

Mimi Kennedy

ACTOR, AUTHOR, ACTIVIST

A TRIFECTA OF TALENT!

By Kristen Bourestom

My trusty Google let me down in my attempts to learn a little bit about your upcoming movie, *Midnight in Paris*. Though Mr. Allen has seemingly revealed more pre-release information about this film than he usually does, there is still very little floating around out there. I understand it's a romantic comedy about a family traveling for business in Paris and experiencing a social/cultural awakening of sorts? Am I on track and can you help shed a little more light on the film for us?

I'll answer as best I can, but first let me say that when I was offered the role, I had to tell my agent a time and day when the script could be delivered to me. The delivery person returned two hours later to pick it up, and it wasn't the whole script, it was just the scenes that involved my character, Helen. I knew she was Rachel McAdams' mother. That's it. A typed note from Woody said I might have fun as Rachel's mother; if I hated the role, maybe another role another time. Of course I wrote back that I loved it. I noted in the margin that the character seemed to be channeling a Helen in my own family, a stylish, assertive Manhattan cousin of my mother's. What I know from the shoot is that Rachel's character is engaged to Owen Wilson's character, who is Woody's persona in the film, a screenwriter. He wants to be a novelist, and on a Parisian vacation he wanders all night by himself and enters the Parisian past. By day, my corporate-deal husband and I drag the couple around on our super-rich shopping expeditions and dining experiences. I think it's safe to say the movie will comically present the dilemma of our times: given the present and the past – what is really of value?

This is a period piece. Is the main message historical in nature – relevant primarily to the 1920's? Or can we take it with us today?

Woody would insist he doesn't do sociology, I think. He doesn't talk much to his actors, by the way, since what he values is naturalness and wants to see actual life unfold on camera in the scenes he sets up. But I love his films precisely because he's one of the most brilliant social observers we have, in his writing, in his films, and he's lived in New York, in a brilliant cultural community, through the last half-century of social change, maintaining his position as an outside commentator. And I felt like this film might have something oddly reassuring to say about America's

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Mimi Kennedy, Rachel McAdams and Woody Allen on the set of "Midnight in Paris"



Mimi Kennedy and Rachel McAdams



Woody Allen, Mimi Kennedy and Rachel McAdams



Mimi Kennedy and Rachel McAdams

cultural moment, a moment of decline but also real possibility in terms of discovering what used to be and could be again.

You play Rachel Mc Adams’ mother in the film. What was the relationship between these two characters?

Like mother like daughter. Perfect consumers, handle our men as if they were trained-but-difficult race horses. Pretty toxic, but funny to reflect (in this way it reminds me of *In The Loop*). Both narcissistic, spoiled. I assume my daughter will affirm my values and share my enjoyments. I’m wary of her choice of grooms, but at least he’s rich (a successful screenwriter!) She and I pick out the wedding ring for him to buy for her at Chopard’s—a French gem house from which I got my character’s jewelry wardrobe. Which was so dear, they sent a security guard to shadow me on the set all the time I was in costume!

And how did you develop your character relative to hers?

We did that on set and at a few odd meals we had, early on. There wasn’t time to do anything else. In many ways, you don’t have to do much except to get relationships right in Woody’s films except understand what the scene’s about and take his (minimal!) direction, absorbing his reaction (slight smile and twinkle? Or consternation?) before doing another take. Rachel is so smart and so good as an actress. We found our way pretty fast.

This is quite a star-studded cast; which is enticing for the movie “goer.” Is it fulfilling as an actor to work with so many talented people all at one time?

It’s ideal. Michael Sheen, who’d played Tony Blair in *The Queen*, and David Frost in *Frost-Nixon*, was wonderful; Owen made me chuckle, playing his Woody persona in his own California style; Rachel sparkles, mentally and physically; Kurt Fuller (who plays my husband in the film) is open and sharp about subtle comedy. The great pleasure in working with wonderful actors is that they make the scenes seem real. That’s what you need, for comedy or tragedy. Bad acting creates that awful, plodding rhythm of

staged fakery, which great actors avoid, like race-car drivers who know how to handle their vehicle at speeds no ordinary driver dare attempt. I never met Mrs. Sarkozy (Carla Bruni) or Marion Cotillard, much to my regret, but they’d finished their roles before mine began.

I would have been tongue tied side by side with the first lady of France. What was it like to work with Carla Bruni-Sarkozy?

It was not my pleasure to have met her, as described. We had one three-star private Michelin meal Woody arranged for us from the chef at our five-star hotel and I hoped she’d show there, but I guess the First Lady of France didn’t need to travel outside her home for great French food...

I understand Midnight in Paris will premiere at Cannes in May. Any word on a firm release date yet?

You know more than I do! But I did suspect that Cannes would be the target premiere. I doubt my role is large enough for me to get a paid invitation!

Midnight in Paris is only one of your current projects. Tell us a little bit about the television roles on NBC’s Love Bites and TV Land’s Retired at 35 that you have coming up.

