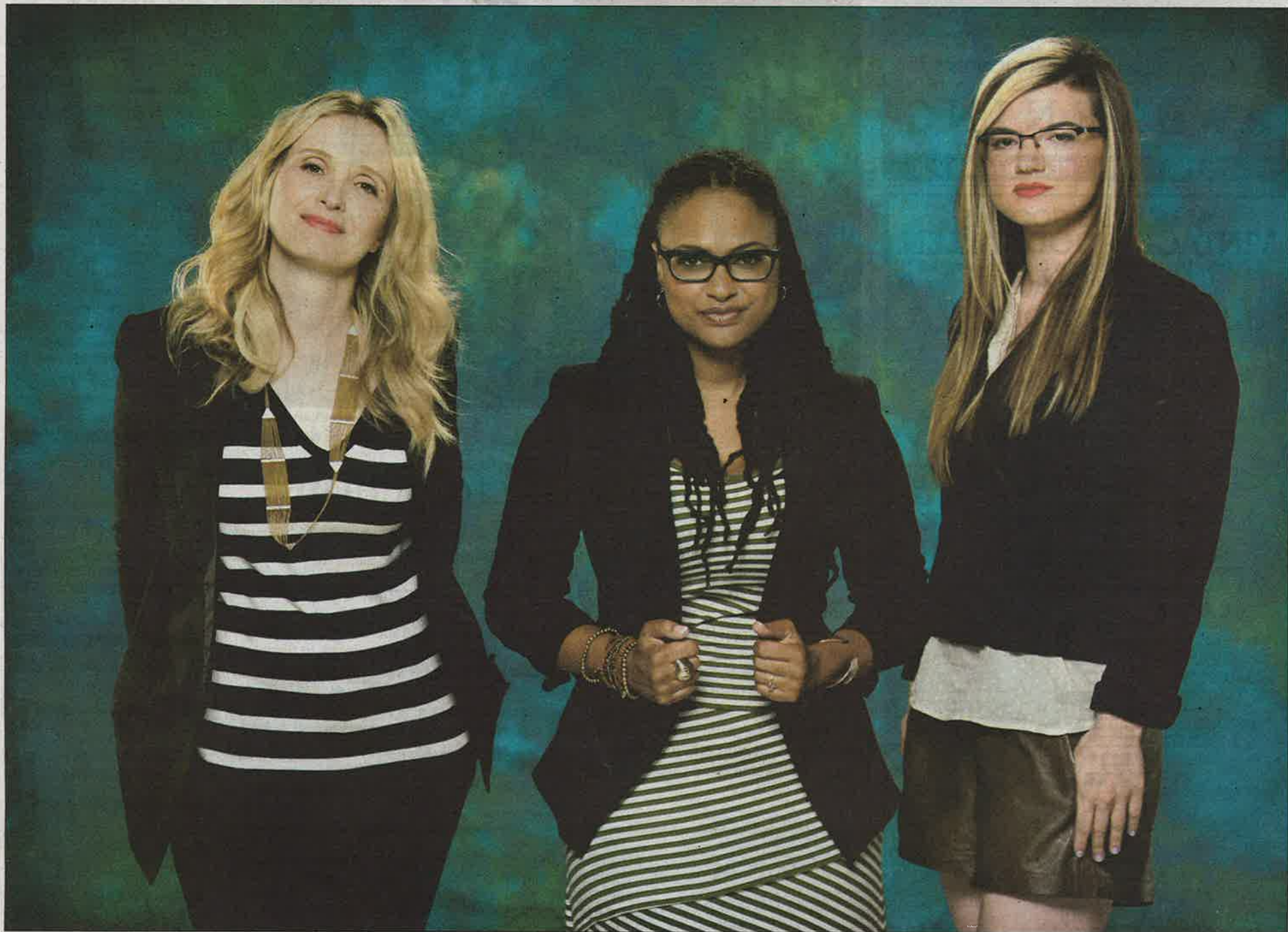


CALENDAR

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RICARDO DE ABATANHA Los Angeles Times

WRITER-DIRECTORS Julie Delpy, left, Ava DuVernay and Leslye Headland say that the environment for female filmmakers is complicated despite some successes.

