



Feature stories and interviews with groundbreaking and inspiring people.

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COUGHLIN**

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ERIN COUGHLIN

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Golden Globe Winning Screenwriter On Creating Birdman

By Erin Coughlin | January 13, 2015 | The Surge

While many people believe that screenwriters have to live in Los Angeles in order to have a successful career, New York native, Alexander Dinelaris and the rest of the Golden Globe winning writing team of *Birdman*, prove that it is becoming easier for writers to develop and produce their original stories from locations all over the world.

After establishing a career in theater, Dinelaris decided to pursue his interest in writing. His work caught the attention of acclaimed director Alejandro González Inarritu (*21 Grams*, *Babel*), when his stage play, *Still Life* premiered at the MCC Theater off Broadway in 2009. Impressed with Dinelaris' writing, Inarritu then invited him to work on the early drafts of the hit film *Beautiful*, starring Oscar winner Javier Bardem. In the years following *Beautiful's* success, the award winning writer-director has called upon Dinelaris to collaborate on various new projects.

"*Birdman* started with Alejandro calling up Nico and myself, explaining that he had this idea about making a film in entirely one take. We were totally intrigued by it. He wanted to do

something a little more lighter with a lighter tone," said Dinelaris.

Using Skype, Dinelaris was able to collaborate on the script with his writing partners Inarritu (Los Angeles), Nicolas Giacobone and Armando Bo, both of whom are based in Buenos Aires.

"Once we had some ideas, Nico would come to New York and we would hammer out a draft. Then he would go back to Buenos Aires. I think Skype has changed a lot. You can collaborate from a distance. It feels more personable, more creatively beneficial to be able to see somebody rather than just have a phone conversation," said Dinelaris.

Set during the days leading up to the opening night performance of his new play, famous actor and former film superhero Riggan Thomson struggles with his ego, career, and personal life.

"Theater is always live back stage, so there was a lot of room to roam and prowl with the camera. We could extend scenes with dialogue. It just seemed to be the perfect fit."

Despite the fact that former *Batman* star, Michael Keaton, comes across as the perfect fit for the role of Thomson, the screenwriters penned the script without having a particular actor in mind.

"We had a conversation about Michael (Keaton) and thought he was perfect for the role in that he had the tools necessary and a sense of humor. He's extremely likeable, so we knew he would have the audience's sympathy. Of course his tact and elegance with comedy was clear. We got really lucky."

Shot on location in NYC, the actors faced the unique challenge of filming scenes in a series of long takes, most ranging from between 10-12 minutes in length.

"Actors love to work with Alejandro because they know he brings the best out of them. We all did it out of the passion of making the film together. The cast was stellar from top to bottom."

The intricacies of the one-take camera method allowed the screenwriters the opportunity to maintain an important presence on set during filming.

"Because of the one take method, there were times where the camera needed a few extra seconds or we needed to brush in some extra dialogue. It was all about developing a sense of continuity. Basically, we had to be around all of

the time. We rehearsed for three to four weeks with the camera. Not much of it was going to change because it was so dependant on the choreography. Sometimes we had to be there for a change or to do some quick line edits.”

The passion they have dedicated toward the film has resulted in unforeseen raves from the critics and an enthusiastic, universal audience.

“It’s been surreal. If you had told us six months ago that we would be this well-liked by the

critics, (including winning The Gotham Award and 7 Golden Globe nominations), nobody would have believed that. We thought it was a quirky and personal film. It’s very bizarre on the page.”

Hot off of *Birdman*’s success, Dinelaris is currently involved in developing three different projects for stage and screen. Along with the *Birdman* team, as co-creator and executive producer he is busy writing the first season of *The One Percent*, a new series for Starz starring Hilary Swank and Ed Helms. He is also collaborating with Gloria and Emilio Estefan on a new Broadway stage musical, *On Your Feet*, with previews scheduled for October.

How Close Are We To Creating A.I. Robots Like Those In The Movies? Experts Weigh In

By Erin Coughlin | Oct. 16, 2017 | NBC Universal's SyFyWire

Maria, Marvin, Sonny, David, and Ava are all ordinary-sounding names -- but in film, television, and literature, these seemingly ordinary names belong to extraordinary individuals who, despite their exemplary skills and complex personalities, are not human.

Since Brigitte Helm's 1927 portrayal of Maria in *Metropolis*, audiences have developed an increased love/hate fascination with artificial intelligence. While filmmakers continue to address the controversy regarding the acceptance and cohabitation between humans and their modern creations parallel to real-world technological advancements, just how accurate is this representation in modern film, and have cinematic depictions evolved at all? Early films reflected the heightened fear of technology that developed among the working class during the Industrial Age by depicting metal machines as unstoppable forces of mayhem. This successfully fed into the pre-existing "anti-immigrant" nervous anticipation that technological advancements would go from taking over people's jobs to taking over the world.

After decades of being portrayed as maniacal, clunky metal murderers or invaders, the films of the '70s and '80s shifted to show the more advantageous, congenial aspects of artificial intelligence. While films like *2001: A Space Odyssey* and *Alien* nurtured viewers' distrusting opinions of humanoids, robotics, and artificial intelligence, others introduced lovable bots like R2-D2, C-3PO, and Johnny 5 of *Short Circuit* (1986). The disturbing mechanical reincarnation of *RoboCop*'s Sergeant Alex Murphy featured a sympathetic, well-meaning character, while even the iconic T-800 in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* was turned into a protective, surrogate father figure. Over the past two decades, films and shows like *Westworld*, *Prometheus*, and *Ex Machina* have explored sentient characters that are alarmingly indistinguishable from their human counterparts, along with formless, all-encompassing consciousness and deep learning machines.

Despite the technical advancements of filmmaking, Hollywood has generally failed to evolve beyond its reliance on the consolidated, inaccurate portrayal of the isolated, singular mad genius or God-like father figure. With the rare exception of Cyberdyne Systems (*T2: Judgment Day*) and Cybertronics (*A.I.*), the majority of films continue to focus on the relationship between one prominent male inventor and his creation (e.g. Arthur Wayland and David in *Prometheus* and Nathan and Ava in *Ex Machina*). A maneuvering central male villain leads even *RoboCop*'s Omni Consumer Products.

"I kind of get angry at that stereotype of the father figure of A.I., especially because it's a guy. It's so false," said Angelica Lim, a world-renowned roboticist who worked at Softbank and is now a professor at Simon Fraser University.

"There's a common platform called Robot Operating System, or ROS. It's a way for roboticists to share software with each other to build all of these different functionalities for their robots, whether they're coming from India or Europe or Japan," Lim continued. "People are contributing this open-source software to other robots to allow robots to navigate in different environments and be able to detect obstacles. It's coming from thousands of people, so it's most certainly not one person building robots and A.I. It's a community. There are so many different specialties that have to go into robotics. From electrical engineers to mechanical engineers, to firmware engineers, low-level and high-level software engineers, even designers, artists, linguists, and animators are all working to build these machines."

In film, humans and robots appear to fluidly walk and work among one another when in reality most robots are learning to take their first awkward baby steps.

"On TV you see robots just walking around interacting with people like you normally would. Sometimes robots can't tell it's a human, they can't see their face. They're just not very smart yet. On TV there are these interesting demos,

but most of the time they are controlled by humans. It's almost like a trick, and it's giving an impression that's not quite there," said Lim.

"Take a look at the DRC-DARPA Robotics Challenge. There are videos online about these robots that we tried to use. There still are people controlling them. You can even see on a blooper reel -- that is the most accurate portrayal of how things are. You can see all of these robots falling down, not being able to get up again or completely missing the doorknob that they were supposed to use to open the door."

Many experts have also stressed that it is not possible to upload or implant artificial intelligence with human memories and consciousness, as depicted in *Transcendence* (2014), *Ghost in the Shell*, and *Amelia 2.0* (2017). Juergen A. Knoblich, a scientific director at the Institute of Molecular Biotechnology of the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna, recently explained in *Scientific American* that even though neuroscientists are working on an "organoid" or human brain tissue in a dish, it isn't possible to create life via a "brain transplant" or for lab-grown brain tissue to develop thoughts or personalities as depicted in blockbusters like *The Matrix*.

"Humanoid social robots are becoming more common and more diverse. They will soon become a common form of interface to A.I. and will be refined into a new kind of computer animation, like computer animation for movies, with the difference of being physically embodied," said David Hanson, Founder and CEO of Hanson Robotics Limited.

"Humans have an innate preference for faces and to empathize with other humans; therefore social robots designed with pleasing aesthetics and a full range of human expressions are in a better position to inspire trust and empathy from the people with whom they interact."

Chappie, Ava, David, and Walter are popular onscreen humanoids that can learn to think, feel, and even manipulate situations like actual humans. Although Intel is at work on a self-learning chip, it would still take a lot of time and resources to create a program that allows an artificial life form to learn for itself.

"Creating intelligent machines is not just about engineering the algorithms. We need to get the right data into those algorithms in order for the algorithms to get really smart," said Hanson.

"Making A.I. understand people requires the right algorithms and the right data. You can't just feed the algorithms with data from the web. We want our A.I. to be as smart as humans, so we need them to learn like babies do. Babies learn from physically interacting with the world and from face-to-face interaction with people. If you socially deprive babies, they suffer and don't develop correctly," Hanson said. "So, if we develop these bio-inspired intelligent algorithms and give them this rich social data, letting them interact with the world through this rich array of sensors, physically interacting, Internet of Things plus social interactions, they will get smarter faster. They will grow up to be socially well adjusted and they will live well with humans."

"I think in my particular field the challenge is trying to understand how humans communicate in order to build intelligent robots that understand all of these signals that humans use," said Lim.

However, artificial intelligence in film has evolved in parallel chronological order in regard to scientists' purpose and intentions. Robots in film have graduated from completing dangerous industrial or hazardous based tasks to providing better healthcare (*Big Hero 6*) and expanding deep-space exploration. *A.I.*'s Gigolo Joe and Spike Jonze's *Her* have emphasized an interest for providing personal companionship. Films like *Passengers* and *Alien: Covenant* feature characters who provide professional assistance and are advanced models reminiscent of the real-life Kodomoroid androids and Geminoid-F model.

"We wish to dramatically improve people's everyday lives with highly intelligent robots that teach, serve, entertain, and provide comforting companionship," said Hanson. "This means the robots must learn to love and learn what it means to be loved, so they are capable of friendship and familial love. This will create a deep bond between humans and robots and assures a benevolent A.I. in a shared future with humanity. Ultimately, I seek to realize kind and wise genius machines, who will collaborate with us to solve the world's hard problems and realize an unimaginably wondrous future."

For now, science fiction and tech enthusiasts will have to settle for enjoying their iRobot floor cleaners (*WALL-E*). NYC tourists can spend the night at the futuristic Yotel Hotel, where robots transport luggage to individual sleeping

Pods. While voice recognition has become familiar in our daily lives, it is still going to take some time before even our *Minority Report*-type eye scanners and self-driving cars become available to everyone. When asked about people's misconceptions about artificial intelligence, Lim compares the fear of technology to an anti-immigration mentality.

"We have all of this other tech around us that is being created, that's actually making a big impact on the economy, and they're not robots," said Lim.

This includes companies or websites that we use every day, like Travelocity, Google, and Facebook, who have invested in deep learning projects and rely on neural nets in translations, searches, and photo programs.

A robot cannot suddenly change its programming and become evil unless its inner programming was designed to believe that its actions are the most logistical in keeping in line with its preprogrammed purpose (HAL in *2001: A Space Odyssey*). In other words, its reactions would not be personal in the same way that humans react to and engage with one another. Unfortunately, films like *WarGames* predicted a recent interest in the "Rise of A.I. Arms" among competitive nations. Well-known figures like Elon Musk have spoken up in protest against the development and usage of artificial intelligence in the military.

"Developing benevolent A.I. / robots is not just a nice thing to do, but a prerequisite, and we must work together not just as an industry or a nation, but as a species, to create more capable and also 'good' A.I. / robots to realize the fullest potential of this human invention," said Hanson.

"I really hope robots can help us in some of the challenges of the world. My ideal robot is something that can help save our planet. My dream is to find robots that are able to help humans," said Lim.

Has the film industry hit the ceiling regarding their portrayal of artificial intelligence, robotics and humanoids? Is the human race ready to decide such matters regarding the responsibility and issues that such a scientific, progressive undertaking involves? For now, we will have to find contentment while still working out the glitches with Siri and Alexa. While the films we love may inspire or predict such challenges, it looks like we still have a few reels of our own left in which to figure that out.

Why Wonder Woman's Success Needs To Wake Up Hollywood To Other Roles For Women In Filmmaking

Erin Coughlin | June 10, 2017 | The Gal About Network

Right now, everyone is celebrating the success of **Wonder Woman** for a lot of reasons. It is the first film directed by a woman to both gross over \$129,350,709 and surpass the Bechdel test – that's a lot of long over due girl power at the box office.

It's great to see that more awareness is being brought to female filmmakers in the entertainment industry and that Hollywood is crawling it's way back to featuring – and even creating more- strong, female driven films while attempting to treat the women in front of the camera as well as behind the scenes with more equality.

However, despite this new call to action and awareness of women in film, I can't help but feel that a lot of women are being shortchanged both at the box office and on the set. Over the past few years, a lot of attention regarding equality in Hollywood and the entertainment industry has remained focused on two primary roles: **female directors and actresses.**

As a filmmaker and writer with experience both behind and in front of the lens, it feels that a great percentage of women are still being ignored. In the media we hear about more opportunities for female directors and equal pay for actresses. Jennifer Lawrence was among the many stars who voiced a need for equal pay and international groups such as the Film Fatales organize awesome events and opportunities to nurture female directors.

But let's be honest, that's where the conversation and debates appear to end.

No one seems to talk about the other hard working female artisans who work – or try to find work- in the other areas of film production. While director Patty Jenkins managed to blow audiences away with her modern take on our favorite golden lasso carrying superhero, **it is also worth noting that the film was penned, shot, edited and even scored by men.** While screenwriter Allan Heinberg of *Gray's Anatomy* produced a fun and fantastic script, one still hopes to see more female screenwriters (besides favorites like Diablo Cody and Sophia Coppola) be given the opportunity to **pen new, strong scripts that are not merely "band aids" aka reboots or remakes of films originally created for male actors just to appease modern audiences.**

If the entertainment industry is serious about embracing this sense of equality, then we need more people to speak up on behalf of creating more opportunities for women in all aspects of filmmaking- from screenwriters to cinematographers all the way down to production assistants.

Luckily, Jessica Chastain (Freckle Films) and Geena Davis (The Geena Davis Institute On Gender in Media) are among a handful of actresses who have recently started new organizations to help generate more opportunities for female and diverse filmmakers – which is a hopeful place to start. Modern audiences want broader, more diverse forms of storytelling.

Perhaps the success of *Wonder Woman* will help wake Hollywood up to the full extent of success (or at least profit) the entertainment industry faces if they procure more important roles for women on every level of production and adapt their storytellers to reflect the diversity that their ticket holders crave.

Lev Grossman On Writing And The World Of The Magicians

By Erin Coughlin | December 30, 2015 | The Surge

Fans of the best-selling series, **The Magicians** can look forward to seeing their favorite characters on television in the New Year. For author Lev Grossman, it has taken years of hard work and passion to create an original, magical world loved by so many readers all over the world.

“I knew I always wanted to be a writer. Both of my parents are writers so it took me a little while to get up the nerve to say ‘You know what, I want to do this too.’ As a kid for a long time, it was like ‘this is something my parents do like drinking and smoking.’ So it took me a while to go into the idea that I could try to do this too,” said Grossman.

Originally a biochemistry major, Grossman realized his calling to pursue writing during his freshman year of college after reading *Miss Dalloway*.

“When I read Mrs. Dalloway, not only did I love it and appreciate it as a masterpiece (and I still think it’s the greatest novel of the 20th century), I felt like I understood how it worked. I thought, ‘Oh my God, I can see what she’s doing’ and I thought I could feel for the way she was setting up these giant motifs and shifting points of view. I thought ‘I understand this. Maybe I should try. Maybe I could try to do something like that too. But like, 1000 times as good.’ It was a moment where I felt like I found something that I had an intuitive understanding of,” said Grossman.

Fifteen years and three books later, Grossman started working on *The Magicians* series. It

took five years to write the first novel, *The Magicians*. Two years later he finished the second title, *The Magician King* and three years after the sequel, the third book, *The Magician’s Land* was released.

“I’d written three books already and I was proud of them. I’m still proud of them, but I didn’t feel that I had found my voice as a writer. I thought, there’s something that I really want to say that’s on the inside and it’s not getting onto the page. I thought hard about what the greatest, most important and most informative experience I ever had was. I kept coming back to *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe*. I thought the way that story worked, it transported me like nothing else. But I also thought, I’m 35 and the things that worry me and concern me are very different from the things that were on my mind when I was eight and read that book,” said Grossman.

“I tried to tell a story like that. A story about somebody discovering they had power they didn’t know that they had and finding their way into a world nobody else knew existed – but for adults. Using adult language and putting in all the things that adults have to deal with like sex, drinking, depression and all that other stuff. ‘Can I tell the kind of story and tell it about my life?’ And that was the great experiment of *The Magicians*. As it turned out, that’s where my voice was all along. I need to write about magic, the people who do it and I wanted to say what I wanted to say.”

Fans of *The Magicians* and viewers looking for a new series about the complex world of wizardry can look forward to the live action show on The SyFy channel in the upcoming New Year. For Grossman, the process of seeing his work adapted for the screen has been both scary and amazing.

“It was initially quite difficult for me to hand over the characters and the world of *The Magicians* to other people to work with. I think if you talk to the show runners they would back me up on this. I did some kicking and screaming but at the same time, like I said, writers don’t talk to other people. You’re not that used to collaborating and obviously you get feedback, but basically you’re running the whole show. Writing is not a collaborative medium. You do the voices. You dress the characters. You decide how everything goes,” said Grossman.

