

IT'S A R E V O L U T I O N !

FORMERLY A BASTION OF THE OLD BOY'S CLUB,
THE FILM BUSINESS IS BEING INVADED BY . . .

W O M E N



girls on film

STORY BY JODI CRAWFORD



Kirsteen McLean

- As a 3rd Assistant Director works with cast, getting them to the right place at the right time, making sure things run smoothly
- has worked on such films as *Mimic*, *eXistenZ*, and the recent blockbuster *X-Men*
- is currently producing a short, independent film. Raises money, scouts locations, gets shooting permits, puts together schedules, etc



Lisa Hayes

- Has completed five short films and is working on her first feature
- Has taken her films to festivals around the world, including those in France, Italy and Russia
- Has sold copies of her work to French television, Canadian television, and post-secondary institutions world-wide
- Made her first film for about \$2500
- Makes films about people and things she knows
- www.hazypictures.com



Paula Tiberius

- Has completed three short films and is working on her first feature
- Sold her film *Busk* to WTN, The Comedy Network, and TV Finland
- Has taken her films to festivals across North America
- also works for an animation production company, travelling throughout the U.S. to pitch the studio and their programs
- Is working on her current project, *Goldirocks*, a rock 'n' roll fairytale
- www.interlog.com/~paulat/tapas.html



Justine Whelan

- As a 2nd Assistant Director, supports the 1st Assistant Director, plans next day's schedule, implements creative ideas, makes sure cast and crew is aware of what's going on
- Has worked on a number of feature and television films, as well as series
- Has worked on such programs as "The Real Blonde," "Daydream Believers: The Monkees Story," and currently, the TV series "In a Heartbeat"
- Deals with communication, problem solving and the flow of information
- Is currently producing an independent short film and has completed two feature scripts

ABOVE PHOTOS: r v plastino
MAKEUP: ASHLEIGH FOSTER
HAIR: AMANDA BRIGHT
HAIR PRODUCTS: L'ANZA

VENTURING

into the once testosterone-laden worlds of independent and mainstream film, women are rising through the ranks behind the scenes. I sat down with four women involved in the film industry (in both independent and mainstream factions) to see what it was really like behind those scenes. Is it an enlightened, egalitarian industry? Or do things still have to progress? Their responses may surprise you.

So, What's It Like?

Although some definite improvements and breakthroughs have happened in the last 15 to 20 years, these women say that the industry still, unfortunately, doesn't treat woman and men as equals. Those involved in mainstream film admit that there's still a disparity between numbers of men and women on set. Specifically in technical fields, women aren't given the same level of authority either.

Their numbers, however, are on the rise. "Thanks to the women's movement, women are being permitted to do more male-oriented jobs," says Kirsteen McLean. She adds that the younger crews moving up through the ranks help fuel the increase in the numbers of women in film.

Lisa Hayes agrees. "A lot of equity issues over the past ten years have helped to promote women and visible minorities in filmmaking. But, there's still a long way to go." Paula Tiberius observes that there are many people in Toronto's independent film scene who are breaking through the stereotypes of male and female-oriented jobs. But, don't get too complacent! She too warns that things still aren't equal. "Younger people haven't been in the workforce long enough to see how you still get cut down. Women still make less money."

The f-word

All the interviewees assert that women in film face more difficulties in being taken seriously than their male counterparts do, advising that females must be thick-skinned. McLean points out that there's a perception that, as a female, you don't really know what's going on, and that you have to prove yourself. Justine Whelan agrees that things can be difficult, with sexist, joking

comments on set and gender-specific titles like *Best Boy* still in use (although she acknowledges that a word is not going to stop women who are determined to make it).

Another problem, one that seems to be inherent in this business, is the whole female "bitch" versus male "go-getter" stigma. It's difficult to be a woman and assert yourself, as you can be tagged a "bitch," says McLean, and she admits to playing a slightly more submissive role in order to avoid that.

