

Interviews: Red-Carpet Opening Night for Reeling32 Film Festival

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CHICAGO – Reeling32, the Chicago International LGBT Film Festival, had a sensational Opening Night on Thursday, September 18th, 2014. The festival began with “Boy Meets Girl,” featuring Michelle Hendley in her debut performance, and directed by Eric Schaeffer. Both star and director attended the Opening Night.

“Boy Meets Girl” tells the story of Ricky (Hendley), a transgender girl from a small town, who accepts the world as it is around her. Hendley is a transgender actor, and brought a perfect balance of humor and valor to the role. Eric Schaeffer is a veteran director of television and film, including the indie favorites “If Lucy Fell” (1996) and “Mind the Gap” (2004). This is his ninth feature film.

“Reeling32,” the 2014 Chicago LGBT International Film Festival has an incredible line-up of films, events and parties until closing night on Thursday, September 25th. Theater venues include the historic Music Box Theater, Landmark’s Century Centre Cinema and Chicago Filmmakers. Click the link below the interviews to check out details on the entire line-up of happenings.

HollywoodChicago.com was on the Red Carpet on the Opening Night of the Reeling32 Film Festival, and captured the following interviews with Michelle Hendley and Eric Schaeffer of “Boy Meets World”



Michelle Hendley, Lead Actress in “Boy Meets Girl”



Michelle Hendley on the Red Carpet at Reeling32 Opening Night, Sept. 18, 2014

Photo credit: Patrick McDonald for HollywoodChicago.com

HollywoodChicago.com: What was it like portraying a character in ‘Boy Meets Girl’ that so closely aligns to your actual life?

Michelle Hendley: This was my first movie role in anything ever, so I would say it was a pretty good stepping stone into acting. Ricky isn’t completely like myself, but our lives have a lot of parallels. It was comforting, since this was all so new to me, that I just had to bring myself into the role.

HollywoodChicago.com: What was the most amazing parallel that you found between you and Ricky?

Hendley: That other people find us so empowering. I just live my life, and people I encounter seem so moved by it. That’s humbling and pretty cool.

HollywoodChicago.com: At what point in your life did you know you felt different than how you’d been born, and how did you first deal with the truth of it?

Hendley: I always felt different. I dressed the part when I was young, and played with dolls. It wasn’t until I was a teenager that I assessed that part of myself. I looked more into it then, went to my parents about it – they were supporting and loving – and I decided this is what I needed to do for myself.

HollywoodChicago.com: You use cyberspace as a forum for expressing the stages and circumstances of your full transition. How do you believe the miracle of the internet helps persons that have similar circumstances to you?

Hendley: I would have not have started by YouTube page, until I saw other girls doing it. It’s a community, and it’s incredible – that was something I didn’t have growing up in Missouri. On the internet they were so many that were willing to share their stories, and when I saw that, and it made me feel better, I wanted to share myself with the world as well.

HollywoodChicago.com: What is the most personal element of yourself that we find in your film?

Hendley: There was one scene in which I am called out, and torn down, on a basic and fundamental level. It shatters the character. To get to that point for the film, I had to let myself feel that way. It was pretty deep and pretty emotional, but it made the scene work, and I was proud of it.

HollywoodChicago.com: Did you find that to be cathartic, and did you find that it unburdened you more personally?

Hendley: A little bit. One of the other actors in the film, Alex Turshen, told me that I had to exorcise those emotions, to get it out of me, and I don't need to revisit them. It was very powerful.

HollywoodChicago.com: Finally, when you talk about the love of what your life has become, given the trials it took to get here, what's the first thing you talk about?

Hendley: The fact that I have a very strong and supportive network of friends is at the forefront of what pushes me in my life. It helped me to be who I am today for sure, and I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for those people in my life.



Eric Schaeffer, Director of "Boy Meets Girl"



Director Eric Schaeffer and Michelle Hendley Answer Audience Questions at Reeling32 Opening Night

Photo credit: Patrick McDonald for HollywoodChicago.com

HollywoodChicago.com: When did you first have the germ of the idea for this film?

Eric Schaeffer: There wasn't a 'ah-ha' moment. I make a TV show or a movie, then I turn around and think, what am I going to do next? I was just thinking about it, and actually this film is thematically similar to all my previous films. It's about finding love, experiencing friendship, having a spiritual life, feeling alienated and in the end wanting a unification of spirit. My films are very human and work to break stereotypes. I thought, how can I achieve that type of movie, where people can see it in a fresh way? It was a path into subject matter that is important to me, in a way that audiences can see it.

HollywoodChicago.com: Sexual identity and self-identification has gotten much more loose in the younger and more-open late-teen and early twenties generation. How do you think that will affect overall attitudes when that generation gets older and in power?

Schaeffer: Well, the ones who are comfortable and 'out' in the identifications of who they are, I would hope that continues. And when they get power, they will yield it in a way that will be helpful to further the cause against misinformation and bigotry in that area. I would hope that, but who knows? Only time will tell.

HollywoodChicago.com: What fascinates you about the history of sexual identity, and the psychological ramifications of the closeting most people had to do up to the late 20th Century?

Schaeffer: I don't think it's dramatic to say that anybody who closeted their desires, especially their sexual desires, are at the forefront of emotional and physical violence. When they self-hate in that way, by squashing their true selves, it manifests into hating everybody else. It could range from politicians who speak against a sexual preference, but practice it, to actual physical or psychological abuse.

HollywoodChicago.com: You had an ‘It’s a Wonderful Life’ moment in the film, how did you feel confident that the story that came before it was enough to generate that moment?

Schaeffer: I’m a big fat romantic at heart. One of the greatest reviews I ever got in my life is when a writer said that my film ‘If Lucy Fell’ reminded them of a Preston Sturges movie. There is a resonance to the films that I love from that era, which have a fairy tale element to them, but are also grounded in radical reality. I feel like it’s not an easy fence to straddle, because we experience life in all emotions at once, and I want that to come through in my films.

HollywoodChicago.com: When you talk about your love for filmmaking, what is the first thing you talk about primarily?

Schaeffer: It’s the feeling that I am unifying people. It’s the feeling I get when I’m in the audience at my film, and I hear a laugh, that they are laughing through their identification with the human condition. And that in a world of daily fractures, what a great gift to experience. If I can be of small service or help in that area, then it is gratifying for me. That’s what I talk about.

“Reeling32,” Chicago’s LGBT International Film Festival, runs from September 18th-25th, 2014. For film, events and ticket information [click here](#). [18]



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