

Interview with Kiersten Myers – Independent Filmmaker

Dave: Welcome to the Elegant Workflow Podcast - A member of the Tech Podcast network Today we are speaking with Kiersten Myers – Independent Filmmaker. Kiersten, welcome to the Podcast.

Kiersten: Thanks for having me.

Dave: So, can you tell our listeners a little bit about your background and what led you to attend Sundance Film Festival through HP in creative future?

Kiersten: Growing up I've probably just played around with cameras and the big bulky video cameras we have at home and all that. But I think I really got my start in film when I was 7 years old. I don't know why but I really wanted to, I wanted to make a web show so that was around the time that I had discovered YouTube and I thought it was really cool so I had asked my parents and they were really supportive and my sister said she would do it with me so, I started making little scripts and it was a lot of fun and eventually I had gotten a camera and we went on vacation to the River and we had filmed the first episode. So, I had found an off the wall editing program from either a camera or off the internet and it would quit like every 5 seconds I tried to edit but I still, I don't know why I didn't quit but I kept going. I uploaded the first episode. As I was doing the show, I was slowly doing better and better in editing. I was learning new programs and the show actually started to get a lot of views which I thought was crazy. People around all, people all around the world are watching and it was just, it was the coolest thing for me and I think even the 3rd episode had gotten up to 370,000 views which blew me away. That was really how I got my start. Few years ago, I stopped the show because I wanted to start making my own personal videos and music videos and you know, went off and do other things. So, I joined a video production in 7th grade because that was the 1st year you're allowed to join. It was a fairly new class so they didn't have super great editing programs and, but it was still really good. It was something new but it wasn't really challenging so I thought it'll be fun to make a video or join a competition so I looked online for anything that I could do music video competition, you know, short film competition, film festivals but nothing was in my age range so I didn't find anything. But funny thing is, a few months later my teacher handed me a flyer for the Temecula Valley International Film and Music Festival and it was a future filmmaker competition for middle school to high school. And you were to make like a 4 minute or less video and upload so, over that summer, I spent a few weeks with the idea and scripting and then I made some story boards and I got props and equipment together that I could find and that I could find. And then we went up to Idlewild, spent a day and filmed. And then I after that I spent a few weeks editing I was able to use some cool, newer programs like after effects and then turned it in. Not long after that I was told, when I started to go into 8th grade, the beginning of 8th grade, I was told that I was a finalist in the festival so I was able to go and have my film screened which was super cool because it was on a huge screen and it was, I had my family there and it was just a really cool experience. And then I ended up getting 1st place which was super cool, I was, it was the first time I was ever able to turn in a film into anything and it was just, it was an amazing experience and the program was sponsored by Creative Future. That wasn't necessarily how I had really got to meet them though because the next day, I was able to go to a panel with Ruth Vitale who is the head of Creative Future and after the panel I had introduced myself so ever

since then we have been keeping tabs. And a few months later she had invited me to Sundance so she sent my videos and my work to HP and they all invited me to go and it was, it was amazing. I was able to go to panels and meet people and interview people and it was, it was an awesome, it was just a great experience and it's kind of crazy to think that something like that starts with a flyer that my teacher handed me in 7th grade. It's just, it was crazy.

Dave: I love that story because I think a lot of people get caught up in, I need to learn about filmmaking, I need to learn about equipment, I need to learn editing programs before they go and actually just try to do something and I love how you just went out and you just decided you're going to make a show, you started doing a show then you learned the production elements around it as you were going. You know, obviously when that platform kind of felt constricted that you dropped it and moved on to making what you're doing now. But I think it's really interesting because people just get so caught up that I have to know everything before I can even start.

Kiersten: Yeah, I feel like the best way to learn is probably just doing it, that's how I've learned.

Dave: I agree. And what is your passion behind making all these films? What kind of brought you to becoming a filmmaker?

Kiersten: That's an interesting question because I think finding the passion for me, its film, it's different for everyone. It started because I wanted to get a message out and I think one of the most important things is showing the world the way you view things and evoking emotions from people and everybody's creative and everybody has ideas but finding your outlet is so important because it helps you express yourself, and for me it was film. So, I think it's just so cool to be able to make you know, someone sad, happy or to make someone think about something they have never thought about before or and you know, you really find your passion or the reason for your passion by living life and finding inspiration to do that and really, I think its personally just once you find it, it's just self-motivation how badly do you want to get your voice out there, what do you want people to know and what do you want people to think about and I think that's really what I've learned throughout filmmaking and how far I've gotten and you know, how much I've learned.

Dave: As a filmmaker, obviously, there's always limitations. It doesn't matter if you have a \$100 million movie budget or if you have a \$10 movie budget. What is your philosophy around those limitations?

