

Filmmakers' Bootcamp: Bringing the arts together

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Ben Rose spends most of his time at the Art Institute of Indianapolis — where he is currently getting a degree in Photography — and this night is no different. He is making himself comfortable in a photography studio, a second home to this Indianapolis native, getting prepped for an interview about his newest project: Indiana's Filmmaking Bootcamp.

The walls are black, punctuated by an occasional headshot from a past photo shoot, and the room is lined with photography equipment: stands, backdrops, stools, PVC fabric screens, lights — all sitting there in disuse as an interview begins. The questions are in regards to Rose's bootcamp, the entrepreneurial artist's newest campaign to enliven Indianapolis' film industry. The studio sits quietly as Rose explains the current situation of the Circle City's film community.

"Indianapolis is fractured," Rose says, citing the fragmented arts scene as one of the problems behind Indianapolis' stagnant status in film. The poets, the dancers, the photographers, the actors, the writers, the cinematographers, the musicians, and all the other visionaries enlightening the minds of central Indiana face a major networking crisis in that they all remain in their own little pockets of the city.

"All these little areas are self-contained," Rose explains, "I think that's one of the things that keeps Indianapolis removed from becoming a larger entertainment city. People don't network enough between these groups."

With a long resume of photography, writing, acting, spoken word poetry, directing, and filmmaking, Rose is familiar with Indianapolis' arts community. As such, he sees an opportunity to bring the local film industry to the next level.

Using his own experience as a launch pad, Rose is starting Indiana's Filmmaking Bootcamp to educate those with a passion for film.

The bootcamp is a three week crash course targeted to intermediate writers, directors and actors interested in filmmaking. The writers will be charged with writing a short 10-15 minute script, which will then in turn be produced and filmed by the directors, who cast the actors in the film. The bootcamp culminates in a two-day production period in which the films are made. Rose then edits the films and releases them for a public viewing. It's a small-scale replica of the film production process in the bigger industries—both independent and mainstream.

"I asked myself how can I foster growth in the film community, and the answer is to take what I've learned in the past 15 years and share it with others," Rose says. So what exactly has he learned in the past 15 years? From his time as a frat boy to a single dad living out of a studio, Rose has tasted every flavor the entertainment industry has to offer.

Ben Rose: The E! True Hollywood Story

Originally a writer, Rose attended Indiana University Bloomington with an interest in poetry and short fiction. The then freshman was surprised at how easy college turned out to be, and a bad case of over-confidence resulted in Rose's eventual drop-out.

“I was going to blow up, I knew it,” Rose recalls. “I was going to write a novel and just blow up. But, I realized there is a business side to everything.” A large dose of reality in the form of professional rejection prevented Rose from publishing his best-seller and retiring early. Instead, the young writer went back to school at Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis and it was there he felt in love with screenwriting. Very different from short fiction, poetry, and long novels, screenplays were a new adventure for Rose, and opened the door to production of films. Hopes of directing sent Rose into a series of Telecommunication courses, where he learned about cameras, lighting, sound, and editing. Rose was no longer just a writer—he had gained his second identity.

The writer/cinematographer was anxious to expand his knowledge further, and Rose got a job at Channel 13 WTHR in his hometown. His work behind the lens at Channel 13 led him to a job at Comcast Cable making commercials, a position he filled for seven years. It was during his time with Comcast that Rose transferred to Atlanta, GA, and there his interest in filmmaking grew, producing his first feature-length film and becoming increasingly connected in Atlanta’s underground film community.

He found his way back to Indianapolis a few years later and soon discovered a new outlet for his creativity: Spoken word poetry.

With his newfound home behind the poetry slam mic, Rose was back to his writing roots. The firsthand brush with the live poetry performance took Rose into theatre, where he found a second home on the stage. The Phoenix Theatre took him in, giving him the opportunity to work closely with actors, directors and crew members in multiple shows.

The once one-dimensional writer had grown into a versatile writer/cinematographer/producer/director/poet/actor, making contacts with artists of all kinds in every corner of the city. As such, Rose became increasingly aware of the communications gap between artistic groups, and his response is Indiana’s Filmmaking Bootcamp.

The Bootcamp: No push-ups necessary

The bootcamp is a unique opportunity, giving participants the chance to learn firsthand what it is like to work on a film. Rose is using his personal experience in the industry as a foundation for the bootcamp’s curriculum, taking things he has learned and sharing them with the camp’s participants.

The writing workshops cover everything from the fundamentals of screenwriting to marketing scripts. Writers learn not only to compose a screenplay, but how to pitch that screenplay to the industry and, furthermore, how to launch themselves and their craft outside of Indianapolis and the Midwest. The most important aspect of the writing workshop is the 10-15 minute script that all participants must complete. The writers are given two locations for the setting of their script, and must have two male and two female roles. These parameters serve as a creative challenge, heightening the writers’ learning experience. After finishing their short script, the writers pass on their work to six directors, who meet with their respective writers to get a feel for what the writers want of their film.

The directing workshops include learning camera work, lighting, blocking with actors, movement, and other aspects of cinematography. The directors spend their three weeks immersed in the technical side of making a film. Furthermore, they will learn what to do with a

film after they've produced it: How to pitch their product, being featured in Film Festivals, talking with production companies, and other post-production pursuits. Toward the end of their workshop, the directors hold auditions with the actors, casting two males and two females in each film.

The actors' workshop will focus on the basics of acting for the camera, character study, body language, vocal work, and memorization techniques. It will also cover improvisational acting, monologues, and making and distributing demos. Things like landing agents will be touched on as well, emphasizing the business side of acting as well as performance. All actors will be featured in two films, providing them with quality demo material. On top of that, the actors learn the dynamics of working on a set with a full crew—an experience few beginning actors can claim.

Liz Collar, a local actress/model, looks forward to partaking in the bootcamp. "I look forward to learning from other people who have expertise in the film industry, and also being part of a film production team," Collar says. "I really liked Ben's vision to pull together in a collaborative effort all kinds of talent in the city."

Indy-wood: The Next Big Thing?

"Indianapolis will blow up," Rose assures. "We've got great architecture, great people, and a great infrastructure to do these kinds of projects on a budget. We're the crossroads of America and once people start taking pride in that, Indianapolis will just blow up."

Community involvement is key, and Erin Newell, director of FILM Indiana (the Indiana Film Commission) feels like the community is enthusiastic to help.

Newell feels that everyone in Indiana's film industry would like to see something more happen.

One problem is that Indiana's incentives for the media industry are not competitive with other states, and therefore does not attract out-of-state film projects. Indiana's Media Production Expenditure Tax Credit sits at a low 15%, half that of film-friendly Louisiana's 30% Motion Picture Incentive. "There are strengths we have," Newell says, "Such as tremendous accessibility to locations and a strong crew database that's readily available."

Not only is Indiana well-endowed on the technical end of filmmaking, but also on the artistic end. There are so many fascinating and gripping stories in Indiana just waiting to be told, and who better to tell them than the Indianapolis film community?

Ben Rose encourages the local film community to focus on what they know, because those are the real stories that don't need the glamour of Hollywood. What makes a story potent is its level of reality. It might be a weird or unsettling story, but it is real and it is genuine and that is what makes it great. After years of being force-fed mainstream movies with formulaic arcs, archetypal characters, and exhaustive one-liners, the audience needs something more. Rose believes Indianapolis can deliver that something more.

"Indianapolis has the perfect setting to make a great film community," Rose insists. "I'm hoping this bootcamp will stir a lot of fire in people's bellies to get out there and do it."



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