instruments paved the path to developing a solution.

Jay and his wife Gwendolyn Sanford are music composers (*Weeds/Orange is the New Black/Romy and Michele the Musical*) who lost their home, their music studio and all but two of their instruments in the Eaton fire. Jay's desire to create an online registry to allow musicians to list their lost items led 5D Spectrum to look for a viable solution that could be deployed relatively fast. Working with development partner BOSC Tech Labs, the 5D team came up with an idea for the app. The BOSC team ramped up for a 600 hour project to deploy the first phase of the new app. In just 6 short weeks the app was ready for launch. With a soft launch of onboarding donors first, the app was released to the community at its official launch party on April 26th 2025.

The new app, "Instrumental Giving," connects donors with fire-affected Southern California musicians and music enthusiasts who lost instruments, recording equipment, and vinyl records in the devastating wildfires. Instrumental Giving aims to streamline the process of replacing these essential items, which hold both professional and sentimental value. The app provides a direct platform for fire victims to list their specific needs, while donors can easily browse requests and contribute items or funds.

"The loss of these items is particularly devastating for musicians and those who cherish music. It's not just about replacing things; it's about restoring a means of expression, a source of income, and a connection to the music community," says De Ivett, founder of 5D Spectrum and Advisor to Instrumental Giving. "We created Instrumental Giving to provide a direct and efficient way for the community to help those affected get back on their feet."

Anyone can join the online community to help musicians replace musical instruments, recording gear and LPs lost in the recent fires. Use the QR code to learn more.

Fringe Corner

If you're looking for inspiration from other artists, there are many upcoming Fringe Festivals to visit around the world. Where possible, we have indicated if applications are still open for submissions.

- July 1 -31, 2025 Greater Manchester Fringe, Manchester UK, www.greatermanchesterfringe.co.uk
- July 5-26,2025 Festival Off Avignon, Avignon France, www.festivaloffavignon.com
- July 9 - 27, 2025 Buxton Festival Fringe, Buxton, UK, buxtonfringe.org.uk
- July 11-20, 2025 Darwin Fringe Festival, Larrakia Land - Darwin, Australia, darwinfringe.org.au
- July 11-20, 2025 Gwyl Llangollen Fringe Festival, Llangollen, Cymru/Wales, www.llangollenfringe.co.uk
- July 13-27, KC Fringe Festival, Kansas City, MO, www.kcfringe.org
- July 13-26 Fringe PVD, Providence, RI, www.fringepvd.org
- July 16-19, 2025 BorderLight Fringe Festival, Cleveland, Ohio, www.borderlightcle.org
- July 18-20, 2025 Shaftesbury Fringe, United Kingdom, www.shaftesburyfringe.co.uk
- July 25-Aug 3, Portsmouth Fringe, Portsmouth, UK, @portsmouthfringe
- July 27-Aug 30, Stockholm Fringe Festival (STOFF2025), www.stockholmfringe.com
- July 31-Aug 10, Minnesota Fringe, Minneapolis Minnesota, www.minnesotafringe.org
- Aug 1-10, Fringe By The Sea, North Berwick, Scotland, www.fringebythesea.com
- Aug 1-9, 2025, Calgary Fringe Theatre Festival, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, https://www.calgaryfringe.ca
- Aug 1-25, 2025 Edinburgh Fringe, Edinburgh, www.edfringe.com
- Aug 6-10, ON THE EDGE Fringe Festival, North Bay, Canada, https://fringenorth.com/
- Aug 7-10, 2025, Guelph Fringe Festival, Guelph, https://www.guelphfringe.ca/
- Aug 7-17, 2025, Nanaimo Fringe Festival, Nanaimo, British Columbia, Canada, https://nanaimofringe.com
- Aug 11-24, 2025, Mississauga Multilingual Fringe Festival, Missisauga, https://www.mississaugafringe.ca/
- Aug 14-24, 2025, Edmonton Fringe, https://www.fringetheatre.ca/
- Aug 18-Sept 18, 2025 Tallinn Fringe, Tallinn, Estonia, www.fringe.ee
- Aug 28-Sept 8, 2025, Halifax Fringe, https://www.halifaxfringefestival.ca/
- Aug 29-Sept 7, 2025, Gothenburg Fringe, Gothenburg, Sweden, gbgfringe.com
- Sept 1-30, 2025 Philadelphia Fringe, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, www.phillyfringe.org
- Sept 4-14, 2025, Amsterdam Fringe Festival, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, https://amsterdamfringefestival.nl/
- Sept 6-21, 2025, Dublin Fringe Festival, Dublin, Ireland, https://www.fringefest.com/
- Sept 6 - 28, 2025, Wanstead Fringe, London UK, www.wansteadfringe.org (**Deadline July 19**)
- Sept 9-20, 2025 Rochester Fringe Festival, Rochester, New York, rochesterfringe.com
- Sept 19-28, Elgin Fringe, Elgin, IL, www.elginfringefestival.com
- Sept 19-27, Istanbul Fringe Festival, Istanbul, https://www.fringeistanbul.com/
- Sept 25-Oct 5, Scranton Fringe, Scranton, PA, www.scrantonfringe.org
- Sept 25-Oct 25, The Lambeth Fringe, London, England, www.lambethfringe.com
- Oct 2-12, Milano Off Fringe Festival, Milan, Italy, https://milanooff.com/en/
- Oct 8-12, Thessaloniki Fringe Festival, Thessaloniki, Greece, www.thessfringe.com
- Oct 16-26, 2025, Catania Off Fringe Festival, Catania, Italy, https://cataniaoff.com/en/
- Oct 24-Nov 2, 2025, Colchester Fringe, Colchester, UK, www.colchesterfringe.com
- Nov 7-9, Chattanooga Fringe Fest, Chattanooga, TN, www.barkinglegs.org

Parting Poetry

SIRF AND TURF

By Andrea Monroe

This damn wave keeps following me
So *in my face* it is
But did I manage to still it just now?
Halt it in place?

It went something like this--
I extended my arms
And with a voice as big as thunder
I yelled, “Enough already!”
Just like a referee marking foul play

Only this is no game
This is my life
Which has become some kind of tsunami
A sea of destruction
Yet on this exact spot where I’ve been toppled
And left so helpless before
The wave of despair has finally stopped

The surf teems with all sorts of life
Jumping and whipping about in the salt sprays
This excites me
I hold my Possibility as if it’s a kid’s balloon
With the string gently wrapped around my finger
It’s my reminder to laugh again

Still, it’s hard to do a balancing act
With such weight wrapped around me
The thought of *him* snuffs out my smile
Chokes me with sadness
God, if only I could just bite him
The meathead
To see if he has any feelings at all

Darling Poetry

THE DEATH OF PETER PAN

By Celia Markham

So much promise
Wrapped in so much pain
He can't fly to Neverland
His wings are broken
A sunny smile and a
Wave of his hand
And in your mind
He's in Neverland again
So, let's all remember
Peter Pan
Engaging smile and
Heart in Hand
A favorite pal for all the boys
Charming enough to fool
Captain Hook
Charming the girls
With one brown eyed look
Raise a Toast to Peter Pan

He never grew up
In his Neverland
He left us all here to grow
Old and grey
He took his pixie dust
When he went away
So much promise
Wrapped in so much pain
He'll never come back
To see us again
But deep in your heart
And mind he will stay
The golden boy
For all of your days

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