In the *Love Bites* episode I play actor Greg Grunberg’s mother. The scenes felt hilarious and cracked us actors and our director, Timothy Busfield, up – which is always a good sign that the audience might be amused. There is a christening, contrasting the ridiculous with the sublime while respecting the sublime. It reminded me of laughing in church, some of the most hysterical laughter I know, because you have to suppress it and can’t. A rich comic vein. I don’t know the rest of the shows, but the actors (Constance Zimmer plays Greg’s wife) are really good and funny. I can’t wait to see it. I hope the mother recurs.

Actor, Author, Activist! You are a trifecta of talent! My first instinct was to ask which of these three hats you like wearing best. But then I wondered if that might be akin to asking

someone which of their children they like best! So instead, can you tell us how your writing and political activism inform your acting or vice versa?

They don’t always mix well, anymore than children do, as siblings. There is rivalry as one career demands from another; the writer doesn’t have to pay attention to hair, make-up, figure; the actress doesn’t have to invest deep mental time; the activist threatens the economic viability of success in other realms - this shouldn’t be so in America, by the way, and perhaps it will change as we mature out of this period where we’ve gotten so far from the Constitution, but even in grade-school I learned the political reality of *To The Victor Belong The Spoils*. It’s a very war-based metaphor. I’m a non-violent activist. My whole thrust is to teach and do activism in a way that sheds light on cooperation to nurture the coming generations, not violent de-construction and destruction of everything they’ll need to sustain their lives on this planet – and, ideally, America’s constitutional self-government, freedom and (relatively-speaking) respect for the creator that gave us inalienable rights and, by the way, the planet (Ben Franklin was a scientist. He’d believe in the need to self-govern our way to a solution for atmospheric destruction!)

You’ve written your autobiography, Mimi Kennedy, Taken to the Stage; The Education of an Actress, which received phenomenal reviews. You blog religiously and now you are about to come out with your first novel. I won’t even ask how you do it all! But I do hope you’ll tell us a little about the book and when we can see it in print!

It’s a coming-of-age story involving three friends – two are cousins, the third is their mutual friend. We follow them from the summer of ’67 to the summer of ’88. They come from the culture of privilege and money, but their loves, marriages and child-rearing are quite different, tracing the different paths America has taken. There’s a lot of emphasis on mothers-daughters, and a background story of chemical pollution and corporate fraud whose effects, of course, impact the lives of women and children. I don’t blog religiously, by the way – I wish I had time! And literally, to blog about religion! I have been published in two compilation books that are used in adult catechism classes in some Catholic churches; *Articles of Faith*, and *How To Find God*, both edited by James Martin, S.J., who is a frequent commentator on National Public Radio.

Speaking of writing; I came across another very delightful, very short and very SWEET piece when I was preparing for this interview. Thank you so much for all the tremendous work you do that inspires, challenges and entertains us. And from the hearts (or should I say stomach’s) of my daughters, thank you also for your “Nutella Crepes,” recipe that is now and forever a staple of our Thanksgiving morning breakfast menu! (Can you share that with our readers too? Wink, wink...)

Ooh-lala, you’ve done the crepes? That is truly a lasting legacy of my Parisian location shoot! No better food in any Michelin restaurant than those Nutella crepes sold on the street! So I learned to make them (not that hard – the crepe batter – then the Nutella, ready to go!) The crepe recipe is from *The New Basics Cookbook*, the crepe section of “Crepes Snow White.” The Nutella is from the jar!

Do you have other projects on the horizon you’d like to tell us about or anything else you’d like to add?

There were times, raising my two children, that I despaired of doing anything else with my mind or in my career. My son has just been married (we had the ceremony on our front lawn, following the tradition of ‘parlor weddings.’ I learned about when studying the great suffragist and visionary feminist historian-theologian, Matilda Joslyn Gage, who lived in Fayetteville, NY, and whose restored home has just been opened as part of the Women’s Rights Trail – go!) The gathering of relatives, the outpouring of love, the surround of old trees and new flowering plants (October is a gorgeous month in LA) was so profoundly rich – in the midst of this Recession – that I’d just like to say that giving your all, to the next generation – all your love, creativity, protection – and using your creativity and smarts to keep your family together and health – mentally, physically and spiritually, even when that requires hard choices and, at times, confrontation – is absolutely worth it. Our lives as individuals, our dreams and hopes, are profoundly true, but they are still but brief expressions of all that is really going on, and it does us good – even does our careers, dreams and hopes the best good – if we respect and remember the larger picture.

As 2011 begins “What is your wish for the New Year?

That we get smarter about cause-and-effect, and learn to search for the truth and not be afraid of it. That includes psychology – why we hate and fear – as well as science – what’s causing stronger hurricanes, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions – and politics – what motivates people to power, which motivations harm the general good and which help it, and why there must be more citizen instruction in levers of government leading to stronger citizen oversight of, and helpful cooperation in the good endeavors of, government officials. My son, daughter and husband are all teachers in classrooms; I guess I’m sort of a teacher-by-story in all I do. So I wish there would be more and better education, in every way. In hard times, people can still (maybe more than ever?) read, learn and think for themselves in a way that won’t cost much, but will generate huge rewards for them and generations to come.

Thank you so much for giving us a glimpse into your prolific life! We will look forward to your next venture.

<http://www.mimikennedy.org>