

TO BE DIRECTED BY  
HILLARY R. HEATH



THE  
WALTZ

**sundance**  
institute

Fellow

WRITTEN BY SUNDANCE FELLOW  
AVA DAVIS



EMMY AWARDWINNING  
CINEMATOGRAPHER  
ABIJEET ACHAR

CAST, CREW &  
PASSION

Prepared For :  
Sundance Institute

From:  
studio vosges  
328 boulevard se, atlanta, ga 30344

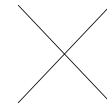
[www.thewaltzfilm.com](http://www.thewaltzfilm.com)

11 APRIL 2022



# THE WALTZ





## Why this film? Why now?

A Sundance Fellow. An Emmy-Award winning cinematographer. A first time female director backed by a producer with three features under her belt. A post-production producer who works as an editor and teaches editing at the Georgia Film Academy. Countless shorts and other projects under this teams belt.

And an ongoing national and global discussion about being transgender. Not to mention the ongoing violence against transgender persons.

But, the focus of this story remains on joy. Trans joy, but universal joy in pursuing one's happiness. Her personal liberties she's able to make in her life, because of the love and care she's surrounded by. This is a movie that centers on showing someone in a marginalized community thriving. Not just surviving.

This is the story that needs to be told. To anyone considering transitioning, and wondering if a life can still be lived. For family members wondering how to handle a loved one transitioning. For coworkers wondering how to handle someone transitioning. And for romantic interests. And the simple answer is .... just be human. Just be.

As writer and creative force behind this movie, her life is intentionally easy because mine has been easy. I was born middle class. My parents love and support me. I work at my spouse's family business. I am incredibly aware of my privilege as a black queer trans woman. But I know too many of my sisters and brothers who have not been as fortunate. Who have lived through trauma.

And honestly, we've seen enough. Now is the time for hope. To dare to dream. And this movie dares to dream. Claire's life is intentional. So that the obstacles she faces are singular. So that we, as the viewer, have external factors removed so that we can focus on Claire as a human, her wants, her desires, her needs. And her fears. That has been a steady criticisms of this script so far, that Claire's life is too easy. And it is intentional, so that we are focused on what Claire wants out of life.

And these amazing people are as passionate about this project as I am. They are my yellow brick road crew and we are committed to bringing this story to life.

### ATTACHED CREW

Ava Davis - Producer, Writer, Actress  
Hillary R. Heath - Director, Producer  
Abijeet Achar - Cinematographer, Producer  
Crystal Jin Kim - Production Designer  
Madison Hatfield - Producer  
Nicole Kemper - Post-Production Producer

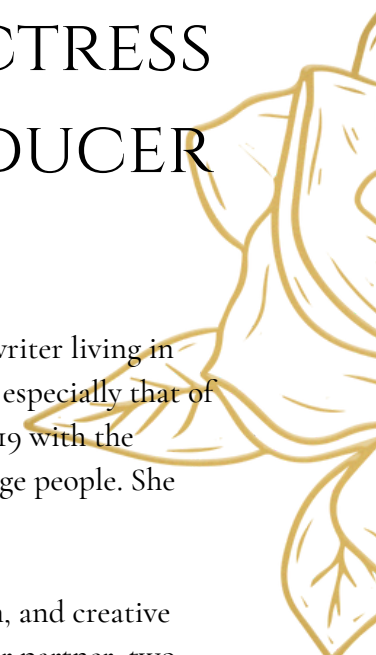
### ATTACHED CAST

Ava Davis as Claire  
Spencer Mumford as Dave  
Nikki Garza as Annalise  
Skye Passmore as Justin  
Carlette Jennings as Christie  
Brian Ashton Smith as Austin



# Ava Davis

WRITER  
ACTRESS  
PRODUCER



Ava Davis, also known as the Duchess of Grant Park, is a trans actress, producer, and writer living in Atlanta, Georgia. She is also an advocate for increasing trans and queer representation, especially that of black and other minorities. She founded her production company, Studio Vosges, in 2019 with the expressed purpose of telling the stories of queer and trans (GSM) black, brown, and beige people. She hosts the talk show, The Ava Davis Show, on you42.com.