“TV is nothing like that, you’re collaborating with a hundred people at once – including all of the people who are saying the lines. You have to let it go and it took me a little while to do that. That said, it’s really exciting. I liked going to the set, seeing racks of costumes, hearing people say the lines and seeing them do the hand motions to cast

a spell. TV does things different from books and it's pretty wonderful to see those things done with *The Magicians*. That's really exciting," said Grossman.

Sometimes the most difficult part about writing is sitting down for uninterrupted writing time. In addition to his fiction writing, Grossman works full time as the senior editor at *Time Magazine*. Unlike many of his successful counterparts, Grossman doesn't have twelve hours a day to devote to his personal writing.

"I have a job and I have three children. I've never in my life written for 12 hours. I do my writing in 45 minutes on the subway, maybe an hour at lunch, on the weekends or vacation. I fit it in wherever I can," said Grossman.

"I think for a lot of people, especially for people starting out, their experience writing is similar to that. You don't get to put in a full day's work. That never happens. The thing I tell people is that if you don't have a lot of time to be in front of your keyboard, spend that time thinking about your book. If you have to walk 20 blocks just take 20 minutes to go over in your head what you're writing, what you're doing and what's coming next so that when you sit at the keyboard you are ready and you can start typing right away. For me, a lot of writing is going on when I'm not at my keyboard. I'm just walking around living my life. I'm writing in my head."

For Grossman, social media has played an enjoyable and significant role in connecting with his audience. By developing an online platform he has become more accessible and familiar to his readers. This has also enabled him to show that despite his author bio, Grossman was not an outsider trying to jump on the Harry Potter bandwagon.

"I got on Twitter initially because I realized that they (the readers) didn't know who I was and the ones that did had gotten the wrong idea of who I was," said Grossman.

"It was really important for me to get on Twitter, to surf and go to conventions. To talk to people. To give people a sense of the kind of person I was – which is: I am a nerd with low self esteem just like everybody else and that's where these books are coming from."

Grossman hopes that his readers find his stories both fun and entertaining. The *Magician* series also answers unaddressed issues that other series do not, including depression, life after graduation and the difficulty of being a wizard in your twenties.

"The first thing I want is for them to have a good time. I want the books to be just fun and entertaining before anything else. A lot of people who have had experiences with depression come away from the books saying, 'Yeah, I recognize some of that. That's something that I've struggled with that I haven't seen written about that much.' So I feel good when people who have dealt with depression find something special in the books," said Grossman.

"People often wonder where do people go after they graduate from Hogwarts? They have the whole rest of their lives ahead of them; what's that like graduating from the school for magic, having those powers and having to figure out what you're going to do with it? We don't hear about the lives of wizards in their 20s and I imagine that some of them have quite a difficult time."

For those pursuing a career in writing – let alone completing an entire novel – the task can feel overwhelming. Grossman generously offers honest and re-assuring advice to aspiring writers.

"When you read a novel, it looks like the person who wrote it knew what they were doing the whole time. Everything is just pieced together neatly. There's a sense of intention and confidence that runs all the way through the book, like they know exactly what kind of story they wanted to tell and what they wanted to create," said Grossman.

"The experience of writing a novel is very different. You lose your way and find your way again every day. Every day you come to a point where you say, this is ridiculous I can't write a novel and in particular, I can't write this novel. You push through that and eventually you find your way back to it, but not before all these alarm bells are going off in your head saying 'whoa you got to stop because you're in way over your head.' Everybody writing a novel is in way over their head. I wish somebody told me that because it's really hard to push through it and to keep going."

Some of the key relationships that contribute to Grossman's successful writing process include working with his agent, wife, and a group of ten to twenty beta readers.

"The person I work closest with is my wife who is an English professor and a novelist. I wish my readers consisted of many copies of my wife but sometimes you need a stranger to read your book to get a clear sense of what's happening with it. I do have beta readers but they come in very late in the process. I show my agent my work. She's an important reader for me," said Grossman.

In addition to his writing, Grossman is on the Board of Directors for The Electric Literature Series, an organization that explores new ways of storytelling and in particular, digital storytelling. Coincidentally, our conversation took place on the same day that the Shortlist for the National Book Award was released.

As both a novelist and a book reviewer for Time magazine, Grossman discussed and recommended other authors worth looking into.

"Kate Atkinson (*The Jackson Brodie Mysteries*). I think she's stunningly gifted and has written some of the best books in this millennium, particularly her last two, *Life After Life* and *A God In Ruins*. Rainbow Rowell's new book *Carry On* is very good, very smart, emotionally raw and romantic. I also like Paul Murray (*The Mark And The Void*)," said Grossman.

After spending the past 10 years working in the world of *The Magicians*, he is excited about and hard at work on a new novel. While Grossman plans to focus on his writing and trying to keep public appearances down, he is set to make an appearance at The Hong Kong Literary Festival.

"I never imagined *The Magicians* would take me to Hong Kong," said Grossman.

Deborah Harkness On Writing The Best Selling All Souls Trilogy

By Erin Coughlin | June 10, 2015 | The Surge

By combining multiple genres with fantastic, original characters, bestselling author Deborah Harkness has successfully created a new series enjoyed by readers of all ages, all over the world. *The All Souls Trilogy* consists of three gripping novels, *The Discovery of Witches*, *The Shadow of Night*, and *The Book of Life*.

The series revolves around the incredible adventure of a young scholar and witch, Diana Bishop, who uncovers a bewitched manuscript in Oxford's Bodleian Library. With the assistance of an intelligent and brave vampire, Matthew Clairmont, she unlocks a great, supernatural mystery.

"I was traveling in Mexico and saw an airport bookstore display that featured dozens of books about supernatural creatures. I wondered if there really were all these extraordinary creatures living alongside us, what did they do for a living and how did they date? *The All Souls Trilogy* began as an answer to that question," said Harkness. "And while I did not know this would be a trilogy, I always knew it would be a story in three parts. The length dictated it needed to be in three bindings, as well."

Because the series successfully combines elements of the supernatural with interesting historical events and figures in an exciting way, it continues to draw the attention of readers across multiple genres.

"As a history professor, I believe that the past is meaningful and relevant to the present and future. Once I figured out what witches, vampires, and demons did for a living, I focused on how to share my belief in the value of knowing what happened in the past through the story of Diana and Matthew and Ashmole 782," said Harkness.

Readers can also enjoy knowing that the significant settings frequented by their favorite characters are based on real locations both in the United States and abroad.

"Nearly all of the locations in the books are based on real places that I've visited at some point. So the Old Lodge is based on Speke Hall outside Liverpool, which I moved to Woodstock. Sept-Tours is based on Chateau Dauphin in Pontgibaud in the Auvergne. The Bishop House is based on a house one of my ancestors built in the 18th century."

Compared to his literary predecessors, Matthew Clairmont is a very different and unique

vampire. Inspired by a real life historical figure, this romantic leading character has earned fans worldwide with his intelligence, charm, distinguished habits and thorough, equally intriguing history.

"My inspiration for Matthew Clairmont was a sixteenth-century poet and spy named Matthew Roydon who was friends with an extraordinary cast of characters including Walter Raleigh and Thomas Harriot. I met Roydon while writing my master's thesis, and it was a challenge to find out much about him though he had very famous friends and was a published author. So I took what little I knew about Roydon—he liked artists and philosophers, he was interested in science, he was a spy—and followed those threads into the present and imagined what kind of man he would be today. The result was Matthew Clairmont."

As a reader, it is often possible to get a feeling that an author enjoys their characters and story. This connection with her readers is present in both their responses in person and even online. The characters resonate with and are beloved by avid readers all over the globe.

"I'm particularly fond of my characters, complete with quirks and foibles. They feel like real people to me, and I like to think that comes across on the pages of the books."

Harkness has found the entire experience rewarding and her fans generous. From creating crafts to forming online petitions to persuade film studios to cast their favorite actors in the lead roles, fans have openly expressed great enthusiasm for the series.

“I am always amazed when the books have inspired my readers’ creativity. Candles, jewelry, clothing, craft projects, cookies, and cakes—I’ve seen all kinds of things produced by my readers and it makes me very happy. The thing I enjoy most is meeting readers. I love talking to them about history, about the themes in the novels, and about how books and reading have made an impact on their lives. It is a real privilege,” said Harkness.

Fans can anticipate *The All Souls Trilogy* being adapted for the screen, as it is currently in development over at the BBC.

“During development, a great deal is happening behind the scenes in terms of a vision for

the program, agreeing on the structure of the show, thinking about writers, writing drafts, and more. Unfortunately, none of it can be divulged. You will have to stay tuned!”

In regards to new projects, Ms. Harkness is currently focusing on her teaching at University of Southern California.

“I do occasionally get ideas for new projects and new novels. Like the television business, however, everything is strictly “in development” at the moment—which means it is in far too fragile a state for me to talk about it.”

The one piece of advice Harkness suggests to aspiring writers is to keep writing. “Write. Every day. That’s what writers do.”

For more information on The All Souls Trilogy, upcoming author events, Deborah’s blog and more visit <http://deborahharkness.com>. The last book in the trilogy, *The Book of Life*, is now available in paperback.

Female Directors Push Horror Genre Barriers

By Erin Coughlin | October 24, 2014 | The Surge

Over the past few years, there has been a surge of women directors taking on what has socially been seen as male dominated area of the film industry — the horror genre. Los Angeles based filmmaker Jessica Cameron is among many of the new successful directors, actresses and writers to step forward and create original, award winning thrillers.

“We’ve always seen female characters in horror films, which is why it’s even more shocking to me that people are surprised that there’s someone (a woman) behind the camera because we’re often so prominently in front of it,” said Cameron.

A veteran horror filmmaker, Cameron is about to embark on a new, ambitious cross-country filmed project. For the next two months, Cameron and a core group of nine filmmakers will shoot two new feature length movies and a new documentary at the same time.

Jessica will be directing the feature film *Mania*, along with *Kill The PA*, a behind the scenes documentary about the filming. *Mania*, part inspired by Cameron’s personal life and her love/knowledge of the genre, is a cross between *Henry: Portrait Of A Serial Killer* and *Thelma and Louise*.

“The core of this story is a beautiful love story. I didn’t want to produce it and have someone else direct it, because as someone in this industry, there is nudity in the film. I didn’t want it to become gratuitous or sensationalist because it’s there with purpose. A lot of the times, men don’t use it to further the plot. The story is new and fresh on a social level. It isn’t something that we’ve seen before. I decided to direct this to tell the story, as it’s currently written & hope that I can add a stronger focus on plot and characters,” said Cameron.

Her first film, *Truth or Dare*, has recently won it’s 30th award after having runs in both the American and Foreign marketplace. It has been accepted and praised in cities all over the world including Bruges, Ireland, London and Australia.

“The horror genre overseas is so much ahead of the curve,” said Cameron. “Overseas they celebrate, rather than judge. They’re more willing to get people involved and know about it. It’s all about the movie for them. Is it good or new? They’re more excited that you were a woman who made a movie. It’s interesting to see the difference in the emphasis of what you are doing depending on where you are.”

While much of the press focuses on prominent and established male directors, it is important to shift focus and acknowledge that a large majority of horror fans are in fact, women. From America to Australia and even Laos, female filmmakers are taking the reins of directing the horror genre.

Jen Soska and Sylvia Soska are a sister filmmaking team from Canada known for fighting to make films that take the genre in new, exciting directions.

“They’re the ones that are the loudest and getting the most press; pushing the genre forward,” said Cameron.

The most supportive film festivals for female directors are known for having screened the Soska sister’s previous films. “Singlehandedly, they have pushed the door open for women horror directors,” said Cameron.

Other directors to keep an eye on include Jennifer Kent (*The Babadook*) and Jennifer Lynch, (daughter of Oscar nominee David Lynch), who after directing films (*Chained*, *Hiss*) is preparing to move to television.

For more information , visit www.jessicacameron.com.

Executive Producer On The Big Bang Theory Asks: Does Santa Exist?

By Erin Coughlin - December 21, 2015 | The Surge

For the past 8 years, Eric Kaplan has become well known for his work as the Executive Producer for the hit show, *The Big Bang Theory*. His new book, **Does Santa Exist: A Philosophical Investigation** is sure to delight fans of the show and readers everywhere with its humorous and logical approach to thought-provoking subject matter.

Kaplan became inspired to write the book when another parent cancelled their children's play date due to an unexpected reason. Initially, the children were scheduled to visit a nearby zoo where there would be reindeer for the holiday season. The mother cancelled their play date because she feared this would lead to an awkward conversation between her child who did believe in Santa Clause with Kaplan's son, Ari, who did not.

"I found this pretty weird because I thought, Santa does not exist. My son does exist, so why has she sacrificed her son's relationship with someone real so that he could have a relationship with someone who wasn't real," says Kaplan.

This unique request of the other parent prompted Kaplan to reflect on the situation in more depth.

"If you go to another culture and they say, 'Well we believe in Krishna,' why would I think someone was an idiot for not believing them in my own culture. I certainly can't prove that Santa doesn't exist. It's okay to say I've never seen him because there's supermodel Bar Refaeli, and I've never seen her. If I went to the North Pole I wouldn't find him because frankly I'm not a polar explorer, I'd probably die. If I survived, much less came back with an inventory of everything that's up there – even if I had scientific equipment, he is supposed to be magical, so who is to say that he doesn't have the ability to erase from my mind that I've even met him. It's not clear how you could prove to someone that believes in Santa that he doesn't exist, so maybe I should take a step back from saying that he doesn't exist," says Kaplan.

Throughout the book, Kaplan also addresses mysticism, theoretical and practical rationality, internal contradictions, and even The Kabbalah. He also includes humorous and insightful analysis of the famous Monty Python cheese sketch, Sarah Silverman jokes and a scene from *The Big Bang Theory*. Complete with Edward Gorey type illustrations, the book uses logic, mysticism, and humor to resolve various paradoxes in an original way.

"I discussed the different paradoxes of the two forms of rationality including Newcomb's rationality and this whole notion of there are certain things that are good for us, but if we try to get them by fighting, then we might not be able to get them. For example, being spontaneous. You could say if I come up with a plan to be more spontaneous there's something self-defeating about that — that I will end up not being spontaneous because I'm planning it and yet, we can still say that spontaneity is a good thing," said Kaplan.

For Kaplan, studying and writing about philosophy has been a life-long passion. Although his main interest in college was studying Buddhist Philosophy and Western Philosophy, he majored in comparative religion. Kaplan worked for Spy Magazine and The Harvard Lampoon before attending grad school, where he originally planned on becoming a philosophy professor.

"I was tempted by the larger audience. To tell you the truth, I liked the idea that I could write something that people would see. I was actually offered a job on *King Of The Hill*, but I couldn't take it because the students had final exams," said Kaplan.

Kaplan followed the blunt advice of the show runner to give up philosophy and pursue his

interest in writing full time. After deciding to move to New York, he ended up getting his big break at *The Late Show With David Letterman*. Kaplan ultimately ended up quitting *The Late Show* to take a job writing for the hit show, *Futurama*. After about five years of jumping between various writing jobs, his friend Bill Prady, a computer programmer turned writer invited him to work on *The Big Bang Theory*.

“Prady talked with legendary TV producer Chuck Lorre about all of the weirdos in programming and they decided it would be a good show. At some point they realized it would be better if they were physicists who write on whiteboards instead of being hunched over computer screens. I think there’s also the feeling that it’s always good to write about people who care about something. There’s something special about people who care about understanding the universe as opposed to those who just want to get rich by developing an app,” said Kaplan.

“There’s always that aspect of something interesting when you’re jumping into the dark. We started filling in the worlds of these characters and it seems to have led to the development in the global nerd pride. People are proud of the fact they are nerds. Culture has changed. Nerds are more socially acceptable and *The Big Bang Theory* has had a positive influence of that fact and a response to that. It gives them a chance to look at themselves being successful on TV and many of the nerds love that. Although there are some nerds who do not because it takes away the specialness of being a nerd,” said Kaplan.

For those unfamiliar with the behind-the-scenes reality of working in television, the daily life of a script writer is jam packed with various responsibilities including staff meetings, reading sessions on set, and re-writes.

“I get up and get to my office right at 9:30 a.m. and then there’s a light meeting with the other writers of *The Big Bang Theory* to write the scripts. Then we also go down to the stage where the actors are putting on the script that we wrote. We see what works, what doesn’t work and rewrite it. On Tuesday evening, we bring in a live studio audience. They watch it and we see what they laugh at what they don’t laugh that. Then it’s edited and that’s what you see on your TV set,” said Kaplan.

As Executive Producer of *The Big Bang Theory*, Kaplan engages in writing and rewriting the script, which takes about nine hours a day. Not counting sleep, this leaves him with 17

hours available for participating in other activities.

“I’m a dad and husband with responsibilities to my family. Then I have to take care of my health, run errands etc. Then what’s left over, I use for my other creative projects. So I did a puppet show for a while. I did an episode of *The Simpsons* and then I wrote this book, so I usually have enough time to keep some of the creative pot stirring,” said Kaplan.

The show films 24 episodes a year, leaving the cast and crew with a six-week hiatus in April and May. During this time, the actors go off and make movies. Kaplan used his time off to focus and write a majority of the book.

“I wrote the book during one of my hiatuses, although I wrote during and afterwards as well. Sometimes I get up really early in the morning and get in a couple of hours of uninterrupted work before I go to *The Big Bang Theory* or before taking my kids to school. The only drawback is that I go to bed super early. I just try and find the time and not waste too much time when I do have the time,” said Kaplan.

After 20 years of comedy writing, the transition of going from scriptwriter to published non-fiction author has been a unique and fun challenge for Kaplan.

“Writing a book is a bit like talking to an imagined individual friend, almost like talking to myself so the book is much more intimate in that sense. TV is supposed to be performed for a group of people. It’s a little less of a shot in the dark so to speak because I feel like I’m able to take certain risks in a book. I’m writing it alone in my room in the middle of the night and the readers’ reading alone in their room in the middle of the night. There’s a certain kind of riskiness and intimacy. It is a little bit different than when I’m putting on a show, so it just feels different,” said Kaplan.

Fans who enjoy Kaplan’s work can visit his [online blog](#) , which features additional thought provoking and humorous content similar to the book.

