

RT FEATURES, MADELEINE FILMS and SIKELIA PRODUCTIONS  
PRESENT

# PORT AUTHORITY

A FILM BY **DANIELLE LESSOVITZ**

2019 – USA, FRANCE – DRAMA – ENGLISH – 94'

## SYNOPSIS

On the steps outside New York City's dizzying central bus station, Port Authority, a girl named Wye vogues with her siblings. Paul, a young drifter, watches her, transfixed by her beauty.

After he seeks her out, an intense love soon blossoms. Wye introduces him to the ballroom community, an underground LGBTQ subculture, and to her house, a self-selected chosen family.

But when Paul realizes Wye is trans, he is forced to confront his feelings for her and the social forces that seek to rupture their bond.

## DANIELLE LESSOVITZ – DIRECTOR

Danielle Lessovitz is a San Francisco-born writer/director in film and advertising. She is based in New York City and works internationally in countries such as Italy, Ecuador, Brazil, and China. Trained in documentary film at Northwestern's prestigious Annenberg School of Communications she discovered a passion in screenwriting and directing through her documentary work. Her most recent screenwriting effort, *Mobile Homes*, which she cowrote with Vladimir de Fontenay, premiered in the Directors' Fortnight section at Cannes 2017. *Port Authority* is her first feature film.

## INTERVIEW WITH DANIELLE LESSOVITZ – DIRECTOR

**You've written for other filmmakers and worked on others projects before this first film. What did you learn during that period?**

Most recently I co-wrote with Vladimir de Fontenay on *Mobile Homes* (2017), and what I learned from this project is how to be fearless with the story. I trusted his directorial vision and knew that if I wrote from a place of truth it would be well translated. So in a sense, I learned how to let the story take shape without trying to control it too much. In terms of the craft, the more you write the better you become, so with every writing opportunity there is a chance to improve, go deeper and be more precise.

**When did you have the idea of *Port Authority*?**

It was a gradual process. I think every artist is mining their subconscious to some extent. I have a fair amount of trauma around gender and family, as most of us do and in writing I tend to process it. About ten years ago I saw a performance by Antony and the Johnsons of a Leonard Cohen song, 'If it be your Will.' And this idea of person surrendering to a more formless, higher kind of romantic love really impacted me. Not long after, I moved to New York City for film school and came to terms with my own queerness, which was quite scary for me. I also experienced the suicide of my father around this time and with that came a lot of pain that was difficult to escape. Not long after, my girlfriend and I were invited to a kiki ball and as I watched one dancer, something in how they expressed themselves - with enormous strength and vulnerability really shook me. It was as if their spirit had transcended their body. I also learned about the chosen family structure and who was whose sister or brother or aunt or niece and so on, and it was all very powerful for me. As if someone had quickly shown me a different way of looking at things. On the walk home I told my her the basic structure of the story for *Port Authority* and it resonated with her. It took me a year before I attempted to write it. And about two years of writing and research to complete.

**Why did you choose to start the movie in this New York's bus station?**

Port Authority is a symbol of New York for me. It's very rootless, a place where people from different cultures intersect and pass through. It also has a certain amount of history in the LGBTQ community as a place of congregation. People come to it trying to make a better life for themselves.

**You show New York intimately, without the classical big shots. How did you think about the way to represent this city?**

There is only one real panorama shot of the city on the Kosciuszko Bridge. The bridge is under construction and we see the skyline for a second. And that's the experience when you're living in New York, it's a city in constant flux. For me, it's the neighborhoods and their different textures that feel relevant. It's Bushwick, Sunset

Park, East Harlem and the Bronx, and how they change with time. That's what you feel when you're in New York, it's more about how people influence the city over time, rather than big panoramas.

***Port Authority* follows the classic 'Boy meets girl' scheme. Why did you choose this very simple narrative structure?**

I think the truth is that the story really calls for this classic structure. In many ways this is a classic love story, simply updated to include the specifics of what people are experiencing now. That said, the script was a bit more complex than what the film became. We realized in the editing that we could lose a bit of nuance. We wanted to just be with our characters: when they fall in love, when Paul's life is falling apart, etc. When we found the simplicity of it, we started to feel the characters more.

