



## DIRECTOR'S SPOTLIGHT: JULIE DAVIS

Julie Davis is a writer, director and producer who was once called “the female Woody Allen” by the New York Times. Her films include “*I Love You, Don’t Touch Me*”, “*Amy’s Orgasm*” (in which she also starred in the title role), and “*All Over The Guy*”. Her latest directorial effort is “Finding Bliss,” which debuts at the Slamdance Film Festival 2009.

**TM:** *So tell me about your earliest memories of movies. Do you remember a particular film, or a moment that first sparked your passion?*

JD: You know, I remember Woody Allen films just being everything to me in Junior High School and High School. I just was obsessed with all of his films; I’d watch them over and over and over again, on VHS of course – there were no DVDs back then. And I also loved old movies; I loved “Sunset Boulevard”, and I loved “All About Eve”, and films like that. I loved Casablanca; those were the films I loved. Then when I was in college, I saw my first Pedro Almodovar film, and I loved his films as well. I would say those were the, Woody Allen and Pedro Almodovar were the two influences that made me want to be a filmmaker.

**TM:** *So how must it have felt to literally compared to Woody Allen?*

JD: Oh my god, it was the – it was like a wet dream. I just died and went to heaven. (laughs) It was so great; I couldn’t believe it. And that was when he was still doing his better films, at the time, you know. I hate having to say that, but he went through a period where it wasn’t that great to be compared to him – although to me it’s always great to be compared to him – but it was really amazing, and ...yeah.

**TM:** *That comparison was made for your feature directorial debut, “I Love You, Don’t Touch Me,” which you wrote, produced, and even edited. So, after all the sweat and the effort to make that film, your very first feature, to receive accolades like that – what was that time like for you? Did you feel, in some sense, like, “I’ve made it”?*

JD: Um, I didn’t feel like I’d made it because it was just – it was so surreal. I’d struggled for so many years. I moved out to LA when I was 21, and I was 28 when the film premiered at Sundance, so- it might not sound like a lot of years, but you know, it was the decade of my twenties, and I had done so many just crappy jobs, temp jobs, the low of the lowest jobs, working as a movie extra; I did everything to learn how to be a filmmaker. And I just never thought it would happen. You know, I’m not a quitter and I really love making films, so, you know, at the end of the day, I – I just had to do it, even if it was just with my little home video camera making films on my own. I couldn’t believe when it was actually accepted at Sundance, and then when it had the reception it did, and when it actually sold. It was surreal in one of those feelings of , “Oh my god, it might actually be too good to be true.”

**TM:** *And then, what kind of doors did that open for you, after?*

JD: Well, it was too good to be true, because (laughs) the distributor that bought the film was Samuel Goldwyn, and then three months after he bought the film, they, um, they shut their door, and they were taken over by the big studio MGM. So, my Cinderella story had a kind of, you know, sad little ending. They tried to bury the film, and put it on the shelf; which they couldn’t do, thank goodness, contractually. They had to release it and it still got



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good reviews, but they didn't give it the kind of release it would have gotten from the original buyer, Sam Goldwyn, who had fallen in love with it. So, you know, it was definitely... *almost* got to the mountaintop, but didn't.

**TM:** *Well, of course, moviemaking generally can be very thrilling, and also very disillusioning. What was the hardest lesson you had to learn about the business?*

JD: Oh, there's so many; so many lessons, hard lessons, and they continue; they're always – no matter how many films you make, there's always a new one. You know, you just don't know what's going to happen, so many steps of the way, with making a film. It's a miracle that actually gets made at all, and then it's a miracle that it turns out well and people like it, and then it's a miracle that it gets to see the light of day. It's so many steps, and I guess what I've learned is – just keep going. Just focus on the work, and the part that I love, that made me fall in love with making movies, when I was a kid. 'Cause if you focus on the end result, you will always be unhappy. It's hard not to focus on the end result, you know – that's how we're wired, that's such a human thing to focus on, the end result, but ... you have to just focus on the actual work itself, and whatever happens, you know – what do they say, expect the – hope for— hope for the best, expect the worst. (laughs) I can't even say it, it's too painful.

**TM:** *So your next film, which was originally called "Why Love Doesn't Work," that was later changed to "Amy's Orgasm", and since by Blockbuster to "Amy's O". I have to tell you, when I looked for it on imdb, and these were the plot keywords: "Female nudity, boyfriend girlfriend relationship, celibacy, feminist, lesbian, sex, writer, independent film."*

JD: I love it! (laughs) That's so perfect!

