

## **Film Wisconsin Presents Black Voices in Production**

*with support by the MFA*

**Start time 6:03pm 7/29/20**

### Introductions:

Jessica Knap tells us a little bit about her.

2020 is a year of changes and motivations. Systemic problems exist in our own spaces as well as nationally. This panel is meant to open conversations and to hold ourselves accountable. We are here to listen and reflect. Resources will be available at the end of the panel to further educate yourselves.

### Panelists: Brei Harvey (attached bio in chat)

Eva Juniel (attached bio in chat)

Serbata Tarrer (attached bio in chat)

Tyree Pope (attached bio in chat)

Kenny Dean (Sommerville) (attached bio in chat)

### **Starting off trying to keep it general until specific questions come up. What networks are you looking to cultivate**

Brei: it has always bothered her that the numbers don't add up. Milwaukee has a large black population and that is not reflected on the sets that are actively working in the industry. It's messed up that most of the panelists before this had not met each other.

Eva: She has also not met many of the people on the panel and just wishes they had known each other.

Serbata: Lack of mentorship is a problem in the city. There needs to be more mentors and the leadership that is in place also needs to step up. Growing up he didn't see people like him doing the jobs that he wanted to do, so that is also something that needs to change

Kenny: It's refreshing to hear these things and acknowledges that they are all sort of calling him out. Kenny knows that he could give more guidance or connections. He also wants to make sure the difference between film and commercial is addressed later on in the panel. He wants to do more and hopes to do better in the future.

### **Who is UWM Alum? Serbata, Eva and Brei. Did those experiences give you connections? Is there a gap between being in school and starting to work in the industry?**

Serbata; Did get any connections in commercial from UWM. He has met many artists that make films but that means that the budget is almost nonexistent. He didn't meet people that make a living working in the film industry.

Eva: When in school, was getting connections but those did not transfer into work outside of school. The first time getting onto sets do happen, the problem is then that getting hired a second time after that does not happen.

**Kenny asks Eva to clarify, did the connections from school disappear? Or what happened?**

Eva: The connections didn't disappear as far as she is aware. They just don't lead into active job opportunities.

**Migrate from this into Tyree's story and background, what opportunities exist for you?**

Tyree: The majority of the jobs happening for him are small businesses or "mom and pop" shops. Places that have a limited budget and just need something small to promote their businesses. He also does many music videos. He has felt like he got sucked into a loop, just doing music videos and there is nowhere for him to grow outside of that, especially as a black filmmaker.

Brei: is privileged to have friends that have given her opportunities on films but when she goes out and tries to foster relationships with people on her own she is often met with indifference or unwillingness to take the time to meet her.

Kenny asks Brei to clarify "they aren't willing to know you?" To which she agrees this is something she has heard in the past

Kenny: Thanks everyone for putting this panel together and to promote the panelists, special shoutout to Jessica. "Who we are" it took Kenny 10 years to actually make money while working in the Milwaukee Film Industry. He just wants to lay everything out the way that it is and get to the real problem. Milwaukee is a "mom and pop" market. There aren't huge opportunities here. So when big jobs do come in, the first thing the production is worried about is getting the right equipment. It's also about fostering relationships and keeping those intact through the years. A lot of people get hired because people know someone through networking and those people often supersede the accolades from school (which sucks)

Jessica: How Wisconsin operates is much different from everyone else. We are developing differently. What will help you? Database? Round Robin? How do people get to know BIPOC working in the industry?

Brei: That's a question for Jessica

Jessica: I suppose it is, availability is the first step. When regulars aren't available, you find new blood to get into the door. If she had known the panelists before this, it would've been great for her to get them onto past jobs. But she's not positive how to help.

Kenny: Does Jessica know the "gatekeepers" in Milwaukee?

Jessica: Yes she does. When she's hired, often the productions are already crewed up and she is filling in the PA roles so she doesn't have the capacity to hire any more than that.

Kenny: it's good to get green people into the PA roles on set. Bringing realism into the conversation, Milwaukee is not a hub of filmmaking. To change anything here is to move the mountain. He wants to move with everyone else but it's still a mountain.

Tyree: We need the opportunities to fail (Kenny LOVES this and wants to get this printed onto a t-shirt) You might need to leave Milwaukee and then come back to make things happen but he wants to opportunities to try

### **What is keeping you in Milwaukee?**

Eva: Before COVID, she was going to move to Atlanta which broke her heart a little bit. She grew up in Sherman neighborhood and wants to be a voice here, moving is not something she wants to do but feels like she needs to do in order to get ahead.

