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Filmmaker Shirley Petchprapa A-Profiled

by [aarisings](#)

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This issue of the A-Profiler, Nelson Wong interviews filmmaker [Shirley Petchprapa](#). Find out how her latest film project *Roxy* came about, what it was like working with a dog, and what aspects of filmmaking she enjoyed the most while filming *Roxy*.

What inspires you to be a director? What is your earliest memory of wanting to become a filmmaker?

Emotions inspire me and the human condition. When I was younger I created narratives for myself to compensate for what I thought I lacked in life. I begged my parents for a hi-8 camera when I was in high school which I shot silly things. I cut between a VCR and the camera - used as a deck (the degradation was awful). I always did visual art stuff. It was a combination of all those things that probably brought me to filmmaking but it wasn't until much later that I decided I was ready to tell stories that reflected very personal ideas and sentiments.

Tell us about *ROXY*. How did the project come about and what is it about?

Damien [Puckler] is a good friend and an actor. *Roxy* is Damien's dog. I love that dog. For me that's all it took for me to feel I had enough to shoot a film. The idea for it came later, but I knew that I wanted to tell a story from the dog's point of view.

As for what is it about, I think I've given a different answer every time this question has been asked. I suppose because I believe it's about a lot of things. It's about how uninteresting and anti-climatic the events can be leading to something really big. It can be about suicide but the guy survives and I forget to talk about that. Does he live another day just to try again later? Maybe the film is about the questions that are left for the audience and how they may identify with the despair of the protagonist or being abandoned through the eyes of the dog. As a filmmaker I just hope that the audience feels something even if they can't put a finger on it.

I've heard that working with animals are sometimes the most difficult for filmmakers. Did you find Roxy, the dog, sometimes presenting a challenge in filming?

People say that when you cast non-actors you should cast people that best resemble the character you need them to portray. Roxy did Roxy very well! I also know Roxy and I took into account what she does naturally.

There were times when we had to come up with some clever tricks to coax her into different actions, but for the most part she was amazing.

Damien was an excellent wrangler. It also helps that she just likes hanging out with us. Retakes weren't a problem but she was probably wondering what these weird humans were doing around her. Oh, and she never looked into the camera, she's a natural!



Of the things you did for ROXY (Director, Writer, Producer, Cinematographer, Camera Operator, Editor, Foley Artist, Colorist), which was the most fun and which was the least fun, and why?

The most fun was shooting. I had the scenes mapped out for story and a loose shotlist in my head but I didn't know what our locations would look like. When I find frames I can get really excited. Least was probably the grading, I'm no expert at the software so it can become frustrating knowing what you want and having to take several stabs at it to get there.

You were an award-winning Graphic Designer/Art Director for the likes of MTV and Russell Simmons' *ONEWORLD Magazine*. Do you feel your background in art and design helps with your filmmaker's eye?

Sure. Well, I'm untrained in both so maybe the visual stuff is instinct. I did go to art school for a second and dropped out.

What project(s) are you currently working on or plan to work on in the near future?

A feature...its incubating. If I have to do it alone again, I'll find a way! I'm also doing some art stuff (see next answer).

Beyond film, what other interests are you also trying to pursue?

Um...being happy? Actually I'm collaborating with an artist friend on some video pieces we hope to install in galleries if we are lucky. It's a series, we've shot one and plan on shooting another next week. It will be ongoing.

What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

Stress out? Joking. I like to eat. I look at art, watch films, hang out with friends, play with toys, pet my cat and take unmapped drives out of Los Angeles to explore.

What advice do you have for other aspiring filmmakers?

I guess, don't let logistics stop you. If you want to tell a story, you can probably do it with a bunch of rocks and a stick.