**TM:** *Pretty much sums it up, right?*

JD: (laughs) That's hilarious. I have to say, it's so funny – I loved the title, "Why Love Doesn't Work", and when I was trying to sell the film – I had a rocky road with that film; it didn't get into Sundance, where my first one did. So that was really tough, and then I was trying to sell the film, and I showed it to Sam Goldwyn of course because he had bought my first film, and he said to me, "The title's horrible! This is a horrible title! Who's going to go see a movie called 'Why Love Doesn't Work'? I mean, it's a date movie! Who's going to take their date to go see that?" And he said, "You know, it should be something really sexy," and I said, "Well, what do you suggest?" And he said, "I don't know, something with 'orgasm' in the title. She's always talking about having orgasms." And I thought he was kidding. But I thought about it, and I came up with "Amy's Orgasm". It was one of about 20 titles with "orgasm" in it, and that's the one I settled on. And I have to say, I'm so – he didn't buy the film, but I'm so grateful to him, because that title really helped get that film seen.

**TM:** *Now, do they actually file it in the correct place in the store, though?*

JD: Oh, yeah! No, it was – they ran the ad in the New York Times, "Amy's Orgasm", you know, huge ads, and at first they kind of balked, but then, you know, when my publicist said, "This won the audience award at the Santa Barbara Film Festival, it's gotten great reviews in Variety and the [Hollywood] Reporter, and all this stuff, and they saw that it was a real film, it just added to the whole kind of controversy of it... which is what you need when you make an independent film. If you don't have any stars, they have to have something to grab on to, so instead of having Julia Roberts in the lead, I had "orgasm" in the title.



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**TM:** *You wrote, directed, and starred in the movie, as Amy Mandell; she's a self-help author, who tells women they don't need a man to be fulfilled, and she's sort of thrown for a loop when she finds herself falling for a radio "shock jock" who's a bit of a chauvinist. Any of this scenario true to life? What do you have in common with Amy?*

JD: You know, I uh, have always had trouble with what I believe and what my head tells me and what my heart tells me, and reconciling those two things, especially in romantic relationships, and that's really what the movie was about.

**TM:** *It seems that you're drawn to material that is about relationships, about love, and about sex. Is there another genre that you feel like you want to explore at some point, or do you feel like this is your groove, this is your niche?*

JD: No... these are the things that are important to me. You know, I think I come to filmmaking as a writer and a storyteller first, and I've always I guess had bad luck with love - I never was a dater and I never was popular and knew how to be with boys in those formative years, so this was kind of - for me, being a filmmaker was a form of self-therapy, and that's really where it stems from and, it's just - it's a topic that is interesting to me. Now, it doesn't mean that I don't want to do other genres; I'd like to broaden my - my stories, but that's always going to be a part of them, because I think that's a part of everyone's life, no matter who they are and what they do; everyone can relate to that.

**TM:** *Now, prior to starring in this film, had you done a great deal of acting?*

JD: Oh, in Amy's Orgasm - yeah, I had been an actor in high school, and in college.

**TM:** *And this was your feature debut, though - is that correct?*

JD: Yes.

**TM:** *Kind of a lot to bite off, right, for your first time in a feature? The starring role.. .*

JD: Yeah - whew. It was a huge challenge, and I knew that I was setting myself up for incredible criticism. But, you can't let that stop you. It was my dream. And I'm so glad that I did it. It was the right part for me, you know. It was just - the part was right for me, it wasn't even my idea to be in it, it was the casting director, [who] would see me reading the part of Amy with all the other actors who would come in to audition, and we had trouble finding someone for the role. And one day she said, "You should play it; you're the character. You can do it."

And I was thrilled to hear her say that, but I was terrified. And we did a screen test; we actually did a real, old-fashioned screen test; did full makeup, and had me do some scenes with a really good professional actor, a TV star, see if I could hold the screen with him, and then we projected it on a big screen at Deluxe, and - to see if I could hold the screen, and to see what my ticks and bad habits were. And then I did it.



