

Reel Talk with Film DC Interviews DC Web Fest Coordinators

Leslie Green: Welcome to Reel Talk with Film DC. This is your host, Leslie Green, director of communications for the DC Office of Motion Picture and Television Development, also known as the DC Film Office.

We're here today with Otessa Ghadar. She is the creator and founder of the wildly popular web series called "Orange Juice in Bishop's Garden," and she's also the founder of the new, fairly new, I should say, since it's a year old now, the DC Web Fest. We're so excited to have you here today along with the festival coordinators, Ashley Mumford and Kathleen Loughran. Thank you for joining us here today.

Otessa Ghadar: Thank you so much for hosting us. It's very exciting to be here.

Leslie: Absolutely, absolutely. We're excited to have you because we are sponsoring the second annual DC Web Fest that's coming up next month and wanted to have you guys talk a little bit about what it is and give us some details on it. Tell us a little bit about why you decided to create this web festival, why did DC need its own web festival?

Otessa: I think in particular when we were first testing out the concept for the first annual, what I had noticed was, well web series and Internet television had continued to grow.

At the same time, there was really just this vast swathe of the United States that didn't have gathering point or a festival to really highlight the content that was coming out of the region and also nationally. LA had something and New York had something, but there was nothing in the Delmarva, nothing in the southern area of the US.

I figured that there was really an opportunity and an advantage to be had by doing that, so that was something that we were very excited to do last for our first annual. We're actually so pleased with the results of it that we decided that not only was there really a lot of interest, but there was also so much more that we could do.

This year we have expanded significantly. The event is over the course of a weekend. It's September 19th and 20th, which is a Friday and Saturday, and we have an opening night party with meet and greet the artists and scientists and specialists and luminaries. Then on Saturday we have just a long, full day's worth of all kinds of different panels and speakers.

Actually, I might throw this over to one of the festival coordinators to discuss some of the particularly exciting speakers and events that will be happening.

Leslie: Yeah, that would be great if you could give us a detailed lineup.

Kathleen Loughran: Sure. We have about three or four different panels that run the gamut from web series to marketing in the digital age to digital art. Then we also will have three key speakers. Alex Reben, who is the creator of "BlabDroid," which are these cute little robots that interview humans.

We have Justine Aitel, and she is the, basically runs cybersecurity for Dow Jones, and then she'll be talking about privacy in the digital age and what you can and cannot do and what people are actually watching.

Then we also will have Gregg Deal, who's a local DC-based artist who does "The Last American Indian On Earth." He's really gained a lot of traction on the web through his social media presence, and he'll be talking about what advocacy looks like in the digital age.

Leslie: Excellent.

Otessa: I would say that generally what we've taken as a theme for this year is using technology as a means to study humanity and seeing where those intersections lie. Again, we'll have robots, video games and interactive experiential art, apps, and tons and tons of tons of web series.

Leslie: This is actually very different from the first web festival that you did, and I should actually give the full name of it. It's the Web and Digital Media Festival, so it's not just about web series, it's expanding that and taking that a little bit further. Last year you partnered with Film Fest DC in some of your programming.

Can you tell us a little bit about how you believe this festival represents how the web and digital media space has changed over the last, even the last year? I'm not even going to say years.

Otessa: That's an excellent question. I think in particular what we're really trying to study and represent, and also in some ways shape, is, again, just all the ways that technology has changed and altered the human condition.

Some of that is for the better and some of that may not necessarily for the better, and so we wanted to discuss all of those things and talk about just what it means to be living digital and what it is to be post-Internet. Not only where are we going, but where would we like to go?

Is there anything that you would like to add, Ashley?

Ashley Mumford: No, I think that you've covered it. I also think that although we've added so many different other mediums to the mix that the web series factor is still very strong and we've received a lot of submissions that are very interesting. I think there's a lot to look forward to in that area as well.

Leslie: Sure. Now when you joined us last year back in February you talked about Orange Juice in Bishop's Garden. In fact one of our other filmmakers of the month, Anthony Anderson, was here talking about his popular series, "Anacostia." How are you infusing perhaps any programming around Orange Juice in Bishop's Garden or perhaps Anthony's web series as well?

Otessa: Actually, Anthony will be joining us. Anthony and the creators of Thurston and myself will be leading a panel about Internet television, which I'm very excited for.

