

### *Welcome to ÉCU Interactive*

*In this new section you will find excerpts from some of the latest ÉCU 2008 submissions, articles on a vast array of hot topics, a director's spotlight, film reviews and all the latest news on what is happening out in the indie world. And we want to hear from you in the blog. You can leave comments, story ideas, thoughts on the latest movies around town and don't forget to update us on all your latest projects!*

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## Chicks Making Flicks

By Rhiannon Hobbins

For decades the film industry has suffered from a lack of female directors. But the tide looks to be finally turning with more and more chicks sitting in the director's chair making some exceptional flicks. These filmmakers are determined not to let anything stand in their way of telling a story - even if that means working on storyboards whilst giving birth.



ÉCU 2007 debut director Nicola Morris

ÉCU 2007 debut director Nicola Morris "I actually took my storyboard into the delivery room and worked on it as I was going into labor," said debut director Nicola Morris whose film *Out of Milk* screened at ÉCU 2007.

Morris admits that she was "a little nervous" of how she would get a great team to work on *Out of Milk* when she "hadn't even made a home movie on a camcorder". Determined to succeed, she decided to go to the British Film Institute Library where she read every book on directing. "That was my film school," she said. "It wasn't until the wrap party that many of the crew discovered that it was the first time I'd directed."

Samira Goetschel is another indie chick that is taking the industry by storm. Born in Iran, she fled the country after her father was executed during the 1979 Revolution and has grown up mostly in the United States. A New York University Film School graduate, Goetschel was driven to make her first film, *Our Own Private Bin Laden*, after the events of September 11, 2001.

"Like everyone else, I turned to the media for explanation for the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington. But I soon became frustrated with what seemed to be the media's exploitation of the attacks and the images of terror. So I decided to go out there and find out for myself why the terrorists did what they did," she said.

Now that's what I call independent spirit.



With her DV camera tucked under her arm, Goetschel set off on a mission to investigate the rise of Islamic fundamentalism. Her sheer determination secured an array of high-profile interviews with the ex- director of the CIA Stansfield Turner, President Jimmy Carter's national security advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, Pakistani ex-president Benazir Bhutto, prominent investigative journalists and many more.



Samira Goetschel's film 'Our Own Private Bin Laden' was awarded Best Foreign Film and Best Foreign Doco at ECU 2006.

Such an impressive list left many journalists stunned. They were “reluctant to accept the facts behind the making of the film and in particular about my access to some of the interviewees,” Goetschel said adding that she was even accused of lying about her identity.

LA indie filmmaker Dawn Westlake also expresses the same defiant attitude. “I don’t think there are any obstacles for women,” said Westlake. She was driven to make the ÉCU 2007 gem *God’s Good Pleasure* from her disgust with the United States Administration and their lack of concern for the Geneva Conventions. “If you have a story, just tell it”.

The hard work has definitely paid off for these indie chicks. Morris’ film *Out of Milk* has screened at fifteen film festivals worldwide, was nominated for six awards and won two awards.

Samira Goetschel’s film ‘Our Own Private Bin Laden’ was awarded Best Foreign Film and Best Foreign Doco at ÉCU 2006. Goetschel’s *Our Own Private Bin Laden* was awarded Best Foreign Film and Best Foreign Documentary at ÉCU 2006 and has since gone onto screen in over 25 countries as well as securing a distribution deal releasing the film for sale around the world.

Westlake’s film *God’s Good Pleasure* has played in film festivals throughout the US, Europe, Asia and Africa with an “overwhelmingly positive” response from the public and critics alike.

## THE BIG SCREEN



Academy Award winning 'Little Miss Sunshine' was co-directed by Valerie Faris.

Great strides aren’t just being made in the indie scene. Flicks from chicks are also flooding into theatres and onto the big screen.

Helen Hunt made her directorial debut at September’s Toronto International Film Festival with ‘Then She Found Me’ and ‘2 Days in Paris’ is the culmination of actress Julie Delpy’s battle to reach the director’s chair.

‘Waitress’ from the late director / writer / actor Adrienne Shelly who was tragically murdered last year has been screened around the world with outstanding success.

Next year will mark the return of Kimberly Pierce with ‘Stop Loss’ which tells the story of a soldier returning from the Iraq War and will be her first film since 1999’s ‘Boys Don’t Cry’.

