



## MFA in FILM & TV

IN ASSOCIATION WITH KILLER FILMS

### Introduction

Spring has sprung! It feels like just yesterday we had a giant snowstorm roll through. We are at the end of our spring semester. Students are tying up loose ends on projects and scripts, and faculty are getting ready for grading mode. In this issue of In the Loop, we wanted to highlight two incredible TV writing students, ask our MFA directors how they feel about teaching and learning during a pandemic, and get everyone excited for Fall 2021. Read all about this and more below!

### Spotlight: Year Three Students

SBU's third-year Television Writing graduate students are winding down their final semester and preparing for graduation. The following two are heading out with a bang! For **Talisa Chang**, an internship with showrunner and writer Bash Doran (*Traitors*, *The Looming Tower*, *Boardwalk Empire*) has been an amazing experience. "I was first introduced to Bash's work when she spoke at the TV Writing Guest Series," Talisa said. This year Talisa has worked closely with Doran by attending producer meetings, researching imagery, and brainstorming stories. She has been able to attend table reads and studio pitches, and listen in on calls with agents and managers—but it's her great working relationship with Doran that has made her internship so educational. "It's very much a mentor/mentee relationship," Talisa explained. "She makes time to answer career questions and always brings me into the conversation." Talisa, who has freelanced in tech research, copywriting, teaching, and plenty more, appreciates working with a mentor who recognizes her competency. "She sees what I'm capable of doing and she wants to lift me up."

During her third year, **Ada Lee Halofsky's** short scripts and pilots have gained attention at festivals and contests. This spring, two of her scripts, *Two Falls Forward*, *One Step Back* and *Going out of Business Special* were semi-finalists in the Atlanta Film Festival. Her work has also placed at Austin Film Festival, BlueCat, and the Final Draft Emerging Screenwriters Contest. Ada, who writes dark comedies, says that the repetition and notes process in her graduate program has absolutely improved her writing. "You will find your voice," she said. "Everyone in my cohort has a distinctive style and point-of-view. You could pick up one page of any of our scripts and immediately identify who wrote it."

Congratulations to Talisa, Ada, and the entire talented Class of 2021!

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Welcome to our final newsletter of the 2020-2021 school year! Time has really flown by, but we are excited for the summer and the Fall 2021 semester. May your summer be full of relaxation and creativity!



Third-Year TV Writing Students Talisa Chang and Ada Lee Halofsky

### End of Year Reflections

#### From MFA in Television Writing Director, Alan Kingsberg:



During the pandemic, our TV writers' dedication to their craft and their dreams was inspiring as they managed to turn their quarantine into words, pages, stories, and scripts, with more awards won than in any past year. We were able to bring more working TV writers into our community, including LA-based showrunners Ashley Lyle and Bart Nickerson who shared the story of getting their series *Yellowjackets* greenlit at Showtime. Award-winning directors John Coles (*West Wing*, *House of Cards*) and Matt Penn (*Sopranos*, *Orange is the New Black*) found time to create a new class covering the history of television. Showrunner Michael Sardo (*Fairly Legal*, *Tracey Ullman Show*) visited via Zoom for a three-session master class. A source of pride for me is that visiting industry professionals and guest faculty consistently rave about the talent, knowledge, and positive energy of our students -- so much so that four showrunners offered one-on-one mentoring internships this year! The culture of our program as created by our leaders in Southampton and modeled by our faculty in Manhattan has led to a community of students that consistently shine. And the pandemic only accelerated this sense of cooperation, camaraderie, and generosity in our community.