“One of the things that I talk about is various kinds of thought experiments; like if you have a machine that’s connected to your brain and if you were to change your brain to any kind of brain that you wanted (e.g. an artist, scientist or warrior etc.) What would you do? Would that experiment teach you anything? Are we, as a civilization,

doing such an experiment in all sorts of different cultures and subcultures? The blog touches on that kind of comedy and philosophy,” said Kaplan.

In addition to his work on *The Big Bang Theory*, Kaplan is currently working on several different projects. At present, he is hoping to bring his first feature length screenplay, *Magical Morons*, to the big screen.

“It’s a tale of two stupid friends who steal a spell book. It’s a little like *The Sorcerers Apprentice*. They get frustrated at the wizard who made them his apprentice. He doesn’t think that they are wise enough for the power of the spells, so they steal the spell book. Of course the wizard turns out to be correct and they get involved in a story which sends them across multiple universes,” said Kaplan.

In addition to his screenplay, his latest projects revolve around thought provoking subject matter and the lives of complex, original characters. The first is about a psychiatry researcher who suspects and tries to discover whether or not he is the subject of a big psychological experiment. He is also playing around with a possible contemporary take on the classic Nathaniel Hawthorn story, “Young Goodman Brown” and a separate story, which focuses on cartoon characters.

“They sort of figure out that they are creations, that can they can have their own programming and redraw themselves and discover the consequences of that,” said Kaplan.

When asked if he could do a cross over between *The Big Bang Theory* and any other show on television, Kaplan came up with an exciting and original idea.

“Blue planet is the best show that I’ve ever seen to show the world the beneath the waves,” said Kaplan.

International Race Car Driver Ali Afshar Starts Production Company

By Erin Coughlin | December 11, 2015 | The Surge

Most people are lucky if they get to pursue a singular dream.

Ali Afshar gets to combine his two gifts and passions every day as both a professional actor and racecar driver. By combining his vast skills both on screen (*Three Kings*, *Godzilla* and *The Siege*, *King of Queens*, *JAG*, and *NCIS*) and on the raceway, Afshar has started to produce entertaining and thought provoking films with his new film production company, **ESX Entertainment**.

“I took a big break from acting when I started racing for Subaru America. I missed the acting world, but I had made so many connections during my racing days that I was in a position where I could make a movie. My love of acting brought me back to acting. My success in the car racing business put me in a position where I had friends who were film financiers,” said Afshar.

While professional acting and racing might at first seem like two unrelated careers, there are many similar correlations between the two industries. Over the years, many actors including Paul Newman, James Dean, and Patrick Dempsey have become well known for enjoying the adrenaline rush of driving on a racecourse and appearing on screen.

“I think it’s just a natural high. It’s not redundant. It’s exciting, entertaining and ever changing – going faster between different roles. Both involve a lot of travel and focus,” said Afshar. “The first couple of movies I did and the one we’re going to do next year with Forrest Lucas are all race car driver movies.”

Afshar started making his own films when his friend Jared Underwood, a film financier, offered to help him make a movie. After Underwood introduced him to a movie producer, Afshar went on to make the hit film, *Born to Race*. Afshar then showed the film to self-made millionaire, Forrest Lucas (founder of Lucas Oil Products, Inc., MAVTV, Lucas Cattle Company, and owner of the naming rights to the Indianapolis Colts’ Stadium, “Lucas Oil Stadium”). In addition to sponsoring 700 race teams worldwide, Lucas became involved with *Born To Race 2* and took on the vital role of both Executive Producer and Chief Financier of ESX Entertainment.

“Lucas is an automotive legend. Mr. Lucas is our inspiration across the board. He’s a true rags to riches story. I was born in Iran and grew up on a ranch in California, so it’s kind of cool to have this (very American) man who I can see eye to eye on a lot of issues,” said Afshar. “He’s a very cool very inspiring man.”

For Afshar, the experience of working with Lucas is enjoyable and inspiring. Despite their differences in location, they are both very collaborative and involved in the day-to-day aspects of production.

“We’re both very involved. If we don’t talk every day, we talk every other day. He (Lucas) reads the script. He gives us notes. He does give me a lot of lead way. I’m pretty much the second in command. He’s a very cool smart and understanding boss,” said Afshar.

ESX Entertainment has successfully produced 5 films in the past 15 months using the same film crew. Their goal is to make and release seven movies in total over three years. Afshar’s traditional producer responsibilities behind and in front of camera often include taking on the role of Executive Producer.

“I’m the one who puts the stories together, approves the script, sometimes helps write the script, hires crew, finds locations and making some executive decisions,” said Afshar.

There are many advantages to working with the same film crew on different productions. Afshar has worked with director Alex Ranarivelo (*Dungeons & Dragons: Wrath of the Dragon God*, *Evasive Action*) on all five films. The key to their successful collaboration is friendship and understanding.

“We’re friends first, so we understand each other. We used to street race together back in the day. I’m an extrovert, he’s an introvert. We click well. He understands what I need and I understand what his needs are, so it’s been a lot easier than trying to bring on a new director. I think once you find a good team, you try stick with it,” said Afshar.

The Wizard is a heartfelt coming of age story about perseverance in the face of adversity. *The Wrong Side of Right* is a social issue drama starring Lea Thompson, James Remar, Allison Paige, and Jayson Blair. Ranarivelo also directed ESX’s original action-packed *Born to Race* and the sequel *Born to Race: Fast Track*.

“We’re deep into the *Protect The Harvest* movie. Protect The Harvest is a non-profit organization that tries to promote the all American way of life. It’s all about educating the

public on farmers and ranchers. Right now the media tends to paint every farmer as a bad person. *Wrong Side Of Right* is about dog breeding. *Pray For Rain* is all about the farming and drought in California,” said Afshar.

Running Wild tells the story of Stella Davis, a widow who saves her ranch by working with convicts to rehabilitate a herd of wild horses that wandered on to her property. Stella must fight prejudice, greed, bureaucracy and vanity – including her own – to finally understand that there is no better remedy to misfortune than helping another living creature.

“I don’t want to do just thrillers or horror films. I want to do movies that are inspirational (non-faith based) in that they have a topic that’s important or socially relevant.” Said Afshar. “The one we just did in April (*The Wizard*) is about my own personal life story and my family’s story of coming to America in the late 1970s and 1980s during the middle of the Iran hostage crisis. It’s about all of that prejudice but perseverance,” said Afshar.

“We’re trying to convey messages in films to help people think for themselves. To not just believe the hype. To listen to and understand what’s going on. To really think for yourself and use your own judgment. Right now, a lot of people are under the false belief that every dog breeder is a puppy mill. That’s not true. We want people to think on their own about the way of American life where American traditions are and appreciate new ones.”

ESX’s dedication to making films, which address relevant social issues and their promising scripts, have attracted the interests of major Hollywood talent including Sharon Stone, Jon Voight, and William Fichtner.

“We’ve gathered really good people. They totally trust their instincts and they would help us elevate every scene. We learned that actors of their caliber wanted to read the scripts. In a certain way, we listen to 80% to 90% of what they had to say. We try to incorporate this because they are educated on the topic,” said Afshar.

The Wrong Side Of Right, *The Wizard*, *Running Wild* and *Pray For Rain* are all due to be released next year. ESX Entertainment is currently in production filming **Dirt**, a racing film to be shot in February and March. The producers are hopeful that **Dirt** will see the same success that similar shows including *Friday Night Lights*, *Limitless* and *Minority Report* have made since taking the leap from big screen to small screen over the past few years.

“It would be *Fast and Furious* meets *21 Jump Street*. I just think it would be fun. We have a lot of sponsors and big brands that are supporting these movies, so we can have a lot of fun with it. That’s why the *Born To Race* movies looks so big – because we have awesome partners,” said Afshar.

Afshar’s advice for working and aspiring filmmakers is both honest and inspiring.

“Do what you know. Do what you love and the stories that you really care about. Put passion first and business second. If you like doing it, you’re passionate and it’s your story/own experience, it will not feel like work. If it doesn’t feel like work, your brain, heart, and soul will be behind it 24/7. Then it will be bigger and better,” said Afshar. “Don’t look at the results. Ask, what would I be doing if no one was paying me and do that – whether it’s film, racing, or something else.”

Winning Filmmakers At Geena Davis' Bentonville Film Festival Are Guaranteed Distribution Deals

By Erin Coughlin | April 27, 2015 | The Surge

This May, Oscar Winning Actress Geena Davis will break new ground in championing for gender equality in the film industry by presenting The First Bentonville Film Festival.

Sponsored by Wal-Mart, Coca-Cola, AMC Theaters and Arc Entertainment, the Arkansas film festival is dedicated to promoting women and diversity in film. It is the first and only film competition in the world to guarantee the winning filmmakers theatrical, television, digital VOD and retail home entertainment distribution. Categories include Jury Selection Award, The Audience Award and Best Family Film. Winners are guaranteed distribution in Wal-Mart stores, online through its instant video demand service, VUDU and a traditional theatrical release on a minimum of 25 screens from AMC Theatres.

“The key for us is to support and champion women and diversity in film, not only on screen or regarding the environment in which it was created in, but also behind the camera. We believe the films will be highly commercial and appealing to a mass audience,” said Trevor Drinkwater, CEO of Arc Entertainment and co-founder of the festival.

Advisory Board members include Angela Bassett, Nick Cannon, Viola Davis, Bruce Dern, Emilio Estevez, Samuel L. Jackson, Randy Jackson, Eva Longoria, Julianne Moore, Paula Patton, Natalie Portman, M. Night Shyamalan and Shailene Woodley.

The festival will open on May 5th with the heartfelt feature premiere of *War Room* by Alex Kendrick and Stephen Kendrick. A free screening of Universal's *Pitch Perfect 2* is set for closing night on May 9th at the AMC Fiesta Square 16 in Fayetteville.

Attendees can look forward to screening the premieres of 75 films ranging from studio films to independent features and documentaries. In addition to the screenings, the festival itinerary will include additional programs designed to offer industry support, mentorship activities and celebrity panel discussions. There will also be free public events and film screenings held in exciting non-traditional venues.

“A lot of the schools, churches, and local businesses have auditoriums, so we were able to find venues that we could convert into pop up theaters in the town. We're pretty excited about how we put this together,” said Drinkwater.

Davis and other festival guests (including *A League Of Their Own* co-star Rosie O'Donnell) will re-create some of the greatest dialogue in the history of cinema. They are also slated to

participate in “In Control of Her Own Destiny,” a panel discussion featuring female celebrities who manage their own successful film production companies.

Robert De Niro and Joey Lauren Adams (*Big Daddy*, *Chasing Amy*) will also headline special panel discussions about the film industry. Iconic actor Bruce Dern (*Nebraska*) will be in attendance to host and present “The Dernsie,” a new feature film screenplay competition. In addition to the award, the winning screenwriter will receive \$1,500 and a potential 18- month option of their script with Kickstart Productions.

Nick Cannon (*America's Got Talent*) and award winning journalist Soledad O'Brien will co- host the festival's star studded closing night awards show, presented by Kraft Foods Group.

As part of the film festival's initiative, events will be held year round at several universities in partnership with the Geena Davis Institute on Gender In Media Studies at Mount St. Mary's College.

The Bentonville Film Festival takes place May 5th – 9th in Bentonville, Arkansas. For more information visit <http://bentonvillefilmfestival.com>.

“Submissions Only”: How These Pro Actors Are Using YouTube To Further Their Career

By Erin Coughlin | August 19, 2015 | The Surge

Thanks to the accessibility of portable, modern production equipment, it is easier than ever for professional actors to create outlets which allow them to showcase their work to a global audience. **Kate Weatherhead** (*Legally Blonde*, *The Musical* and *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*) and **Andrew Keenan-Bolger** (“Crutchie” in the original Broadway show *Newsies*, *The Rewrite* starring Hugh Grant) are two “triple threats” who successfully put their talent and dedication for their craft into creating the hit online series, *Submissions Only*.

While working together at the Dallas Theater Center (*It’s A Bird, It’s a Plane, It’s Superman!*), Weatherhead and Keenan-Bolger developed the idea for *Submissions Only* in the parking lot across the street from the theater.

“We started writing the pilot the next day and finished it about three days after coming back to New York. Filming began about a month later,” said Weatherhead.

With affection and humor, the series depicts the archetypes that exist within the entertainment community. To prevent the show from becoming a vehicle for bitter actors to express their grievances, they focused on representing different perspectives of several different characters, including agents, casting directors, directors, writers.

“We wanted to accurately represent our business, which requires pointing out the absurd – but we never wanted it to feel biting or like there was an undercurrent of resentment,” said Weatherhead. “Having an agent and a casting director at the center of the story, alongside an actor, felt like a great way to do that. From there we asked ourselves, ‘So how are they inextricably linked?’ How can we deepen their relationships so that there are reasons for them to be on-screen together?’ That’s where you get the friendships, the rivalries, and the romantic relationships, both doomed and promising.”

Over the years the crew has played around with a lot of different cameras. Season One was shot on a small camcorder that Keenan-Bolger bought to do video blogs on YouTube. After moving through the Canon family of DSLRs, they settled on shooting using the popular RED camera.

One of the advantages to filming in the New York Metro area include having the opportunity to film in a variety of studios and live locations. After a season of primarily shooting in rehearsal studios, Kate and Andrew were given free access to Pearl Studios, among several gorgeous locations.

“In Season 3 we wanted to diversify our locations; it got very ambitious. My favorite was shooting at 54 below – the color palette there is just gorgeous,” said Weatherhead.

“We’re lucky enough to have a lot of spaces donated by big-time theater people. Tim’s office is actually my manager Jen Namoff’s office. For Steven’s agent’s office, we had space donated to us by Roundabout Theater Company,” said Keenan-Bolger. “I loved shooting the fourth episode of Season 3, where Penny goes apartment hunting and Tim and Steven have an awkward encounter at an artist’s studio in Brooklyn. So much of our show takes place inside the rehearsal and audition room — it was a blast getting to take our characters outdoors.”

The show features a great, diverse cast including well-known TV/stage actors in guest cameo roles. Weatherhead and Keenan-Bolger assembled the talent by reaching out to friends and former colleagues. As the series went on to find more success, they started to extend roles to a larger roster of talent.

“By Season 3, we’d hired casting director Merri Sugarman to help secure talent for our guest stars. We never auditioned anyone. Merri would make lists and we’d re-arrange the names in order of our preference. Then she’d start making calls to see who was available,” said Weatherhead.

For Weatherhead and Keenan-Bolger, working on the show allows them to enjoy numerous rewards.

“Watching actors whom you respect, adore and admire bring the words and characters to life is such a thrill. I loved writing with their voices in my head, and then loved even more watching them exceed my expectations,” said Weatherhead.

“With *Submissions Only*, where we had a huge rotating cast of characters, I got the opportunity to direct actors who I never thought I’d even get the chance to meet.” Said Keenan-Bolger. “There were countless days before a shoot where Kate and I would have to look at each other and be like, “Let’s keep it cool. It’s just Audra McDonald. She put on clothes the same as us this morning.”

Like most Millennials, new technology and social media has played a major role in assisting both Weatherhead and Keenan-Bolger in creating more opportunities for their careers.

“It’s not just having a Twitter profile and tweeting out press releases and episode links — it’s about being a member of an online community and connecting with our fans. So many of our early viewers came because I watched and commented on so many other web series. To have a successful online presence, it can’t just be shouting into a void — it’s engaging with fans and making them feel a part of the process and sometimes being a fan yourself,” said Keenan-Bolger.

Both have an impressive and extensive list of credits in several different mediums. This has not only impacted how they approach each role or medium, but has in unique ways influenced their overall work.

“Everything affects everything else. Now that I’ve worn the writer/director/producer hat on *Submissions Only*, I’m much more respectful and appreciative of the process of creating anything,” said Weatherhead. “So now, if I’m acting in a show, I feel more patient, and more aware of how many pieces go into creating the puzzle of the show. I’m just a small part of it, and my job is to help tell the story – not get the most laughs or be the center of attention.”

“I think they all play a role in how I approach material. As an actor, especially on film, I’m constantly viewing my work through the lens of the director and editor, knowing where you need to leave pauses and avoid overlapping to make clean cuts. As a writer, Kate and I are always acting out the conversations our characters would be having and seeing what feels natural. I think the best way to be objective about your work is to view it from another member of the creative team’s perspective,” said Keenan-Bolger.

In addition to the show, Weatherhead and Keenan-Bolger continue to work on other projects together for both film and print.

“We’re in post-production on a short film that Kate wrote and we co-directed called *The Ceiling Fan*. It’s a beautiful, haunting film, and a real departure for us,” said Keenan-Bolger.

They are also working on the third installment of a series of books for Penguin Young Readers about two middle-school age kids who meet and do theater together. The first book, *Jack & Louisa: Act 1* is on bookshelves now. The second book is scheduled to be released next winter.

“When Kate and I got the book deal, the first thing we did was sit down and share stories about growing up and our relationship with theater. Our backgrounds were very different: Kate had a typical pre-teen life, performing in community theater and school plays, while I was performing on Broadway,” said Keenan-Bolger. “Despite this difference, we realized how similar our passion (obsession?) was and we thought it might make a great framing device — what if a twelve-year-old Kate had met a twelve-year-old Andrew? It’s been such a treat to revisit that period of our childhoods that was so ruled by our musical theater nerd-dom.”

While collaborating with other people on artistic endeavors can often be difficult, Weatherhead and Keenan-Bolger have found their own successful way to work together on projects they both care about.

“The secret is we became collaborators before we became friends. We were buddies working on the play in Dallas, but really didn’t know each other that well. The real friendship grew over years of working together. On *Submissions*

Only we divided and conquered. I would write the episodes; Andrew would shoot and edit them. We would both direct – me working mostly with the actors and Andrew with the crew,” said Weatherhead.

For the book series, Weatherhead and Keenan-Bolger use a more intricate and intimate process.

“The chapters alternate between Jack and Louisa’s perspective. We spend a lot of time together deciding what the story is, what’s going to happen, how it affects our characters, who reveals what information, etc. Even though we’re writing individually, the process is incredibly collaborative,” said Weatherhead.

