



Founder's Award Winners Director's Interview

Fall 2014 North Carolina Film Award

Rain Bennett
Raise Up: The World is Our Gym, Director
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NCFA: Are college courses necessary, and if so, where did you go?

Rain: College courses are NOT necessary, as the best way to learn is in the field. However, certain things I got from my college experience at NCSU were invaluable - my first paying job with a camera (wedding videos), my internship with Eagle Video Productions (which taught me how to run my business that I started six months after graduating), and of course, the basic fundamentals of camerawork, lighting, sound, and editing.

NCFA: What are some qualities in yourself and others that make one suitable for film directing?

Rain: Qualities needed for directing: First and foremost, you have to be a leader. You have to be able to get your team to gel and make them want to work hard for your vision. You have to convince them that is their vision, too. Good crew will already want it to be successful upon arriving on set. Secondly, you HAVE to be self-aware of your weaknesses/strengths and be honest with yourself. This way, you can adjust your needs on set to your traits (e.g. I'm not as good with technical aspects, so I always

want a DP that can take the wheel sometimes, while I focus on story and performance).

NCFA: Was there a particular event or time that you recognized that filmmaking was not just a hobby, but that it would be your life and your living?

Rain: It was gradual for me. I didn't have any jobs coming in, so I just started doing it myself (with the knowledge that I had). So, it started with wedding videos, sports recruiting videos, and music videos. I really just threw myself in the deep end and made myself HAVE to learn to swim, and learn quickly.

NCFA: Is it harder to get started or to keep going? What was the particular thing that you had to conquer to do either?

Rain: It's not hard to be inspired. It's DEFINITELY hard to get started. To sit down and look at that "blank page" and just start is confusingly difficult. However, at the tail end of postproduction on a project that I've independently (and solely) done for the past five years, I can say that keeping going, at times, feels impossible - especially with no money. In any instance, it is surely self-doubt that one must conquer.

NCFA: What was the most important lesson you had to learn that has had a positive effect on your film? How did that lesson happen?

Rain: The most important lesson was to be patient and take a break from it. I was under extreme pressure of (somewhat self-induced) film festivals deadlines, as well as pressure from my audience anxiously awaiting the release (and sometimes even hounding me about it through email, Facebook, Instagram, etc), and financial stress because I needed to finish my project and get back to paying work. But from the great advice from a writer/friend, I took a sabbatical just to read, watch documentaries, and think. It was two weeks at the beach alone, and it worked.

NCFA: What are personal attributes that make for a good filmmaker, and what do you do to foster them?

Rain: I'll say three things that make a good filmmaker. One: the ability to tell a good story - I possess this, and always have. Two: the ability to make things happen, improvise, make tough decisions (like a producer) - I possess this, and have shown it in my career and life. Three: the ability to paint a beautiful picture and make beautiful images: I struggle with this one the most, as I am not naturally a gifted visual artist.

There are two kinds of moviegoers: those who wish to relate, and those who wish to escape. I want to relate, so I don't like bad (or unrealistic) writing, or even scenarios. If it's a superhero movie, you almost have free reign for far-fetched scenes or ideas. But if we're supposed to be watching real people, don't have them doing unreal or supernatural things.

NCFA: We get noticed because of our successes – but we create them on the back of our failures. We learn best from the experiences where it doesn't work. And yet we still only discuss the success, not the failure. What failures (of your own) have you been able to learn from? How did they change you and your process?

Rain: I try to learn from all my failures - daily. And it's pretty simple to me: If something didn't work for you before, or it cause you harm or caused you issues, try not to do that thing again. I think the biggest and most important thing is not to harp on them and carry them with you forever.

NCFA: How did your parents take to your desire to becoming a filmmaker?

Rain: My parents did not like the idea of my doing a "risky" or "not secure" job. But my mom has always been supportive of whatever we were interested in doing - she just wanted us to do it the best we could (and preferably the best of anyone).

NCFA: Do you have a day job?

Rain: I do not have a day job. Nor have I ever (since graduating college).