**Family is an important theme in the movie. Paul seems to be distanced from his and Wye has a very welded one. What interested you in this opposition?**

We often see stories of people from a minority culture trying to integrate into a dominant culture and I wanted to do the inverse. Ballroom culture has developed a beautiful response to some of the weakness in dominant American culture. It's a buffer against marginalization but also a buffer against the aspect of American culture that functions like an anonymous marketplace. If someone doesn't inherit a supportive family in the US, where do they find connection and identity? American culture can be dehumanizing for the people it rejects, but also for the people who should technically benefit from it. I wanted to show that even if you come from a place of privilege there are essential human needs that often go unmet and unfulfilled and that it's okay to seek them out. I wanted to give honor and respect to a community that found a way to take all of the beautiful aspects of family and keep it alive in another form.

**How did you learn about the existence of the ballroom scene, and how was born the relationship between you and this community?**

The film 'Paris is Burning' was my first introduction, but I didn't realize the scene was still active and thriving until I was invited to a ball. From there I went to smaller kiki events and simply started meeting people. I started seeing people outside of events for lunches and coffee and the relationships just developed organically. Many of the people I met, who are now friends, have strong talents in fashion and music and we would collaborate on videos together.

**How did you make contact with Leyna Bloom, who is a LGBTQ icon?**

Our casting director, Damian Bao, is very involved in the community and has known Leyna for some time. I first Skyped with her - she was out of the country at the time - and then she came to an audition and it just made sense. I actually performed the role of Paul opposite to her, and it felt very powerful being there with her in that moment. I was looking for a collaborator in whoever played Wye, someone who could own the role and shape it, and that's who she was on the project.

We workshopped her dialogue together and she improvised in certain scenes. Her story incidentally is also close to Paul's, in terms of how she arrived to the city and housing instability. In that way she could relate to both sides of the story.

**Why did you choose Fionn Whitehead?**

Fionn is very self-reflective and has lived a lot for his age. We skyped at first, we talked about relationships, the constraints of masculinity and our childhoods. He seemed to have direct experience with where Paul was coming from and perspective on it. He was excited about the material and he just intuitively understood where the role was meant to go. We searched for maybe a year for the role. Fionn came to us and he was the obvious choice.

**You choose a stranger of the ball community as the main character. Is it a way for you to educate viewers about the values and the wheels of this community by an external point of view?**

Not consciously. I simply wanted to be honest and to make audiences aware of their position as outsiders. We see a lot of movies where immediate access to a marginalized community is taken for granted and I wanted to set boundaries for myself and the audience. I want audiences to experience the world from Paul's perspective and to understand the importance of asking for permission.

**What do you think of transgender representation on screen?**

I think there aren't enough yet to really represent the range of trans experience. Each film is a contribution to this, but hopefully there will be more.

**What do you think about trans roles that are played by cisgender people?**

In an ideal world, any actor could perform any role. That said, as long as transgender actors are restricted to transgender roles, I don't think cisgender peoples should take them.

**The specificities of Wye's transition are not mentioned. Was it important for you to not capitalize on this subject?**

For me and for this story in particular, the specifics of Wye's transition are irrelevant. She is living authentically and that's all that matters. While Paul asks the question, for the audience it's never answered, it remains between the two of them.

**How did you decide to represent queer and trans bodies without fetishizing them, especially in the dancing scenes?**

We decided on a lensing that was very linked to the movement of the body rather than trying to *see* the body. We wanted to be in the body, with the body rather than outside of it.

***Port Authority* has a very realistic style, through its camera work or the dialogues between the characters. Why is it important for you be faithful to reality on screen?**

Thematically the film deals with what is real vs what is fiction and how the two aren't always easy to distinguish. Film is like this in many ways, on one level it is a fiction, but it's a fiction that can either mask or reveal a deeper truth. I didn't want audiences to get too sucked into the fictional aspects. In the story, Paul feels like he has to assume a false self in order to be loved. He wants to seem richer, more stable than he actually is. To capture that cinematically, I wanted to simply let the camera be and try not to stylize it too much. I wanted to be as honest as possible about what was real and not real in order to make space for audience reflection.