True artists, both Weatherhead and Keenan-Bolger have taken what he refers to as a “Cone of Silence” in regards to discussing any upcoming performances or gigs that they are involved in at the moment. Anyone interested in their future work is encouraged to follow along on their social media to find out when the news has officially received the green light.

Visit the official *Submissions Only* site.

This Magician Decided To Incorporate An iPad Into His Routine, What He Does With It Will Leave You Speechless

By Erin Coughlin | June 25, 2015 | The Surge

Thanks to modern, mobile technology, visual performers are now able to take their creative passions to new levels. Among the new, groundbreaking performers is Simon Pierro, a talented magician from Germany who has discovered an innovative way to entertain audiences all over the world using his iPad.

Pierro first began to pursue his passionate interest in magic after losing money in a shell game to a street hustler during a family vacation to Manhattan at the age of 15.

“To cheer me up, my sister bought me a magic book containing the explanation of the shell game and some card tricks. Ever since then, I have been fascinated by the art of magic and it has been my passion,” said Pierro.

Here’s just one of Pierro’s mindbending tricks: Like most successful magicians, Pierro found more inspiration from watching the acts of his favorite performers.

“When I just had started, there was a six-episode TV show in Germany called Magic Las Vegas. When I saw Kevin James perform on that show, I was totally thrilled by his style, ideas ... even the music he used. I just became an instant fan. It certainly felt like a dream come true when, twelve years later, I had a chance to work with him as a fellow magician on my own regular television segment,” said Pierro. “My other hero when I was learning about magic was Lance Burton. By watching his show at the Monte Carlo Hotel in Las Vegas, I was able to define how I wanted my own magic to be presented: with intelligence and gentle humor.”

Some of Pierro’s favorite magic acts have been mastered and performed by Penn and Teller and David Copperfield.

“Penn & Teller have such smart humor and deep knowledge of magic techniques, I can’t help but admire their skill and creativity. And then there’s David Copperfield, who created some of the best illusions ever performed in the ’90s (e.g. his Flying Illusion), and he keeps on going with even more astonishing innovations today,” said Pierro. “In general, I love any magic technique that is highly visual and that entertains audiences, no matter if it’s unexplainable or not. Above all, I think the work should be creative and new, showing the audience something they’ve never seen — or even imagined — before.”

In 2008, Pierro created an act called “Interactive Television” where a TV would react to all of his actions. The magician would shake the device and an earthquake would appear inside. He would then tilt it to one corner and the actors would proceed to fall into it. His first successful performance using an iPad occurred in an Apple store in Munich.

“The audience reactions were fantastic and I immediately realized this could be a game changer for my career. I was working for more than a year on the first iPad act before I felt ready to present it to a live audience. When I had the first-generation iPad in my hands, I quickly realized to my delight that I could finally stop lugging a huge TV to all my performances, carrying a sleek iPad instead.”

Some of his more well known interactive magic tricks include pouring milk into an iPad and producing instant photos of the members of his live audience. All of his illusions exhibit elements of modern ingenuity and humor.

“Creating new illusions can result from a story I’d like to tell, new features that are rumored or existing effects I want to combine with the iPad. For example, when I heard the iPad 3 would be slightly heavier than the iPad 2, I thought it would be cool to have an app that makes the tablet lighter. That’s how I came up with the iPad balloon trick.”

What makes his act stand out is his consistent ability to come up with original material that successfully entertains viewers across multiple generations.

“I think my iPad magic caught on because it not only worked for all ages — literally from 3- 99 — but also for any audience, almost anywhere in the world. I think its visual appeal is so strong because it crosses the divide between the digital world and reality. It helps that iPads have become such familiar household objects to so many people. Nearly everyone has held an iPad in their hands at least once.”

Of course it is only natural that certain countries or audiences call for or favor particular tricks over others. Different locations and cultural standards allow Pierro to discover new, exciting ways to alter his act in order to entertain a global audience.

“In some countries such as Kuwait, where alcohol is prohibited by law, I simply pour milk out of my iPad instead of beer. Also for my clients, I try to create special customizations that perfectly fit their businesses. The best examples can be seen online when I created viral videos for LEGO and Angry Birds, pulling big bricks out of the screen or shooting little birds with a virtual slingshot.”

Over the past few years, his hard work has allowed him to tour new, exciting places and venues. One of his most memorable and significant experiences includes being invited to perform his act live on The Ellen DeGeneres Show in Los Angeles.

“It was such a thrill to meet Ellen and her audience was so enthusiastic! Best of all was the enormous national TV audience and online fan base Ellen commands. Her staff placed a video of my performance on her show onto YouTube and it just passed the 10-million-views mark. That meant a lot to me.”

In addition to his recent appearance on national television in Jakarta, Indonesia, Pierro has started developing new tricks using the Apple iWatch.

“I’m continuously developing new tricks and incorporating different devices into my show. For instance, I’ve created lots of new tricks for the Apple Watch in the past several weeks, and I plan to do more. I’m expanding into other brands of tablets and smart watches and screens of all kinds, as well as incorporating virtual reality and 3D printing into my act. I think there’s a big future in digital magic, and I’m looking into every aspect of it, so expect to see me doing lots of new illusions in the coming weeks and months.”

Fans can watch him make an upcoming appearance on The CW Network’s show, *Penn & Teller: Fool Us* and the new street magic show *Don’t Blink* on the Pop TV Network, which is part of CBS. Premiering this summer, *Don’t Blink* takes viewers inside the world of underground street magicians as they perform incredible tricks for the public and celebrity guests.

“As a kid I had this dream of being a world-renowned magician, following the paths of my idols. And I guess I’m on my way there. So if I can inspire young people to believe in themselves and their vision, then this would be a nice extra to add to the fact that I am already doing what I love ... every single day.”

“Being Pulled On Stage w/ Prince In Front of 20,000 People Including Beyonce & Jay-Z, Was Mind Blowing...”

By Erin Coughlin | August 20, 2015 | The Surge

Many musicians aspire to reach new audiences all over the world and find opportunities to perform alongside their favorite music icons. Over the past few years, singer/songwriter Gina Cutillo has had the great fortune of having her original electronic pop rock sound featured on every available major media outlet and has enjoyed collaborating with some of the top players in the contemporary music industry.

Her music has been featured in several popular commercials (Hyundai) and television programs (*Degrassi*, *Oprah*, David Foster's *Star Tomorrow*) across all major US networks including MLB, NBC, VH1, MTV, and The Food Network. Movie buffs will also recognize her music from several mainstream films including *Mean Girls 2* and the foreign film, *Fack ju Göhte*.

From an early age, Cutillo knew that she wanted to pursue a career in music.

“I grew up with music being a very important part of our family. My mother was a great vocalist. We were always singing in my house and listening to all the greats,” said Cutillo.

Early influences include various rock and jazz artists including Madonna, Michael Jackson, Nirvana, PJ Harvey, Etta James, The Supremes, and Patsy Cline. While Cutillo doesn't set out to express any particular message to her audience like Neil Young or Bob Dylan do, she does enjoy playing with lyrics and asking listeners to think of the dualities that exist in life and love.

“If I can make people feel any sort of emotion while listening to my songs, then I'm doing my job,” said Cutillo.

Over the years, her songwriting has evolved to reflect and incorporate both personal and professional aspects of her every day life. Cutillo's inspiration for most of her music stems from her surroundings, her own life or the relatable experiences of close friends.

“There's always up and downs. You can only truly appreciate the highs in life by experiencing the lows. Life isn't meant to always be a high. Some of my best work has come out of being in that low place. I guess you need to know how to take that low and make it productive. I believe we should all try being good to one another because in the end, positive energies, and good deeds will create the best highs. The universe loves to give back what it gets,” said Cutillo.

Unlike many other contemporary artists who release whole albums at once, Cutillo records an album while simultaneously completing and releasing individual songs. Her music is frequently featured on several popular television shows and commercials.

“ReverbNation garnered my big break with licensing. I submitted my music on the Opportunities section of their official website. Reverb partnered with APM to find artists like myself to submit for licensing. The VP of APM received my album, *The Lover* and loved it. It was all uphill from there,” said Cutillo.

In recent years, her music has become available on every major digital outlet including iTunes, Spotify, Pandora, and Amazon. Her most recent accomplishments include releasing a new 2-song EP on iTunes and fulfilling her goal to record new music with a big time producer. One of the tracks called “The Inside” was recorded and written with the assistance of Pete Nappi, a successful producer known for his work at Arthouse Entertainment. Nappi is also known in the industry for laying down tracks with Ke\$ha, Shinedown, and Meghan Trainor.

In addition to recording music with several prominent producers, Cutillo has had the great opportunity to perform live at many different venues all over the country alongside several world famous musicians including Katy Perry and Prince.

“Performing on Warped Tour with Katy Perry, Paramore, and Gym Class Heroes was one of my favorites. Being pulled on stage with Prince in front of 20,000 people that included Beyonce & Jay-Z, was mind blowing. I love to perform and most places I have played have been great,” said Cutillo.

Her favorite venues also include 89 North in Patchogue, New York and the Dewey Beach Music Conference every September.

“Some of the best bands play at this conference. Atlanta is one of these cities that are totally up for a good time. They nurture original acts,” said Cutillo.

By having her music featured on television while performing for a live audience, Cutillo has found both experiences rewarding in different ways.

“Hearing my music on television is pretty surreal. I will be watching something and start humming along to the music, when I realize that it’s me. It’s the best feeling in the world. Live performance is something I absolutely love. It’s physical and emotional. It’s great meeting people that dig your music. The best reward is when listeners explain how my songs made them feel good or helped them get through something. My songs are pretty energetic, so I also get people who love working out to my music. I once had to lock myself in a port-a-potty because a hundred 13 year olds were chasing me. That was scary and exhilarating all at once. I always wondered what they would have done to me if they had gotten a hold of me,” said Cutillo.

She also recently enjoyed filming music videos with directors Jeff Hersh (“Remember You”) and Peter Tedone (“So Easy” & “Fly (Feel Love Tonight)”), two close friends who are independent filmmakers on the East and West coast.

“I love the landscape in ‘Fly (Feel Love Tonight).’ We shot it on a rooftop in Brooklyn with the New York City skyline in the background. It’s one of my favorite songs that I’ve written,” said Cutillo.

While Cutillo continues to live in the New York City area, she frequently travels to Los Angeles to collaborate on new projects and promote her music. When asked about dividing her work between locations, Cutillo admits that there is little difference between working on the East Coast versus the L.A. music scene.

“I’m not sure because I never lived in LA so I don’t know how it is to be an artist out there. I think living in any big city is difficult to get noticed. I do a lot of business in LA. I love it there. I think East Coast and West Coast just have different sounds,” said Cutillo.

Moving forward, Cutillo is looking to work with Lady Gaga on her new album. In addition to getting featured on iTunes, she hopes that one of her new singles will be featured on an upcoming episode of the hit E! show, *The Royals*, after meeting with show creator Mark Schwahn at a recent cast party.

“I’m proud of all the work I do as it’s all part of my growth as an artist,” said Cutillo.

Nomorobo The Digital Batman Startup

By Erin Coughlin | December 8, 2015 | The Surge

Start up developer Aaron Foss has unexpectedly become a digital Batman – protecting people from an overwhelming, frustrating amount of scam artists and unsolicited calls with his new venture, **Nomorobo**.

“I just had a very creative solution to a big problem that everyone told me was getting worse,” said Foss.

By garnering years of previous experience with five other start-ups, the Long Island native has found unexpected nationwide success and the ability to apply important knowledge to the constantly evolving development of Nomorobo.

“It’s really cool because a lot of the stuff I learned in those other businesses, I am now able to apply to Nomorobo. You work hard enough and over and over again – after about 15 years, you’ll be an overnight success,” said Foss.

Among the list of Foss’s previous start-ups is Side Tour, which unites travelers with local guides who have an interesting, in depth knowledge in the area of their choosing. Groupon acquired Side Tour in 2013. Foss teaches entrepreneurship to undergrads and adult entrepreneurs at Malloy College. He has also developed Smart Chemo, software for pediatric oncologists that makes it easier for them to write orders for patients, and Wing Dippers, a smashed clover shaped cup perfect for dipping Buffalo wings.

“I’ve always been a freelance developer. Since I’m a programmer and I always love solving interesting problems, those are two things I let people come to me for,” said Foss.

After realizing that neither invention was solving a big enough problem, Foss put all of his energy into developing Nomorobo. Foss’ idea for Nomorobo came about when The Federal Communications Commission created a competition offering \$50,000 to anyone who could come up with a helpful way to help put an end to the growing, nationwide problem. In April of 2012, Foss was announced one of the two official winners of The FCC competition. Foss then used the \$25,000 dollar winnings as seed money to build up Nomorobo.

Using Nomorobo is just as easy as sending a text or posting a tweet. To block robo calls, simply visit the site and enter your phone number. It is a free service currently available for landlines and is compatible/available to cable company subscribers of Optimum, Comcast, AT&T and more. At present, he is hard at work on developing a mobile version, which he hopes will be available to everyone by the end of the year.

Since the creation of Nomorobo, Foss has played an active part in advocating the benefits of the program to phone carriers.

“The reason it’s only available on land lines right now is because I need the cooperation of the carriers. In their defense, until July 10, the rules from The FCC were ambiguous. According to The FCC, they had to complete every call. They couldn’t stop calls but that was more on an anti-competitive level. For example, AT&T couldn’t stop calls coming from the Verizon network. It was never really meant to block calls, so based on advocating on my end, The FCC finally said carriers it’s totally cool if your customers want Nomorobo. So it’s actually been a very cool to be a part of,” said Foss.

In July of 2012, he was asked to testify in front of a Senate subcommittee hearing, appearing as an expert witness to explain to the phone carriers the many advantages of his program. In October of 2013, he launched the public version of the website. Today over 350,000 users have signed up. So far it has successfully blocked over 40 million robo calls, proving that it works. Now because of available stats, he is able to show how it works to both phone carriers. He’s also appeared on an SEC panel to show how it works and has gained a lot of credibility in the phone fraud spectrum. Since then, carriers have started reaching out to him to talk about how they can build this into their system.

“Since the early days of Graham Bell, the most important thing has been focusing on that the call gets connected. Now, it’s about stopping them,” said Foss.

Nomorobo saves innocent people of all ages from being scammed out of their money. According to his data, 40% of all calls are robo calls or scams. Common phone scams include the classic “Grandparent Scam” where someone calls up pretending to be a grandchild in need of financial assistance. Another popular scam involves someone claiming to be a member of the I.R.S. The person on the phone threatens to arrest you unless you send them money.

“The ones that I hate are the ones that take advantage of the elderly. They are a huge and annoying problem,” said Foss.

Contrary to popular belief, modern day phone scams are not just targeting senior citizens. While most Millennials no longer have landlines, they still have to be cautious of scams and robo calls that get through on their mobile devices.

“Right now I only have data on land lines but I’ve been hearing from more people that it’s moving to the cell phones. It’s so cheap for them to blast phone numbers with robo calls that it doesn’t matter whether it’s a landline or mobile line. The reward (for scammers) is huge and the risk is very low.”

There are two scams Millennials should be aware of. The first are calls from fake debt collectors claiming that you have an outstanding debt and that if you don’t pay them, your credit is going to be revoked. The more troublesome scam involves refinancing student loans.

“That’s a really big problem. They call up and fish for information to get people nervous and to pay them money.”

Until the mobile version of Nomorobo becomes available, the only good advice that the FCC has to offer is for people to simply ignore incoming calls they do not recognize.

“It’s important, especially in a business setting when you don’t know who’s going to be calling you. It gives me the confidence to answer the call when I don’t know who it is,” said Foss.

Foss has spent the past two years focusing all of his physical and mental energy on improving Nomorobo. According to Foss, Nomorobo detects and tracks 300 new numbers every day.

“For some reason robo calls are mostly a unique, US-based problem, however it is starting to creep into Canada and the UK,” said Foss.

Because there are certain phone calls and warnings that need to get through (e.g. pharmacy calls, tornado warnings etc.) the algorithm over time has gotten smart enough to recognize these numbers and let them get through.

“It’s my job to make sure that the bad calls stay away and the good ones get through for hundreds of thousands of people. With great power comes great responsibility,” said Foss. “I take that part of my job and customer service very seriously.”

Part of the job that Foss enjoys is hearing from satisfied customers and helping them to get the most out of the program by providing them with excellent customer support.

“I get multiple unsolicited emails every single day thanking me,” said Foss.

“Nomorobo works 24/7. It doesn’t matter where I am or what I’m doing, the software that I wrote once is now working, looking and analyzing one million calls a month,” said Foss. “It’s all about crafting an idea to fulfill a need.”

Back in March, Foss auditioned for the hit show *Shark Tank* in New York City. The most grueling part involved in auditioning for the show was perfecting an attention grabbing pitch and spending hours waiting in line.

“A two minute pitch is really tough because you have to jam two years of your life into two minutes. Editing takes so long as does refining and figuring out what you can toss overboard,” said Foss

Foss generously shares a few words of advice for aspiring entrepreneurs and inventors.

“When I work with entrepreneurs, I tell them it’s so important to get your message down clearly and succinctly because nobody’s paying attention. You just need to get something that hooks. You want to have a dialogue,” said Foss.

“When you have product market fit and you’re not pushing and pushing, then it becomes

much easier to go and talk about your business. What’s going on, what is the growth and what problems you have solved. Don’t try to solve twelve different things. You want to do one thing so small and so idiotically good,” said Foss.

Shark Tank notified Foss that the producers passed on his pitch due to their need to meet and fill certain quotas for consumer products, college inventors etc. for the current season. However, they strongly encouraged him to apply again this upcoming March.

You can sign up to use Nomorobo [here](#).

New Thriller, *Fragile Storm*, Brings Social Awareness To Younger Audience

By Erin Coughlin | September 17, 2014 | The Surge

At first glance, *Fragile Storm* is a raw, edgy in your face dual perspective thriller about a young woman being held captive in the home of a much older man. But beneath this tense indie film lies a story which, at its core, breaks new ground in addressing and representing the devastating aspects of Alzheimer's.

