



JOLENE GUZMAN/Itemizer-ObsERVER

Justen Noll films a scene from "When We Were" with leads Emily Johnson, center, as Lauren Mae and Luke Disney as Colver Allen at Dallas High School. The film will be the last Noll will shoot at DHS, also the location of his first film, "Hero Unknown."



TELLING STORIES

Young filmmaker ends Dallas High movie making in place it all began

By **Jolene Guzman**
The Itemizer-ObsERVER

DALLAS — Rain threatens as Justen Noll, Nathan Beaton, Luke Disney and Emily Johnson make their way out the side door of Dallas High School near the shop class.

The foursome are the majority of the cast and crew of Noll's movie "When we Were."

Noll looks around for a moment. It's a nostalgic spot, the set of a crucial scene in the first movie he filmed at DHS, "Hero Unknown," back in the summer after his freshman year.

Now a senior, "When we Were" will be his last at DHS. Coincidentally, it's about the friendship — or more? — between a girl and boy who meet their senior year in high school.

Noll's 20th film, "When we Were" seems a fitting final production in the place his film passion started.

"There are certain elements of the high school that are distinct that you can't replicate or achieve elsewhere," Noll said when asked if he will miss filming at DHS.

"There are the memorable locations and the nostalgia," he added. "That's why I'm doing 'When we Were' as my 20th and trying to capture the nostalgia from 'Hero Unknown.'"

It's also perhaps his way of sorting through the emotions surrounding completing this part of his life.

"The title comes from struggling between the past, present and future," Noll said. "Both characters are seniors, and senior year is that year where the past, present and future really hits you. This is my attempt at capturing that."

Noll's love of film actually began in middle school,



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Justen Noll, a DHS senior, has directed or produced 20 films since his freshman year.

when he took a computer class and learned to use animation to make movies.

"I made all these shorts," Noll recalled. "They were terrible, ridiculous."

But his teacher, Doug Harms, encouraged his budding storyteller, something Noll is grateful for.

"Mr. Harms really encouraged me and really wanted to see me grow," Noll said. "He thought I had a knack for something."

Call it a teacher's intuition, Harms was right.

Since that first computer class, film quickly moved from an interest to Noll's method of expressing what he thinks and feels about the world.

"It lets me bring to life what I have in my mind," Noll said. "There's other mediums where you can do that, but film has a certain quality to it that is really unmatched. There is so much to it that you can express. It's hard to do that with other mediums. All other mediums are just parts of film."

In the nearly four years since Noll debuted "Hero Unknown," he's directed or produced 20 films under his production company JN Films, hosted online film festivals, and launched a small business offering film and photography services.

He's shown a number of movies at Dallas' Fox Theatre.

More recently, he's begun sharing his passion and knowledge, giving other young directors and writers opportunities to work on his films.

Hannah Scadden, a friend

of Noll's who starred in his film, "The One and Only," and is the co-writer and director on "Two to One" currently in production, said she's learned how to work with actors through her experience with Noll.

"With 'The One and Only,' he gave me a lot of room," she said. "He lets people put in their own creativity. I'm trying to imitate that as I'm directing. I'm hoping that

Filmography

JN Films productions and release dates:

- "Hero Unknown," June 2012
- "Havoc," November 2012
- "Miss & HIT," November 2012
- "The Life of a Congressman," December 2012
- "The Lyle Project," May 2013
- "Transition," June 2013
- "Bloom & Wither," August 2013
- "Tomorrow is our Today," August 2013
- "Readiness," September 2013
- "The Flirt," November 2013
- "The Rebel for Christ," November 2013
- "The One and Only," August 2014
- "Lives," May 2014
- "Summer," November 2014
- "A Little Thing Called Love," August 2014
- "VAL," February 2015
- "Offbeat," to be released
- "Collectors Anonymous," April 2015
- "Two to One," shooting April 2015
- "When We Were," shooting April 2015

Films in pre-production:

- "Picture"
- "Buttons"

For more information about JN Films or to watch Justen Noll's work go to, www.justennoll.wix.com/jn-films or www.facebook.com/jnfilms.

I'm letting people express themselves like Justen did through 'The One and Only.'

Another young director Noll jokingly called his "little protégé" has become an inspiration in her own right. Alicia Scherer, who first worked with Noll as the star of one of his early productions, "Bloom & Wither," recently won a state competition for directing on a short film, "This Kiss."

She said it was Noll who first fostered her creativity and gave her opportunities in front of and behind the camera.

"Justen introduced me to filmmaking," she said. "He has been so supportive of my every move, whether it be acting, directing, or even photography. That brave,

young filmmaker is my brother at heart, and I couldn't be any more proud of him than I already am."

Noll plans to keep making films after he graduates high school in June, and he already has a few in the works.

He hopes to turn his experience thus far into a long career in films.

While still early in his filmmaking journey, Noll said he's already made what could be his most important discovery about the art.

"There are some many things I've learned, but I think the main (thing) is that it's storytelling. You should be telling a story and there is no other way around it. You can have pretty images, pretty visuals, but without that story, it's going to be empty."



KYLE STOCKDALL/for the Itemizer-ObsERVER

Justen Noll, center, shoots a scene from "Hero Unknown" with actors Paul Disney and Jackson Geiger.



Photo courtesy of Justen Noll

From left, Hannah Scadden, Luke Disney, Jenna Friesen, Nathan Beaton and Phil North work on a scene from "Two to One," which Scadden co-wrote and is directing.