**How did you conceive the 'white boy realness' scene?**

We workshopped the script with members of the community. I asked them 'could someone like Paul be accepted into this community? And they were like 'Yeah!' So I asked would he walk? and someone said 'White boy realness' and everyone started laughing, because it's not a category that really exists. You have these realness categories where the idea is to be passable in dominant culture, or at least be as close as one can to the ideal of cis or heterosexual status. In that sense, that idea, to walk 'white boy realness', becomes an interesting exercise in self-reflection.

**Do you feel like there is more of a collective movement against patriarchy and others forms of discrimination, nowadays?**

I do feel like something is opening up. People are becoming more vigilant about power distortions in society. I think this film in particular suggests that these structures and norms can be destructive to both those who are served by them and those who not served by them albeit in different forms and magnitudes. And I think this is important to recognize. To be honest though, I don't know if even four years ago I would have been able to direct this film simply because there weren't as many opportunities for female directors as there are now. So I feel very fortunate - to be around now. And I hope it'll continue, because it's good for everyone.

**Can you tell us about how you built your creative team, and how you collaborated internally and with the larger community?**

It was important for me to make this film with artists who could directly identify with the subject material and who came from diverse artistic perspectives. Jari Jones calls us the Adam's family, in the sense that we're a very eclectic group.

## **INTERVIEW WITH LEYNA BLOOM – WYE**

### **Can you tell us about what attracted you to this project or role, was there a pivotal moment when you read the script, or when you spoke to Danielle?**

When I first received the script, I didn't know too much about the character outside of the fact that she was a trans woman and she was a woman of color. Any roles that I read about being trans in modern day society, and also just being a woman of color, I'm extremely attracted to. When I fully read the script, Wye reminded me a lot of who I was when I was around her age, and it also explored the lifestyle of the ballroom scene in NYC - a community that I am very very well aware of. I thought Wye's love life, and her love for Paul, was just a beautiful, romantic story, and it's so New York City - I just felt it was so real.

### **Can you talk about your first meeting with Danielle, and what that was like?**

My first meeting with Danielle was actually over FaceTime while I was in Italy. We basically went over this character and what she's been developing over the past 3 years, and how it's important that she's looking for someone to bring this character to life and give it color and give it a heartbeat. We had an amazing moment where we talked about my experiences and her experiences and she requested for us to meet when I arrived back in NYC. Then when I met with her in person, we just kind of hit it off the first second we saw each other, so I felt like I kind of knew her already.

### **Without giving too much away, can you tell us what the film is about in your own words?**

I think the movie is a modern day love story, taking place in the NYC underground ballroom scene. It's a story about someone who is not from the NYC world, not from this fast-paced environment, who meets a woman that represents every layer of life in modern day society, and he falls in love with her and her family, and with her community – and he also goes through his own trials and tribulations getting to know himself through getting to know her, and getting to know this big city. There's so much action and adventure and excitement and love and passion - it's a story that could literally touch every single person, because I feel like every single level of human being is involved in this film, in society.

### **Do you see yourself in Wye, and in what ways?**

Yes, I do. Wye is this beautiful, non-conforming, eccentric individual who is just truly a free spirit, and she also pays attention to her body and how her body is projected in society. She reminds me of me when I was younger, when I was trying to figure out who I was and where I wanted to be in the world. She just wants to be loved and protected, and she wants to protect others. She's a leader, but she doesn't know it yet, and she's on the verge of something truly truly amazing if she just stays focused... She is loved in her community, but she's also a person that walks her own road, and she



doesn't need a group of friends to define her. She's a hard working woman, and I think she's really really a treat for anyone that gets to meet her.

**How do you as an actress prepare for a role like this?**

For me personally, as a child growing up on the South side of Chicago, you watch movies and you see these different characters in magazines and cartoons, and you try to emulate them. I think when I was creating Wye's character, I was looking at myself and I was also looking at women I've seen in my community that I've adored and loved, who were my heroes, and taking fragments of different personalities, to bring her to life.

I've been waiting for an opportunity like this for so long, and I feel very lucky to have it. Right now in society, people are writing narratives of trans folk in various different communities around the world, and especially right now in ballroom people are writing about our stories. I think it's an honor to be a part of telling this story, and giving this community a place in society when it's been neglected for so many years.