Kiersten: My philosophy around limitations is probably to view it as if there are practically no limitations. If you start limiting yourself, then you're thinking about, oh I can't do this, I can't do that, when you could be thinking okay, what's another way to do it or what's another way to do that. In another view of limitations and films is, some people won't start film or make a film not just by what how much money they have but probably if they're like a girl or they're young or if they're old, they think that you know, I can't do it I'm a girl, or I can't do it I'm a guy or I'm too old or too young. I mean, I went to Sundance at 13 years old and if I had listened to myself or limited myself or listened to others telling me I was too young, I wouldn't be you know, talking to you right now and if you're a filmmaker, you're a filmmaker, it doesn't matter your age, it doesn't

matter your gender, it doesn't matter how much money you have because you want to get your message out there. The cool thing about film is we are all here to express ourselves and our ideas and I think it'd be a shame if someone's brilliant vision was not expressed because you know, they feel they are not good enough or they don't have enough money or that they can't do something when really all they needed to do is find an alternative to it.

Dave: Yeah, I think that's really true and especially around age. When you look at a lot of the major filmmakers, people like Steven Spielberg, you know, he was doing it for a young age. I think a lot of the very prominent filmmakers started very, very young because as you do film, you're fine tuning your vision, you're learning what works and what doesn't work creatively and most of all you're making mistakes and that's the key, you need to make those mistakes in order to get better. If you just wait until you feel you know everything to make that first film, I think it's going to be a lot harder because you're going to put so much pressure on yourself rather than just grabbing a camera, getting out there and doing it.

Kiersten: As much as you try to prepare, I don't think you're really going to learn anything until you start. That's what I've been taught and that's all the advice I've been giving.

Dave: What process do you use creatively to shape your films?

Kiersten: I always start with writing. Writing is personally the hardest part for me. But I think most of my ideas come randomly, they're inspired ideas just pop into my head and I just jot them down because that's always super hard. And then I'll take the idea and expand it and think about what are other ideas that I've had, what have I experienced, what have I seen. I think just taking little things that you've experienced in you know, living and everything that you've learned it makes it easier and it helps your creativity by thinking you know, what can I do and collaborating, I think collaborating is a really big part because you know, you've got other people's point of view and other people's visions because you are making it for an audience and I think that's really important and I think that finding an important message or what do you want people to feel or what do you want people to think about and you know, critiquing and scripting, it's all part of the creative process and I think everybody goes through it no matter what they're doing if its art or film or anything like that.

Dave: You kind of getting the idea, it kind of pops into your head, you sit down and do you fully write it or do you kind of, outline it or like, what process do you usually follow around the writing and as far as production to your story board, how formal are you in your process? Is it more, hey I have an idea, here's an outline and I'm just going to go shoot it?

Kiersten: I feel like I go both ways but usually, usually I have my idea and I kind of write an outline and, because usually when I go on film, I change like half the film like the whole idea is like it changes and shifts to what you think ends up being better. But I think, I think it's probably, mostly just going out there and filming it, though if it is a bigger project that I do want to have a lot of like, emotion in it or if it's like a longer video, I will storyboard. I storyboard into my last film for like the first time and it was really cool so I think it really depends on what kind of project you're doing but usually it's just going out there and filming and then taking it and editing it and having fun with it.

Dave: Can you tell our listeners a little bit about Future Earth?

Kiersten: I'm growing up in a technology generation where it's all technology and iPhones and computers and all of that and I love technology. We were given the prompt future so I thought why not take it to a technology level so, Future Earth, what it is, is it's a film about these teenagers who are out in nature and they're on a date and they're happy and they're having fun and you're kind of wondering, why are they so happy just being in nature? Later on in the film, you find out that they're not actually in nature but they're in a virtual reality. They have these virtual reality headsets on that brings them into an alternate world and they chose nature because in their world, the world is polluted and there's no more forest and nature and I wanted to take it to a technology level but I wanted to also take it a step further because most good things, they do have a fault to them and I feel like a lot of people want to turn their heads away from that. They want to pretend that you know, it's not there, they want to ignore the fact that you know, technology's advancing but our forest are going away. So, I wanted to express how cool it is that, you know, technology is advancing but I also wanted to take it a step further and show people that you know, if you don't do something, our nature's going to go away. So, that's pretty much what the film is about and I learned a lot throughout that process. I learned how to you know, do certain shots and in the editing that was the first time I really done a lot of v effects because there were holograms and it was really me and it was a slow process but it was probably my favorite film I've done. It was an idea that I was really proud of doing.

Dave: I'll tell you what I really enjoyed about it. The fact that there was a message there but it wasn't like, hey I'm going to shoot a documentary on the environment and why we need to change the way that we were dealing with the environment right now. It was a little disarming, it's kind of like, what Rod Serling and Gene Roddenberry and a lot of these science fiction story tellers have been doing for many, many years is taking things that are at the time were very big issues yet they might have even be controversial politically to talk about and put it into a science fiction world to get people to think about them. And I felt like this in some ways was very disarming like, I'm watching a couple on a date and she brings up the control panel and turns off the virtual reality world. I just thought that it was a really interesting way to make me kind of, think about this but not bang me over the head with, a more traditional way of imparting that message.