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***TM: And I imagine it's a lot of hats to wear, all at once; you know, you're behind the camera, and you're directing, you're setting up the shot, and then you're acting, and then you have to come back and watch the dailies. How did you deal with the self-doubt that I'm sure came up during that process?***

JD: I had some people around me who were really special, and one in particular, named Don Bloomfield, who was a good friend, and was my acting coach as well, and he would just – he was on the set every day, and he was my eyes. He would watch the monitor, just for my performance, and make sure – since I couldn't see myself. It – the hardest thing about doing it was that I couldn't see the other actors, and it felt like I wasn't there for them in the same way I have been in my other films where I'm just the director. I couldn't really see them, because I was in the scene with them. And that was the hardest part of it. But I have to say, it really – it was so much fun, and I was so lucky to be able to do it.

***TM: Your next feature that followed was "All Over The Guy," which featured the romantic complications of two couples, one straight and one gay; what was the response to that movie?***

JD: It was a great response to that movie; people really loved it, and it was great for me to "just" – in quotes – be the director. I wasn't the producer, for the first time, which was wonderful; and I wasn't the writer, and of course I wasn't in it. I was just the director, and I could really focus on directing, and the lead actor was also – Dan Bukatinski was also the producer and the writer, and so I really understood what he was going through since I had just done "Amy's Orgasm," and I really knew ... it was a good, a really good experience. I worked with some wonderful actors, and had really good producers, and – it was fun.

***TM: Have you ever run into Kevin Kline, and he's unhappy that you made fun of his movie?***

JD: Oh! (laughs) I didn't make fun of it, I didn't write the script!!

***TM: For anyone who hasn't seen [it], that's in reference to the Kevin Kline movie "In and Out," which I guess up until that point had sort of been the standard, or maybe really the only mainstream gay romantic comedy, is that right?***

JD: Yeah, it really was.

***TM: Did you really feel that it was just crap, or ...?***

JD: No, I wasn't the writer of that screenplay; Dan Bukatinski was. Dan is a wonderful writer; he's one of the writers on Lipstick Jungle, and he – you know, he's gay, and he wrote that. I think it's the funniest speech in the world; I loved the movie "In & Out," by the way – I think it's just a fabulous movie. But, you know – that was the character; he really doesn't like the movie. But I guess that's because he's a gay man, and I'm a straight Jewish woman, so I loved it.



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**TM:** *So, your next feature is called “Finding Bliss”; you’re writing and directing, and... tell me a little bit about this movie.*

JD: Well, this is the movie, my story that I’ve been wanting to tell for over a decade; it’s based on my first real job in Los Angeles, which was as an editor for the Playboy Channel. I was in charge of all the trailers and promos that ran in between all the regular programming. So I basically watched every single show that ran on Playboy for years, and they also ran a lot of X-rated movies late at night – cut-down versions –so I watched every single porn film that was made before 1995. And it was – and I was single, and looking for my true love. It was such a crazy, you know, conflicted place for me to be at. But it was, um, it’s like a little girl with her hand in the cookie jar (laughs). It was a safe way to be in that world but not in that world, you know, because it was a job. But I really – it appeals to my... I guess my kind of perverse side. And it brought up things for me every single day, in my life; it was never boring. It was just always bringing up psychological issues, and I worked with really fun wonderful people, we’d have great conversation, and it was really a lot of fun. And it was great dinner party conversation, for the rest of my life, that’s for sure.

**TM:** *Would you watch some of those things and think, “I must be really uptight, because that doesn’t seem ok to me”?*

JD: No, I never thought it didn’t seem ok to me; I thought, “I wish I was doing that right now, but I don’t have anyone to do it with, and I’m not just going to do it with anybody!” So I was kind of - I was miserable, and I was a total mess. But it was great – the people were great there. I was only there a year; I have to say, after the first four months, I said “I can’t do this anymore,” and that was it. The first four months were great, and then I thought I was going to just go insane. But I actually got to appreciate my own real breasts, because after seeing so many fake boobs all day long, I was lucky to have real boobs; I felt good about that. And I learned a lot about editing; I had to learn everything. All the new technology, all the equipment; it was like getting paid to go to film school.

