

ALISON

A Harrow Beauty Undertaking

Press Kit - Production Notes



Contact:

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WINNER: *Best Director, Best Actress, Best Screenplay, 2nd Best Feature*, The Los Angeles International Film Festival

WINNER: *Best Experimental Drama*, The Indie Gathering

WINNER: Award of Merit, Los Angeles Cinemafest

Alison Logline

A pregnant 30-something woman leaves her husband and the life she knows, and begins to explore the delicate reach between self-discovery and self-destruction.

Alison Synopsis

“What’s wrong with Alison?”

Alison is the bracingly honest story of a young mother-to-be who senses that something is wrong – with her marriage, with her life, with herself. Told in a prismatic, non-linear style, the movie follows Alison as she tries to understand her disconnected condition: She abandons her husband and moves into a roadside motel, hoping to find some sense of where she’s headed and why she’s been where she’s been. In this way, she struggles to work out the all-too-slight difference between self-discovery and self-destruction.

Photographed by North Carolina powerhouse DP Kenneth Wilson (*George Washington, Undertow*) and crafted by award-winning writer-director Paul Schattel (*Sinkhole*; the upcoming *The Mourning Portrait*), *Alison* is a true-hearted exploration into what we want ... even though sometimes we don’t know what we want.

Adhering to a ‘higher simplicity’ model of filmmaking (long takes, improvised dialogue, Dreyer-esque centered compositions), *Alison* hopes to find the guilelessness beyond the artifice – to go beyond a faux-sophistication and find a purity that burns with truth and raw emotion.

Minimalist and restrained, *Alison* is a touchingly honest homage to personal freedom at any cost.

Alison Production Notes

Shot digitally in and around Asheville, North Carolina, *Alison* is told with intelligence, restraint, and most importantly, a great deal of heart. Working with an outline but not a hard shooting script, the actors jumped into their roles by improvising and finding similarities between themselves and their characters. Honesty was the buzzword on the set: honest performances, honest direction, honest writing. The result is that *Alison* exhibits an emotional authenticity that most movies don't have – an intimacy captured only with a small cast and crew on an unnoticed set.

“So much of filmmaking is about control and parsing out moments and emotions,” says Schattel. “With *Alison*, we tried to let it flow, while staying true to the basics of storytelling – to create a compelling narrative where you essentially just want to see what happens next.”

The simplicity of the approach was echoed in the filming itself – centered compositions, masters with no cutaways, lingering moments to let the story breathe. “We wanted to create truly honest moments, without any ratcheting of the tension, or trying to manipulate the viewer in any way,” Schattel says. “We felt that if the story was compelling enough, we could hang back and let it unfurl without trying to force anything.”

Schattel was particularly influenced by the ‘Higher Simplicity’ approach used by a variety of great filmmakers and photographers. “Imagemakers from William Eggleston to Theodore Dreyer and even Stanley Kubrick went after a real clarity of imagery and intent,” Schattel muses. “Robert Bresson, for instance, shot an entire film with a single 50mm lens. So our focus was to present an uninflected image and story – to present the thing itself. That’s what we were after.”

Working with some of the region’s finest actors (led by Lauren Fortuna), Schattel carved out the bones of the scene with the cast, and then let them take it where the scene wanted to go. Mistakes and uncertainty were encouraged, with momentary, instinctual decisions becoming a part of the design.

“You can only use this risky method with terrific actors,” Schattel explains. “Giving an actor that much room and trust means that the actor is making countless decisions on her own at any given moment. But if you’re lucky enough to find a Lauren Fortuna or a David MacDonald or a Bryan Marshall, performers who can literally run with a scene and create authentic human moments, you might capture something incredible. I think we did.”

Alison Director's Statement

Like most filmmakers, I love to make movies. But we don't get to do it enough – we're usually waiting for things to be approved, or for the money to come in. With *Alison* we took a sudden leap of faith -- this movie was about the process of discovery, of hammering it out and making something that truly came from within.

