

When gay filmmakers Marilyn Freeman and Anne de Marcken founded Olympia's Wovie media studio and began scripting their story idea about several women in queer-friendly group therapy, they soon found themselves in a mess of drafts and rewrites.

So they just started shooting their actors in unrehearsed therapy sessions and realized the story was in the process, not on the paper. They trashed the script.

The directors discussed the characters with the actors in detail but did not provide them with the words. The words came anyway.

They filmed the whole thing with no sound overdubs and no retakes and called it *Group*. It plays during the Portland Lesbian Gay Bi Trans Film Festival at 6:15 p.m. Sept. 28.

Carrie Brownstein of Portland-based band Sleater-Kinney provides one of the movie's most lively performances. She swapped e-mails with *Just Out* before racing out on tour.

Lisa Bradshaw: Why did you decide to audition for *Group*?

Carrie Brownstein: I heard about the open call from a friend. She told me about it two days before the final day of auditions. Fortunately, I had just been given a monologue to memorize for my friend [Miranda July's] movie. I used that for the audition.

I think the impetus for auditioning was to challenge myself. I don't get stage fright with the band anymore. I didn't think I would get the role; I just wanted to be performing and to feel scared again, to feel completely out of my element.

LB: I heard the filmmakers didn't know who you were when you auditioned.

CB: Yes, this is true. I handed the director a press kit, and she politely nodded; it didn't

Processing



Carrie Brownstein plays the nervous Grace in *Group*

mean anything to her. It's reassuring to know that I obtained the role based solely on my audition as opposed to my work with the band.

LB: I also heard that your character was supposed to be a lesbian but that ended up on the cutting room floor. I'm wondering if that's accurate because that character seemed just such a straight, uptight chick to me.

CB: It's true that Grace is queer. I think it ended up on the cutting room floor because most of her issues had to do

Who Carrie Brownstein might have been

BY LISA BRADSHAW

with her family; her love relationships never came up.

I think it's interesting that you associate an uptight personality with straight people. I think gay people run the gamut of personalities as well. Sexuality and personality do not have a causal relationship, in my opinion.

LB: Your character is described in press materials as a "hypochondriac." I would describe her as more of a cutter. What do you think?

CB: What's a "cutter"? Someone that cuts people down? Someone that cuts in line? I think Grace is described as a hypochondriac because that condition implies a certain relationship with pain. Grace cannot deal with emotions unless they manifest themselves as physical symptoms; that way they are contained, and they are also tangible. It's easier for her to ask for help if she has a headache as opposed to a heartache. I don't know how much of Grace's hypochondria came across in the film, but certainly her repres-

sion of emotions was quite evident.

LB: Two recognizable Northwest faces in the film are you and Nomy Lamm. It seems like Nomy was able to base the character on some of her own experiences. But your character doesn't seem that way at all.

CB: I think Nomy did an amazing job. We wrote our own characters, and we all had a different approach. I wanted Grace to be the person I might have become if I had never found art or music—if I didn't have an outlet or a means of catharsis. I also wanted to challenge myself as an actor.

LB: You've done some other film work with Miranda July and Brett Vapnek. Tell me about how your experience with *Group* differed from those.

CB: Miranda and Brett are both good friends of mine, so the environment is always really comfortable, and I feel like I can take risks under their direction. *Group* was different in that I didn't know [the filmmakers] beforehand, and the acting was entirely improvised.

We also filmed one-hour "therapy sessions" without any cuts, which was quite intense and very draining. I suppose it's no more intense than with a conventional approach, but I felt much more submerged in the process. It's hard to be in therapy two hours a day for 10 days straight, even when you're playing someone else.

LB: So, aren't you too busy being a rock star to be an actor, too?

CB: I didn't know I was a rock star. I try to make my life as rewarding and enriching as possible. Therefore, it's important for me to have other outlets and interests aside from music. I hope that acting can be one of those things.

LB: That dog I saw you walking with on Hawthorne a few weeks ago...is it yours?

CB: That is a beagle named Smolli—my favorite dog in all of PDX. She belongs to a friend of mine. I have two cats who would not appreciate being dragged down Hawthorne.

LB: OK, inquiring minds want to know: Does Carrie Brownstein have a girlfriend?

CB: Inquiring minds will have to keep inquiring. ☐

LISA BRADSHAW is the Arts and Culture Editor at Just Out.

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