In particular I would say that the focus is more fun and educational in terms of the panels, and then there's lots of entertainment to be had from the screenings themselves. The focus will definitely be not so much on personal work and more on exploring the work of other thought leaders.

Kathleen: I think that's one of the benefit of this year's festival is it really crosses over to a lot of different mediums and allows a wide spectrum of people to get together. You might be really interested in web series but this person over here might be a blogger, and so how you marry those two, but how are they different? I think they'll lend a lot of conversations to that.

Otessa: I would say in particular for my own personal interest, definitely starting out in Internet television is my first primary love. At the same time I do consider myself more generally an online storyteller, and there are so many different ways that we're accessing stories and telling stories and sharing stories in the digital age.

This is more generally not just about web series itself, but how do people tell stories and how do people engage with narratives in this new world? That's the way that we expanded it was just how are people telling stories? Not just in terms of web series, but other sorts of stories and other methods of telling stories we've included.

Leslie: Before we move onto, because I want to talk a little bit about 20/20 Productions. Before we move onto that, can you tell us about where folks can go and register and find information about the events going on?

Ashley: Actually, you can go to DCWebFest.co and it has information about the scheduling, the different events that will be held. We are doing registration through Eventbrite, but if you go to DCWebFest.co, everything is there to find together, so you don't have to try to track us down on Eventbrite. You can also see a list of the speakers as well.

Leslie: Excellent, so that's one central location.

Otessa: Just to reiterate, it's September 19th and 20th, and that is Friday and Saturday, and our opening night party will be at the loft at 600 F Street. Then the events for Saturday will be held, we've partnered with AU's campus and their media board, so all of the events will be in very lovely spaces on AU's campus, and everything is free and is open to the public, so we just want people to come in.

If they already have an interest, great, and if they can expand upon it, and if they're interested but don't necessarily, would just like to get their feet wet, that's also more than encouraged.

Leslie: Free is an important word to use, right?

[laughter]

Leslie: Let's say that one more time. It's free, so you can go online and register for that. Otessa, I just want to end the conversation by talking a little bit about 20/20 Productions. You're the founder and director of that DC-based media production company. Tell us a little bit about what 20/20 does and what we can expect to see from you in the next several months.

Otessa: Absolutely. I would say that 20/20 is a full-service digital media production company and have our fingers in lots of different little areas and looking to expand, but we certainly do a lot of Internet television, create our own work as well as produce and distribute other people's work as part of a larger channel of programming.

We also have the festival and we do also partner with other people in terms of corporate work. We've also recently delved into app development, which has been a fun and interesting learning curve.

Leslie: Definitely.

[laughter]

Otessa: We recently developed the Tapestry app, which is also, again, in terms of online storytelling, it's a way for people to share stories online, and in a sort of threaded narrative that interweaves. It's cool. It'll also be unveiled at the festival. Just anything I would say generally that deals with online storytelling in 20/20 is there, and always looking to maintain sight over the next hill, see what's coming down the pike.

Leslie: Absolutely. You just published a book recently, right?

Otessa: Yes, that's true. When I was a student there wasn't really, well there were no programs for how to create a web series. There was no programming that was specific to online viewership and the small screen. It really is a different method.

I figured that there was enough interest but just not enough academic support, so I wrote the first textbook for it, which was, and actually with the tremendous help from these ladies here, Ashley Mumford and Kathleen Loughran. They were also instrumental in the book. That was really exciting to get to work on and was also a foray into self-publishing, and then actually now, now it's been picked up. But that was also an interesting journey.

Leslie: I'm sure. Is there anyone else or anything else you'd like to share with our listeners?

Kathleen: I don't think so. The festival, just to...The party part is where everybody gets to interact with things, so I definitely would recommend coming to all of it, but the party is going to be a lot of fun, I think, too.

Leslie: Great. Excellent. Again, you want to check them out at DCWebFest.co, right?

Ashley: .co, yes.

Leslie: .co. Thank you again for tuning into Reel Talk with Film DC. You can catch us on the web at Film.dc.gov, and you can like us on Facebook at Facebook.com/filmdc, and also on Twitter at DC Film Office. Catch you next time.

Otessa: We look forward to seeing everyone at the DC Web Fest. Tickets are still available, but they are going fast.