NCFA: What did you learn from this project? Both the positives and negatives. Remember this will be read by a lot of first-time filmmakers, so you can get really detailed if you'd like.

Rain: I learned a tremendous amount from this project. I learned that preparation (even in something like a documentary, which will take you on its own ride) is EXTREMELY important - in logistics, as well as you're story. I learned to

be patient with the creative process - which is sometimes hard if you're under a deadline. But, you cannot force that process. Sometimes you need separation.

NCFA: What limitations does a movie director have, in example can he also work as an editor or cinematographer as well as a director on a film?

Rain: In my opinion, it's way easier for a director to also be a DP, than it is for that director to be an editor. My movie is a perfect example to discuss this. While I felt like I would be the most effective editor, knowing the story and the world and the footage better than anyone ever could, I suffered tremendously to look at my story with an objective eye at times. Because of this, I was diligent about showing it to people through the process and listening to their feedback, even having a test screening of a rough cut to an audience of 100 or so.

NCFA: How does where you live influence how and what you make?

Rain: Where you live plays a big role in what you make, I think. They say to "write what you know." So, there are many stories about eastern NC (where I grew up) that I can't wait to tell. And this project was based out of NYC, which is where I was living at the time. Of course you can do a story about somewhere you don't live, I just think it helps to have an authentic voice for your topic. I can speak the language of the world I'm showing in my film, because I live in it.

NCFA: Is the film business fair? Why or why not? How do you make the apparatus work for you?

Rain: Is the film business fair. That's a tough question. What is fair? The film business is hard. And it's often set up to work for certain people and not others. But to me, that's ANY business, and it's not a reason to not do something if you love it. You're gonna have to work hard to be successful at anything - especially something as hard as filmmaking. So fair really doesn't have anything to do with it. Find a way.

NCFA: Is it the filmmaker's responsibility to find and develop your audience? Why do you feel that way? How will you collaborate with your audience, and how won't you?

Rain: It is definitely the (at least independent or first-time) filmmaker's responsibility to find his/her audience and engage them. Especially these days of social media and DIY-everything. I involved my audience with every stage of my process, and they supported me and helped me fund it. The only downside I've seen is constantly getting message from random people from around the world about when it will be released.

NCFA: What role have film festivals played in your life so far? Why are they necessary? How do you get the most out of them?

Rain: I'm just starting my festival process now, but I think they are very important. It's a good chance to meet people, market, network, etc, etc, etc. And I think they just celebrate filmmaking and the filmmaking process and that is a great thing.

NCFA: Now that control and scarcity don't define the Entertainment Economy, but superabundance & access do, how does that change things for creators? There are 45,000 films generated globally annually,

and the largest consumption market in the world – the US – currently consumes only 1% of the output. Recognizing that, are you changing the way you work, changing what you create? How? Why? Or why not?

Rain: The market is more saturated, but I think that's a good thing. It allows more people to have a voice or at least a chance. The cream still rises to the top, so you still have to be great to be successful. If you're good at something, competition should only make you better.

NCFA: If there is one or more thing you think would make the film industry better, what would it be?

Rain: One thing to make the film industry better. Hmm. Just more, and different kinds of stories. Which I think the internet (Netflix, Amazon, Vimeo) is helping with.

NCFA: Do filmmakers have any responsibility to culture? Do you feel that being a creative person requires that you give back or tell a particular story or not do something else? Why or why not?

Rain: That is something I'm dealing with. At first, I wanted to be as objective with my culture as possible, and completely fair and balanced in telling the story of it - because it would be the first time the world was really introduced to the culture that my film was about. I still feel an obligation to make it as good as possible (that would be there regardless of topic..) and the responsibility to "do it justice," because I love the culture and I want the world to see what's so great about it. But now, I realize that the best way to do that is not necessarily be objective and not offend anyone, but to tell the best story in the best way.

NCFA: Did you make this film for yourself or for an audience in mind while writing it?

