

## **The Ultimate Self-Made Media Darling and Author, Diablo Cody**

The film, "Juno," is the latest indie sensation to seduce critics and inspire end-of-year awards buzz. While the sharp dialogue and quirky protagonist of "Juno" are exceedingly sharp and quirky, even by indie-film standards, the film might be most remarkable for its writer, Diablo Cody.

Although "Juno" is Cody's first screenplay, she is shuttling across the country from Sundance to Letterman's New York studios to promote it. Big-budget Hollywood screenwriters rarely enjoy this level of popularity, let alone a rookie scribe. So, what gives?

Cody couldn't really explain it when I caught up with her last Thursday. Literally five minutes before our interview, she learned the Golden Globe Awards had just nominated her script for best screenplay. Everybody is talking about her and her film.

**You never guess in a million years that it's going to wind up opening up...right now, it has a record-breaking per-screen average. It's got a 100% on the Cream of the Crop on the Tomato Meter. I don't know if you read Rotten Tomatoes, but that's our bible in Hollywood. I mean, you do not expect that. It's *really* unbelievable. You know, to have Roger Ebert, you know, go see it in Toronto and blog about it that night, you know, because he's too excited to wait for his review. I mean, that is *crazy*. It's not something you ever expect to happen. That was the most overwhelming part, absolutely.**

You'd have to avoid the *New York Times*, *Star Tribune*, *Wired*, *Salon*, and pretty much any other media outlet covering arts or entertainment not to come across a story about Diablo Cody in the last month or two. She is certainly a talented writer, but has quickly become an A-list media darling because of her persona.

Cody used to be a sex performer. She parlayed over a year's worth of hard labor swinging poles in Minneapolis strip clubs into a high-powered blog that helped nab her a column in the *City Pages* and pen a best-selling memoir. The memoir's success leveraged the chance to write "Juno."

She is the ultimate self-made woman. Even her name, Diablo Cody, she created as a spicier, more memorable alternative to her birth name, Brook Joan Busey. The transformation began after moving to Minnesota four short years ago.

**I lived in Chicago for 25 years of my life, didn't write jack. I move to Minneapolis and my career takes off. And I really feel that this city was a muse to me in some way. And it inspired me. And I hope that people here are proud of me.**

It's hard to say how much of Cody's persona is a conscious creation and how much is inherently her. She grew up in a suburb of Chicago and attended a writing program at the University of Iowa as an undergrad.

**I wanted to be a poet, actually. And, like, Iowa City is like ground zero for budding poets, which is, you know...And to this day I have a fascination with the rhythm of language, just the cadence of language. So, that aspect of studying poetry actually has come in handy.**

Her love of poetry comes forth in her screenwriting as a savvy ear for dialogue. But it's a skill she has honed through very conscious cultivation.

**I actually spend a lot of time listening to conversations. I am the ultimate sort-of eavesdropper. And I always have been. And I think that the conversations people have on the street are so fascinating. People are writing their own best dialogue and they don't even realize it.**

The script of "Juno" has enough snappy, witty exchanges to be worth listening to, even in the absence of a plot.

Cody plotted "Juno" as a comedy. A 16-year-old girl, Juno, becomes pregnant by her best friend and decides she'll give the baby to a yuppie couple after she's given birth. The film's humor develops from the weird relationship dynamics that ensue. It feels very autobiographical, and Cody agrees to a large extent, although she's never been pregnant.

**All the relationships in the film are drawn directly from my life. And I, personally, I relate to Juno in a lot of ways, although I was never that witty or cool.**

The film's locations also have a strong semblance to reality. The film occurs in Minnesota and references a number of places Cody has and hasn't frequented.

**I lived in St. Louis Park first and then I lived in Robbinsdale. So, I've never lived in the city proper, but I worked there. Yeah, I went to Ridgedale Mall. I've actually never been to St. Cloud, which gets referenced a couple of times in the movie.**

How much of Cody's persona is fabricated is impossible to determine, but it's nonetheless intriguing to consider. She claims in a recent interview in *Minneapolis-St. Paul Magazine* that she's an absolutely terrible actor.

But it's hard to believe her claim. She is livelier and more effervescent than most actors I've interviewed. Her teeth sparkle. She has bright photogenic eyes and rarely breaks eye contact while speaking. She certainly has the presence of a starlet.

**I never thought that I would be a person who would make people happy. I never thought I would do the kind of job that made people happy in life because I've always been kind of a little black cloud. Seeing people leave the theater smiling, it makes me feel like...I'm going to cry...it makes me feel like I have a chance to be a good person.**

Whether the tears are genuine or not, Diablo Cody has something better going for her: authenticity. She has crafted a persona and a writing talent that are uniquely hers and made them utterly believable by her active will. And this is what's charmed the media into making her their darling, at least for the moment.

For KFAI news, I'm Paul Bachleitner.