Independence

THREE WOMEN ON THE PERILS OF MOVIE MAKING

By NICOLE SPERLING >>> Looking at the movies opening in late summer and early fall, it would be easy to assume these are go-go days for women in cinema.

Actress Zoe Kazan not only stars in the romantic comedy "Ruby Sparks," she also wrote the screenplay. Likewise, Rashida Jones co-scripted her latest starring vehicle, "Celeste and Jesse Forever," with Will McCormack. Opening in Los Angeles on Friday is Julie Delpy's "2 Days in New York," a follow-up to her 2007 romantic comedy "2 Days in Paris"; Delpy wrote and directed both movies, poignant looks at the day-to-day complications of falling (and staying) in love and navigating the pitfalls of family.

A few weeks later, writer-director Leslye Headland will make her debut with the biting black comedy "Bachelorette," starring Kirsten Dunst, Lizzy Caplan, Isla Fisher and Rebel Wilson as frenemies out for a fraught night in New York. And in October, writer-director Ava DuVernay will release the Sundance Film Festival favorite "Middle of Nowhere," a drama about a Los Angeles nurse whose [See **Roundtable**, D5]



ROBERT Pattinson in David Cronenberg's "Cosmopolis."

PERSPECTIVE

Our most original director?

By J. HOBERMAN

Hypnotic or stupefying? "This is the third time I've seen it, and I still don't know if it works," a colleague told me as we left a screening of David Cronenberg's "Cosmopolis." I totally understand. The movie is undeniably something — but what exactly?

Adapted from Don DeLillo's stormily received 2003 novel about a 28-year-old currency speculator, the billionaire master of an imploding financial universe whose whim-



Aim to 'Sparkle' and to express something too

By GREG BRAXTON

Salim Akil's smile froze as he recalled a day last year when he received a studio offer he feared might derail his blossoming career. "I remember coming home and telling my

A complicated environment

[Roundtable, from D1]

husband is sentenced to prison.

These are hardly the only women in the director's chair this year — Lynn Shelton, Sarah Polley and Lorene Scafaria, among others, opened movies this summer, and Lena Dunham, who wrote, directed and starred in the 2010 film "Tiny Furniture," brought her sly, self-deprecating comic sensibility to television with the HBO hit series "Girls," which last month earned the writer-director-actress multiple Emmy nominations.

But these women are forging their own cinematic paths even as the going for female filmmakers in Hollywood seems to be getting tougher. Only 5% of the directors of the top 250 highest-grossing movies last year were women, compared with 7% in 2010 and 9% in 1998, according to the Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film at San Diego State University.

Delpy, DuVernay and Headland have found in the independent sphere — each of their new films debuted in January at Sundance. The trio recently visited The Times to discuss their work and the challenges they face as women in the business.

Said DuVernay: "I think we see a lot of women entering the foray of independent filmmaking for very much this reason: You're empowered by private equity and less about going into a room and pitching 'This is my vision.'"

Delpy, 42, began acting as a child in France. She wrote and directed her first feature, "Looking for Jimmy," in 2002, and she was nominated for an Oscar for her screenplay for 2004's "Before Sunset," which she penned with her costar Ethan Hawke and director Richard Linklater.

Like that film, "2 Days in Paris" explored the interactions of a young couple in France but with a more overtly comedic touch. It became a niche indie hit that made \$4.4 million in 2007, and Delpy said she was intrigued by the idea of checking back in with her character, Marion, five years down the line. As it turns out, she has settled down with Mingus (Chris Rock) in New York, though the arrival of her French relatives begins to disrupt their domestic harmony.

Magnolia Pictures is releasing the new film, shot on location in New York.

For DuVernay, screening her film at Sundance turned out to be a landmark moment in her career: She became the first African American woman to win the directing award in the U.S. drama category.