And of course who could forget ‘Little Miss Sunshine’. This indie sensation, which was co-directed by Valerie Faris, stormed onto the big screen. The film was nominated for four Oscars and ended up taking home two – Best Supporting Actor and Best Original Screenplay. Academy Award winning ‘Little Miss Sunshine’ was co-directed by Valerie Faris.

## CONTINUING BARRIERS

But despite this bumper crop, the statistics for female directors remain startling. Just seven percent of the top 250 moneymaking films of 2006 were directed by women. And even more eye-opening is the fact that during the 79 years of the Academy Awards, no woman has won Best Director and only three have ever been nominated: Lena Wertmuller in 1975 for ‘Seven Beauties,’ Jane Campion in 1993 for ‘The Piano’ and Sofia Coppola in 2003 for ‘Lost in Translation.’

While Morris, Goetschel and Westlake acknowledge the truth behind these statistics, they refuse to become preoccupied with the view that being a woman makes a difference.

“I think that once you get yourself preoccupied with the statistics, you become part of it,” said Goetschel. “When I make films, I don’t think about my gender. Being a woman is my physical reality and I won’t let it become my handicap.”



Dawn Westlake's film 'God's Good Pleasure' screened at ECU 2007.

Gender is also the furthest thing from Westlake's mind. "I think it ghetto-izes filmmakers if we think of ourselves as from a specific gender, race or religion," she said. "It also ties your hands as a storyteller if you pigeonhole yourself."

At no point during Morris' first experience working as a director did she feel that life was harder because she was a woman. In fact, she found that things worked in her favor. "It seems that if people like your work and they like you, you get respect, regardless of gender," she said.

The lack of prominent female role models is however an issue. "Some of my favorite films have been made by women," said Morris who lists *Lost in Translation* by Sophia Coppola, *Dear Frankie* by Shona Auerbach, *Ratchatcher* by Lynne Ramsey and *Red Road* by Andrea Arnold.

But Morris argues that there needs to be more women directors to encourage more women directing. "As a young woman thinking about a career, I would never have chosen film directing," said Morris who spent her childhood dreaming of being a photographer but ended up working for ten years as a journalist. "It seemed as if it were on a pedestal, like being a king and not something that just anyone could become."

## LOOKING FORWARD

Going to film school helps but Goetschel believes that it isn't necessary. "If you want to become a filmmaker I would do it the old way," she said. "Get a job as an intern, or production assistant if you're lucky, with a film company or a studio and work, or rather slave your way up. And this is true whether you're a man or a woman."

On the other hand Morris believes its best to buck the trend and go straight into directing shorts in the indie world where you can get your hands on every element of the filmmaking process. "It allows you to learn and polish your craft before embarking on feature film directing," she said. "That way you're still learning, but learning in the best way."

Keeping up to date with technology also helps. "There are a lot of inexpensive tricks with the new cameras and editing software where anyone can tell a story and with hard work and creativity, they can tell it well," said Westlake.

But it's the sheer determination and intense commitment to tell the story that is launching these indie chicks into the spotlight. "If you want to make films, the most important thing in my opinion, is that there has to be an internal need for you to do it because there is simply nothing else you can see yourself doing," said Goetschel.

Goetschel isn't one to shy away from the big issues. Her next project will tackle nuclear proliferation and the threat of nuclear terrorism. In her search for answers, she plans to travel to some of the most remote and dangerous places on the planet and talk to those at the heart of this world from the would-be terrorists to the smugglers and the key political players. Most would balk at her ambitious list which includes the current Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the embattled Pakistani leader General Prevez Musharraf, former US Secretary of State Madeline Albright, former French President Jacques Chirac and the head of the UN's nuclear agency Mohamed Elbaradei.



Samira Goetschel at work in the editing room for 'Our Own Private Bin Laden'

But after watching Goetschel's debut film, *Our Own Private Bin Laden*, I have no doubt that she will make it happen. And it's that fiercely determined spirit that keeps these indie chicks making great flicks.

## Comments

[1.](#) Tuesday 20 November 2007 à 11:08, par [P](#)

It is awfully nice to read this , indeed i was pleased to watch the Dawn' s films.

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