Serbata: Also grew up in the Sherman neighborhood and has heard some wonderful stories from people he grew up with and would love to tell those stories. Specific experiences are important and there is no platform for them here. You want to stay in Milwaukee to see it through but there aren't opportunities.

Kenny: Milwaukee is relatively close to Chicago and those opportunities are irreplaceable. PA until you can't PA anymore to get the necessary experience.

### **Eva: Challenge those biases. Don't hire your neighbor's sons. What are you comfortable with a fully white crew?**

Brei: has been told in the past that the "diversity is in front of the camera" that's not enough

Running out of time here and this is part of a larger discussion that needs to happen on a whole. And maybe this calls for more networking events and understanding what we need to do. This discussion should continue as a group and we need to move forward together.

### **Kenny: How confident is everyone in saying that there are sets in Milwaukee that are all white and they are comfortable with that?**

Brei: What was your question?

Kenny: Individuals that are challenging themselves and then get onto a set and notice that it is all white and that they are comfortable with it being that way? What type of knowledge do we have that it's happening?

Brei: gives an example of a production last summer that prided itself on having women in front of and behind the camera but there wasn't a single person of color on that set. So it does happen.

Eva: agrees, if you're comfortable, you are not going to notice that it's an all white crew or all white cast. It's not far fetched to say that that is the default for a long time. So you may not notice it but it is happening.

Kenny: finds that interesting, didn't want to inquire that to challenge it but to just discuss it. Everyone's experiences are their own. Kenny has been in situations where diversity sometimes happens to the detriment of the product. He feels terrible saying that and doesn't think that it's right but it's true. Time is money on set and if you are hiring crew members that are green in order to get the diversity, is that production going to be better off in the long run? America as a whole is an extremely racially affected populace based on the establishment that started decades ago with slavery. America is a racist society. When you start to put the racial disparities of the Milwaukee film industry under a microscope, what you see has more to do with America's past in general rather than on the people that we are working with on sets. He's not sure that the racial disparities on sets is a conscious effort.

Brei: We don't disagree with that, we just don't want to associate quality with whiteness.

Eva: has been on sets where it is diverse, especially on very small crews but it just doesn't happen enough. We just have to continue to do better.

### **Do you find there are more all white sets in the film industry than the commercial industry?**

Brei: has only ever worked on Indie films

Eva: also has not had opportunity in commercial work

Serbata: he was on one commercial set last year where he was definitely the only person of color on set and everyone else was white. He got extremely lucky, he got referred to that set the day of. They did not have any intention to have people of color on that set.

Jessica: her personal experience, on Chicago sets which are much bigger, there is diversity there across the board. But a lot of the commercials in Milwaukee, she hasn't seen a whole lot of diversity. That's going back to root problems. People don't know diverse people to suggest so they don't get hired. And wants to wrap it up with a final question that Molly will answer.

### **What is No Studios doing to provide diverse spaces?**

Molly: would like to defer to No Studios about this. Milwaukee Filmmaker Alliance and No Studios is not the same thing. From what she knows, they are doing a ton of virtual programming. But is not sure if that is a tangible affect on the film community. They can only do

so much work to create more work in the industry here. John Ridley is very passionate to create jobs but she doesn't know the feasibility of that.

Kenny: John Ridley could do a whole lot more if he was willing to put everything he's acquired at stake but he might not be willing to do that. The question becomes, do we blame him if he's not willing to destroy everything he's acquired. Did anyone watch the Regina King sit-down that John Ridley did? Everything that John Ridley did right there answered any questions that'll come up. He's noticing talent in Milwaukee and they want to work in Milwaukee but John Ridley didn't do it all in Milwaukee. He had to leave and come back. Emmy's is Black AF this year. He's not suggesting that there are a bunch of black folks running around crying that there aren't opportunities. He grew up on Center St and he has questioned the systems of this world. He's been on the wrong side of the police and the right side of the police (if that even exists). The idea of creating your opportunity in this world is really treacherous terrain. The big picture of resculpting the world is going to be so much bigger than our zoom. The history of America is racist. It was illegal to teach black and brown people in this country less than 100 years ago. Even in a day where we can be educated, do you believe that instantly the problem will be solved? The education goes back decades so someone that grew up in a different background (i.e. white) is going to have different values and habits than someone who grew up in a BIPOC household where they haven't been practicing these habits for generations.

Brei: That just boils down to every individual acknowledging their privilege. Everyone has privileges, even black people.

Jessica: That is something that is coming up on the national level constantly, Firelight webinar is a gem because of that. She hopes that when she can hire, she brings more people to the table and create that rotation. Many people don't know the resources that are out there.