In general, I think that this opportunity is not just for me, it's for so many other women who have paved the way for me, and who are breathing through me. Every time I went on set I always said a prayer to all the women I looked up to and idolized. I said "I'm trying to do you justice - you didn't get the opportunity to have your moment, and this is for you, this is for us, and I hope this moment for all of us." I just want to pay homage to them - the faces and stories that people don't hear about, that people would never ever know, but who have made such an impression on my life.

**Can you tell us about what was the most challenging scene to film for you?**

There were so many scenes that I love and that I will never forget. Everything up until that "action!" moment - that heartbeat, the nervousness, those chills down my spine... I think for me the most challenging was on my first day of shooting, I had to do this diner scene where I have a breakdown. That was a challenge for me because I've never cried, I've never had to tap into my emotions so fast for the camera. It was kind of life-changing for me because I had to think of combinations of a lot of different dark moments in my life, and I was trying to bottle them all up in one - I think we took like maybe 5 takes, and each take I was just trying to make sure that it was as real as possible, and people could really see the pain I was feeling. I think that was kind of like the most challenging moment for me in the film out of all the scenes.

**This is such a NY movie; as someone who lives in the city, can you talk to us about what it was like shooting an indie film in NYC? Does the film parallel your own experience with the city at all?**

When I was a little kid I always used to watch movies about NYC and tell myself that I would one day live there, and become whatever I was destined to be, whether it was in front of the camera or behind the camera. We shot not that far from where I used to live, and it was very invigorating to see the same people were part of this project, they were from the same communities and lived the same stories I lived, in the same world

I lived in! To go into those neighborhoods that I first lived in when I first moved to NYC, and for us to just share it with NYC, was unforgettable.

When I first moved to NYC, I arrived at Port Authority, I had a red suitcase, I didn't have anywhere to go, no one was there to pick me up, just like Paul. I was looking for a home, and wherever I laid my head became home. So I was really living in every single moment - getting ready for a ball, and meeting a guy randomly, being at the house with my ballroom family - I think all those scenes were familiar.

What really was amazing for me was meeting all the artists on this project behind the scenes and in front of the camera, and to see them all come together to bring life to my community. So many people coming from different worlds - white people, black people, brown people, gay people, straight people, trans people - we're channeling a lot of different stories and we're being disruptive at the same time, and doing it in such a beautiful way. I just love the fact that my first acting opportunity was something like this.

**Can you tell us about your experience working with Danielle on set and kind of crafting with her and finding moments together of who Wye is and what the story is and what the hustle on set was like to get there?**

When I first started working with Danielle, I felt a sense of comfort with her. I wanted to always make sure that I was very honest about who a trans woman is, who Wye is. She created this story, but I am living this story every single day of my life. People often say like, "Oh you're acting, it's just acting," but it's like once I leave this character, I am still living her life. She gave me the freedom to bring the words, if I didn't see in the script, to the role. She was flexible with that and I am really appreciative of that. It was amazing to work with a woman who is from the same experiences I am from - we're on two different spectrums of the same experience - and the fact that we came together and we worked together, I thought it was amazing. It's my job as an actress and a trans woman of color to really really be authentic to the lifestyle, the body, the conversation, the language, the fashion, the beauty, the texture - true honesty to the story, to the core - and it's Danielle's job to tell the story for everyone else to understand.

**What was it like to have a director give you that freedom to kind of take that power or authorship truth of this character and the experience of this character?**

Working with Danielle, seeing her give me direction - I saw different ways of doing things, and I saw her vision - it was a total learning experience. I've never had an experience like this before, doing a film, and I'm still kind of processing it now. I'm just very grateful that she was patient with me, and together we created a thing that I will never forget.