Fragile Storm is the previous winner of the First Annual Palm Street Film Festival Contest, founded by Los Angeles based producer and director Dawn Fields. Across the country, screenwriters were encouraged to write and submit a 5-10 page screenplay, which could be filmed over the course of one weekend. Out of the 300 submissions, Carly Street's short was selected as the winner.

"There needs to be a film like this." Fields commented. According to the director, "Everyone involved feels so strongly about this subject matter, they are determined to get it made."

One way the filmmakers hope to intrigue younger viewers is by casting a twenty-something lead actress, instead of the expected hiring of more senior performers.

By doing this they hope to increase the younger generation's awareness. "This is a real tragedy that people are dealing with every day."

In some cases, younger people have been handed down the responsibility of taking care of not only their own parents, but also grandparents and other family members also suffering from Alzheimer's.

"What this film does is show the other side — the horror and devastation inflicted on the care giver. The person who is ill usually isn't aware of it" said Fields. "They don't have the option to forget."

Storm doesn't just bring awareness to both perspectives, but emphasizes and provides insight into the struggle of the caregiver. While the script originally called for several shooting locations, the production team and screenwriter agreed the film should take place in one key location, which would make the film more concentrated and intense.

While the film has been in development for 2 years, Fields has spent the last year directing 5 other short films in preparation for tackling the intense and evocative narrative. She is now applying for grants and appealing to the interest of philanthropic groups to raise money for the production budget. Fans of previous Palm Street Films will also be able to show their support by participating in a 21-day crowd-funding campaign.

Fields hopes to begin filming by the last weekend in September so that the release of the completed film will coincide with Alzheimer's Awareness month in October. While the film is scheduled to have an official world premiere and be screened at various film festivals, the filmmaker's aim to use online screening platforms as a more productive means of raising awareness to an even larger audience of viewers.

For more information, you can visit [FragileStormFilm](#) on Facebook or the [Palm Street Films website](#).

Muse Of Fire Filmmakers Create An Accessible Master Class On Shakespeare

By Erin Coughlin | September 18, 2014 | The Surge

For many people, understanding Shakespeare can be overwhelming. Over the past 6 years, London based actors Dan Poole and Giles Terera have set out on their own labor of love to demystify Shakespeare with their new documentary, *Muse Of Fire*.

Like many students and adults, Mr. Poole and Mr. Terera once found the bard very intimidating. The release of Baz Luhrmans's hip, kinetic version of Romeo and Juliet changed all of that. "It was a more freeing idea of what Shakespeare was," said Poole.

Muse of Fire is a master class for students, the general public and performers all over the world. With a self-funded budget of £100,000 Dan and Giles traveled from the U.K. to Denmark, Germany and the United States.

Over the course of filming, the documentary became a personal journey for the filmmakers, as they set out to find common ground with others and understand a writer whose work continues to be poignant after 400 years. For anyone who believed that they were alone in feeling overwhelmed by his writings, this film shows that they are not alone.

On their own, they produced and conducted interviews with many successful Hollywood actors who regularly return to performing Shakespeare on stage and screen. Among the many well-known performers interviewed are Jude Law, Baz Luhrmann, Tom Hiddleston, Ian McKellan, and Judi Dench.

By having a limited crew, they were able to converse with their subjects in a more comfortable manner.

"The intimate film crew made it very personal and helped form a bond of understanding," said Poole.

Both filmmakers agreed that to hear these actors discuss their life's work about something that they are still passionate about and value is inspiring.

"The film shows them (the actors) being candid and honest," said Terera.

Another stand-out achievement of the documentary is the filmmakers' interviews with individuals whose lives have been changed by Shakespeare. One of the films' subjects includes a former prison inmate who discusses how Shakespeare saved his life.

Within the next two months, over one hundred of the interviews will be available on The Globe Theater's Website for viewing online. While some interviews are 20 minutes long, the site will also feature interviews as long as 2 hours for free. To stay up-to-date regarding the documentary and release availability, you can follow the film on [Facebook](#) or their website www.shakespearefilm.com.

To listen to our full in-depth interview with the filmmakers, visit the Reviews and Commentaries page at www.thegalabout.com.

*****This entire audio interview is also now, as of January 2021, available via Sound Cloud and YouTube. Links are available via www.ecoughlin.com.**

Michal Sinnott of *Every. Drop. Counts.* And *Grand Theft Auto* Actress Captures Unique Characters

By Erin Coughlin | October 16, 2014 | The Surge

With her successful performances in the online web series *Every. Drop. Counts.* and as the voice of Tracey De Santa in hit video game *Grand Theft Auto V*, actress Michal Sinnott is an actress to keep an eye on. I was recently able to sit down to discuss her amazing new projects and her approach to capturing each unique role.

ERIN COUGHLIN: How is your involvement and role in *Every. Drop. Counts.* unique when compared to your previous projects?

MICHAL SINNOTT: This project was unique in a lot of ways. It was the first time I was working on a live set, where we were shooting in the midst of a real horror convention, so the pressure was really on to get it right in the first or second take because the backdrop was always changing, sometimes vendors weren't too keen on what we were up to, and even the hotel where we shot was sometimes vacillating between whether or not it was okay to be shooting at any given moment.

I specialize in girls with issues. I play the 'hot mess.' So in that respect, the role was similar, but the variables of this specific character were entirely unique. Scott was great because he gave all of us a lot of room to flesh out who these people on the page were.

You don't always get that luxury in bigger studio projects where you come to the project with all the other elements already taken care of. I had a huge hand in designing my costume and even in bringing an actual roller derby team to the project, my honorary team, the Shore Points Roller Derby. A number of their members are featured in the series and they were amazingly supportive and informative about what it means to be a derby girl.

EC: You have a well-rounded, diverse list of credits. Do you approach each project or role differently depending on the medium it is presented in? How do you approach such work?

MS: I think there's always a little nuance on how you approach a role depending on the medium and project but I definitely have a way of working. First and foremost, I like to get the lines out of the way and know them well enough that they're almost secondary so they can flow out of me without having to think about them no matter what gets thrown at me. I memorize them flat without emotion or meaning added so that I can deliver them any way I choose in the moment. Research is very important. The more time I have before shooting the better so that I can know the circumstances and facts about the character and the world they inhabit. I want time to break down a script and find the motivation for the character in any given scene. Once you do the work you can be free to riff on it the same way that a jazz musician might riff on a song with the rest of the players when he's playing a song he knows with a new group of musicians for the very first time.

EC: Immersion is obviously an important part of your process. Do you ever take your role off set for inspiration?

MS: Costume is also really important to me. If I can, I try and spend at least one day out in public as that person. I head out alone, in costume and go places that the character would inhabit. As a result, the world gets to play up against this person. It naturally teaches me things about the character and provides grounding for my work on set.

When I was playing Wendy (*Every. Drop. Counts.*), I took Wendy on a date to the Jersey Shore one day. At a red light a woman in the car next to me hit me. She made me roll

down my window and asked for Wendy's number. That would never have happened to Michal. I was really proud of myself because I felt like I'd tapped into Wendy's energy enough that I was radiating her energy strong enough to be approached by a stranger.

EC: You provided the voice of Tracey De Santa in the popular game *Grand Theft Auto V*. Can you tell me a little about that role and your experience?

MS: Working on *GTAV* was a great experience. I shot that on and off for three years, so I had a lot of time to get to know Tracey De Santa. It's actually way beyond voice acting.

The work we were doing was performance capture. So it's the same technology as *Avatar*, where you wear the suits with the balls and you act in a sound stage with the other actors in the scene. The sound stage has 36 cameras that correspond to the balls on your suit and pick up your movement. Eventually, with the help of the graphic artists and technicians, those movements get transformed into a cartoon version of yourself. You can't see it as much in the cut scenes, but if you play the game and go into Tracey's room, the character looks eerily like me, only with far bigger boobs and a lot more angry attitude. It's a head-trip.

We shoot with helmets on our head that have cameras on them so it picks up each of our facial gestures as we shoot. And we have voice packs on our waist that pick up our voices.

Sometimes we have to go back and redo dialogue the same way you do in a movie where there's looping. The experience is sort of an amalgam of a green screen studio film, the wide shot feel of a soap opera, and the theatricality of a play. It was a blast to work on because of the audacity of the characters. They're all such awful people but they're a satire on the worst of America so there's a humor and heightened awareness underneath the moral depravity, which I think people really connected to.

EC: You seem to be busy with so many fascinating projects at the moment. Do you have anything new, in particular, that you are excited about?

MS: I'm in the final rewrites of a passion project, a feature film that I co-wrote and will star in called *Born That Way*. A few years back it was a Finalist in the Sundance Screenwriters Lab, but I'm expanding the plot now. I am really looking forward to soon attaching a strong director to the project. I'm also writing a dark comedy in the vein of *Sideways* for my dad.

Location Scout Discusses Setting The Scene For The Blacklist And Law And Order

By Erin Coughlin | September 15, 2015 | The Surge

While many modern audiences celebrate their favorite actors and directors, it is also important to acknowledge and appreciate the often overlooked crew members working behind the scenes of our favorite films and shows. One of the most important and underrated jobs in film production includes the role of a location manager and location scout.

Over the past twenty plus years, Shannon Bowen Causey has enjoyed working on commercials, television shows, and movies of all budgets. She has also worked as a scout for many hit New York-based television shows including *Law and Order: SVU*, *Elementary*, and *Gotham*. She currently works as a scout on NBC's *The Blacklist* and VH-1's new film, *The Breaks*. Her film credits also include experience working with popular directors/actors Steve Buscemi, Stanley Tucci, and Tim Matheson.

At age 21, Causey moved to New York City to become an actress. After 8 years of waiting tables, she decided to go back to school and study film at Columbia College in Chicago. Following an internship at The Chicago Film Office, she started finding success by developing credits working on various sets.

For those unfamiliar with film or television production, there is a notable difference between taking on the responsibility of working as a location manager and location scout.

“The location manager works very closely with the production designer and the director to interpret the look of the project. The location manager then explains what the key elements for the locations are. The location scout goes out and scouts the location,” said Causey.

Unlike actors, producers, writers, and directors, location scouts do not belong to any official union. At present, this is a subject that is of great concern to location scouts in the industry.

“Location scouts as a whole are trying to unionize. We are one of the only departments in film that's not union,” said Causey.

“I'm in the Directors Guild of America because of my history of managing, but most scouts are not and my scouting work doesn't apply to the DGA. This is a big deal for a lot of us.”

Causey notes that there are many challenging and rewarding aspects to her work. One of the biggest challenges is time management.

“I love what I do but it's often hard to balance career, family and time to take care of myself. A big problem for a lot of people who work in film is making sure that we eat right and get enough exercise. For me, I am in my car a lot and sometimes it's impossible to eat well. I try to pack a lunch and remember to stretch,” said Causey.

“The most rewarding part (and sometimes the most challenging part) is the people. I have met a lot of really wonderful people over the years and some not so wonderful. But I love it when I can give money to a church or organization that really needs the funds,” said Causey.

One of the key responsibilities of working as a location scout involves obtaining information, maintaining an ability to engage people in a professional manner and always being prepared to productively handle unexpected situations.

“I am the first person the public meets so I need to represent myself appropriately, but also when I am on site, making sure that I find out about any potential issues that may come up — like truck deliveries, construction, etc. I also have to make sure that when I show a location, I show it in a pleasing light so that the creative team knows why

I took pictures of it. I also have to be honest. If a ceiling is too low or the owner is going to be hard to deal with, these are all things that need to be noted,” said Causey.

“As a manager, it’s getting the agreements and permits in place in a timely manner.”

While many crew members spend most of their time in an office or on set, modern technology is enabling more filmmakers to work from locations all over the world. They no longer need to check in daily at a production office.

One thing that most people find surprising about her work is that Causey is able to scout locations from the comfort of her own apartment. “As a scout, a lot of my time is spent alone. These days, we do a lot of interaction via email and text. Even when I am managing, unless there is a creative scout going, most of my interaction is done via computer,” said Causey.

“A funny thing my husband always says is that his wife makes big money and doesn’t leave the bedroom! This is in reference to when I am working on commercials. More often than not, the window of time I have is so short that all I can do is pull files from my database. And my Brooklyn apartment is so small that most often I work in the bedroom which is the biggest room with the best light.”

“I get up in the morning, drink a few cups of coffee, and make a few appointments for the day. I generally only scout for 3-5 hours, but I work a 12-hour day. The majority of my day is spent either getting/making appointments or after I am done scouting, putting my photos together in a logical manner.”

Working as a scout also enables Causey to work alongside a wide variety of stars and celebrities. Such stars include Gene Simmons (*The Apprentice, Third Watch*) and Mariska Hargitay (*Law and Order: Special Victims Unit*).

“One of my favorite pastimes when I am not working is to knit. One night on the set of *SVU*, one of the wardrobe ladies showed Mariska a cowl that I had made. Mariska commented that it was lovely and that she wished she could knit like that. I have always really respected Mariska as a role model for women and it was a proud moment for me, as a knitter,” said Causey.

After working as a location manager for many years, Causey was unexpectedly diagnosed with breast cancer in 2010.

“Up until that point, I had been location managing a lot, but I couldn’t really work during treatment. It’s less stressful and it also gave me a little more flexibility in terms of making doctor’s appointments when I needed to,” said Causey.

Causey continues to work as a scout for many popular film and television productions. The flexibility of her schedule allows her to enjoy her personal life more than a typical 9 to 5 job.

“I’m also able to be home with my husband more, and I have more time with my animals,” said Causey.

For Causey, success means having the ability to find regular work in the constantly shifting and evolving entertainment industry.

“It changes all the time, but I think the big thing for me right now is that I never really have to look for work. I have been freelancing for many years now as a location scout, and for the most part the work comes to me. I also only work for people I like. I have turned down jobs because I thought that they wouldn’t be the right fit for me. I try to only work for people who respect me and respect my experience. “Please” and “Thank You” go a long way with me.”

Indie Electronic Band Faded Paper Figures On Collaborating

By Erin Coughlin | June 23, 2015 | The Surge

Faded Paper Figures is a successful, award-winning indie-electronic band with an inspiring story. The trio, comprised of three close friends living on separate coasts proves that neither distance nor full-time careers have come between pursuing their musical ambitions.

Heather Alden is busy working as a medical resident after graduating from medical school and John Williams is a full-time professor of English at Yale University and a newly published author. Kael Alden writes music for a production company in Los Angeles called Robot Repair.

The trio has been successfully collaborating on their love of music since meeting in 2005. Their signature sound including electronic beats, gorgeous guitar riffs and beautiful harmonies has accelerated full force into a brave new world of sitars, analog synths and intense vocals.

“Perhaps one reason we’ve been able to collaborate so well together is that none of us necessarily feel like the band entirely defines who we are. We each have our own interests and careers outside the band, even though we genuinely love making music together. It also helps that none of us are so ego-driven that we don’t listen to different ideas.” Said Faded Paper Figures.

The band’s musical influences stretch out over several decades, from their early days of soaking up indie music (Depeche Mode, New Order, The Smiths, Radiohead, etc.) to more contemporary acts (St. Vincent, Pinback, Phantogram, Big Black Delta). After collaborating for some time, their music has not only evolved, but it reflects and incorporates many aspects of both their personal and professional lives.

“Lyrically, almost every FPF song has some origin in one of John’s academic research projects (inflected, of course, by a number of personal convictions and evolutions as well), but there’s also the fact that, musically, Kael spends most of his days writing music for other people or organizations (TV, film, etc.). So when it comes time to write for FPF, he’s eager to do something more freeing and exciting than is allowed for when one is simply writing for an already-defined project. What it means in the end is that we abhor clichés, both lyrically and musically, but also want all of our songs to appeal to a wide audience and evoke intense (even primal, archetypical) feelings,” said Faded Paper Figures.

Despite that Heather and Kael live in California while John resides in Connecticut, all three members continue to regularly collaborate on writing and producing new, original music. By using online video chat software and email, the trio has produced several albums, videos and remixes.

“Our songwriting process is not easy and involves a lot of time and effort, even if the way it all comes together feels (even to us at times) wholly magical. Part of the long-distance nature of our songwriting means that there’s a natural incubation time for each song as it’s evolving. We don’t just write a bunch of songs in a garage somewhere, practice them and then finally record them one weekend in a studio. They’re more like research or startup projects that develop in back-and-forth conversations, moving through different tensions and desires, endlessly revising, until we’re all happy with the result.”

One of the memorable characteristic fans admire about the band is their ability to successfully work full time jobs and still pursue their musical interests. While many other bands struggle to maintain both their friendship and musical ambitions, Heather, John, and Kael have figured out the key to reaching their goals together.

“There’s a lot of patience, hard work and luck involved in both realms, and we feel really happy to have had success in those areas. But part of it is being realistic about what ‘success’ looks like and being happy with what you’ve got while still striving for more. None of our albums have gone platinum and we’d certainly be happy with a Grammy, but part of having our own life careers (and relationships) has meant accepting that we’re not going to be on the road for months at a time and most likely won’t be huge rock stars on that level,” said Williams. “Honestly, though, we’re

not convinced that the singular chaos of an endless tour through festivals and hotel rooms is conducive to the kind of decades-long career in music (and academia and music production, and medicine) that the three of us are shooting for. We burn and rage inside (and some of that comes out in the music), but we're smart enough to know you've got to be Zen about a lot of it to make it work."

Their most recent album, "Relics" reflects the band's effort to combine all of the ways that they have musically evolved over the years.

"We wanted it to sound both intimate and epic, so there's moments of intense (even melancholy) contemplation as well as moments of shout-out-loud joyousness. Lyrically, "Relics" was also something of an evolution, perhaps in ways that don't immediately register for the casual listener, but it's fair to say we're more honest and intrepid than we'd been before—which coincided with evolutions in our own lives as well."

A few projects on the horizon that fans can look forward to include a new video and an EP of remixes. The band is already tossing ideas around for a fifth album within the next two or three years. Their music has also been featured in several films and television programs, including *Grey's Anatomy*.

