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Arts & Entertainment

The Not So 'Dumbass Filmmaker'

A former UCSC student who made it to Hollywood

By Gareth Rees-White
City on a Hill Press

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Sunday morning. I find myself conversing with Los Angeles. I'm talking to former UC Santa Cruz theater arts graduate Elizabeth Gordon. The subject of our conversation? A new online comedy show, "Dumbass Filmmakers," which Gordon produced, co-created and co-stars in. Elizabeth is nothing if not talkative — what was originally planned as a relatively brief discussion of her show evolved into a greater debate about the pitfalls of Hollywood and her time at UCSC. Despite being some 400 miles apart, within minutes we may as well have been undertaking the interview in a more conventional, personable, setting.

City on a Hill Press: Can you give a summary of the show?

EG: It's basically about a group of loveable losers that want to make a movie but have no idea what they're doing. The two main characters are Harrison Dewinter and my character Vicki Moretti. Harrison is an ... artsy director who thinks he's ... brilliant and amazing. He's written this really weird movie ... that makes no sense. Vicki comes on and really doesn't understand the movie at all. Over the course of the first season, they hold auditions. Some are really good, some really bad. The people they don't want as actors they hire as crew. Over the course of the show, they all become close and realize what they really want to do. It's really heartwarming. I think once people start to watch it, they'll really start to connect to individual characters.

CHP: Who do you think will relate to the show?

EG: I think it'll especially relate to people in the entertainment industry who've come across people like this. That's actually how the series started — we'd come across these kind of people while producing other projects. It was like, "Are these people for real?" — and they are. So we introduced that into the script.

CHP: Did it always start off as a comedy program, or did it evolve into that?

EG: It was intended to be a comedy. Yet, when we started working on it and had our actors come in ... we found a lot of depth with them. We found their backstory, how they'd got to that place in their lives. They say that comedy is harder than drama. You have to actually come from a real place, and a lot of comedy comes out of pain. We did a lot of in-depth work with the actors. Where they were coming from was a big deal. They're all leaning on each other. Still, they all really want to make this movie, even if they all have their own agendas. We want them all to be multi-layered as characters. So as well as the comedy, there are some really human moments between the characters, which make them all relatable.



UCSC alumna Elizabeth Gordon creates based on characters in the film industry in her online comedy show, "Dumbass Filmmakers." Courtesy of Elizabeth Gordon.



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CHP: What websites do you plan to be hosted on?

EG: We're going to have dumbfilmmakers.com, which is our website, and we're definitely going to have YouTube.

CHP: Changing tact, you were producer, co-creator and the lead actress. How is it juggling all three roles?

EG: [nervous laughter] You have to be very good at staying on top of things. You have to be able to separate the jobs, but at the same time keep them all encompassed together. You have — and I hate this word — a sense of control. It consumed my life for eight months, but when you see the footage, it makes you proud. We did our jobs. We had a great team of people. I really enjoy the ride.

CHP: I see that you've produced theater productions. Was it a different experience?

EG: Yes. I did theater for a long time before I moved to film. It was definitely stressful at times, but I was already adept to that world, having acted for some time. When I moved into film, I was like, "Oh my gosh, this is a different world." You still use a lot of the same things as in theater — you have to know what's going on and time elements. You also have to deal with stuff like lighting, which you don't have the language for at that point. You have to know how to get a good crew of people together — that's essential. At least by the webseries I knew a lot more things.

CHP: Does your character Vicky have much of you put into her, or is she a blank slate?

EG: She has some of my traits. The thing that I love about Vicky is her need for love and acceptance. She started in another play we did together [and we loved her]. The comedy comes from how she deals with people, because not everyone "gets" her. In the series she's very organized, but has to deal with a lot of people, and gets in over her head.

CHP: Is there any advice you should give students here?

EG: Oh yes. First I should say that I loved my time at UCSC. It taught me so much. I learned that things can change in a heartbeat. You have to be tenacious and go after what you want. You never know what's going to pop for you. Just don't give up. Some people do one play and it clicks instantly. Others work for 10 years before finding this. That's what I have to say.

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Yeah Elizabeth! You have always gone after your dream and never given up! I can't wait to check out the show!

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