Kiersten: Yeah because I mean, I feel like especially at my age, a lot of kids wouldn't watch it if they know it's about, oh keep your environment clean, they're like, yeah, yeah, I've been told that, how boring is that but I wanted it to be interesting but then show you know, you have to think about it. So, I think that's definitely where I was going for it. Thank you.

Dave: What technology and tools do you use to get these production guys in your films? When I was watching the film, for example, Future Earth, the stuff loads really, really good. So, how did you go about doing that to get that level of production value?

Kiersten: You know, as I've mentioned, I started off with it like a pretty off the wall program but throughout the years, I, you know, you go to Windows Movie Maker, then iMovie, then I used Final Cut, and now I've gotten into Adobe and it's just, it's kind of a creative process. I've started using a Canon for the video and its only a Canon 23i Rebel which isn't like the nicest line but

you don't need a super nice camera to get something that's really professional looking because I feel, as long as you know what you're doing and you've had enough practice, you are able to create something that you're proud of. That's what I've done and then I took it in and I was editing. I have learned editing completely by myself off the internet and just kind of practicing and I think the tools is important but at the same time it's also you know, learning and knowing your equipment.

Dave: Not getting caught up in the technology for technology's sake but more like you mentioned, there's people who probably go out and they want to buy the right camera to shoot their first movie and you don't need to do that, you just need something that will get you a decent image. It shouldn't be about what piece of equipment did you shoot it on but more about the story and more about what you're trying to impart to the viewer.

Kiersten: Yeah because I've had this kind of philosophy that you can buy the best camera in the world and have no idea how to use it and get like an OK video or you could have a smaller, not as good camera and really know the cam, you know, really know the settings, really know it looks good, really know the angles and get a better video than you would've have gotten with a bigger camera. So, you know, knowing your equipment even if it's not much is so important and I love explaining that, and it's cool with all my friends in video production.

Dave: And are there any specific workflows that you do to kind of simplify the production of your films, do you shoot them raw? Anything that really comes into mind that you come up with workflow wise that you find helps you in the process.

Kiersten: I shoot with the video coding, I usually keep it pretty flat, like with the colors, I don't like to have a lot of happening on the camera because I do so much color grading later and that's pretty much what mainly what I would do and just feed it into the camera and have it in normal like MP4 format because when I bring, I'll use different programs so you know, some of them only accept certain things so I try to keep it pretty even. I think trying to just go through the filming process and then bringing it into editing, I think experience and trying to make it really professional, I guess. I'll go on YouTube and look up all these ways, the way filmmakers do it and I guess I kind of find a happy medium and this person makes it super professional or this person totally gorilla films and find like a little medium in there that works best for me because I don't have anything specific that I do, not yet at least.

Dave: Are you staying, you mentioned there'll be creative cloud, are you staying within that family to do a lot of your work or do you find that you just use whatever tool fits for what you're trying to do?

Kiersten: Recently, I've been keeping in the Adobe family but usually if I find that it's not working and then I know something will work better for it, I'll switch to the app because what's most comfortable and what I know will turn out looking the best is what I usually use.

Dave: And what advice would you have for young filmmakers who are just starting out and wants to start making those first films?

Kiersten: I would have to say, to keep in mind that, for you, there's no limitations because you can do whatever you want as long as you just grab your camera, just have fun with it because having fun in creating some really random stuff is often the best way to do it. I mean, that's how I started, I did the weirdest things, but it was so fun and it really let me enjoy film. Know your vision. Know what you want people to see and show them. Something my dad had told me that I remember all of these years is that everyone is important so if you're collaborating, know that your friend who's just there to hold the boom mic or the person who's behind the camera pressing play. Every single person's important because, you know, if you're there alone you'll realize that every little thing is like a lot of work so if you get big just remember that everyone has a part and even if it's small, it's just as important as everybody else. I think that's really what keeps me going and knowing that it's really a team effort and it's something you realize throughout filmmaking.

Dave: What are you working on right now, what's your next project?

Kiersten: My next project right now, I'm currently working on the video I filmed while I was at Sundance. And I'm making kind of a video blog of what happened and how it is in a young filmmaker's point of view. And after that, I think I want to do a kind of like a throwback to my, the YouTube show I used to do, it was like a Little Mermaid show. I want to do something like that, it's going to be about how our oceans are, you know, pollution, it's still along those lines but it's pretty much an underwater video with music so that's, I think I want to do that next. It's like a music video and that'll be really fun. I'm doing that with my sister and just kind of you know, working on things here and there and it's been really cool.