In regard to other creative projects or going on tour again, the band members are optimistic about their future making music together.

"We feel like we're still only just getting started. Who knows where we'll be five years down the road — hopefully, playing to generous crowds and still writing music."

Visit their [website](#).

How Movie Buffs Can Help Finish Orson Welles' Last Film

By Erin Coughlin | June 29, 2015 | The Surge

Rebel. Genius. Ground breaking indie filmmaker. Many cinephiles know legendary director Orson Welles for making some of Hollywood's top classic films (*Citizen Kane*, *Touch of Evil*). Now, film enthusiasts of all ages have the rare opportunity to contribute to film history by participating in an online campaign to help finish his final – and unfinished – masterpiece, *The Other Side Of The Wind*.

“Orson was the quintessential indie filmmaker. A true, true maverick, but he struggled to find financing throughout his career. More often than not, he'd take on acting gigs or endorsement deals to finance his art. And he wasn't a prodigious filmmaker, so each one of his films is particularly important,” said Filip Jan Rymysza.

Rymysza, one of the executive producers who has been working on the project for the past 6 years, has expressed that 2015 is the perfect time to finish the late iconic director's final masterpiece.

“2015 marks Orson's centenary. What better way to honor him and his place in cinema history than to complete his last film. It's the perfect “thank you” and 100th birthday present.”

For many filmmakers, the film addresses numerous issues that are just as prominent today as they were during Welles' time when he started it 45 years ago. The film was originally shot on a combination of 35mm, 60 mm, and 8 millimeter formats in both color and black- and-white. The film stars Hollywood's legendary director/actor John Houston as a determined but struggling filmmaker.

“The project started and ended with Orson. He began shooting in 1970 and its' status remained largely unchanged since his death in 1985, until now. Director Peter (Bogdanovich) acted in the film, was around when Orson was editing it and is now consulting on the completion,” said Rymysza.

The project has also attracted the attention and support of famous modern day filmmakers including Brett Ratner, Wes Anderson, J.J. Abrams, Clint Eastwood, Jason Reitman, Noah Baumbach, and Edgar Wright.

“This is film history. It's the most famous film never released and there will never be another one like it,” said Rymysza.

As a filmmaker who often encountered difficulties in raising money for his projects, it is easy to believe that Welles would have embraced the accessibility of modern crowd funding websites. The producers are now using IndieGoGo to raise funds to finish the film.

After Welles finished filming the project, the original negative prints remained untouched, locked away in an official vault.

Since purchasing the rights to the negatives, the team behind the IndieGoGo campaign has faced a few challenges in finalizing the film for public screening. Such tasks include scanning the original negatives into digital media formats, editing the film based on Welles' personal notes, restoring the film's color correction, producing a professional score and finding traditional distribution once the project is complete.

Over the years the campaign has created a worldwide community, gaining the additional support of both hard-core cinephiles and new movie enthusiasts just discovering Welles' cinematic brilliance for the first time.

“We wanted to build a community and involve Orson's fans, film fans and, even more broadly, art fans,” said Rymysza.

Film enthusiasts still have time to visit the campaign's official page and make a contribution of their choice towards the project by selecting from over a dozen available donation tiers.

“The time is now! We started with a \$2,000,000 goal, but we managed to cut that in half. We have a financier willing to match us at \$1,000,000, but we still have a way to go. We can only do this with your help!” said Rymza.

For additional information visit the [Indiegogo page](#).

How Ryan Britt Went From Freelancer To Published Sci-Fi Guru

By Erin Coughlin | November 24, 2015 | The Surge

By embracing his love of all things science fiction and fantasy, New York based writer Ryan Britt has successfully transitioned from freelance writer to mainstream published author.

His new collection of smart, humorous essays, **Luke Skywalker Can't Read And Other Geeky Truths**, is a must-read to add to any popular science fiction or fantasy fan's reading list.

"When I moved to New York 11 years ago, I really wanted to write the Great American novel. I liked science fiction, but I stepped away from it for a while because I thought I wanted to be a serious literary writer. Then I started writing essays about sex. I sold some personal essays to Nerve.com back when that was a viable market. It was really fun and I was like oh, I'm like a broke nerdy guy version of Carrie Bradshaw," said Britt.

Britt then started writing science-fiction essays for various online publications including Tor.com. In addition to his online freelance writing, he has penned plays and other works of fiction. **Luke Skywalker Can't Read** is his first collection of essay writings.

"I always liked Chuck Klosterman and his writing about rock 'n' roll (*Sex, Drugs and Coco Puffs*). They're both collections about pop-culture and music. I wondered, can I do that – but instead of writing about rock 'n' roll, what if I could write about sci-fi. I know that stuff. Can I make it a fun essay collection?" said Britt.

The title of the book is one of the several shorter essays Britt had previously written as a science fiction staff writer for Tor.com. The book features longer versions of previous work published online along with new essays in search of an online outlet.

"I couldn't really find a home for certain essays on a sci-fi or pop culture blog, but I knew they would work in a book. I left the staff-writing job to work on a novel. I was doing freelance writing about pop-culture and science-fiction and thought it would be really nice to have a permanent collection," said Britt.

There are three essays in the book about Star Wars. While the subject of *Star Wars* pops up continuously throughout the book, Britt knew that the Luke Skywalker essay was going to be the "hit single" of the collection due to the popularity of the series and the provocative nature of the essay.

"I think that *Star Wars* has staying power in terms of being on people's minds. I'm writing a new piece right now about nostalgia and how *Star Wars* transcends generations. It's just amazing right now. It's obviously very exciting and also nerve-wracking, especially for people who write about pop-culture because there's so many ways it can go with *The Force Awakens*. I wanted to have some slightly different angles that we don't normally hear about regarding *Star Wars*," said Britt.

The book covers a broad spectrum of entertaining pop culture topics and the sci-fi fantasy genre. From Dracula to Lord Of The Rings, there is something for everyone to enjoy or laugh along with out loud.

"I tried to pick pieces that I found were in some form finished, whether they had been already published or that I thought were really strong, that I kept coming back to and knew would also cover a wide spectrum," said Britt.

"There's a funny, weird generational conversation going on about *Star Wars*," said Britt.

Britt points out that unlike other sci-fi films released within the past decade, the new *Star Wars* films are not adaptations of popular publications like *The Hunger Games* or *Harry Potter*. He expresses a lot of excitement over discovering the film's new plot and character angles.

"Creating these new characters is a gamble. Actually, it's a bigger risk to bring in these new characters. It's funny that the Abrams' *Star Trek* movies go backwards and reboot classic characters. I think this is more like *Star Trek*:

The Next Generation. They're like; well let's try out totally new characters. That's really refreshing and I think, as a critic, I'm really interested in that it hasn't happened in a while," said Britt.

Sherlock Holmes fans will enjoy reading the updated version of one of Britt's first essays, *Baker Street On Infinite Earths*, which contains personal anecdotes and contemporary interviews.

"I just wanted to write a fun article about why Sherlock Holmes was so mixed up in science fiction."

This prompted Britt to reach out to Nicholas Meyer, (director, *The Wrath of Kahn*) who had also written several Sherlock Holmes books to find out what he had to say on the subject.

"That piece was a great template. I realized I could combine journalism with science fiction. The Sherlock Holmes essay was one that I was really proud of," said Britt.

"I knew I wanted to end on a *Star Wars* essay so that last essay (*The Fans Awaken*) is a new essay that I wrote specifically for the book. The superhero essay (*Nobody Gets Mad About Hamlet Remakes*) was an 11th hour thing. A lot of it was just my taste."

Perhaps one of the most enjoyable aspects of reading, for readers, is being able to identify with the author on both a lighthearted and personal note. Readers can get a definite sense that Britt enjoyed putting the book together. Another enjoyable feature sure to generate laughs and conversation is *A Totally Incomplete Glossary Of Terms*; a list of humorous and cheeky sci-fi orientated one-liners at the end of the book.

Britt is involved in both the Lust For Genre and Hi-Fi reading series in the New York City area. The Lust For Genre series invites storytellers and performers to read their favorite science fiction, fantasy or genre fiction. Hi-Fi is an ongoing reading series, which showcases a selection of two or three upcoming writers across all genres.

"The idea is to foster a community in the writing world because New York is a tricky place to try to make it as a writer," said Britt.

A dedicated fan of all things Sci-Fi, some of Britt's most memorable celebrity encounters include meeting Patrick Stewart, Margaret Atwood, Matt Smith and most recently, interviewing Mark Gattis for Tor.com

Britt has also enjoyed making the rounds at various Comic Cons and appeared as a panel guest at Wizard Con.

"This year at ComicCon was really fun because of my book. It was the most fun one yet. It was awesome to go out and give my book for free to people who were wearing awesome costumes," said Britt.

While Britt is looking forward to promoting the [book](#), he is also excited about putting together two new manuscripts – a more personal collection of essays and sci-fi novel. Although he is taking a hiatus from his writing classes, he is set to teach a writing for the media course and to make an appearance as a guest lecturer at York College in February.

Animated Film, *Henry And Me*, Hits A Home Run

By Erin Coughlin | October 23, 2014 | The Surge

Every so often, one comes across a film with enduring depth capable of both entertaining and enriching the lives of audience members of all ages.

Henry and Me is the touching and heartfelt story about a young boy battling an illness, who goes on a magical journey with a stranger named Henry. Together, they learn lessons on both life and baseball from New York Yankee players from the past and present.

Written by Executive Producer David Stern, (*Open Season 2*, *Free Birds*) what initially started out as a 30 minute short to be sold at Yankee stadium for charitable causes, became an hour long, award nominated feature film.

Production started to change shape when Yankee Stadium put the filmmakers in touch with famous Yankee fan, actor Richard Gere. Gere, who is also known for his involvement in many charities, provides the voice of Henry.

Directed by Barrett Esposito, the film features the voice acting of talented celebrities and pro athletes including Luis Guzman, Chazz Palminteri, Paul Simon, Danny Aiello, Reggie Jackson, Yogi Berra, and Hideki Matsui.

This film is both a personal project for both the cast and it's viewers. This is strongly reflected in the performances of several of the cast members, including actor Danny Aiello, who's son passed away from pancreatic cancer.

"We're about the emotion, the poignancy and the heart. That's what the script is about. That's what we went for with the actors and that's the film we set out to make." Said Esposito.

Among the star cast is singer/songwriter Cindy Lauper, who re-recorded her popular hit song, *Time After Time*, as a lullaby. Barrett, a member of the True Colors Fund founded by Lauper, hopes that the film will drive traffic directly to the charity. Along with St. Jude's support of the film, they anticipate raising enough money to make donations to more than thirty charities.

Unlike other more recent animated films, the characters were created in 2D, but the background was filmed in 3D so that viewers feel more involved with the story of the film and are less preoccupied with the graphics. Despite the historic and iconic figures on the film and the all-star cast, this reactionary piece it is not just a film for Yankees fans.

"It could be for any child dealing with any sort of adversity. What we were trying to do was provide an uplifting message of hope and never giving up. Just keep putting your foot forward because you never know what tomorrow is going to bring." Said Producer Joseph Avallone. "You have people who have lost children to cancer or are currently battling it. They think it's great because it's so personal to them. It's a documentary of their life because they went through it."

\$2 from the DVD/digital downloads and 10% of the rental fee will be donated to charity. For more information visit <http://henryandmemovie.com>.

Every. Drop. Counts.

By Erin Coughlin | October 15, 2014 | The Surge

Over the past few years, filmmakers have successfully turned feature length projects into high demand, popular web series. *Every. Drop. Counts.*, a new psychological thriller based on a novella by director Scott Norton, expresses modern issues by putting a new twist on classic folklore.

“Due to the dialog heaviness and plethora of important details, it works better. In small bites, it’s easier to concentrate and catch everything,” says Norton.

Set against the backdrop of a horror convention on the Jersey Shore, the vampire tale features strong female leads who explore love, loss, memory, and letting go. Characters include an aging modern day vampire and a much younger, self-medicating trauma/rape victim who work in horror memorabilia.

“The process by which we heal and grow after great loss in an unjust world is at the heart of the project,” says actress Michal Sinnott (*Grand Theft Auto*).

“I think Scott wanted to weave a story about how we move on from tragedy. Who we become when our entire world shatters, but we’re still there, trying to contend with all the broken pieces. How do you find presence when you’re stuck in the past?” says Sinnott.

Sinnott plays Wendy Whipper, an outwardly tough but emotionally gooey derby girl.

“I think Scott is right when he says that Wendy is the heart of the story. The other characters hide their emotions far more than Wendy, who wears her heart on her sleeve. Wendy doesn’t really have subtext. She’s right out there, all her anger, fear and emotional pain swelling up to the surface at any given moment,” says Sinnott.

For Michal, the live set aspect was a bit of an exciting challenge. Luckily, the lengthy audition process provided her with the opportunity to spend a substantial amount of time immersing herself in the world of her character. As part of her preparation for the role, Michal signed up for skating lessons.

“I only had a few weeks with the character before going into shooting, so there was some concern about being a good enough skater. There were big gaps in between shooting, so that allowed me to continue to train and get better in the interim.” Said Sinnott.

With the increasing appeal of the folklore of vampires and lycans, the series is perfect for modern audiences.

“Scott is holding a mirror up to the very audience of the show,” says Sinnott, “There’s a massive appeal in modern day pop-culture. These are myths that we rename and retell in every generation.”

A season two sneak preview will be available after the finale on Halloween. New teasers are posted on Tuesdays.

“We’re very much looking to do a season two so that we can continue following the crazy roller coaster the characters are on,” says Norton.

“The fact that Scott is talking about a second season is super exciting because it gives me an excuse to put those skates on again,” says Sinnott.

Additional Links: Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/HorrorConTheMovie> Twitter: <https://twitter.com/HorrorConMovie>

Alexia Anastasio: Crowd Funding All The Way To Cannes

By Erin Coughlin | September 25, 2014 | The Surge

Some people dream of starring in and showing their films at prestigious film festivals around the world. For filmmaker Alexia Anastasio, her hard work paid off this year when her feature film *Little Fishes* was recently accepted and screened at the Cannes International Film Festival.

For Alexia, this past May marked not just her third trip to Cannes, but her first as the filmmaker of a feature length film. While attending the festival, Alexia was invited to participate in the famous Producers Network. As part of the program, filmmakers spent quality time talking to and learning from key industry players.

“Because I showed my film in the market and had a sales representative, there was a big difference this time around,” said Anastasio.

The inspiration for her featured film, *Little Fishes* came as a result of Anastasio’s experience watching numerous Mumblecore films from the past decade.

“If a film makes me cry or think about my life in a different way moving forward, it’s does it’s job.”

Her film *Little Fishes* is inspired by the D.H. Lawrence poem of the same name.

“I always look to literary works for inspiration. The film is about going with the flow and fun of life. Figuring it out along the way. We try to figure out life our entire lives.”

Anastasio wrote the first draft within one month and went on to revise the script while the film was still in production. Spread out over a fifteen day shooting schedule, the film takes place in Florida, New York and Los Angeles.

Money for the film was raised over the course of three and a half campaigns spread out over IndieGogo, Kickstarter and Fractured Atlas. Although Anastasio paid out of her own pocket for travel expenses, the film tallied 150 backers online.

“There is no normal way to make a film. Crowd funding isn’t for everyone. You really need a team when you do a campaign. People want to help. They feel good about it. When I contribute, it makes me feel like a part of the community,” said Anastasio.

Much of the success of the campaign can be attributed to the team combining a personal touch with direct communication to their backers. Some examples include sending personalized emails, conducting Skype chats, and even going to other movies together.

“I really want to inspire other filmmakers. You don’t need a million dollars to make a movie,” said Anastasio.

As of now, Alexia is hoping to further promote the film by touring the country, approaching LGBT centers and universities. An important element in the promotion of the film is to screen the film at venues where she can be on hand to engage in conversation with the audience. “This is a home grown emotional roller coaster movie,” explained Anastasio.

In addition to creating her own films, Alexia teaches crowd funding, mindset implementation and credibility to others. Her students include everyone from aspiring filmmakers to entrepreneurs starting up their own yoga company.

“I’m very excited about it. I get a massive amount of fulfillment teaching,” said Anastasio.

Alexia is currently wrapping up her project, *Ginger Girls*, a documentary about red heads. She is also hoping to wrap up the script on another film, *The Princesses of Santa Monica* this fall.

To listen to our un-cut interview with Alexia, please visit the [Fun Features Page](#) at www.thegalabout.com . For more information on Alexia's projects visit <http://www.alexiaanastasio.com/> .

“Russian Crime Queen” Polina Dashkova On Writing, Russia and Her New Thriller ‘Madness Treads Lightly’

By Erin Coughlin | Sept. 28, 2017 | The Gal About Network

Dubbed the “Russian crime queen,” Polina Dashkova is Russia’s most successful author of crime novels. She’s sold fifty million copies of her books and has thrilled readers in countries across Europe and Asia. A graduate of Moscow’s Maxim Gorky Literary Institute, she has been active as a radio and press journalist and has worked as an interpreter and translator of English literature. Her books have been translated into German, Chinese, Dutch, French, Polish, Spanish, and English. I was lucky enough to both read and discuss Ms. Dashkova’s thrilling new release, ‘Madness Treads Lightly’, a must have read to add to your fall reading list.

EC: What are the biggest influences in your writing and career and what first influenced you to work in this genre of fiction? And what is it that still appeals to you about writing fiction?

PD: When I decided to write my first novel, I wasn’t planning to write in any specific genre. I just wanted to tell a story based on certain real events that had shocked me greatly.

It was 1994, before the Internet and mobile phones. I was a young mother at the time. My old school friend, who was five months pregnant, called me. She was very scared and was crying over the phone. She said to me, “I’m in a prenatal clinic now. I ran outside for a minute to call you from the street phone. You’re the only person I was able to catch! I came here for a routine medical examination, but the doctor examined me for less than fifteen minutes and then told me my baby was dead. They want to make me abort right now. They say otherwise I might die, but I don’t believe them. What should I do?”

