

Scene and Heard: A Profile of Laura Colella



She sits quietly in a coffee shop, waiting. She is of small stature, and fine boned. She has striking eyes and a beautiful face, one that easily could be in front of the camera. Providence born and raised, no one she knew ever talked about becoming a filmmaker. She is definitely under the radar - but is soaring very high.

This is Laura Colella. In her 44 years, she has managed to impress some very important people in the film world. One of those folks is Paul Thomas Anderson - the same Paul Thomas Anderson who wrote and directed *The Master*, *There Will Be Blood*, *Boogie Nights* and my personal favorite (and I believe his), *Magnolia*. Last February, he hosted a screening of her film *Breakfast with Curtis* in LA, and held a lengthy Q & A session afterward. In the same month, at the Independent Spirit Awards, the film was nominated for **the John Cassavetes Award for Best Feature made for under \$500,000**, and won a \$50,000 distribution grant from Jameson.

Her love of film started early. She grew up heavily involved in theater, was in a few productions at Trinity Rep, and worked there as a production assistant. "My first year in college at Harvard, my boyfriend took me to the end-of-year film screenings at RISD, which opened up that world of possibility for me. I discovered the excellent film department at Harvard, which centered on 16MM production, became totally immersed in it, and never looked back."

Laura now has three features under her belt - *Tax Day*, her first, for which she received a special equipment grant through the Sundance Institute, portrays two women on their way to the post office on that dreaded day, April 15. Together, they embark on an exploration of a variety of landscapes and lifestyles.

Then there's *Stay Until Tomorrow*, a comedy/drama that centers on the life of Nina, an international drifter who shows up unexpectedly at the door of a childhood friend. She asks to crash at his place for a few days, but days turn into weeks as she disrupts his quiet life.

In *Breakfast with Curtis*, Syd is an eccentric bookseller fueled by red wine who caused a rift between the bohemian residents of his house and the family next door. Driven by fervor for a new creative project, Syd now tries to draft the 14-year-old boy next door, Curtis, as a videographer. Interesting and unexpected things happen - secrets and connections are revealed, bad blood dissipates, and fresh possibilities arise as Curtis and the others experience a season of change.

Laura often shoots in Rhode Island, creating a scene around a specific location. In fact, *Tax Day* was

shot entirely in Providence, with mostly exterior locations. The Providence Film Commission has been an enormous help to her, especially in terms of getting access to locations. Laura's first feature coincided with a new interest in film production in Rhode Island, and the establishment of the extremely supportive Film Commission. I asked Laura if she had any plans to make a permanent move to the West Coast or keep making films locally.

"Regional filmmaking and production in states that offer incentives has flourished since I began shooting films here more than 20 years ago. I don't think people go to Hollywood to direct movies there. I've been mostly based in Providence since college, and it has been detrimental to a degree on industry perceptions of me, but has been very beneficial to my creative life. I travel regularly to New York and Los Angeles, and have agents and a manager in LA. I have no intention to move, but also don't tend to plan too far into the future."

What's new? *Breakfast with Curtis* will be released this fall and winter in several cities theatrically and online. Weeklong runs will begin at the Cable Car in Providence on November 22, at the IFC Center in New York on December 4, and the Downtown Independent in Los Angeles on December 20 (other venues TBA). She has a completed script, called *Liquorland*, ready to go, and another one in development. She is currently editing behind-the-scenes footage she shot on Paul Thomas Anderson's film, *Inherent Vice*.

I asked Laura about being a woman in the film industry. "The film industry remains stunningly conservative and exclusive when it comes to female directors. My hope is that the ever-increasing accessibility of DIY production is going to help change that, as women are more able to make work outside the system."

I have no doubt whatsoever she is a leader in creating that change.

For current screenings and to follow along:

blogs.indiewire.com/theplaylist/exclusive-trailer-poster-for-paul-thomas-anderson-approved-indie-spirit-winner-breakfast-with-curtis-20131024

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