

Chloe Lapenat: Nanny by Day & Night; Producer, Director & Actor In Between

By Christy Piña

The cast and crew of miniseries “Joyfully Jaded” trickled into Chloe Lapenat’s apartment in East Williamsburg at 8 a.m. on an early spring morning. A 10-hour day lay ahead.

One hour of set-up and three hours of shooting later, they had filmed the first minute of Episode One, ending with one of the main characters vomiting into a 28-ounce Haagen Dazs container.

Filming in Lapenat’s apartment was a better option than renting a movie set for this low-budget, self-funded project.

Capturing the first scene took 30 shots, instead of the four she’d planned, but by the end of the day, they’d wrapped the almost 8-minute first episode.

It follows roommates Joy and Jade in their separate lives – Joy advocating for the endangered red-barbed ant on a street in East Williamsburg and Jade dealing with the fallout from her previous drunken night.

“It was definitely our longest day,” Lapenat recalls. “You have to kind of get in the groove of a production.”

Chloe Lapenat has been practicing her Oscar speech since she was 8 – two years after her mother enrolled her in an acting class to channel her attention deficit disorder-related energy. Little did either know that a community acting class in Ottawa represented the first step toward Lapenat’s future as an actor and film, theatre and television producer.

Lapenat, now 23, never wanted to be behind the scenes, but after graduating with an acting degree from Pace University, she quickly learned acting alone wouldn't sustain her.

"You have to make your own decisions," Lapenat says, sitting cross-legged next to her business partner on a black and white chair in Spacious, a Greenwich Village coworking space. Her brown hair in a messy bun, she wears a green Label of Legends Record Company T-shirt over a black turtleneck and small gold hoop earrings. "You have to learn how to be an actual human being."

For Lapenat, learning that has involved Velvet Vernacular, the production company she and Angelica Toledo started in January. Actors, Toledo notes, spend most of their time doing things that have nothing to do with acting, or they get cast as the "girl next door" with one line and a nude scene.

"Landing a job that fulfills you artistically, because this is your craft, this is what you want to do, is so limited," Lapenat explains. "It's so rare." So, she and Toledo decided, "'Let's do it. Let's have fun.'"

But starting a women-run production company in a notoriously male-dominated industry isn't easy. Women only account for [31% of people](#) behind the scenes, according to The Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film.

Lapenat and Toledo, also 23, have relied on their network to help them find their footing, people they know from college and from earlier projects. Lapenat worked with Justin, who introduced her to Samantha. Toledo met Anthony through Tommy, whom she knew from working on a pilot last year.

Starting Velvet Vernacular, Lapenat says, helped her realize her individuality and creativity in a way acting couldn't. "To have something tangible to hold onto, to have an actual project that you say you created, you begin to develop your voice as an artist," she explains, taking a sip of coffee.



As co-founder of a startup, Lapenat's days vary. The women work on expense reports, meet with industry contacts, submit "Joyfully Jaded," their first completed project, to film and web content festivals. "It's a little unconventional," Lapenat adds, laughing.

A six-episode web miniseries, "Joyfully Jaded" follows Joy (played by Lapenat), a Midwesterner who's moved to New York to become an animal rights activist, and Jade (Toledo), a Brooklynite with a mild alcohol problem who wants to be a comic. Forced to live together, they put their differences aside after accidentally inviting a cult leader and his followers into their home.

"We started it in the hopes to make content that we would want to be seen in," Lapenat explains.

In January, the cast met for a reading at Shetler Studios in the Theater District. “That was the first time that we were so pumped about it,” Lapenat adds. “People were really excited about it. We were like, ‘This is going to be OK.’”

After five months of writing and editing, Lapenat and Toledo prepared for Day One on the set. They ordered sandwiches for the first three days of filming, then cooked pasta and burgers the rest of the time to save money, creating their own version of craft services for 20 people.

“She and Angie are two very creative people who try to have a go-get-‘em attitude that I don’t see in all actors,” says Riley Galt, 25, Lapenat’s boyfriend, who plays the cult leader. “They kind of just make shit happen for themselves.”

As exciting as those two weeks of filming in East Williamsburg were, the duo encountered problems. Their production assistant quit without warning. Simultaneously acting and producing resulted in shots of Lapenat and Galt in the background stirring pasta for the cast and crew.

They also exceeded their original \$4,000 budget by \$6,000 and are trying to pay the balance by applying for grants, using money from their day jobs as nannies and soliciting donations from friends and colleagues.

After filming, Lapenat would “clean up the apartment, so that her roommates could sleep there when they came home” Galt adds.

Lapenat and Toledo felt they needed to prove themselves to others in the industry, too.

Now with “Joyfully Jaded” wrapped, the women spend their days submitting it to festivals around the world, pitching it to streaming services. So far, festivals in New York,

Toronto, Sydney and Duluth, Minnesota, have accepted the series. Most recently, the project was selected to screen at the Katria Film Series, which will take place online for the first time.

“I still don’t know if it’s any good, but you just have to kind of try to convince people,” Lapenat says.



Nevertheless, there’s always something else to worry about. If streaming services pick up “Joyfully Jaded,” will people watch it?

Producers need literary agents, too, because most streaming services don’t accept blind script submissions. Crave TV – Canada’s streaming service – does accept them, however, so the women submitted their series there. (“It’s the service my parents have at home!” Lapenat says.)

“To get to Netflix or Hulu is like becoming the president of the United States,” she adds. “It’s impossible unless you’re an A-list or B-list celebrity or have been in the industry for years.”

Meanwhile, Lapenat and Toledo find encouragement where they can. The Austin Film Festival, for example, which mainly screens feature films and shorts, seemed a stretch.

Indeed, Lapenat received email from the submissions team with the dreaded first sentence, “We regret to inform you...” A few days later, however, a hard copy of the letter arrived, with a handwritten message on the bottom: “Your film advanced through our selection committee to our shortlist. We enjoyed your film, and we’re looking forward to the future worlds and stories that you’ll invite us into next.” The recognition brought Lapenat to the verge of tears.

“She’s very zany and devoted to what she does, and she cares a lot about her craft,” Toledo says. “In this field, everyone wants to create things, and everyone says that they want to make their own content” — but few actually do.

Daniel Sol, the co-founder of HollyShorts Film Festival in Los Angeles, says it accepted the series because it’s “a pleasure to watch, with performances and writing that flows naturally,” he writes in an email. He praised the “seeming authenticity of the millennial city/roommate experience.”

In the dark comedy’s final episode, Jade buys time by pretending to join the cult, washing the members’ feet. When the oven explodes, the cultists flee, leaving Joy and Jade alone in their apartment again. Or so they think. The following morning, they find a member dead on their couch and panic about hiding the body — until he wakes up.

Next, Lapenat is writing a short film, “Free Bird.”

“I want people to get affected by my work, whether it’s to make their day happier or for them to learn, to realize things,” Lapenat says. “If it affects someone the way I wanted to, I’ll feel like I’ve gained the success that I wanted.”