

Jennifer DeLia visits home with industry advice and new film 'Billy Bates'

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There seems to be two easily identifiable truths about [Kansas City](#) filmmakers. Film professionals who thrive locally tend to uproot and head for larger markets. But even more consistently, they don't.

Some film artists find Kansas City more conducive to film and family. Others want to invest in this city and help lay a durable cine-infrastructure. There are even those who are aware that they have much to learn. They learn it here and utilize it later.

However, a large number of filmmakers stay put out of insecurity. There can be a sentiment of fear surrounding the choice to branch out. What if I don't make it? Am I really good enough?

Self-doubt is a great way to see opportunities deteriorate.

Director and writer, Jennifer DeLia grew up in Overland Park, KS, moved away, made some movies and returns home with her brand new feature, "[Billy Bates](#)".

Produced by Poverty Row Entertainment, "Billy Bates" has its Kansas City premiere at the Tivoli Theater for a special red carpet engagement on Friday, November 7, at 7:00 p.m. DeLia, her producing partner Julie Pacino (Al Pacino's eldest daughter) and "Billy Bates" star, James Wirt will be in attendance.

One of the chief reasons DeLia returns home is to honor her belief that Kansas City has a thriving arts community "I didn't get to tap into it growing up there because I was sheltered."

Being sheltered ultimately assisted in her success. "I had a wild imagination as a kid," DeLia continues. "That was my escape."

As it was for many artists in the past, her choice to leave was one of necessity. Though today Kansas City has an emerging industry of its own, yesterday that was not the case. "In leaving, I felt the not having connections. Growing up in Kansas I knew I needed to learn the business and get to the point where I could create my own opportunities. It was a clear path of starting out as a production assistant or intern and really nurturing relationships along the way."

She emphasizes, "There is not one formula for doing this, [but] the world works on relationships, connections of substance and staying dedicated to the work."

The work is the end result of years of crafting, but the success comes from that age old adage -- not what you know, but who.

“Networking is the pulse of everything. You have to be fearless in putting yourself out there, building your worth as a person, as an artist. You could be the most talented artist in the world, but nobody would ever know, if you don’t step outside your comfort zone.”

Her words are familiar. Every artist hears them at least once. But what they may not hear is the how to cultivate relationships. DeLia sheds some light.

“Follow-through is key. Relationships in the industry have so much to do with follow-through; people seeing that you do what you say you’re going to do. They will continue to have your back.”

That is the golden advice of an artist from Kansas who answered those questions, confronted any self-doubt and took a chance.

Because of it she returns with a film that explores the dynamics of her philosophy about humanity and artistry. For DeLia, it is about vibrancy and authenticity. “Billy Bates” certainly searches the extremes of brilliance -- the colorfulness, the soulfulness and even the madness.

This movie and her next, both films that follow the lives of artists, their process and their choices are the path in a march toward her highest purpose. “My greater interest is to empower the younger generation to embrace who they are.

“We’ve gotten so star-centric, so much about consumerism. My mission is to bridge that gap between art and commerce and really help to create initiatives that set people on a path to honoring their own process.”

Might DeLia’s story, both on screen and personal, encourage each artist to make the choice that best serves their career and lifestyle. Stay. Or go and like DeLia, come home and visit every now and then, bringing art and advice with you.

DeLia and Pacino are in post-production on their next feature “The First,” starring Julia Stiles as screenwriter Frances Marion.

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