She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Comparative Literature, with a focus in art history, film, and creative writing, from the University of Georgia, and has made Atlanta her home, along with her partner, two standard poodles, one Bengal cat, and one Russian ragdoll cat.

She has acted in, written, and produced several short films, including Feast, The Decision, and the short film The Duchess of Grant Park, about a trans woman who claims the Grant Park neighborhood of Atlanta as her duchy.

Ava Davis' stage credits include Alice in Wonderland, The Laramie Project, It's A Generational Thing, Stuck, and Locked. In addition, she has performed with the One Minute Play Fest, including a special performance in collaboration with the Queens Theater in New York City to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Pride. She also performs sketch comedy and collaborates with Critical Crop Top.





# THE WALTZ

## Creator / Writer / Producer Statement

Transitioning isn't easy. Finding love isn't easy. Doing both simultaneously feels near damn impossible, and as much as rom-coms are a horror genre to me, I've been horribly influenced by them. I remember sitting on the couch watching Leap Year with my partner and crying at the end. He asked why I was crying and I told him romantic comedy movies are awful. He said, why? He loves the romance and possibilities of them. And I told him those possibilities are what made me sad. I'd not considered transitioning then, though I did harbor fantasies. flash forward to now, and I'm a year into hormones and fully socially transitioned.

The Waltz is heavily inspired by Beauty and the Beast and Shall We Dance(US), with the sprinkling of romcoms such as How To Lose a Guy in 10 Days and Trainwreck. I think we can all agree that these films feature, for the most part, white cisgender women as the romantic lead.

I have a love-hate relationship with romantic comedies. I love the fantasy and allure of finding love, but realistically those scenarios aren't possible. They feel even further out of reach by being trans, because the biggest question that comes up, for me at least, is will they see me as a woman? Will I always feel in competition with cis-women, and never feel like I am enough in the relationship? Claire's character mirrors my torrid love affair with Beauty and the Beast.

This film arose out of a thought experiment, in the early stages of my transition before I'd started hormones or started to socially transition. As I sat in a coffee shop, I thought about what a meet-cute would look like for someone like me. How to disclose so much, and the fear that comes from being that vulnerable with the possibility of rejection.

This story feels incredibly personal, and makes me emotional every time I come to work on it, because of what it represents to me, and also what I see other trans women talk about when it comes to love - the fear of rejection, the frustration in going out on several dates only to disclose one is trans and then be rejected, searching for a partner and someone to love and trying to weed out the fetishists or perverts. It can be incredibly exhausting and demoralizing.

The beauty I think in seeing a story like this is for all the transwomen who are the heroes in their own stories looking for love. It has a bittersweet ending, in hopes of not painting an unrealistic portrayal of finding love but instead knowing that sometimes you can really like someone and feel that chemistry, but at that point in your life it's just not right for either of you.



# Hillary R. Heath

## DIRECTOR

## PRODUCER

Hillary R. Heath is an Atlanta native and a graduate of Oglethorpe University where she studied Theatre, Art, and English. As a student, Hillary directed and produced *The Effect of Gamma Rays* on *Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds* and *The Vagina Monologues* (2011, 2012). She was Assistant Director of Georgia Shakespeare Festival's *Macbeth* under the direction of Raelle Myrick-Hodges in partnership with the National Black Arts Festival. Hillary won Best Picture for her zombie horror-comedy short film *Getting Brain* at Campus MovieFest in 2013.

Hillary directed the original play *LoversLane* in the Atlanta Fringe Festival 2013 and soon after began work at Pinch 'n Ouch Theatre as the Assistant Director for *Scratching* under the direction of Nichole Palmietto. Hillary worked as an Artistic Associate at PnO from 2013-2016, where she studied the Meisner Technique, directed scenes from *Other Desert Cities* and *The Aliens*, studied directing for film under Jason Winn (*The Fat Boy Chronicles*). She directed *Wall Street Wedding*, an original play by Grant McGowen, and the regional premiere of *Gidion's Knot* by Johnna Adams.