The Los Angeles native and UCLA grad turned to directing after years as a movie publicist. She made her first film, a hip-hop documentary, in 2008 and transitioned to narrative features with 2011's "I Will Follow," about a woman moving out of a house she shared with a terminally ill aunt. She shot that film in just 15 days with her own money, less than \$50,000.

By that measure, "Middle of Nowhere," with its 19-day schedule and a budget of less than half a million dollars, is a somewhat more expansive venture. New-comer Emayatzy Corinealdi plays Ruby, who puts her dreams on hold when her husband, Derek (Omari Hardwick), is sentenced to prison. Ruby deals with her mother's disapproval and financial stress as she strives to support Derek emotionally and maintain their union.

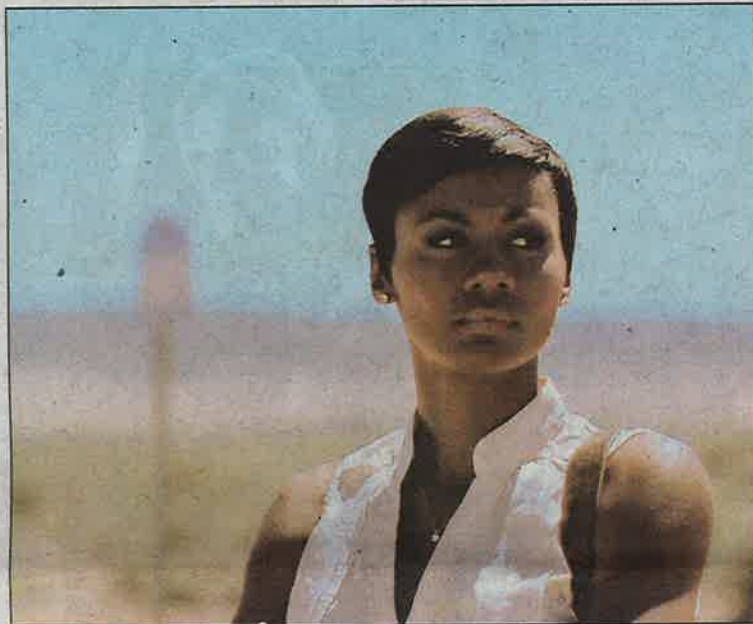
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RADIUS-TWC

"BACHELORETTE," writer-director Leslye Headland's debut feature, stars Lizzy Caplan, left, Kirsten Dunst and Isla Fisher.



AFFRM

EMAYATZY CORINEALDI plays a woman whose husband is in prison in writer-director Ava DuVernay's "Middle of Nowhere."



WALTER THOMSON Magnolia Pictures

"2 DAYS IN NEW YORK" stars writer-director Julie Delpy and Chris Rock as a couple. It follows her "2 Days in Paris."

emotional, because they feel that a good director should be kind of unemotional. They don't make movies because they like movies — they make movies because it's a business. So you have to be a businesswoman.

Ava DuVernay: I think for

Ava, what is your style when you direct?

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up "2 Days in Paris" with this movie, "2 Days in New York"?

Delpy: "2 Days in Paris" explores a tiny little bit of a relationship and a tiny moment in time. I wanted to explore another tiny moment in time five years later.... I like romantic comedies that are in the meat of the [relationship], because that's the hard part. It's not about falling in love and having great sex the first three weeks of the relationship, right? It's about how do you still have great sex after seven years and how do you still like someone and not want to kill them after two years?

Ava, can you talk about casting your lead actress?

DuVernay: Her name is Emayatzy Corinealdi, and we found her through the audition process.... Our casting director, Aisha Coley, brought me a tape, and I just couldn't take my eyes off of her. This character is in every single frame of the film. It's her story. And it's a lot of silence, and it's very interior. So it was really important that it was someone who had that kind of rooted quality but also the vulnerability. All that I wanted, she had.

These films represent female points of view, but they're very different female points of view. Do we need female filmmakers to make these kinds of movies? Could men do this?