**Can you talk to us about the Wye-Paul love story and what it was like working with Fionn Whitehead.**

Fionn is a really amazing person. When I first met him, we took a trip around NYC, because I wanted him to see my city – he’s been here before but I wanted him to see it from my perspective. I noticed that in the movie, Wye and Paul don’t go on a date- they didn’t have that moment to have a date - and I wanted to show him what it would be like for them to have that moment. From the get-go I would ask him questions like “Why did you choose this project?” and “What do you think this project stands for?” and “How do you think you could add to this project?” and he just wowed me every single time. When we were on set, he was very very patient with me. He’s worked on many different projects, and this is my first real film, and after every scene he gave me affirmation that I did well, or if there was anything I needed to add, he was very sensitive to that and making sure that I gave my best performance. I’m very appreciative to be in a film with such an amazing actor. I saw one of his films, the one that started his career, earlier this year! And it was just so funny watching him on my phone, on Netflix, and then seeing him in person... I think he’s an amazing actor and he’s super talented, and on and off camera we had such an amazing time. I’m very lucky to have worked with him.

**Could you talk about working with Taliek and Eddie, and the family dynamic?**

Working with Taliek and Eddie was super natural for me, because we understand each other’s language. We understand each other’s lifestyles. On a lot of occasions, we didn’t even need to say certain things, we already had that familiarity. We did a lot of improvising on set. There were times they had a camera in front of us and they were like, “just start a conversation.” And it was just super natural for us! They’re so talented, and I think audiences will really love our dynamic. For all three of us, and Mother Afrika, this was our first movie, and I love that I got to work with such dope people. From their style, to their personalities, to their performances, it’s all very real. In my community, in my world – In the ballroom community – these are the faces that you see, these are the personalities that you love, these are the bodies that you fall in love with. From start to finish I just loved every minute working with them. I’m going to keep in contact with them as much as I can, because I want to see where they are going to go in their careers.

**What are you hoping audiences who don’t know anything about the film at all will take away from it?**

The first thing I can think of is, I hope they will love themselves more. This film takes place in a world where there’s no money, there’s no fame; it’s all true, raw life. These people don’t need fancy lifestyles to have happiness and to have family. These people have been thrown out into the streets, and have not been able to live in public spaces - they can’t go and work and apply for this job or get this grant, etc. - these are the people who in order to live in a world that they didn’t fit into, had to create one where they did. And I think we can all relate to that, when we were children, we lived in this fantasy world where we could play dress-up and be who we wanted to be. This is what

this movie is about: living life to the fullest with what cards you've been dealt. When I think of my experience in the ballroom scene, it makes me feel very happy and loved and accepted. It's a place where the traditions and conforming to society is not allowed. This is where you can be whoever you want to be, and once the viewer sees that, they can understand that being who they are is just okay. And I think that's what they will take away from the film.

## INTERVIEW WITH FIONN WHITEHEAD – PAUL

### **How did Danielle find you and cast you to play Paul?**

I found *her*, actually. Kevin, one of my agents, sent me the script. I read the summary, which I thought had a lot of potential, but I had a lot of other work on, I was trying to find time. In the end, Kevin pushed me to pick it back up and it was the best thing I had read in a long time, I just couldn't put it down. I found it really moving and subtle and interesting. Danielle really grounded the story. I thought the characters were beautifully written, so complex and authentic. After I read the script, me and Danielle skyped and just talked a lot about it. I put myself on tape and send it to them and... They said *'Alright'*. *(laugh)*

### **Can you tell us a little bit about your character?**

Paul is a troubled, lost young guy from Pittsburgh. He doesn't really seem to have any direction, falls in with Lee and this seedy job and group of guys at the shelter – and then he meets Wye, is drawn to her so much, and falls head over heels in love with her. He does everything he can to be around her. And it's a balancing act for him in the film of being in love with Wye, and working with Lee, and being friends with them and trying to juggle the two.

### **How do you prepare for a role?**

I read the script at least twice after the first time. Then, I dissect it, I do research - just sort of going over the script and picking out little details of my character and really thinking about the arc and how he changes, and the points that he's at, and how his confidence builds or is destroyed. I think I relate in some way to all the characters I play, that's why actors are drawn to certain characters. I think with Paul, his defensiveness is something, less so now, but there was definitely a time when I was quite defensive and guarded with everyone. I definitely see myself in him.

### **Do you use The Method ?**

Kind of. I wouldn't classify myself as a 'Method actor', but I agree with the 'do as much work as you can' so you can own the character.