Hillary worked with Atlanta-based sketch-comedy group, *Critical Crop Top* as a co-Artistic Director from 2015-2019 producing, writing, and directing live sketch comedy variety shows and film. She worked as the Assistant Director on *The Mother Load* Web Series with Nicole Kemper where she learned the ropes on set. As Hillary got more involved with working in film, she wrote, directed, and produced *PYT's* Web Show and co-wrote and co-directed *80's Dating Video Remix*. From there, she wrote, directed, and produced the short films *Bad Day* and *Honest Makeup Blog*. Hillary was honored to also direct episodes one and two for the You42 produced web series *PrettyFunny*.





# THE WALTZ

## Director Statement

When I first read the script for *The Waltz* I was moved by the universality of the script but also the specificity of the story. Audiences are familiar with the traditional rom-com and they affect us because often they are our stories - unrequited love, being rejected, falling head-over-heels. But rarely, if ever, do we allow our ingenue to be someone other than an attractive cis-gendered woman and that is only part of what makes *The Waltz* special.

This film follows a young, confident trans-woman, Claire, who knows the love she deserves and is willing to work to get it. She is successful at work and pursues her passions and hobbies through dance classes. She has a full life and needs someone to share that life with. This is far from the trans representation we typically see in film and media. Trans women are often cast in minor roles, usually their characters' stories are filled with pain and discrimination. *The Waltz* breaks from that norm and shows us a different story- the story of a woman who has not lived a life without difficulty, but a woman who has overcome, who does not let her past define her and instead seeks to find joy and give joy in return. As the director of this film, I plan to show the audience a new story about love, romance, and happiness. A film where every woman can feel seen and heard.

I have worked closely with Ava during the development of this script and one of the most important elements of this film will be the music. Music has the incredible ability to make us swoon, give us goose-bumps, and make us feel alive. The character of Claire is no different. She listens to her favorite songs when she gets dressed in the morning and dances down the street. She knows the difference between a song that is made for a tango and one made for a samba. Her life is alight with music and the filmmaking will reflect the incredible fullness that music brings to her life. While staging the preliminary readings of the film, one of the most important things was for us to be able to incorporate the music we intended for each scene and see how it helped to create the world of the film. With music, a dance between two people becomes intimate, fun, and romantic. Because of this, music is one of the most important elements in the filmmaking for *The Waltz*. A large portion of our budget is dedicated to post-production sound and music costs to help bring this aspect of the film to fruition.

*The Waltz* is also a dance film unlike one we have seen. We are familiar with films like *Black Swan*, *Save the Last Dance*, and *Step Up* but what this film offers audiences is a chance to see partner dance in a new way - a hobbyist who just wants to express the rhythm she feels within. It isn't just about sensuality like in *Dirty Dancing*, it's about friendship, romance, and learning about yourself. Claire pursues dance not to meet a man, but to meet a personal goal. Her life is a dance, she flows from moment to moment sure-footed and confident. The dance element will also be incorporated into the visual aspects of the film with the use of Steadicam and fluid movement. The film itself should feel like a dance, a waltz that the audience and Claire are dancing together.

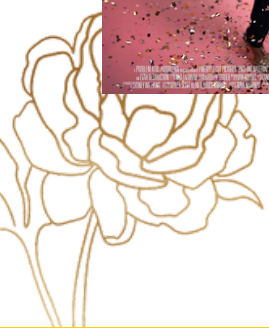


# Madison Hatfield PRODUCER



MADISON HATFIELD (she/her) is a writer, actor, and filmmaker based in Atlanta, GA. Her debut feature film *Pageant Material*, co-written with her collaborator and Peach Jam Pictures co-founder Jono Mitchell, was an official selection of the 2019 Atlanta Film Festival. Their award-winning follow-up short *Jenna Gets An Abortion*, in which Madison also stars, premiered online in the spring of 2020. In 2021 she co-wrote, produced, and acted in the feature films *Miles From Nowhere* and *Courtney Gets Possessed* (which she also co-directed). She also wrote and produced three shorts: *Making a Scene*, *Thirty Candles*, and lastly *Post-Citrus*, her solo directorial debut.

All five of these projects are slated for release in 2022, with *Miles from Nowhere* and *Post-Citrus* premiering at the 2022 Atlanta Film Festival. In addition to their independent productions, she and Mitchell are currently writing a film adaptation of a to-be-announced queer YA coming-of-age novel for Walden Media. She is proudly represented by The Gotham Group for literary and Stewart Talent as a performer.