**TM:** *So, in “Finding Bliss,” LeeLee Sobieski plays the character – the young woman, working for – in the porn business, cutting her teeth in the film industry. You’ve mentioned, um, kind of your struggle with it; how much of that is shown in the movie?*

JD: It’s semi-autobiographical. She makes it her own – she makes the character her own. And the script isn’t the original script; the original script was a lot closer to my experiences, but it was a bigger movie, and it was a bigger-budget movie, and so that version of the movie, which was financed a couple of years ago, fell apart. And finally, after many, many years, I think about 6 years, I was able to raise a much smaller amount of money to make the film, so I really had to pare it down, and took out a lot – a LOT - of what was in my experience when I was going through that. A lot of stuff is not there anymore; it’s a much more streamlined version. It was also originally a TV pilot that I had written for Showtime. And that one was – I have to say, that was the truest to my experience. It was going to be more of a workplace comedy, the day- to-day of this girl going to this job. But to then make it into a movie, I had to go with a lot of the movie conventions, to give it an Act I, Act II, Act III, which isn’t like real life.

So... and I ‘m far enough removed from it now, I’m so much older – you know, I wrote it so long ago, that it just feel like a movie to me, it doesn’t feel so personal. Like my other movies were very .. when I made them, it was the exact time I was going through the things I was going through, so they really were painful to watch. But this feels, you know - it’s old material.



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***TM: Tell me who else is in the cast.***

JD: Jamie Kennedy plays Dick Harder, the lovable but very dim-witted porn star, and he's absolutely wonderful, and who I imagined in the part for a long time. Denise Richards is in the movie, and does a fabulous job. Matt Davis plays the porn director. Kirsten Johnston plays the owner of the porn company. Wonderful actress named Mircea Monroe plays one of the porn stars, sweet, young, innocent porn star. I shouldn't say "innocent"... and PJ Byrne plays the tech, uh, the head of technical support, at the company, who is based on a couple of people that I worked with at Playboy. And I have to say, that he does them all justice.

***TM: Have you been to Slamdance before?***

JD: Well, I've been to Sundance, and so this is my first film at Slamdance. But it's kind of - they're both in Park City the same week.

***TM: Slamdance kind of came about as ... sort of the indie festival, right – it's 'for filmmakers, by filmmakers', it was a little bit of a response to Sundance, is that right?***

JD: It was... it was kind of a rebellion against Sunday, which was starting to become very, um – bigger movies, movies with stars, movies that weren't truly independent, as they had been when Sundance originally started, and now Slamdance is in its 15<sup>th</sup> year. This is actually the first year that Slamdance has quite a few movies with stars in them. So it's kind of become the new Sundance. I mean, you know – Sundance is great, it's the pinnacle, but this year they have so many huge movies; I mean movies with huge stars like Jim Carrey, and William Hurt and Richard Gere. You can't compete with that when you're making a movie for a million dollars. It's just.. you can't.

***TM: So now that Slamdance has gotten so big, somebody's going to come out with Slam-Slamdance.***

JD: Well, they have! There's a Slumdance and a NoDance.

***TM: Of course there is!***

JD: (laughs)

***TM: So of course doing the sound mix is the very last touch to complete a film. Talk a little bit about that process. And feel free to throw in complements for Mercury.***

JD: Oh, I'm so lucky to be working with Mercury. Well the first day I came here to do some ADR, I told Michael Sable, who is the managing director of the company, I said 'I have to mix my film here. ' Everyone is so pro, and so nice. It's like coming into a house. It's really warm.

This is the final end of the marathon of this movie "Finding Bliss", which has been so many years. Without a great sound mix, you do not have a good movie. It could be a good movie going in, and the sound can either bring it way down, or can elevate it. It's so important. People just don't understand. I try to explain to people, what you're doing in a sound mix. And I'm excited, 'cause this is the finishing touch.



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***TM: So what's the best piece of advice you've received along the way? What's the one thing you want to pass on to other aspiring film makers?***

JD: Don't wait for permission, to do what you love to do. Before I ever made my first film, I had a cheap little consumer video camera, and I would write short 20 minute scripts. 30 minute scripts. And I would make them for under \$100.00. I'd just cast my friends, and we'd make a movie. Because at the end of the day, it's about telling a story and acting. And how you can use the camera, to tell your story. Then I would edit it, put in music. That's what making a film is. There's no excuse. You don't have to wait for the money, for the big bucks. You can get your feet wet, and do some good work. Especially with all the new digital technology, you can do it on your own. Get practice. Be good, when the opportunity finally comes. You want to be prepared, when someone does give you a check.

So that's my advice: Don't wait for permission; get a video camera and go out there and make it happen.

***TM: Julie Davis, we're big fans.***

JD: *I'm a big fan. Thank you.*