### **Did you know anything about the ballroom scene before reading the script?**

No, barely at all, I may have heard just once about the Kiki balls. So that was another thing I had to learn about. When I was in New York, I met the community – a lot of the actors in the film are involved in the Kiki community and the ballroom scene – for the first time like the character. Reading the script, I thought there was something very beautiful about his naivete and his attraction to the community, but not because he thinks he should be, or because it's hip or trendy. He's attracted to it for the expressiveness, the freedom these people have to express who they really are.

**Do you dance yourself?**

Ha! No. But I used to really like the idea. When I was growing up, my sister's ex-fiancé was really good at bebop dancing. That always fascinated me. I thought they were the coolest people on earth, they looked amazing. I kind of self-taught myself a couple of things, but I never really learned. I don't think Paul is a dancer either. He likes the idea of the group, the family. I think he likes dancing but he's not comfortable enough to say he would like that, to the extent that he would ever go out and dance.

**Paul seems to have a lot of internal violence. How did you work to externalize it?**

I think the thing important to understand about Paul is – but this is just my personal opinion, but I think that violent men and violence often comes from a place of fear and anxiety. Growing up believing that's how you should deal with those feelings. In order to not feel threatened, you literally fight back. And that's where his violent tendencies come from, I think. Particularly if you see violence when you're a kid, you think that's what people do, so you believe that you should do that. Particularly in some communities like the one I think Paul grew up in.

**How was it like to play alongside Leyna Bloom, who was acting for the first time?**

I think Leyna brought her heart. While she may not have had prior acting experience, she balanced it with her experience in the real world. I think it forced me to ground my character in a realness, to match her genuineness. She's got a really big personality and it's clear that she commands the attention of a room. I've really got a lot of respect for her.

**This is the first time that you star in a romance and there's a lot of intimacy between Paul and Wye. How did it go?**

I was nervous, for sure. I think it's important to explore that in a role. Because it's one of the fundamentals of being a human, to be intimate with people. There were definitely awkward moments, but not 'awkward' in the same way as when you meet someone in real life, because... it's a job. At some point, someone says 'cut' and you realize you're on a set.

**How did Danielle direct you?**

I don't want to put words into Danielle's mouth, but I think together, over the course of the shoot, we learned how to trust each other. It's one of the most important things for me, when you're collaborating with someone, that you get on and you feel comfortable enough around them to really talk openly about different scenes and little things, and I totally felt that throughout with Danielle. She's incredibly easy to talk to and she pays such close attention to the details and everything that's going on - it was a pleasure.

**Talk about the 'White boy realness' scene at the end? What do you think it tells about your character?**

Paul's character struggles a lot with identity and knowing where he stands. He's a bit lost. I think his 'white boy realness' walk is a way of reclaiming his own person. It's like a release. For me, it's like he spends the whole film bottling up so much and keeping a lot of stuff down, so at the end, this walk is his way of releasing all that emotion, his way of accepting who he is and owning it. Owning his own narrative, unapologetically. And to try to show Wye that, whether or not he wins her back.

**Last question, what do you hope audiences will take away from this film?**

I hope that audiences just get sucked into it, and that they are drawn into this world – because the vogueing world is still sort of a close-knit, underground scene, so it's such a privilege to be able to take audiences there. I hope people lose themselves in it.

## **INTERVIEW WITH JARI JONES – ASSOCIATE PRODUCER & SCRIPT CONSULTANT**

### **How did you get involved in the production?**

So initially I auditioned to be in the film and even read as Wye, very early in the casting and script construction. Danielle just so happened to be monitoring auditions that day and I got to read for her and we clicked instantly. We really got to explore the text and the script and the heart behind this character in such little time. Danielle said " of course I want you in this film " but simultaneously offered me a script consultant position as well. This was such an honor as this was a community that I held very close and to be able to be the bridge between these two worlds excited me and I accepted Danielle's offer.

### **You were involved in the casting process, working with Casting Director Damian Bao. What was your approach to finding new faces, and where did you scout?**

Damian is literally a walking genius in this idea of real people casting! Besides the incomparable Fionn Whitehead and McCaul Lombardi, Damian really set out a challenge for me and the other casting agents to find the most authentic talent and not in the acting pool. It is a value that Damian and I have spoken about on a number of occasions especially with films and media projects about ballroom culture and queer culture : to go to the source (all around NYC's Kiki scene), employ the source, empower the source and pay the source. Casting for this film was definitely a tricky feat, it was a combination of finding folks who had natural acting abilities but also held on strong to who they were. We were asking everyday folks to bring themselves and their community to the camera and have the ability to showcase that in a cinematic way. We were looking for stars and we found a galaxy!