# THE WALTZ

## Producer Statement – Madison Hatfield

As long as I have been a storyteller, I have wanted to make people feel joy, make people feel seen, and make people feel a specific kind of joy that only comes from being seen, as they have never been seen before, through art. For me, there's nothing that brings delight quite like a love story, and reading *The Waltz* I could immediately see the impact that a film of this specificity could have on an audience. As a screenwriter I've heard plenty of bad advice about making work that is "broad," "marketable," and "commercial" in a sense that nothing can be too "niche" and "alienating." But I have learned that it is actually SPECIFICITY that inspires our empathy and humanity; when we see an authentic, complex, and nuanced experience on screen, no matter how close or far it is from our own, that is when art can function at its best and broaden, deepen, and emotionally ignite our perspective on the world. Ava, Hillary, and I share this vision of art and specifically how *The Waltz* can impact others. I am honored to lend my time and experience to make this film a reality.

As an independent filmmaker myself, working with only a little money and even less time, I have learned lessons in quality, efficiency, community-building, and storytelling that I am eager to bring to the development and production of *The Waltz*. And with production happening in Atlanta, I am also excited to bring a long list of former collaborators in this amazing city that would be as honored as I am to lend their time and talents to *The Waltz*.

With this being Hillary's first feature film, we are taking special care to find, interview, and ultimately select a director of photography who is experienced, collaborative, and both a good listener and willing to provide insight, ideas, and solutions as issues arise. By filming in our city and working with people we trust not only on a professional level but also a personal one, I am confident that we can work with passion and efficiency to keep our shoot window contained and end each day with high quality footage that is exactly what Hillary needs. In 2021, with the help of an amazing team, I produced, co-directed, and starred in two feature films back to back. We shot them each over 11 days and took three days in between to switch gears. No experience has ever taught me more lessons about how to get what you need from a set quickly, correctly, and while maintaining a culture of positivity and joy as that month did.

Filming only ONE feature with a strong budget made possible through Catalyst investors will honestly feel like a luxury for me personally, but I am eager to recapture that culture of almost magical levels of efficiency and apply it to *The Waltz*. This film is not only an opportunity to showcase a much needed Black, Trans love story; it's also a showcase for the filmmaking talent that exists in Atlanta. My goal is to make Atlanta the city that people think of when they think of independent film, and *The Waltz* will be an amazing contribution in a growing patchwork of films made by a diverse and talented network of creators here at home. I am delighted to find investors who share this vision for us, for Ava, for Atlanta, and for the dream of independent filmmakers everywhere. Stories are meant to be told. Let's help each other tell them.





# Abijeet Achar

## CINEMATOGRAPHER

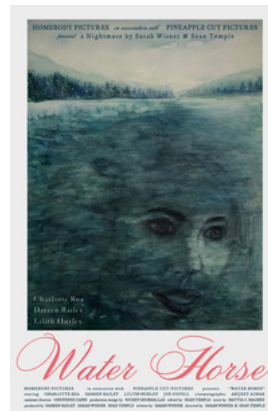
## PRODUCER



Born and raised in Durban, South Africa, Abijeet Achar is an Emmy award winning cinematographer and director of Indian and Mauritian descent. After graduating from Emerson College with an MFA in Cinematography, Abijeet co-founded Pineapple Cut Pictures as an outlet for his creative and commercial projects.

Since then he's gone on to DP projects such as "Pageant Material" (World Premiere at the 2019 Atlanta Film Festival), "Water Horse" (Awarded "Best Cinematography" at the 2019 Atlanta Underground Film Festival), "Forgive Us" (World Premiere at the 2021 Palm Springs Film Festival and Audience Award Winner at the 2021 Sidewalk Film Festival), and several other acclaimed projects.

As a writer/director, he will soon follow up 2016's "My Indian Rhapsody," with "Mysore Magic" in 2022.