I told her not to go back to that clinic, to go to another one and get examined again. She called back a couple of hours later and told me her baby was okay. Four and half months later she gave birth to a healthy baby boy.

I couldn’t forget that story. First I thought it was an accident, the usual kind of medical negligence I faced so often in the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. An ignorant scum doctor rushed his diagnosis. But why were they in such a hurry to push for an abortion? It seemed very odd.

Then I stumbled across a TV talk show where the head of a large and famous medical center was talking about a new treatment, completely natural, without any side effects, that could rejuvenate entire organisms and treat all diseases, including cancer. The magic medication was made from the human fetus and placenta extracted during the twentieth to thirtieth week of pregnancy.

Then I started to dig for more information. I talked to my friends’ doctors and to biologists and learned that this sort of treatment really did exist, though its effectiveness was greatly exaggerated, but people wanted to believe it could work and unscrupulous manufacturers were making money. I asked where and how they got their source material and couldn’t believe the answer: “They use late-stage abortions.” I asked: “Spontaneous?” The answer was: “Induced, mostly. The fetus has be alive and well.”

Maybe it sounds like a tabloid scare story, maybe the incident with my old school friend was accidental, but I was so shocked that my imagination engaged like an electric motor, and in 1996 my first thriller, *The Blood of the Unborn*, was written and published.

Years passed. I wrote many novels, but I didn’t really think about the genre each time. I truly cared about each and every shocking story and about the characters acting inside the story and about the sequence of events. All my subsequent stories were usually, though not necessarily, based on real events.

EC: Can you explain a little about your writing process, how you get your ideas or characters?

PD: The challenge is not to get ideas, but to choose from the many I have in my head, my notebooks, and my laptop. The most important thing is making the right choice. Some ideas seem very attractive, but on closer inspection

collapse like an empty shell. If the choice is right, if the idea is strong and viable, it's not that hard to come up with the characters. They're everywhere.

EC: What is the publishing industry like in Russia / from what you've experienced, how is it different from other countries and is there anything about the contemporary literature, literary scene etc. that you feel would be of interest to our readers? What is the general attitude etc. towards writers, genre fiction in your country?

PD: We never had literary agencies in Russia. Now we have some, but I've never heard of the barely-known writers they work with. Usually writers and publishers communicate directly, without intermediaries. Sometimes it's very difficult, especially for beginners. I've learned from my own experience. I never had an agent in Russia, but I do have an agent in Germany, and I know the difference. Writers in Russia are divided and have little contact with each other, especially now, since Putin's Crimean trick, which split the whole society, including what you call the "literary scene."

EC: You have a very extensive portfolio of published work. Can you share a little about your writing process and if possible, how you successfully manage to keep your stories so fresh (as in new / original)? Are there any challenges and if so, what are they and what steps do you take to overcome them?

PD: In order to keep my stories fresh, I try to keep my mind and my feelings fresh: empathy, anger, amazement, curiosity. The main challenge is the difference between reality and literature. Real life is not very logical. Real events and people's motivations are absurd, chaotic, and too often rambling. In a novel, especially in crime fiction, the sequence and interdependency of events must be logical and motivations reasonable, so they seem absolutely real. Maintaining the balance between fiction and reality sometimes seems like walking a tightrope through the dark, blindfolded. When I get tired, I take a break and lie down on the couch.

EC: What has been the biggest challenge of having your work translated?

PD: For me, no challenge at all. I have no secret levers of influence over the publishing houses and readers in different countries. There is nothing I can do about it, so it is not my challenge. In 1999, a literary agent from Germany, Galina Durtshoff, called me. We met and signed a contract and she began to sell my novels around the world more or less successfully.

EC: Your work has been translated into so many different languages. Can you talk a little about your experiences or encounters with your readers/fans from other countries and if you have noticed any differences in their reception, interpretation etc. of your work.

PD: My Russian readers love to talk and ask lots of questions about everything. Sometimes the debates get so hot, they forget me and argue with each other. My readers in Europe are calmer. They sit quietly, listen to my chatter, ask a few questions, and clap at the end. I think the interpretation of any book or film depends on the personality, educational level, and personal preference of each particular reader, no matter what country he or she lives in.

EC: What do you hope your readers get out of your work? What are some of the rewards or challenges you have experienced?

PD: I hope that today and tomorrow somebody somewhere opens one of my books, reads it to the last page and doesn't regret the time spent. That is quite enough.

EC: Do you have any upcoming projects, events etc. that you would like people to know about and what are they?

PD: I'm writing a new novel, a historical thriller. The plot is based on real events that took place in Moscow in 1977. In late October I'm awaiting a great event – the birth of my first granddaughter, Elizabeth.

EC: Is there anything else that you feel is important for our audience / American readers to know about or would like to share with them?

PD: People in Russia are going through a period of disillusionment and depression. Surely we have had more awful periods in our history, but never have we had such an absurd and stupid time as now.

Please, never forget that propaganda is always a lie. Its only fruit is mental and moral degradation. Politicians are ordinary people, and hardly the best, moreover. Very few of them are smart, many fewer are honest, and not one has a good soul. The leader of the country and the country he rules are not the same things. The confrontation between sanity and propaganda seems to be going on indefinitely. I'm afraid, sanity is losing now, but I hope eventually it will win out.

'Madness Treads Lightly' is now available to buy online. Don't forget to stop by and check out my interview with Marian Schwartz , the award winning translator who worked on Ms. Dashkova's book and more!

Author Sarah Vermunt On Finding Your ‘Careergasm’

By Erin Coughlin | Oct. 2, 2018 | Her Faith Magazine

Looking for work can be hard enough when you know what you want, but for some, the real challenge is figuring out just what their life’s wish is. Luckily, overwhelmed and frustrated individuals can now check out **Careergasm**, an online course and recently published book by its’ creator and founder, **Sarah Vermunt**. Unlike many other courses, online outlets or publications which promise success and fulfillment through more traditional practices, Vermunt uses her own unique style and experience to present a more approachable method to individuals who are looking to find a more fulfilling career and life. We recently enjoyed a conversation with Ms. Vermunt, who sat down to explain her work and some useful insight into how it is possible to overcome universal obstacles in order to take the right steps forward in your desire for change.

Erin Coughlin: Can you explain a little about yourself and your background?

Sarah Vermunt: I used to be a professor at a business school. I taught organizational behavior which is basically workplace psychology and I hated conducting research, which is a huge part of academia. About four years ago, I made a change and instead of researching and working on workplace psychology, I became a career coach helping people actually get happier at work and life in general. I’m helping actual people with real problems now.

Erin Coughlin: What is Careergasm and how is it different from what we’re used to?

Sarah Vermunt: Careergasm is the name of my company and it is also the name of my book that helps people realize what they want and how to go after it. At both my online course and in my book, I like to offer a very special kind of career support that’s meant to help people specifically who don’t know what they want. Other career coaches help people with strategy – which is awesome for people who know exactly what they want. They just maybe need a little bit of resume, LinkedIn or interviewing help. My work is a little bit different. Instead of focusing on strategy, I specialize in focus and clarity so that people can actually figure out what they want to do, so that they can finally quit the job that they hate.

Erin Coughlin: I’m sure that’s a pretty common issue.

Sarah Vermunt: Yes, there are so many people trapped in jobs that they hate because they just don’t know what they want. Instead, people feel trapped for years because it’s really hard to make a change if you’re not sure what you’re pursuing and that’s okay. I help people get the clarity that they need, so they can take a leap of faith and make a change.

Erin Coughlin: What do you think are some of the common mistakes people are making when it comes to pursuing their dream careers or careers in general?

Sarah Vermunt: One of the biggest mistakes people make is that they focus on the skills alone. I think it’s really important to look at your skills and also your desire – not only what you are good at, but what you actually want because there are a lot of people who are really good at jobs that they don’t enjoy. If you focus on a skill, it’s likely to point you in the direction of something similar to a job which you already don’t enjoy. If you just take into account your desire and what you actually want, it is more likely to lead you in a different direction towards something that’s going to be different and probably more for fulfilling for you.

Erin Coughlin: What do you think are some of the items or tools that people should have in their career arsenal that can help them as they move forward? For example, whether it’s an online presence or essentials on their resume, is there anything that you think people often ignore that they should take into account or use to their advantage?

Sarah Vermunt: A lot of people who don’t enjoy their jobs panic and immediately start doing a job search. This isn’t actually effective. I really believe in clarity first, strategy second. If you don’t know what you’re looking for, it’s actually impossible to write a really good resume or do a great job search because you’re not quite sure how to customize what you’re looking for or what you’re trying to promote about yourself. As hard as it is, I think the best thing people can do is press pause on the strategy side (job searching and interviewing) and spend the time that they

need to do some introspective work and look inward to see what really matters to them. That's what the book is all about. There's also a free online course to get people thinking about that.

Another thing that is very helpful is that sometimes people think of making a career change as a logical, rational decision making process only. I like to think of making a career change as two parallel tracks that you have to look at at the same time. On one track is figuring out what you want. On the other track is doing some personal development work so that you can get out of your own way because a lot of us have different ways of committing self sabotage. There are probably some thoughts, beliefs and behaviors you have that are obviously preventing you from moving forward. I think it's important to work on that second track, as well as becoming a little more self-aware and developing a contingency plan to help you with some of the ways that you typically self sabotage. This is something we all do, we just all do it in different ways. For example, one of the ways that I self sabotage is I care too much what other people think, so I tend to get really caught up trying to work out what people are going to think about the decisions I make in my life. There are things that I have to constantly troubleshoot and that's a really common problem that a lot of people have to deal with too. There are plenty of other self sabotaging things that people struggle with like procrastination, being overly sensitive to feedback or risk aversion. There's an entire chapter in the book all about this because it's so important.

Erin Coughlin: I thoroughly enjoyed what you referred to as the 'Boa Constrictor'. Can you explain what you mean by that and address a few steps on how people can avoid falling victim to it?

Sarah Vermunt: We like to think of decision-making as this logical, rational problem or process right? Intuition is actually our body giving us biological feedback about various decisions, so if you're trying to force yourself down a path that feels bad or maybe if you're in a job right now that feels bad, you might have an injury. For example, if your back always goes out or you're constantly getting sick. For a lot of people that I work with, these are actually signs that you're moving in the wrong direction. You are getting actual biological feedback from your body that things are out of alignment. If you can start to notice what your body is trying to tell you a little bit more, it will actually help you navigate your life.

Of course we want to make strong logical decisions, but intuition is also a very important part of it. Your intuition should be the thing that helps you make the decision and logic should be the thing that helps you execute the decision. So if you're pointed in the right direction, your head should help you actually execute your plan. The way to avoid having those feelings is to turn away from the things that make you feel bad. Sometimes navigating your career is a lot like playing hot and cold – you don't really know what's going to feel good or bad until you start turning away from the things that feel bad.

Erin Coughlin: Do you have any positive daily rituals that you do or that you would suggest other people start doing in order to help them stay focused on trying to figure things out?

Sarah Vermunt: I started doing 10 minute self-guided meditation session in the morning. I'm finding that it is really is amazing. It makes quite a difference for the rest of my day and helps me make better decisions. I feel more calm as I go through the day and I actually do think this is especially important for women because we are so busy and very often, we are so busy taking care of other people's needs. Finding some time in the morning that's just for you, I have found, is a really positive thing. I do find it important to take short pauses between things. I think having a little break or pulling yourself out of what could be a chaotic day for a few minutes actually helps you think a lot more clear and it actually makes you more productive. Giving yourself some downtime away from the problem counterintuitively might be the moment that you actually solve it.

Erin Coughlin: (laughs) I understand, I'm a fan of taking breaks myself even though it means sometimes being laughed at.

Sarah Vermunt: Yes, you come back from a 10 minute break thinking more clearly, you're more energized, you have better ideas and you're more creative. Brakes are incredible for people and I know that I find them very valuable too.

Erin Coughlin: Do you mostly work with individual clients or do you work with groups, organizations or companies?

Sarah Vermunt: I mostly work with individuals. The way I help a lot of people is through a very popular online course that people around the world can take to help them figure out what they want.

Erin Coughlin: Can you walk me through your process when you have a new client? What would you say is your unique, signature speciality that you use or incorporate during this process and how do you approach your clients?

Sarah Vermunt: Well, one thing about my course that they'll notice is that it's very playful and very unconventional. That's definitely my signature – it's a playful approach to getting work and finding work that makes you happy.

Unlike other books that tackle this field with a more serious and traditional approach, Sarah's is more playful and welcoming. Even her website features pleasant cartoons and incorporates fun elements throughout the lessons that allow Careergasm to stand out from its more traditional contemporaries.

Sarah Vermunt: It uses the power of play to help people get the clarity that they need. If you think playfully, it triggers the part of your brain that you don't get to use where you almost return to a childlike state and we are able to come up with better, more innovative and unconventional ideas. That's what helps you to break out of a rut.

Erin Coughlin: I really appreciated the Jim Carrey story that was included in the book. You address a lot of subjects, but is there anything that you wish that you had known at an earlier point in your life? Is there anything that you wish someone had sat down and said to you earlier that you now feel comfortable sharing with others?

Sarah Vermunt: I wish I had known that I would feel better the minute I let go. I did not know how soon release would come once I changed my mind. For example, in the book I talk about a breakdown and how I went in the next day and gave notice. I felt instantly better even though the rest of my future was still fairly uncertain and I wasn't entirely sure where it was going to next. I didn't know that and what I would love to tell people is that release and freedom comes quickly once you really decide to make a change. I didn't know it would come so swiftly and it was a beautiful feeling.

Erin Coughlin: I was doing something very similar which I was also very unhappy with and it just led to dead end after dead end. After awhile, you just can't do it anymore.

Sarah Vermunt: This would also be something helpful for people to know. Sometimes a breakdown is exactly what you need. It's not a pleasant way to go about making a change, but often it is a path to freedom and as uncomfortable as it is, it often leads to some really beautiful things. I can imagine that some of your readers are struggling with things right now with trying to really hold it together and sometimes falling apart is exactly what you need.

Erin Coughlin: That always reminds me of the philosophy regarding how sometimes you have to lose everything and hit absolute bottom in order to realize what's really important or what you really want and then get fired up enough to do something about it. That's a great point to touch on. Is there anything else that you hope your readers and students can take away from the new book? Are there any favorite parts of the book that you are excited about or struggled with?

Sarah Vermunt: I'd love for people to walk away feeling like they're not alone and that there's not something wrong with them. Feeling lost isn't a feeling we often talk about very often in society. If you think about it, we live in a world that tells us just to follow her dreams – which is really a lot of pressure when you don't know what your dreams are. So many people who feel lost very often don't talk about it. This book is for people who feel lost. My hope is that they realize feeling lost is part of the human experience, you can work through it and get to the other side. If you feel lost, there's nothing wrong with you.

Erin Coughlin: I totally agree with you in that there's so much emphasis on having the blueprint to know exactly what you want and how to get it. There's a lot of pressure to begin with. People have a lot of pressure being put on top of them by other people, so adding that to the pre-existing amount of self-induced pressure that you have already dealt with is just a recipe for disaster.

Sarah Vermunt: I think so too. Wanting a change is actually a really wonderful signal that your evolving and growing as a person. What you thought was going to be great for you when you were 17 and forced to pick what you

wanted to do for school, a career etc.– well, you're no longer that person. It's actually very natural that your interests change and evolve as you grow.

In addition to her book, you can check out [Careergasm](#) at Ms. Vermunt's official site.

Navigating Translation: Marian Schwartz Discusses Her Award Winning Work As A Literary Translator

By Erin Coughlin | Sep. 27, 2017 | The Gal About Network

Today's feature is part of our weekly celebration of International Translation Day (Sept. 30). Marian Schwartz translates Russian classic and contemporary fiction, history, biography, criticism, and fine art. She is the principal English translator of the works of Nina Berberova and translated the New York Times bestseller *The Last Tsar* by Edvard Radzinsky, as well as classics by Mikhail Bulgakov, Ivan Goncharov, Yuri Olesha, and Mikhail Lermontov. Her most recent publications are Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, Andrei Gelasimov's *Into the Thickening Fog*, Daria Wilke's *Playing a Part*, and half the stories in Mikhail Shishkin's *Calligraphy Lesson: The Collected Stories*. She is a past president of the American Literary Translators Association and the recipient of two National Endowment for the Arts translation fellowships, as well as prizes including the 2014 Read Russia Prize for Contemporary Russian Literature and the 2016 Soeurette Diehl Frasier Award from the Texas Institute of Letters.

EC: Hi there, can you explain a little about yourself and how you came to work as a book translator? What are some of the languages that you speak / translate?

MS: When I started studying Russian in college, at Harvard, I was already fluent in French, and indeed I've always been interested in languages, taking up Spanish as an undergraduate and doing my minor as a graduate student in Czech. But I only translate from Russian.

EC: Who are some of the writers, organizations etc. that you currently work with? What other sort of writing, creative outlets do you enjoy?

MS: The American Literary Translators Association has been my rock ever since I joined the organization, in 1979. ALTA has been an ongoing source of knowledge, camaraderie, and access throughout the years. I'm also a long-time member of the PEN Translation Committee and have been very active in the literary special interest group of the Austin Area Translators and Interpreters Association. My other creative outlet is the guitar, which I've been playing since I was twelve and have gone back to more seriously in the last fifteen years, mostly classical but with side trips into Americana and samba.

EC: What are some of the basic or unexpected challenges of what you do?

MS: Russian as a language was fairly stable through the Soviet period, but since the Soviet Union's collapse the language has been changing at a breakneck pace. I never dreamed that either of those things would happen. Keeping up and even just deciphering the latest language developments is a huge challenge, and thus all the more gratifying when the challenge is met.

EC: To what extent do you, as a translator, have in the promotion of the titles that you have worked on?

MS: Generally my role is fairly circumscribed, limited to local readings and occasional readings around the country, but then most small presses, who publish most translations, don't have the money or the staff to promote their titles heavily. I'm taking great pleasure in my more active role in promoting [Madness Treads Lightly](#).

