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I Heart NY

An interview with filmmaking prodigy Joseph Zentil

Joseph Zentil is a 21 year-old filmmaker from Toronto. He is the founder and President of Zentil Productions, and has directed numerous short films and internationally acclaimed music videos including The Johnstones "Bank Song" and George Reefah's "Paparazzi".

So, tell us a bit about yourself, where you're from, about your upbringing and how you became interested in the film industry.

Growing up in Toronto gave me the opportunity to be exposed to films and music. In high school I was particularly interested in music. I played drums and bass in a number of bands. I guess this led to photography. It was kind of a hobby, shooting live bands, doing press photos. I can definitely say that what I do today is the result of a progression of interests, it's the way I am wired, I've always been compelled to create things. It's embedded in my personality.

How did you go from Toronto prep school to film school in Manhattan? What prompted you to stray from the conventional path that was laid out for you?

I was doing the whole photography thing at the time so art school seemed like the right move. My family is in the real estate business; I think it's great but just not for me.

What did people in your life say when you declared that you were going to be a filmmaker?

I feel that a lot of people don't understand the arts. I was lucky to have had a good art teacher in high school, she helped me discover a lot of opportunities in the field.

As I mentioned before, photography turned into filmmaking for me. Music videos were a good start, everyone can relate to that, it's unique and exciting, something people can see. I doubted myself, especially early on. But the more like-minded people I met, the more I realized that doubt is part of being an artist. Seeing this amongst peers and people I looked up to gave me a new level of comfort.

What motivates you to keep working at such a risky profession when safer options exist?

This is what I want to do more than anything. Express myself creatively, visually. It's a great opportunity to tell a story the way you want to, as an author. Story telling is an age-old tradition, I choose to do it through film.

Was there ever a point at which you thought you had made the wrong choice, and thought about packing it in and heading home to Toronto?

No.

What's been your career highlight so far/ when did you have your "I can make it in this industry" moment?

I was directing a video for George Reefah, we closed down Commissioners Street in downtown Toronto for filming. We had two 60-foot lifts holding 20,000-watt lights illuminating the street. We were shooting a chase sequence where two motorcycles were trailing a Porsche.

We had the camera car out - I was talking to the driver, and he was telling me that he had just wrapped production on the Dark Knight. Getting to work with someone of that caliber was amazing.

Tell us about some of your upcoming projects that we should look out for.

I'm particularly proud of "The Motel", the (short) film stars Israeli actor Omer Barnea and New York native Alix Liv. We just finished post-production and submitted to around 15 international film festivals. I just found out today that we received official selection for the 11th Annual Milwaukee International Short Film Festival. Still waiting on others.

My latest (short) film, "Im Only Sleeping; Clyde 2004/2005" is a back-story to a feature I've been writing for the past two years. The feature details the conflicts between the members of a rock band. I want to explore their sexual relationships. The short is about "Clyde" the drummer, played by Canadian actor Zak Longo.

As for music videos, I'm really excited about my recent collaborations with Canadian band "The Johnstones". We have two videos currently playing on Much Music. Edge 102.1 just named them one of top 10 bands to look out for in 2009.

Check out Joseph's work at www.JOSEPHZENTIL.com, and his bio on IMDB.

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