But that strategy can backfire sometimes too: Whelan says that often a woman's lack of aggression and of the ability to "sell herself" has held her career back. Often, she says, women with more qualifications but less bravado are passed over for positions in favour of men. Consequently, feminism is not a dirty word for these women. Despite the bad rap it has received of late, they see the need for, and the benefits derived from, the women's movement. McLean admits that 10 years ago it would have been much more difficult for her to get ahead in the feature film industry, adding that there still aren't many female 1st Assistant Directors in mainstream film. Tiberius, who calls herself a feminist, admits that the word makes people "go crazy." She insists that change is still needed. "It's a bunch of bullshit that we're finished with the feminist movement!"

Indie vs. Mainstream

Many women slake their thirst for power and creative control by becoming involved in independent film. All four women are currently working on independent films in some capacity. Hayes says that often people will invest their own money, time and energy to make their films, and to do this it must be something that they feel very strongly about, a particular story they want to tell.

Tiberius loves the input she can have in her own, independent film. Her fingers are in every piece of the pie: she writes, directs, produces, and edits her films, and loves the format because, "I can do what I want!"

"I feel lucky if I can do one film a year that's really worthy," says Whelan, "I want to do something for my soul, and the rest of the year I'll work to make money." Although, she says, working in mainstream film helps her learn how to put together a movie and see how people work, her job isn't terribly creative and ends up sapping a lot of her energy. McLean says that working on mainstream film sucks the creativity out of her too, and feels she needs to work on an independent film for her personal satisfaction – as a labour of love.

Whelan and McLean both admit that they would like to be able to continue to work in the mainstream and independent industries because of the benefits that both offer. They say that the experience and financial rewards of the mainstream industry helps them follow their creative visions and the ability to "call something their own," in an independent production. Although,



at times, the output required in mainstream can use up their energy and creativity, the cachet and money are worth it at this point in their careers.

On the up side

Of course, there are many positive aspects of working in the film industry. Being female can even give you some advantages: there are grant opportunities for women in film, female-centric organizations, and women film festivals. Tiberius says because her film is a woman's story (*Goldirocks* is a twist on the traditional fairy tale, in which curiosity pays off for the aggressive female protagonist), that makes it fresh, drawing attention when something like a stereotypical male action film may not. Hayes has attended a number of women's film festivals showing her short films. And McLean says that the casts allow her to work with them closely because of their relative ease in dealing with women. The women also point out that the old boy's club likes to hire attractive, young women in entry-level positions. Although this may be done for a purely sexist reason, they say this allows for a foot in the door. With some hard work, these women can propel themselves forward from that starting point. And, despite inequities or other negatives, the reality is that the film business is an interesting one in which to work. Says Whelan, "I wake up in the morning, and I'm not going to some cubicle in a bank!"

Back to the Future

What a difference 10 years makes! Everyone interviewed admits that, although 10 to 20 years ago women just wouldn't hold certain positions, things are now heading towards much more equality. Because of the women's movement, many women are now being offered certain opportunities and encouraged to enter industries that are not traditionally female. All four of these women stress that, as women advance to positions of power, they hope that they'll address the imbalance of gender in the industry. And all say they are planning on doing their part in changing the perception, and the numbers, of women in film. ©

advice FROM 4 WOMEN IN FILM

do

- get a thick skin
- believe in yourself
- define your vision and stick to it
- join LIFT (Liaison of Independent Filmmakers in Toronto)
- try to have a life outside your career
- work hard!
- determine your goals
- glean all the information you can
- volunteer
- have the ability to be a team player — working with others is integral in film
- join organizations relating to woman in film

don't

- plan on getting rich
- let people bum you out
- sleep around — it could cost you a job and your reputation in the industry
- be too flirtatious — you'll lose your credibility
- get into it for the glamour — filming in garbage dumps, outside in the middle of January, in some crappy warehouse with fake snow blowing on you ... does this sound glamorous?
- get too involved in the gossip
- be intimidated
- stop being open-minded and flexible
- plan on being autonomous