# Cinematographer Statement

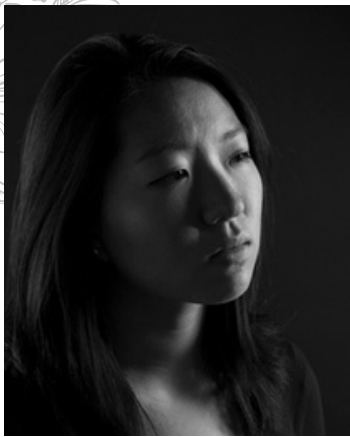
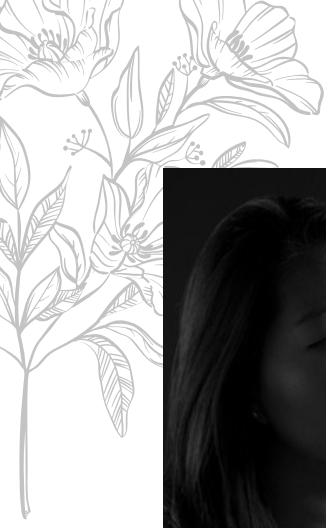
As a Cinematographer, I want to tell stories that shed light on underrepresented characters and communities. When I watch a film focusing on a South Asian or immigrant narrative, the empowering representation positively affects so many areas of my life. I want others to relish that feeling, to see themselves on screen and feel seen. The magic of cinema is the possibility to share these unique stories that an audience would never experience otherwise.

For example, the first feature film I lensed, PAGEANT MATERIAL, a queer narrative, had an incredibly positive response at its world premiere at the 2019 Atlanta Film Festival because of its genuine and heartfelt perspective. As filmmakers, we have the opportunity to spark understanding and empathy in audiences. And in these turbulent times, we urgently need these stories to build bridges.

Ava Davis' THE WALTZ does just that. It tells a beautiful love story that not only shares the hardships of romance as a black trans woman, but also celebrates its many joys. As a child of the 90's, I've been fed a steady stream of romantic comedies, Disney films, and Bollywood epics. Needless to say, I love a good romance story. However, in hindsight, I see how problematic many of these stories are, because they lack diversity and present limited perspectives. So as a new generation of filmmakers, we have the chance to reimagine the rom-com and more fully represent persons of color, marginalized genders, & LGBTQ communities. There aren't enough films like this that exist in mainstream cinema, so let's make them.

I'm so excited to help visualize THE WALTZ as its Director of Photography, not only for its cultural importance, but also because the screenplay demands rich cinematic images: the silhouette of two dancers cloaked in both light and shadow, a flowing Steadicam that dances with our protagonist, delicate warm light as romance builds, and harsh contrast as we share our lead's anxiety. I plan to approach the cinematography much like choreography: at times formal and restrained, swiftly punctuated by surreal and magnificent moments.

Above all else, the cinematography will be in service of this beautiful narrative. THE WALTZ is a Cinematographer's dream to film, and it's an absolute honor to collaborate with this powerhouse to make this incredibly urgent story come to life.



# Crystal Jin Kim

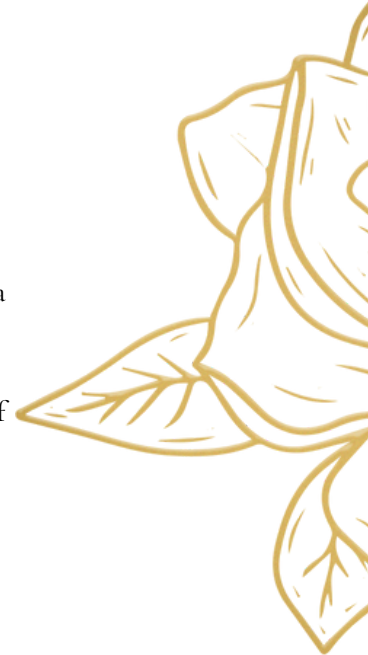
## PRODUCTION DESIGNER

Atlanta Film Festival Alumnae  
Artist-in-Studio Fellow Creatives Project

Crystal is a Korean American artist and award-winning filmmaker from Atlanta, Georgia. She is a 2020-2022 Artist-in-Studio Fellow with The Creatives Project.

