

EXTRA EXTRA...

Deedra Ricketts | Theater '86

BY LISA HALPERN

Extras Casting is a unique art form. Finding the right faces and bodies to populate the world of a film gives the audience a truer, deeper sense of reality – of place, time, mood and intensity.

Perhaps the term Extra leads you to believe that these roles are somehow less important to the vision and meaning of a film. Sure, for many actors, it's certainly not the fulfillment of their dreams, but to a filmmaker each individual who appears in the frame impacts the audience in a subtly powerful way.

It's the nameless, sweet-faced child who stares deep into the eye of the camera moments before being kidnapped. It's the anonymous, gaunt soldier who smiles weakly before dying in the field.

"I'm not sure how the word 'Extra' got a bad rap," says DeeDee Ricketts, a highly sought after Extras Casting Director and Cornish Theater alum. "I often meet actors who say, 'I don't do Extra work, only speaking parts.' Like the guy who asks, 'Paper or plastic?' is more memorable than the band of Kuwaiti Refugees George Clooney and Mark Wahlberg escort out of the desert in *Three Kings*. How else is someone right out of acting school going to get on-set film experience? What better way to get your feet wet than to do Extra work? There are folks who make their living doing Extra work, whom the Screen Actors Guild considers 'Background Artists'.

Having recently wrapped *Lords of Dogtown* and *Skeleton Key*, DeeDee is currently working on *Jarhead*, directed by Sam Mendes. She's hardly had time to come up for air, but that's nothing new for DeeDee, who's been on an amazing roll ever since making the decision to pursue Casting as a career. Her resume includes *Training Day*, *8 mile*, *The Village*, *Big Bounce*,



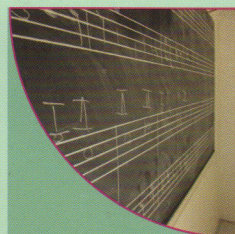
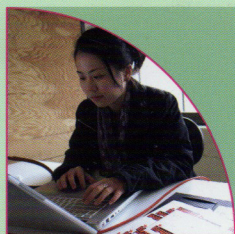
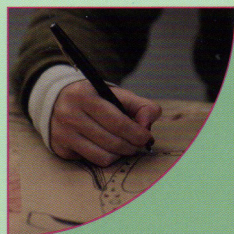
DEEDEE RICKETTS WITH GEORGE CLOONEY

Titanic, *Tears of the Sun*, *Three Kings*, *Any Given Sunday*, *Thirteen*, *Hardball*, *The Waterboy*, *Without Limits*, and *Bedazzled*. Clearly, the directors of these films appreciate DeeDee's eye for faces.

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After she graduated from Cornish, DeeDee was immersed in the Seattle Improv scene, with no intention of shifting gears. But an independent film came to Seattle and her life took an unexpected turn. "The filmmakers came to see an improv show, and cast us all. On that set, I realized I was more interested in working behind the camera."

"My theater background enables me to set the stage for an audition. I help the actor relax and avoid getting caught up in 'saying the right words', which can get in the way when the stress of the audition makes someone nervous. Sometimes my office is at Sony or Universal Studios, and just coming to the audition can be intimidating. Being an improviser allows me to step out of my role and act with the actor, and help them to play in the moment."



As an improviser, DeeDee thinks on her feet. "Recently, during the shoot for *Jarhead*, an actor was nowhere to be found and I had to race around trying to find a replacement to play the featured role. I called Mark Davis (Theater '86). I knew I could count on him to turn in a strong performance at the drop of a hat. I was right. The shoot went great and the director loved him. It's great to be able to give work to the talented people I know – it's one of the perks of this job."

DeeDee works with directors who regard Extras as an important element to make their movies truer and richer. "Curtis Hanson, director of *The Hand That Rocks The Cradle*, wanted all the Extras in scenes with the villain, Rebecca DeMornay, to look very stark, sharp and cold, while in scenes with the heroine, Annabella Sciorra, the Extras needed to be warm, round, more and earthy-looking."

Casting is a multi-layered process and DeeDee works hard to stay in synch with her director. "One of my favorite directors to work for was M. Night Shayamalan on *The Village*. He knows what he wants but is open to creative suggestions. He hand picked every single face, every single extra!"

"They built a village from the ground up and I got to cast the entire village," DeeDee explains. "And I had to think, who would be friends with Sigourney Weaver's character? Who would live with who? I put on my boots and tromped out into the country – Amish country – to find the right look."

"As a director, M. Night Shayamalan was so cool. He would congratulate everyone and thank them for their work. That level of respect gives background actors a huge, deserved boost."

DeeDee's own high regard for those working as Extras is not only evident, but one of the reasons she's so successful. The film business has rewarded her in other ways as well. Amidst the busy swirl of life on the set, DeeDee met and recently married a wonderful man, Peter. They are expecting their first child in the fall. ▽

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