#### From MFA in Film Director Magdalene Brandeis:

Film production, during regular times, is a complex, multi-faceted thing, involving time and space and money and talent and people, lots of people. During lockdown, our film faculty and students faced the enigma of how to keep the dream alive, with production -- the whole film industry -- stopped in its tracks. Perry Blackshear stepped in and offered up his Friday Lab, Jordan Roberts taught essential hands-on skills-- editing and cinematography--on zoom. Jennie Allen got students writing short films and prepping them, so that when we emerged this spring, all could shoot their projects with the COVID safety plan she crafted from tracking the union rules and ever-changing white papers. Annette Handley-Chandler and Lenny Crooks led them through first and last drafts of features, Karen Offitzer trained them how to teach, Simone Pero guided them to prep their projects for marketing and distribution, and Scott Sullivan, the director of our Manhattan Center, trained himself to give COVID pool tests. Christine Vachon, too, went out of her way. She zoomed in at 2 AM from the Venice Film Festival and on the road to Kentucky, brought into our zoom classroom stellar guests from far and wide such as: casting director Maribeth Fox (Laura Rosenthal Casting), head of physical production and scheduling Brian Bell (Notable Features), production designer Sam Lisenco, cinematographer Ashley Connor, Post Production Supervisor Isabel Henderson & executive Tom Quinn from Neon and legendary director Todd Haynes and producer James Schamus. Spring focused on distribution, bringing in executives from A24, Bleecker Street Media, IFC Films, Cinetic Media, Annapurna, and K Period Media. After visiting our class, Mynette Louie's company The Population offered internships to our students, as did the International Emmys, with Killer Films' offering coverage on our students' scripts as well.



Equally, if not more, the students have impressed me. They have shown greater flexibility, adaptability, perseverance, patience, and compassion for each other. During lockdown, they trained as teachers and taught their first film classes. As we began to meet in person, they started crewing together, developing an acute awareness of the actual distance of six feet, the HVAC capacity for air filters, and the immune strength of a variety of face masks. They self-tested, self-isolated, and finally, after nearly a year of patience, shot their movies. Our *Dogme* team won the SUNY PACC Prize, and a first-year student was just awarded the Turner Fellowship Research Funds to make her short film this summer. We, at this moment, have short films on their way to Cannes, a film/TV collaboration on its way to the Stony Brook Film Festival, and a feature on its way to Sundance and to the Hamptons Film Fest. We have not just survived, we have prevailed.

This year I often think of memory - how these people will be associated with each other and this time, forever, unforgettable. How lucky are we to have gone through this with each other.

### Spring Productions

Film students are finishing up their spring productions. Second-year student **David DeOliveira** directed the film, *A Night to Remember*, on May 1st and 2nd. The short is about a man with insomnia who fights through a sleepless night while battling a growing obsession with the Titanic. Parker Cowden, Charlie Desjardin, and Conor Demmett were the producer, director of photography, and sound recordist, respectively.



A Night to Remember

First-year student **Alberta Kallon** directed and produced her first short in mid-April. The film is called *Survival of the Fittest*, and tells the story of a young woman named Zahra and her realization that the only way out of her abusive marriage is in a casket--so, Zahra chooses to live. With the support of her crew, Alberta shot her ten-page script in two days in Brooklyn.

Additionally, first-year students **Micah Demby** and **Edward Krasniewski** both completed shooting their first-year films over May 1st and 2nd. Micah's film, *He Came From Venus*, was shot with a RED camera and Easy Rig in Dallas, TX, and revolves around ghosting and loneliness within the pandemic. Edward's film, *Spring*, follows the story of a young boy vying for independence and ultimately growing up too fast. While Micah crewed with Dallas locals, Edward shot his film with assistance from other students in the program. Edward shot his film entirely outside on the streets of Fort Greene, Brooklyn, using a single lens (35mm) and an Easy Rig.



Micah's Shoot, He Came From Venus



Edward's Shoot, Spring



Alberta's Shoot, A Night to Remember

### Graduation, New Class, Scholarships and Awards

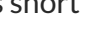
First, we want to extend an enormous, heartfelt congratulations to our graduates! A graduation ceremony will be held this Fall for all those graduating from our programs in May 2021.

Additionally, we want to welcome our incoming graduate students who have chosen to seek out their MFA in Film or TV Writing with us. We are so excited to have you join us.



Finally, congratulations to our first year student **Micah Demby** for receiving a Turner Research Award for her short film project. *Silhouette* is a short film in which a young escort falls for one of her clients, only to discover he is not the man he presents himself to be. However, *Silhouette* is much deeper than that. It addresses the stigma society has placed on sex workers, the dangers women face when dating, and the lack of care society often has towards black women and people of color. Micah will film this short this summer. Go get 'em, Micah!

### Connect With Us!



Thank you for tuning into our newsletter this year! Have a great summer and we hope to see you in the Fall! Be sure to follow us on our social media pages for any summer updates:

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To apply to our Film or TV Writing MFA programs or for more information, please visit <http://stonybrook.edu/film-tv-writing>