

Interview, Audio: Director Jeremy Jasper Rocks 'Patti Cake\$'

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CHICAGO – How does a filmmaker create a movie about a white girl in New Jersey dreaming of being a hip-hop star? He takes the beats from his own life admiration of the music genre and fleshes out a working class story about pushing back against the odds. Jeremy Jasper wrote and directed the electrically poignant “Patti Cake\$.”

The film features Danielle Macdonald as the title character, that of a bartender with a talent for hip hop rhymes, and her friends Jheri (Sid Dhananjay) and Bob (Mamoudou Athie), who want to help her record those beats. Patti’s home life is difficult, as her mother Barb (Bridget Everett) is depressed and unstable, plus her beloved grandmother (Cathy Moriarty) is fighting a homebound illness. But Patti will not be stopped, despite her weight, the odds and her obsession with rapper O-Z (Sahr Ngaujah). The film marks the debut of Jeremy Jasper as a feature director, and he composed the original music.



Writer/Director Jeremy Jasper Bonds with Danielle Macdonald on the Set of 'Patti Cake\$'

Photo credit: Fox Searchlight Pictures

Jasper was born in New Jersey, and considers Patti to be his fictional soul sister. After graduating from Wesleyan University, he cut his teeth on music video for Florence + The Machine and Selena Gomez, and his direction for the “Target Kaleidoscopic Fashion Spectacular” won a Cannes Golden Lion and was inducted into the New York City Museum of Modern Arts’ permanent collection. Encouraged by fellow

Wesleyan grad Behn Zeitlan ("Beasts of the Southern Wild"), Jasper submitted his "Patti Cake\$" script to the Sundance Screenwriters Lab. He was selected, and was mentored through the process while developing his characters with eventual cast members Danielle Macdonald and Bridget Everett. HollywoodChicago.com talked to him about that process, and his roots in hip-hop and New Jersey culture.

HollywoodChicago.com: We've seen this type of hip-hop themed film in 'Hustle and Flow' and '8 Mile.' What makes your interpretation of the underdog against-the-odds different, especially in Patti's interaction with the music that propels her forward?

Jeremy Jasper: The films you mentioned are the gold standard, but definitely 'Patti' is in the same genre. My central character has a very different personality than the other examples, first I consider it a feminist film, because it is led by strong female performances. It contains a bit more emotion, and it mixes reality and fantasy, and that opens it up in a different way. I nicknamed it '8-1/2 Mile' [reference to the classic Fellini film].

HollywoodChicago.com: [Laughs] That is beautiful, man.

Jasper: Yes, we weren't shy about going into hallucinations and dreams. There is a 'Wizard of Oz' quality to this suburban misfit story... we even put Manhattan in the elusive background as sort of an Emerald City. Patti is a different kind of female hero, she's beautiful and talented despite being heavy set, with no f**king excuses. She is what she is.

HollywoodChicago.com: How did Danielle and Bridget coming to help build the characters at the Sundance Labs help to bring those roles alive?

Jasper: It was incredible. I'd been thinking about and writing these characters for a year and a half before I met them, and they came in the middle of the process at Sundance. Characters on paper always feel two dimensional, so to find and meet the faces that felt right, and then bring them to Sundance, convinced me that these women in the story were the real deal. That influenced a few more drafts of the script, using what I learned from them, and tailoring the characters to their talents.

HollywoodChicago.com: Since you also created the music in the film, how did you get inside the minds of Patti and her friend Jheri, to compose the music that they might compose?

Jasper: That was tricky. I am forty years old, so I had all these illusions, and the rhymes were peppered with 'old guy shit.' [laughs] I had people reading it, and they would say 'a 23 year old girl doesn't know a Last Tango in Paris reference.' Patti wouldn't know what that was. It was actually a generation that I wasn't quite in touch with, so I had to whittle down the 'me' in the music and the references a bit.



Danielle Macdonald Brings it Home in Jeremy Jasper's 'Patti Cake\$'

Photo credit: Fox Searchlight Pictures

HollywoodChicago.com: In the Sundance Lab process, what did you learn about yourself and filmmaking, after going through it?

Jasper: I was very nervous going in, and I didn't know if I had what it takes to get through it... at the point I was in my career this might have been a fluke. I had some incredible mentors, even Robert Redford...

HollywoodChicago.com: Bobby came in?

Jasper: Yeah, and 'Uncle Bob' kind of took me under his wing, and was very supportive. He is the man, and made me feel what I was doing

was working, and was good and important. There were other people who would here the story and there reaction would be like a punchline... 'oh, you're doing a film about a white girl from New Jersey who raps?' But Robert Redford understood the other angle to the story, and gave me the right encouragement.

In the audio portion of the interview, Jeremy Jasper talks about the working class angle in the film, his cinematic influences and how hip-hop is the music that defined the last part of the 20th Century and still defines the moment.

"Patti Cake\$" opened in select theaters nationwide on August 18th. See local listings for theaters and show times. Featuring Danielle Macdonald, Bridget Everett, Cathy Moriarty, Mamoudou Athie and Siddharth Dhananjay. Written and directed by Jeremy Jasper. Rated "R"



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