DuVernay: Nobody could've made that film but me. I think we all put our personal imprint on these films, and I see a definite difference between films that have a cast of predominantly women that are told through a male lens. Just the choices, you know — not that they're horrible, but they're different. Like, there is something about watching a romantic comedy made by a woman filmmaker. There are nuances there that I see in Julie's work, just little things that she's getting at just doesn't come through a male lens because they don't know that behavior or those feelings.

Delpy: You know, it's funny, but when I watch some films by women, especially things to do with sexuality or flirting or how men are portrayed — I remember seeing [director Jane Campion's erotic

Delpy: Yeah, because we have no imagination.... It's actually kind of insulting.

DuVernay: No, it is insulting.... There's not one interview that I've done for "Middle of Nowhere" through the whole Sundance experience where someone didn't ask me if this was my story.... Or how do I know about this? It couldn't have come out of my imagination. There's always an automatic assumption that this is a film about a black woman whose husband is incarcerated and I'm a black woman, so... "Is your husband incarcerated?"

Delpy: It's insulting. Like, they don't ask [Paul Thomas] Anderson if, like, when he did "Boogie Nights" if he's a porn actor, ex-porn actor. That wouldn't even come to people's minds.

Leslye, how was the process of adapting a theatrical production for a feature screenplay? How much did you have to change?

Headland: A lot of it did change.... The play is sort of plotless in a lot of ways — it's a character study, it's putting a bunch of people in a room and turning up the heat and just seeing what happens and what unfolds. Whereas in the film, the plotline of this wedding dress that the girls are guilty of compromising and then having to save the day with, that was elevated to sort of the most important thing in the film. That being said, as different as it is, I think that — for lack of a better word — the vibe is the same. You're experiencing the same journeys, and you're experiencing the same characters, but you're just watching them be a little bit more active and a little bit less contemplative or passive.

So in 1998, there were more female directors out there making movies than there are today. Do you have any idea as to why are we in this position and how can it be changed?

DuVernay: I think it's directly — I mean, if you look at those percentages, it's obviously very directly related to this startling statistic about the second and third film.

Delpy: It's terrifying. Women

after years as a publicist. She made her first film, a hip-hop documentary, in 2008 and transitioned to narrative features with 2011's "I Will Follow," about a woman moving out of a house she shared with a terminally ill aunt. She shot that film in just 15 days with her own money, less than \$50,000.

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Headland, 31, was a New York playwright (and former Weinstein Co. assistant) who was encouraged by "Bachelorette" producers Will Ferrell and Adam McKay to direct the adaptation of her off-Broadway production. Though the movie is built around comedic set pieces in which close female friends come to love, hate and ultimately understand one another in the run-up to a wedding, the tone of "Bachelorette" is much, much darker than, say, Kristen Wiig's raunchy R-rated comedy smash "Bridesmaids."

"I... was blown away by how dark and awful she was willing to make people," Caplan said on stage in Park City, Utah, after a screening of the film.

Following are excerpts from The Times' conversation with Delpy, DuVernay and Headland.

Does the environment for female filmmakers appear to be getting easier, or is it the same struggle?

Julie Delpy: It's still complicated. When my friends that are aspiring women directors tell me they walked into a room and didn't get the job and say, "I don't know what I did wrong — I was passionate, I was telling them how much the project means to me." I always tell them, "Don't do that. Don't be passionate! Ever! Be an accountant." Because I think being a woman director, being this person in charge, [they think] we are weird, crazy animals.... I think they need reassurance that women are un-



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emotional, because they feel that a good director should be kind of unemotional. They don't make movies because they like movies — they make movies because it's a business. So you have to be a businesswoman.

Ava DuVernay: I think for female filmmakers a big issue is making their second and third films. You see the statistics, and the dropoff on the second and third [films] are dire. I think women are finding a way to kind of circumvent a lot of what you're talking about and get that first film made but the big question for me is, where do you go after the first and second? You know, who has the longevity? Woody Allen had the opening-night film at L.A. Film Festival, and I was really just struck that this is a 70-something-year-old man. Where's his American woman equivalent?