Crystal graduated from Northwestern University (Evanston, IL) in June 2014 with two Bachelor of Arts degrees, one in Radio/Television/Film and the other in Art Theory and Practice. Her short films, "Jinju" (2015), "죽어도 (Jookuhdo)" (2017), "Young Won Han Bok" (2019), and "Dated" (2019) have screened at numerous film festivals in the U.S. and abroad. These include the Atlanta Film Festival, Seoul International Youth Film Festival, CAAMFest, and National Film Festival for Talented Youth.

Her arts practice also includes drawing, ceramics, mixed media, mother-of-pearl inlay, painting, installations, and digital manipulation.





# Nicole Kemper

## POST-PRODUCTION PRODUCER



Nicole is a writer/actor/director/editor based out of Atlanta, Georgia. She completed her MFA program in writing and directing from Columbia College Chicago in 2010. Since co-founding Critical Crop Top Media in 2016, Nicole has written, directed, and performed in films like 80s Dating Video Remix, War on Christmas, The Mother Load Web Series, and in Critical Crop Top's live sketch comedy shows.

Her films have screened at Atlanta ShortsFest, Terminus Conference + Film Festival, NewFilmmakers New York, Chattanooga Film Festival, Macon Film Festival, Ya'llwood Film Festival, and the New Mavericks Film Series. She now serves as executive producer for Critical Crop Top Media which continues to produce films, series, and podcasts.

When not hustling to get her next project off the ground, she teaches editing at The Georgia Film Academy and works as a casting director for Launch Light Films. Most recently she wrote, starred, and edited the short film, Could This Have Been An Email..





# Cast



AVA DAVIS  
Claire



SPENCER MUMFORD  
Dave



NIKKI GARZA  
Annalise



SKYE PASSMORE  
Justin



CARLETTE JENNINGS  
Christie



BRIAN ASHTON SMITH  
Austin

# Ava Davis CLAIRE



Ava Davis' screen credits include *Could This Have Been An Email*, *Torn Together*, *Feast*, and *The Duchess of Grant Park*. She has also starred in the small indie film, *The Bitter Better*.



While the concept of the *Duchess of Grant Park* arose out of a short film, Ava Davis has worked to bring the duchess to life, and to ensure that Her Grace, her title, and her office stand for something. In the process she has made herself into the first transgender royalty.



Her Grace, in claiming to be noble, hopes that her missions and actions reflect this. She is an advocate for queer (LGBTQIA+) youth, for gender and sexual minorities (especially persons who are black, brown, & beige), for the arts (theatre and film especially), and ways of increasing equity, access, and inclusion (education, housing, transportation, living wages).





# Spencer Mumford DAVE

 378.2K 

 22.4K 

“

I believe it has made me an ally. I don't necessarily post about social justice issues a lot on my social media (because who wants to hear this "Blonde Hair, Blue Eyed, G'o, White guy, post about these things. I don't know really get social media sometimes.) However, in conversations I am constantly learning and trying to fight oppression, learn how to fight oppression and changing ideologies that need to be changed in the country and trying to be an ally in any way I can. In my major my favorite, most eye-opening book we studied was "The New Jim Crow, Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness" By Michelle Alexander. Gosh, this book just opened my eyes to systematic racism, discrimination, oppression. Honestly, I look back to before my major and I am disappointed in myself and how I saw the world. I try to give myself a break because I needed to be educated. That's why I think everyone can learn and I'm trying to formulate conversations that can "Wake people up" like I did.

”

Spencer Mumford is an actor originally from Palm Beach, Florida. While he started out pursuing a career in baseball, he made a pivot to acting after an injury sidelined those dreams. He was the head coach of a travel baseball team that was ranked the four-team in the nation (out of thousands) for kids in the graduating class of 2020 (2020 high school). He worked out for the Miami Marlins, Baltimore Orioles, Pittsburgh Pirates and San Diego Padres.

After moving to Atlanta and signing with an agent, he was cast in Problematic Production's *Bro Time* that allowed him to showcase his comedic skills. He also has roles in the upcoming feature film, *Courtney Gets Possessed* and *An Awful Thing Has Gone And Happened*.

Though he's recently moved to Los Angeles, he is still a Southeastern and Atlantan Actor first.





