

Interview: 'The Women's Film Festival' Co-Founder Layne Marie Williams

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CHICAGO – One of the best points that Layne Marie Williams – co-founder/director of “The Women’s Film Festival” (TWFF) of Philadelphia – made in her interview with HollywoodChicago.com, was that even though the festival was developed to showcase the works of women filmmakers, it plays to an audience of everybody. This is how badass creators come together, and this is the second year of The Women’s Film Festival, unspooling on Friday, March 11th, and running through Sunday, March 13th, 2016.

Layne Marie Williams was just out of University of the Arts in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania – and was working as a professional stage actress – when she decided to co-found a women’s film festival. TWFF launched last year, and Williams continues to help facilitate it, even though she moved to Chicago nine months ago.



In Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, at the University of the Arts

Photo credit: [TheWomensFilmFestival.org](#)

Williams spoke to HollywoodChicago.com recently about TWFF, about her own experiences as a model/actress, and the progress of work on her next film as director – entitled “Doll Face.”

HollywoodChicago.com: This is the second year for TWFF in Philadelphia, what are the origins of this festival and was your role as co-founder and director?

Layne Marie Williams: I met the other co-founder in October of 2014, totally at random, while working on my first film, ‘Trigger Happy Dagger.’ She ran the local Asian film festival, and when we met for lunch we talked about there wasn’t a women’s film festival on the East Coast, and how that left women with a lack of opportunity to showcase their work. We just agreed, ‘let’s make a festival,’ We got the ball rolling, and I pulled in women that I believed in and had worked with and she did that as well, and we did the first one last year.

HollywoodChicago.com: Since is the second annual festival, what did you learn from the first one that affects the upcoming second one?

Williams: Holy hell, so many things. [laughs] When I began this process, I had just graduated from college with a BFA in acting, and here I was founding a film festival. I just threw myself into it, despite a lack of background in it, but the reason I got involved in it because I just kept saying ‘yes.’ So the biggest challenge for the first festival was just learning how to do it. I had to sit across from potential sponsors and the Greater Philly Film Office and seem like I belonged there. This year, the challenge is helping to coordinate from a distance, which I don’t think I could have done last year.

HollywoodChicago.com: What are some distinguishing elements of the TWFF that make it difference than any other film fest in the country?

Williams: The team we've assembled in the past two years are super unique. We have people creating this platform that come from all walks of life – we've got people of color, the Asian community, the LGBTQ community and women of all ages. That vast range of women's voices has been a great advantage, because they all believe in the cause. It's just from the ground up – with blood, sweat and tears.

Another thing that makes it distinctive is that we actually enhanced the film community of Philadelphia, because that community isn't as advanced as it is in Chicago. I think this film festival, along with the women who are behind it, are all helping the film scene in Philly move forward.

HollywoodChicago.com: I noticed some panels on your schedule. What are some of the topics you're tackling?

Williams: We have one panel called 'Funny Women,' highlighting the larger comedy scene in Philadelphia and women's contributions to it. And we always do panels on current women directors and projects, which updates everyone.

HollywoodChicago.com: What percentage of short films do you have versus feature films?

Williams: I don't have exact percentages, but we do show more short films than features. One of our showcase features is "I Believe in Unicorns," and the director Leah Meyerhoff is going to do a Skype Q&A afterward.

HollywoodChicago.com: What in your opinion is the state of women filmmakers in 2016, versus the general film industry? What is exciting about some of the younger female voices in cinema at your festival, and their contributions to storytelling and the art?

Williams: I think that women in the film industry are progressing, and the industry is becoming more aware of women's contributions. And the people that I work with, women and men, are actively working to provide opportunity for women, and as importantly, talking about it without fear. The more that people speak up unafraid – with the Oscar diversity situation, for example – and the more they actively pursue change, that keeps making the situation for women in film that much better.



Layne Marie Williams, Co-Founder and Director of the TWFF

Photo credit: Layne Marie Williams

HollywoodChicago.com: Do you think there are characteristics that define a woman's approach to the cinema art versus a man's approach, or are you of the faith that it doesn't really have to distinguished?

Williams: I don't believe it has to be distinguished. One of the valuable approaches at our first festival was that we intentionally wanted to include men, and never exclude any film point of view. That is part of encouraging men and women to work side-by-side, both in front and behind the camera. I not interested in pushing anyone aside while working in the film industry, or making men less valued or threatened. It's more about everyone pulling up a chair to the table, and sitting together, to make really powerful artistic expressions.

HollywoodChicago.com: You are in the midst of shooting and directing a feature film called 'Doll Face.' What is the story within the film, and why was it close enough to your creative core to make it your first feature?

Williams: Actually it's still on edge of whether it will be a feature or not, which is one of the interesting things about the process of making the film. There is an outline of a script, but we're using a lot of improvisation, that's why the length hasn't been determined. We're showing a

trailer at TWFF, and we’re going to keep filtering what will best serve the material in the film. It’s become an epic beast.

HollywoodChicago.com: What’s your one sentence pitch on the film?

Williams: It focuses on a contemporary interracial couple, that get caught up in a societal, religious and fundamental premise regarding the institution of marriage. It’s a wild love story, with elements of magical realism, with themes of what we want and hope for in the pursuit of love.

HollywoodChicago.com: You are also a model. Where do you think the line is for expressing the female form and the energy it gives fashion versus exploiting it? Did you ever think you’ve danced on that line?

Williams: I think the female form is one of the most beautiful things in the world. In being a model and an actress, you can get used to being ‘puppeteered,’ and you get used to people looking and scrutinizing you. It’s never something I feel apprehensive about as long as the work is motivated and artistically driven.

HollywoodChicago.com: The millennial generation of women is bring a new bad ass attitude toward culture, politics and the workplace. What do you anticipate the future of this generation will be when conquering leadership roles and the arts, especially in cinema?

Williams: I think we’re on the brink of opening a lot of doors. I hope that someday if I have a daughter that she won’t have to fight as much to make her voice heard. We’re on our way to continuing a conversation that has gone on for generations, even eons, regarding a woman’s role in society, and it’s always evolving.

HollywoodChicago.com: As an actress, what is the best piece of performance advice you’ve ever received, and what is an example of how you used it when doing a specific role?

Williams: Trust the journey. But that also translates from performance into any endeavor in any career, but everything you do is part of the process, and you can use every bit of information to be a better artist and human being. Also actually listening and being present – that’s all part of the best advice I’d ever received.

HollywoodChicago.com: Finally, what do want to say to welcome the filmmakers and potential audience to The Women’s Film Festival next weekend?

Williams: I just want to say that women, men – even if you’re purple or wear two different shoes – anyone out there, just keep creating work, putting yourself out there and keep hustling, and pull up a chair to the festival.

“The Women’s Film Festival” opens in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, at the Terra Building at The University for the Arts on Friday, March 11th, and runs through Sunday, March 13th, 2016. [Click here](#) [14] for schedules, admission prices and more specific information.



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By [PATRICK McDONALD](#) [16]
Writer, Editorial Coordinator
HollywoodChicago.com
pat@hollywoodchicago.com [15]

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