Leslye Headland: I felt when I was shooting my first movie, I had to really appear to be in control of something that's equivalent to herding cats or wrestling clouds. And I would go home and just cry — not because I was upset but just because I would just need to let go of everything that had happened that day and didn't feel necessarily like the film set is a conducive place to be feeling those emotions.

Delpy: Maybe on my first film, I was a little bit stressed out, but I usually stress out about logistics and stuff like that. I try to detach myself emotionally from the film when I'm directing it.... And I think it reassures people.

Ava, what is your style when you direct?

DuVernay: For me, it really starts from who I have around me.... I select people by craft but also by personality. It's also how I cast. There are some amazing names and some folks that might've done more for the film's prospects early on than the lead that we eventually cast in the "Middle of Nowhere," who is a complete unknown, but I liked her. I liked her as a person, so I wanted to spend all that time with her.

Leslye, you landed some big names for your first film. Was that something that you were actively going after?

Headland: It wasn't something that we sort of set out to do.... But when my producers, Adam McKay and Will Ferrell, came onboard they had these relationships with these bigger-name actors. They had access to people that I didn't have as a first-time filmmaker. Isla, Lizzy and Kirsten, they all loved these characters, which was something that not everyone could say reading this script. A lot of people felt that the girls who are the leads in the film fit that classic Hollywood term "unlikable."... In comedy, most women are playing the girlfriend or the person who's not having any fun or not behaving badly. I think all three of them were excited to get the chance to play the outside-the-box type of female characters.

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Delpy: You know, it's funny, but when I watch some films by women, especially things to do with sexuality or flirting or how men are portrayed — I remember seeing [director Jane Campion's erotic thriller] "In the Cut" ... and I'm like, "This is sexy." I think it's because maybe the males are a bit more objectified!

DuVernay: Hey, that's why I liked it! [Laughter] But no, it's interesting to look at male characters in women-directed films — who we're casting, what they're doing, and how they're being directed. I always kind of look at that, because we are used to seeing films directed by men with female characters, kind of on the sidelines or adjacent to the main action in some way.

Delpy: At the same time, I think it would be good if eventually that women direct films about men without even thinking ... even romantic comedy. I mean truly, I wrote a new film that the lead character is a man, and it's from the point of view of a man, basically. And I didn't feel so weird about doing it.... It felt very comfortable.

Headland: I don't know if you guys have this experience, but with my film, a lot of times people just assume that it's based on real life. Like, they sort of assume because I'm writing about women that I must know women exactly like this and I'm sort of reporting from the field.

Headland: A lot of it did change.... The play is sort of plotless in a lot of ways — it's a character study, it's putting a bunch of people in a room and turning up the heat and just seeing what happens and what unfolds. Whereas in the film, the plotline of this wedding dress that the girls are guilty of compromising and then having to save the day with, that was elevated to sort of the most important thing in the film. That being said, as different as it is, I think that — for lack of a better word — the vibe is the same. You're experiencing the same journeys, and you're experiencing the same characters, but you're just watching them be a little bit more active and a little bit less contemplative or passive.

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DuVernay: I think it's directly — I mean, if you look at those percentages, it's obviously very directly related to this startling statistic about the second and third film.

Delpy: It's terrifying. Women make their first film, their second film, and then it's like a nightmare, right, to make the third or fourth? I mean, it's almost like men can have three films in a row that don't do that well and keep on going.... And you know what I find interesting? That that's not just in the movie business, is that some women are at the heads of studio or very powerful women that could be promoting women directors. But I think there's a tendency — you know, the kind of sisterhood of women doesn't really exist. Like, women will not help other women. Women doubt other women — as much as men if not more. Women hate each other.

DuVernay: I will note that I disagree with that.

Delpy: I'm joking, obviously. But I feel like you would think that if there's a woman at the head of a production company, that she would help women. But she won't do that. It's not gonna come.... Maybe it's my interpretation. It takes forever for things to change.... I know that in France, you couldn't have your own bank account as a woman before 1969. So it's 40 years ago — it's not that long ago.

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