### **Describe your day-to-day role on set.**

You know, I probably have the most incredible hat collection from this film, that I can say I am most definitely proud of, as I wore many! Every day brought up a new challenge, a new obstacle, a new announcement of shifting directions and it was exhilarating. When you are working on such an intricate film and employing people who have lived this experience, there is no choice but to be constantly moving, there is no choice but to constantly switch up, you are getting a direct interpretation from the source. As a writer, a director, a cinematographer, you are getting material that surpasses your wildest of ideas. That's how you attain the rawness, the genuine heart, the grit that creators die for. My day to day was making sure those stories and this community was heard, understood and celebrated for their major contributions.



**You worked closely with Leyna. Can you talk about the work you did with her on character building and preparation?**

Leyna Bloom is the hidden gem the industry needed a long time ago. The community already knew and the announcement of her securing the role was a collective “ about time ” Getting to be her acting coach was a phenomenal experience, seeing her take on the challenge that I laid out for her in terms of technique and the challenge Danielle laid out for her in terms of the character Wye, was a beautiful experience I’d never forget. But being her acting guidance on set was the dream role. It is a breath of fresh air to see actors have the vulnerability and the hunger to let themselves go and really allow someone to take them on a journey so that they could give their best performance and that’s exactly the relationship Leyna and I had. She already had the experience of the character, she already had the inner monologue of the character, so all that was left was pulling Leyna out to meet Wye and really learning how to tap into that inner self for an outward performance, it was like watching a transcendence of someone out of their own skin.

**You are credited as both producer and script consultant. What kind of work did you do with Danielle on the script?**

Danielle’s writing style and ability to be a storyteller till this day still stuns me. How one can have such detailed ideas of this community and the characters and the story and yet still leave all this beautiful beautiful empty space for her cast and crew to grow in and out of, still stops me in my tracks! To build from a foundation, a framework like that, it was the most inviting process I have ever been a part of. Her script felt like a puzzle that was able to shift and morph to create spaces for new pieces or better yet fit old pieces into new spaces and it was beautiful to have the mobility in the script to do so! Danielle and I would have conversations for hours on very small details that would be the catalyst for huge shifts in the film, that’s how we found our most authentic moments. It would start with something as simple as dress choice or hair and would turn into a conversation, then a shift and a statement on history, representation, and honor. Our communication always seemed to be the turning point in any of our major challenges.

**You also act in the film – what was it like working on both sides of the camera?**

Acting has, and will always be, my passion, but I have to say the combination of both really opened my eyes to a world of a new possibility. I loved to be made up, dressed, given a script and put in front of the camera one day and then editing through scripts and watching monitors the next day. But it was the days where I could give a performance or be a part of a performance and then step behind the monitor to watch and give critique just moments after that was the real joy of the position.

### **Why did you personally feel it was important to make and be involved with this film?**

Being a black trans woman myself and being queer as well really has opened my eyes to both sides of film, the amazing and the uplifting and the dark and trauma-filled, but what has always puzzled me, whether these films were good or bad was the team and then, of course, the talent behind the film, none of them looked like me or had my experience. I have seen a number of films about transness, trans lovers, trans families, trans dancers but was never moved. For obvious reasons, they weren't written with the involvement of an actual trans person, weren't played by trans actors, they were always focused on physical transition or showcasing trans people as secrets or mysterious creatures, but the more complex reasoning for not being moved was the experience being shown, the inability to be humanized, the over-exaggerated narrative of self-hate that led to self-mutilation, the idea that trans people only struggle, the misconception that trans people aren't worthy of love or respect because of physical makeup and that our only purpose is to be hyper-sexualized, fetishized or othered. It was my duty and my main focus to transition those ideas and instead of trying to shy away from them, we overpower and overshadow them with genuine narratives of community love, of determination and self-advocacy. I wanted to be apart of a project that wasn't going to skate around changing the narrative, that was going to truly employ trans and queer people of color, that was going to allow us the power to tell our stories without restraint and allow us to step into a light that seemed to always miss us. That is why *Port Authority* is iconic, that is why it will be historical, it's the people who shaped and molded the vision.