There's a literary quality to so-called 'small films.' You don't have to destroy the world in these movies; some stories are better for their brevity or their modest scale. They're 'short stories,' in the best sense of the word – stories meant to be consumed at one sitting.

I'd also been experimenting with some new techniques – long, single takes, basic compositions, making something interesting happen *in front of the camera*, rather than cutting and manipulating moments into being 'better' through editing. I liked the commitment of using a single take; it was a challenge, like playing tennis with a high net. I'd been watching the films of Bela Tarr, the great Hungarian filmmaker, and his use of the steadicam was breathtaking. I wanted to see if I could find that same hypnotic immersiveness with a digital camera like he did with 35mm.

My first thought was to get the best actors and crew I personally knew involved, and have it be a sort of 'friends and family only' affair. Production Designer Linda Jean Marlowe was first on-board; both her fun spirit and her unfortunate battle with ovarian cancer informed the movie at every turn. Sadly, Linda passed away just after shooting was completed. The disease is even referenced at one point in the movie, and because of Linda's impending health issues a feeling of mortality seemed to hang over the project like a shadow.

At the same time, when I asked Lauren Fortuna to come on board and literally carry the movie, she informed me that she was pregnant, and would be pretty rotund and physically exhausted around the time of the shoot. Not to be deterred, we decided to forge ahead anyway, and suddenly our movie was gonna be a movie about a pregnant lady. Okay. Thus, even in the shadow of mortality, there was renewal and new beginnings and stirrings of new life.

In this spirit, *Alison* was born. We rolled with the punches, made use of the accidents, found beauty in unlikely spots. It was an exercise in punk rock filmmaking, a spit in the eye toward immobilization due to scheduling or budgeting or lack of resources. For me, it was a new way to make art – to trust yourself, trust people around you, and especially trust the process. It'll be kinda hard to go back to making movies any other way.

-- Paul Schattel, Director

Director's Bio

Paul Schattel's first film, the 35mm *Sinkhole*, a rural noir thriller about a small-town meth ring, was nurtured through the IFP-NY program, and upon its arrival was a critical favorite and won many festival awards, including Best Feature. It was quickly snapped up by Shoreline Entertainment for their Watermark label, and has since been acquired and played on television around the world.

The following year, the IFP welcomed Paul back with his screenplay, the supernatural thriller *The Mourning Portrait*. That script was optioned by NYC's Belladonna Productions (*Transamerica*, *L.I.E.*, *Funny Games*), with Schattel attached as director. (Believe it or not, Dermot Mulroney, Melissa Leo, Wentworth Miller and Diane Ladd are attached to star – check out our Facebook page at the links below.)

In the extended development process for that film, Schattel decided to mount a quicker, smaller, more experimental project. Using a local cast and crew, and hoping to expand his own craft and learn new ways to tell a story, Schattel conceived a project that used extensive collaboration as a means to creating a narrative. That movie is *Alison*.

Other projects in development for Schattel are the skewed romantic comedy *Countrypolitan* (about the 1960's country music scene), the dark contemporary fantasy *Old Exit One*, and a sinister and surreal coming-of-age story, *Harvestman*.

In the meantime, Schattel also runs Harrow Beauty Pictures, a commercial film and video outfit based in North Carolina, and has directed and created content for Volvo, Moog Music, Paste Magazine, Animal Planet, The Discovery Network and more.

Alison: www.alisonmovie.com

Paul's next movie: <http://www.facebook.com/mourningportrait>
www.themourningportrait.com

The Filmmakers

Directed by Paul Schattel
Produced by Paul Schattel
Written by Paul Schattel & The Alison Cast
Director of Photography Kenneth Wilson II
Camera Operator/Tech Guru Shane Peters
Production Designer Linda Jean Marlowe
Gaffer Dustin Cassels

The Cast

Lauren FortunaAlison
David MacDonaldRick
Bryan MarshallEd

Featuring

Jessica Bachar
Tom Chalmers
Savanna James
Cody Magouirck
Jessica Tomasin

ALISON

TRT: 87 minutes
Digital HD
16x9 aspect ratio

EPK's and extensive press and publicity photos available