Rain: I made this film for myself at first, because I saw the chance to tell a good (and original story). But then, as the culture/world grew, I began to see that there would be a huge audience for it by the time it was finished, so it has now become for them.

NCFA: What makes a film great for you? Are there certain qualities that make a film better for you?

Rain: A good story and good performance make a good movie. It's honestly that simple to me. And it would be great if it were original. If I can learn something from it, or feel a certain way after it, or even change the way I feel about something, it's been super successful.

NCFA: It is said that there are only six stories. Maybe twelve. It's all been done before. And we have seen it all. What do you do to keep it fresh? Is there anything that you can do to subvert the process to keep it original?

Rain: As long as it has some authenticity, you can be original. Back to writing what you know. What is unique about your background or culture that hasn't been told. And, many times, it could be something as simple as changing your lead character from male to female to make it completely different and/or original.

NCFA: Films evolve through the creative process – sometimes most dramatically in the editing process. It's often really hard to reconcile the difference between what we desired and what we achieved. How have you encountered this and how do you move through it?

Rain: You must move through the film EXPECTING it to change and welcoming those changes. Because if you're not changing (i.e. evolving) over time (in film, and in life) then you aren't learning or getting better or getting smarter. It's tough sometimes, if you've had a set idea in your mind for a while and then it's not working in the cutting room. But, you have to be humble, and know that there might be a better way than your idea. ALWAYS get feedback from your peers and colleagues. The worst thing that could happen to someone is for him/her to be surrounded by "yes" people. You need people to challenge your ideas - to put your ideas to the test. Did I get off topic here? haha

NCFA: Are you on social media and do you use it in your work? Why or why not?

Rain: Yes, I'm on social media. For me, it's crucial. If you can have a successful career and not be on it, then I want to take your workshop.

The amount of screens now just gives you the chance to tell new and different stories. Think outside the box now - what can I tell to this audience, and how do I do it? This is a good thing.

NCFA: Have you done any other films before this? If so, how many others and what format did you shoot it in? If not, how did you convince these guys to go in on this project (esp. if done w/ favors)?

Rain: Yes, I've done films before - my background is in documentaries. But this is by far the most ambitious. And ANY relationship you make along the way is crucial - you never know when it will come back. I just convinced a friend to mix my whole feature and even score it because of one little thing we did years ago.

NCFA: How did you finance your first feature/short film?

Rain: I financed through crowdfunding (partially) and myself. I suggest the former, but not the latter, haha.

NCFA: What kind of salary would a director expect to make in the independent scene, or is it completely dependent on the success of the movies?

Rain: Hm. Don't expect to make any salary. It definitely depends on your success, but sometimes, you just have to do what you have to do to eat. Filmmaking doesn't pay until it pays, if that makes sense.

NCFA: Film, perhaps more so than any other popular art form, is the compromise between art and commerce. How has your art been shaped by both the money you have had or not had? Do you create with budget limitations in mind?

Rain: If you don't have anyone backing you, or even if you do, you REALLY need to know both of these worlds. Or at least have a basic knowledge. I'm fortunate that I've always been business-minded as well as artistic. Actually, I feel in many way I'm MORE business-minded, I just WANT to make art, so I always have budget issues in mind when I'm thinking of my story. I am a producer naturally.

NCFA: Is it possible to sell out? What would that mean to you and would you like it to happen or not? What do you do to encourage the professional approach you want?

Rain: I guess there is such a thing as selling out, but it is totally subjective. I think just don't

compromise who you are - just have a line that you won't cross. To me, it's not worth it if you have to deal with disrespect or something. But, when someone like Robert DeNiro does a silly movie and people say he's a sellout now, it pisses me off. This is his JOB. It's not your call if he's selling out or not based on YOUR issues. Now, if Bob had been an advocate for blue things his whole life and then came out and did a commercial for red things just for the paycheck, okay maybe he's a sellout, haha. But it's HIM that has to deal with it morally and internally. And, it doesn't mean he didn't play Travis Bickle or Vito Corleone.



Rain Bennett on location.