### **How did you feel when you heard the film was accepted into Cannes?**

I wish there was a word that surpassed and transcended joy. You know most folks would be excited about the glitz, the glam, the fancy parties, the celebrities and trust me that is exciting but the part that had me emotional and experiencing that feeling that is somewhere above and beyond joy, was the thought of black and brown bodies, of trans experience, of queer experience, coming from backgrounds of tribulation and fight, just the mere thought of seeing them in their most beautiful form on the Cannes Red Carpet moved me to tears. The history behind being the first black trans woman to produce a film showing at Cannes, the history of having the first black trans woman lead a film at Cannes, the history of celebrating this community in such an esteemed space can't be compared to any earthly event, it's going to be such an ethereal moment not only for us, but for our community, those before us and those who will come after.

## CAST

PAUL	Fionn Whitehead
WYE	Leyna Bloom
LEE	McCaul Lombardi
SARA	Louisa Krause
NIX	Will Dufault
FATS	Stephen Cavalieri
EDDIE MCQUEEN	Eddie Plaza
TALIEK MCQUEEN	Taliek Jeqon
TEKAY	Devon Carpenter
AZZA MCQUEEN	Azza Melton
MOTHER MCQUEEN	Christopher "Afrika" Quarles
MAX MCQUEEN	Max Kpoyour
PRECIOUS	Precious Ebony
SNOOKIE	Lawrence "Snookie" Taylor
NAIMA	Jari Jones
CINDY	Courtney Marie McCotter
SAMSON	Brett Smith
JACKSON	Christopher Bizub
MRS. HERNANDEZ	Sasha Morales
CASHIER	Rao Rampilla
DAVEY	Jon Trosky
FRANKLIN	Drew Leary

## CREW

DIRECTOR	Danielle Lessovitz
SCREENPLAY	Danielle Lessovitz
PRODUCED BY	Rodrigo Teixeira Virginie Lacombe Zachary Luke Kislevitz
PRODUCED BY	Paris Kassidokostas-Latsis Terry Dugas
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS	Sophie Mas Lourenço Sant' Anna
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER	Jean-Luc De Fanti
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS	Efe Cakarel Bobby Allen
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS	Martin Scorsese Emma Tillinger Koskoff
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS	Lawrence "Snookie" Taylor Rodrigo Gutierrez Frédéric de Goldschmidt
ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS	Damian Bao Kate Antognini Jari Jones Fernando Fraiha Arnaud Quesada
LINE PRODUCER	Amanda Messenger
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY	Jomo Fray
EDITORS	Clémence Samson Matthew C. Hart
ORIGINAL MUSIC BY	Matthew Herbert
ARTISTIC COLLABORATOR	Hélène Zünd
PRODUCTION DESIGNER	Emmeline Wilks-Dupoise
COSTUME DESIGNER	Chester Algernal Gordon
FIRST ASSISTANT DIRECTOR	Kate Branom
INTERNATIONAL SALES	mk2 films

## INTERNATIONAL PRESS

Ryan Werner  
Cinetic Marketing  
ryan@cineticmedia.com  
+1 917 254 7653

Rachel Allen  
Cinetic Marketing  
rachel@cineticmedia.com  
+1 937 241 9737

Claudia Tomassini  
claudia@claudiatomassini.com  
+49 173 205579

## FRENCH PRESS

Monica Donati  
Monica.donati@mk2.com  
+33 6 23 85 06 18

## INTERNATIONAL SALES



Juliette Schrameck, Managing Director  
juliette.schrameck@mk2.com

Fionnuala Jamison, Head of International Sales  
fionnuala.jamison@mk2.com

Ola Byszuk, SVP International Sales  
ola.byszuk@mk2.com

Olivier Barbier, VP Acquisitions & International Sales  
olivier.barbier@mk2.com

Camille Dupeuble, VP International Sales  
camille.dupeuble@mk2.com

Anne-Laure Barbarit, Festival Manager  
anne-laure.barbarit@mk2.com

Visit our website [www.mk2films.com](http://www.mk2films.com)