EC: What is the experience of working with Ms. Dashkova like?

MS: Ms. Dashkova has been a pleasure to work with, always responsive to my questions. I was lucky enough to meet with her in Moscow last year and came away full of admiration for her intelligence and insight.

EC: What is your writing process like and what are you and Ms. Dashkova's roles in that process?

MS: Our writing processes are completely separate, in that I begin working with her final text. In my process, a translation goes through four phases, each of which involves detailed interaction with the text, from the first, very rough pass, through the query and research phase, and onto the point where I let go of the original text and read my

translation as a work in English. The last phase always involves reading the entire text out loud, which is something I think all writers should do no matter what kind of text they are creating.

EC: Do you have any funny, inspiring or profound encounters with people who have read your translated work or writing?

MS: My long collaboration with the émigré writer Nina Berberova led to a two-book collaboration with Jacqueline Onassis, who was a great admirer of Berberova. Working and interacting with Onassis at Doubleday showed me what it means to publish at the highest level. She took her role as editor on my translation of Edvard Radzinsky's *The Last Tsar* utterly seriously. I've always felt that that book's phenomenal success had to be attributed in large part to her. Unfortunately, she died before our second project together, Vasily Peskov's *Lost in the Taiga*, was published.

EC: What are some of the rewards or most enjoyable aspects of your work?

MS: My biggest reward has been the luxury of working in solitude and spending my days with the Russian and English languages for nearly forty years. My work has also been an excuse to consort with writers and translators of similar bent. I had always hoped that my efforts would make a contribution to Russian literature and its writers, and I think, having published eighty or so book translations, I can say that I have.

EC: What are some of your upcoming projects, events etc. that you would like to share with our readers?

MS: I'll be part of a local reading for International Translation Day at the wonderful Malvern Books, here in Austin. I've decided to read from what is perhaps Nina Berberova's finest collection of novellas, *The Tattered Cloak*. The book was published decades ago but remains in print, thanks to New Directions. In November, University of Notre Dame Press will be publishing my translation of the third of eight volumes of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's cycle of historical novels, *The Red Wheel*, which has been a rather monumental undertaking.

Baker Street Babes Unite Fans From Around The World

By Erin Coughlin | Oct. 21, 2014 | The Surge

If convenient, read. If inconvenient, read any way.

Since May of 2011, The Baker Street Babes have united Sherlock fans from around the world. Based in London, this international online group is run by friends who share a mutual love for the iconic characters created by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

“Regardless of which degree you see it, it's the greatest relationship in literature. They're so loyal to one another, endlessly fascinated with one another and they go on adventures. What's not to love?” Said site founder Kristina Manente. “We all long for adventure and to have that one person who is, essentially, our soul mate, whether romantic and platonic. Mystery is always interesting, because it's trying to figure out the unknown.”

Popular regular features on the site include Sherlock episode reviews, interviews with the cast and crew of the hit BBC show and an engaging podcasts.

“We've met and interviewed nearly everyone involved with BBC's Sherlock in some form or another. People are always excited to talk about Sherlock. You can really tell how much they all love it.” Said Manente.

In addition to their current programs, The Baker Street Babes plan on further engaging the community both online and in person. New features will include launching two new podcasts, BSB Live and Local. Site fans can enjoy Author Spotlights and interviews with local Sherlockians.

“We'll be interviewing Holmesian authors and writers about their work. We're expanding what we're covering on the podcast beyond discussion and big name interviews.” Said Manete.

In January, they will celebrate their third annual charity ball during the Baker Street Irregulars Birthday Weekend. Over the past two years, they have raised over \$8,000 for the Wounded Warrior Project.

“One of our members, Taylor, is a founding members of 221B Con, which is hugely successful and we're so proud of her. It's great to interact with people outside of the internet, to meet our followers and new people.”

The Baker Street Babes regularly try to celebrate in person, often meeting at conventions and fan related events from San Diego to London. Events include participating on panels, hosting live podcasts and setting up a presence at 221B Con, SDCC and BSI Weekend.

“We want people to enjoy themselves. A lot of our listeners say that our podcasts remind them of talking with their friends and we really enjoy that. We want people to come away knowing that fan girls are smart and articulate, but can also have a great time discussing what they love. I always say, never apologize for enthusiasm, and we never do, because enjoying what you love and interacting with it is a great thing.”

For more information, visit <http://bakerstreetbabes.com/>

On Twitter: <https://twitter.com/BakerStBabes>

Podcast: <http://bakerstreetbabes.libsyn.com>

Doctor Who Illustrator Combines Childhood Passion With Talent

By Erin Coughlin | Dec. 10, 2014 | The Surge

Some individuals are lucky enough to combine their talent with their childhood passions and interests. Simon Fraser is a New York-based illustrator known for bringing to life the adventures of Doctor Who and many other popular characters.

Erin Coughlin: What different mediums do you like to use when creating your work? Is your work mostly hand drawn and do you incorporate any sort of digital mediums/programs?

Simon Fraser: I'm a big fan of pencils, pens and ink on white art board. I keep trying digital drawing tools and they get better every year, but it's not quite as pleasurable for me to draw that way. Coloring on the other hand is an entirely digital process and has been since the late 90s. It's vastly more convenient and efficient to use Photoshop to color black & white artwork than inks and paint. Especially as I collaborate with Gary Caldwell for my coloring and he lives in Scotland, while I live all over the place.

EC: How long have you been illustrating The 11th Doctor?

SF: I started working on Dr. Who during the IDW 50th Anniversary special 'Prisoners of Time' where I drew the first chapter starring the first Doctor, William Hartnell. That was 2 years ago. I have been working for Titan on Matt Smith (#11) since the beginning of 2014.

EC: What is it like having Matt Smith as a subject?

SF: Matt Smith is a fascinating actor. He's quite mercurial in his ability to shift from one emotional state to another. He can be intensely grave and somber (for a 30 year old man) and then behave like a small boy. His physicality is an enormous help. Smith is immense fun to work with.

EC: Is there anything new regarding your work on the 11th Doctor that fans might be interested in knowing? Are there any plans for your work regarding the new 12th Doctor?

SF: I've still got a few more issues to go with #11. Then I think I'm drawing the Free Comicbook Day Special. I'd love to draw some #12, not least because it's being written very well by my long-term collaborator Robbie Morrison.

EC: You recently met Terrance Dicks among others at the LI WHO Con, is it safe to say you are a fan of the show? If so, for how long and what is it about the character/show that you find appealing to yourself and others?

SF: I've been a Doctor Who fan for as long as I can remember. The first story I can remember seeing off-air was 'The Sontaran Experiment' which starred Tom Baker, Liz Sladen & Ian Marter. I loved it. I think for a long time I wanted to grow up and become the Doctor. He's the perfect hero, smart, funny, mysterious and he hates violence and injustice. It could also be a very weird and imaginative show, which was very compelling to me. Also Liz Sladen's Sarah Jane Smith was my boyhood ideal of womanhood. She might still be!

EC: What is the experience like for you as a fan of the show? Do you have any particular fond memories regarding your encounters? Interesting people you enjoyed meeting?

SF: I think the best part of doing this Dr. Who comic is that I've been propelled deeply into Dr. Who Fandom. It's an uncommonly creative, passionate and energized place to be. I spent a lovely weekend at the Long Island Who 2 Convention recently and really felt at home. There were people of all ages, cultural backgrounds and persuasions, all united by the love of this crazy TV show. It's nice to meet actors and writers etc, but seeing Dick Mills talk about putting together the original Dr. Who theme music in 1963, with 1963 technology, was a real thrill.

EC: What is the experience of attending various conventions etc. like for you as an artist?

SF: It's great fun. Some people come up to me because they know my work and enjoy it, which is lovely. I usually sit down and start drawing at my table, so even if people don't know me, they can see what I'm doing. I sell a lot of sketches at conventions because even if I'm not famous, people like to have an original drawing of their favorite Doctor. It's fun talking to kids, too. Most kids love drawing and they really relate to you if you're sitting there with a pencil.

EC: I spoke to an attendee at the convention who mentioned that you were doing a drawing for them over that weekend. What would you say are some of your most requested/ fan favorite drawings?

SF: Mostly Matt Smith. I can do a quick #11 in my sleep. Fancier drawings take more time. I'm working on my #10 & #12 likenesses so that weekend was a good opportunity to practice in front of a very discriminating audience. I even did a Tom Baker. He's very difficult to get right.

EC: If someone wanted to become more familiar with your work, what titles would you suggest they pick up? Are there any that you are particularly fond of?

SF: My major work is the 11-volume 15-year epic that is 'The Adventures of Nikolai Dante' that came out through 2000AD. I'm also working on 'Lilly Mackenzie' a series of stories about a barmaid and her best friend in outer space. The first book of that is available online at activatecomix.com. I'm working on book 2 of that right now. In my spare time...ha.

EC: Do you work with any other artists or writers? How does that collaboration process work?

SF: I've worked with Robbie Morrison for over 15 years on 'The Adventures of Nikolai Dante' in 2000AD. I've done other projects with Martin Millar, Rob Williams, Al Ewing and Alex DeCampi. We are all friends, which helps immensely. Collaboration is about trust. It's MUCH easier when you have a relationship with the other members of your team. That's why I tend to work with people I know and respect.

EC: Can you explain a little about Lilly Mackenzie's adventures and ACTIVATEcomix.com?

SF: The ACTIVATEcomix collective was created back in 2006 as a way for experienced comics creators to experiment with the Web. It's grown massively since then, but while web comics have changed a great deal in that time we are still resolutely experimental and not for profit. It's hard to do large projects without support, financial or otherwise. We're all about encouraging each other and helping promote each others work. Many of the AIVs stories have gone on to be published on paper and nominated for awards. We've even done an ACTIVATE Primer ourselves through IDW a few years back (and was Eisner Nominated). It's a place to see really interesting work being done in real time and have a real influence on how it develops. One of the really interesting things about the web is that it's a 2 way street. I know that my work has been influenced by reader feedback. That's really fun.

EC: Can you explain about the Dare2Draw contest and how it turned out?

SF: Dare2Draw is a huge project comprising many parts. In the first instance we've been running a monthly evening of figure drawing, professional mentoring and drawing related game show (with BIG prizes!) in Manhattan for over 4 years now. Most recently we've been at the Society of Illustrators in Manhattan. This December 30th we're doing an end of year special at the Brooklyn Brewery. We've had some of the biggest names in the comics industry support the event and pass on their wisdom and experience.

The other aspect of the enterprise right now is turning the monthly event into a TV show. So we've had contests to find contestants for that. We ran a Kickstarter to fund our Pilot last year and we're moving forward with a web version of the show this coming year.

EC: Okay, a fun question. Do you have any favorite Doctors? If you could travel with The Doctor, where and when do you think you would you like to visit?

SF: Tom Baker is my Doctor; he was my first and really defined the part for me. Having said that, Peter Capaldi has really been knocking it out of the park this year. It has been a joy to watch him.

The temptation to see historical events is intense, but I think that a TARDIS would be best used to explore far away worlds. I'd love to meet aliens and see how they live. Saving the world (any world) would be very satisfying.

Every Day Is Tolkien Day At Middle-Earth News

By Erin Coughlin | October 6, 2014 | The Surge

Every author secretly hopes to one day have the privilege of claiming some of the most passionate, active fans in the world. For author J.R.R. Tolkien, his multigenerational fans can come together and celebrate more than just his works by participating in the volunteer run online website, Middle-earth News.

“I created Middle-earth News back on January 12, 2011, so we’ve been running for almost four years now,” says Arwen Kester, the founder of Middle Earth News. “While I’m based in Raleigh, NC, my staff hails from all over the globe. Likewise, Tolkien fans are spread out throughout the world, so we really strive to keep our site as internationally friendly as possible so everyone can keep up with the latest in Tolkien news no matter where they call home.”

There are many popular features on the website besides news updates including a podcast, Feast Day (Middle Earth inspired recipes) and other fun Tolkien related material.

“One of our main goals in reporting is that we don’t just cover Peter Jackson’s films. We’ve received many fan-written letters expressing their thanks and praise for our coverage on other Tolkien-related topics,” says Arwen, “We work hard to report on everything from gaming news to interviews with artists, artisans, musicians, and authors. If it’s Tolkien, we’ve got it covered.”

One thing that makes this website/community stand out is the volunteer staff’s dedication and enthusiasm.

“Since the beginning, Middle-earth News has existed purely for Tolkien fans. Neither my staff nor I get paid for what we do. We do it simply because of the passion we have for The Professor and his world, Middle-earth. It’s our hope that our site not only brings fellow fans together but also helps to foster new fans for years to come,” says Arwen.

In addition to anticipating the release of the new film this December, Arwen is excited about participating in several community events.

“We are in the throes of Tolkien Week and Feast Week at the moment, so there are several contests running where fans can win amazing prizes. Starting on October 26 is our [5 Week Middle-earth Movie Marathon](#), where we’re encouraging fans to take part in watching all of Peter Jackson’s films leading up to *The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies* (BOTFA) theater premiere. Fans schedule the film viewings on their own time, invite their friends and family, and enjoy the film together. More on that event to come so keep an eye out on our site,” says Arwen.

Some of the magic is the author’s ability to still bring people together and make them feel deeply passionate about his work.

“I think it’s Tolkien’s own sheer passion he poured into his writings that pulls people into his world. It’s not just an epic story; his work covers ages of histories, languages, cultures, and civilizations. Each one has been thoroughly thought through and brought to life by his gift of storytelling. When you read his work, you cannot help being transported into the world Middle-earth, and that is a beautiful and wondrous thing,” says Arwen.

Some fans only dream of getting to meet the filmmaker’s responsible for bringing their favorite characters to life. But for the folks at Middle-earth News, it’s a dream come true.

In 2012, Arwen had the incredible opportunity to travel and tour New Zealand for two weeks.

“During my stay, Wellington held the World Premiere for *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey* and I was able meet Peter Jackson and many of the cast. Then, in 2013, Warner Brothers invited me out to Los Angeles for *The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug* World Premiere, where I met and interviewed Martin Freeman, Benedict Cumberbatch,

Richard Armitage, Luke Evans, Evangeline Lilly and many more,” says Arwen, “I still pinch myself when looking through the photos or videos! It was an amazing experience, and I had a blast laughing and chatting with the cast.”

For the new fan interested in immersing themselves in the Tolkien collection, it can often be confusing as to what sequence is best to approach when reading the epic stories.

“It depends on the type of person, I think. Some enjoy the light-heartedness of *The Hobbit*,

and I do believe it’s a great place to start. However, there are some who would prefer more history or lore, so I would recommend beginning with *The Fellowship of the Ring*. And then there are those rare breeds who are fascinated by more complex histories and tales, in which case *The Silmarillion* might be more their speed.”

Arwen’s favorite characters include Gollum and Eowyn.

“Eowyn will always be my favorite. Any woman who can wield a blade is kick ass, and she didn’t stop there, she took down the Witch King! Hard core awesome.”

For the past two years, Arwen has held a premiere line party at the IMAX Theater in Raleigh, where she has enjoyed getting to know some amazing Middle-earth News fans and hearing how they became fans themselves.

“I love meeting up with fans and talking Tolkien. Sometimes it’s a chance encounter, such as being recognized in a local shop. Others are planned hangouts where we watch the films together or meet up for coffee. There’s nothing better than geeking out with like-minded fans!”

You can join the online Fellowship at [Middle Earth News](#).

Part Tim Burton, Part Paper Picasso, Meet Rob Ryan, The Master Of The X-Acto Knife

By Erin Coughlin | November 10, 2014 | The Surge

At first glance popular artist Rob Ryan's artwork emits a whimsical charm and simplistic elegance. Upon closer examination, the intricate designs and details of each individual piece reveal a more universally poignant, personable message.

Born in 1962 in Akrotiri, Cyprus, Ryan studied Fine Art at Trent Polytechnic and at the Royal College of Art, London where he specialized in Printmaking. Since 2002, he has earned the highly esteemed nickname, The Prince Of Paper Cuts for his extraordinary work. A large majority of his art pieces showcase whimsical figures paired with honest, sentimental and humorous autobiographical writings. Although he considers himself a fine artist, Ryan's intricate paper cut work has been successfully integrated with various other mediums including ceramics, fabrics, home wares and jewelry.

His previous artistic collaborations include working with Paul Smith, Liberty of London, Tatty Devine and Vogue. Ryan's work has been recently viewed on exhibit at a solo show in SOHOTEL Artspace Gallery in New York, an exhibition of ceramics at The Charleston

Gallery and a solo exhibition at Sims Reed Gallery in London. Other stand out accomplishments include 'This Is For You', 'A Sky Full Of Kindness', 'The Invisible Kingdom' and 'The Kingdom Revealed', four books written and illustrated by Ryan.

'The Invisible Kingdom' and 'The Kingdom Revealed' are the first two installments in a new book trilogy. The Invisible Kingdom follows the story of a young, resistant prince destined to be king, who finds a way to sneak out of his kingdom and discover the real world beyond the palace walls. In part two, The Kingdom Revealed, the young boy learns to not only overcome the challenges of everyday life, but to appreciate life and discover what matters most.

Ryan currently lives and works in London, where he is presently working on new projects at his studio. From November 26th through December 17th, his shop Ryantown will be open on Wednesday evenings along the shops on Columbia Road in London for the holiday season. For fans living outside of the United Kingdom, you can learn more and acquire Mr. Ryan's artwork by visiting <http://shop.robryanstudio.com/>.



Erin Coughlin is an award nominated journalist, writer and producer.

She is a Guest Commentator for the British Broadcasting Company and was featured on Newsweek's 2016 "Ones To Watch" List.

Erin has developed featured content for popular media outlets including NBC Universal's SyFy, Entertainment Weekly and The Surge. Her work has been translated for international distributed publications overseas. She has worked for various film and TV productions, popular film directors and film festivals. As a public program developer and guest speaker, she generates interactive content for both in-person and virtual events, workshops and more. When she's not working on a book or screenplay, Erin enjoys creating content for her podcast.

For additional information, media appearances and inquiries visit www.ecoughlin.com

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