# Nikki Garza ANNALISE



1M



40.2K

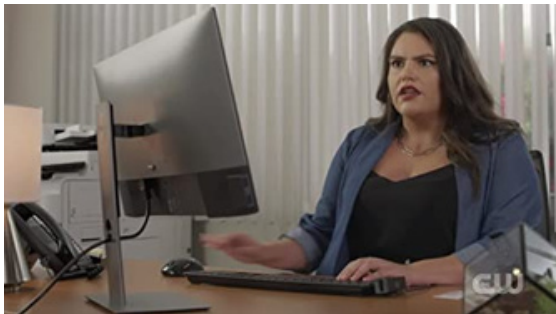


"It's just so refreshing to see a story about someone in a marginalized community not rooted in trauma"

Nikki Garza not only a powerhouse actor, but also a fat liberation activist and part of the queer community and the latinx community.

She has a following of over 1 million followers on TikTok and 40K followers on Instagram, creating body positive videos that encourage everyone to embrace their bodies, but to also liberate the stigma attached to fat bodies.

Her screen credits include appearances on Dynasty and Lone Star Bull. She is represented by Ursula Weidman Talent, and The Waltz will be her feature film debut.



**BODY ACCEPTANCE  
IN THE KNOW HONORS:  
NIKKI GARZA**

Nikki Garza is a Latina actor, content creator, and fat liberation activist who has over 911K followers on TikTok.



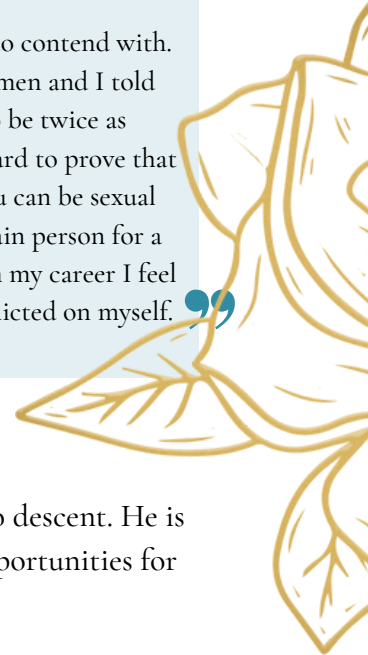


# Skye Passmore

## JUSTIN



There's also the stereotype of the emasculated Asian male to contend with. When I first started out I was being called in for leading men and I told myself, "You are an Asian guy. That means you need to be twice as muscular. Twice as attractive. You need to work twice as hard to prove that you can also be a leading man. You need to prove that you can be sexual too." I was in the gym almost every day. I became a very vain person for a time. That is how I overcame it, I guess, and at this point in my career I feel like I am finally able to start escaping that pressure I've inflicted on myself.



Skye Passmore is a Hawai'ian-born, Georgia-bred actor and playwright of mixed-Filipino descent. He is a member of East By Southeast (ExSE) a group that serves "to advocate for and create opportunities for Asian artists in the region. "

His performances range from reimagined classics to purposely under-rehearsed Shakespeare, experimental new works to golden-age musicals, student films and web series to television pilots and network shows.

As an artist, He is fascinated in exploring the link between peoples' identities and the expectations surrounding them, and has strong convictions concerning justice. He believes a world without exploitation is not only possible, but necessary.





# Carlette Jennings

## CHRISTIE

Carlette Jennings is a stand up comic and actor from Queens, living with her husband, a fellow comic and actor, in Decatur, GA. She was selected as a featured performer in the 10th Annual Laughing Skull Comedy Festival. She has worked with Donald Glover on FX's Atlanta, and can be seen on Hallmark's Christmas Everlasting with Tatyana Ali and Patti LaBelle. She enjoys food, travel, avoiding manual labor, and pretending to understand wine.



# Brian Ashton Smith

## AUSTIN

Brian grew up in the very small town of Wharton New Jersey. His interest in acting was sparked in middle school doing school plays. In high school he was very involved in athletics. He broke school records and led his track team as captain, While starring in school plays and playing for the school band. He attended Morehouse College in Atlanta originally as a physics major. He graduated with a degree in theatre and a minor in psychology. He is an avid traveler and adventurer and associate artist at Pinch n Ouch Theatre. His screen credits include feature films such as The Evil Her and Home Safe, as well as television appearances in Legacies, Kobra Kai, and Dynasty.

