



SCAD SAVANNAH
FILM FESTIVAL
2018
Believe Her
BEST GLOBAL SHORT:
NARRATIVE

OFFICIAL SELECTION
**Big Apple
Film Festival**
2018

Official Selection
NewFilmmakers
Los Angeles

BELIEVE HER

PRESS KIT

LOG LINE

A young professional struggles to process what's happened to her in the immediate aftermath of a date rape. Her trauma is compounded when she reports the assault and discovers that the cops and even her own family don't believe her. Based on true survivor stories.

SYNOPSIS

Believe Her is a 13 minute narrative short film that explores why we are inclined not to believe victims of sexual assault. The story, built from true experiences from sexual assault survivors, follows MONICA (Allison Tolman) from the time she is assaulted through her decision not to file a report. As she's interviewed by the police, we see, through a series of flashbacks, that Monica was violently raped at the end of what she thought was a good first date. But as she's questioned, seeds of doubt are sewn: she was wearing something sexy, she'd had a lot to drink, she has a reputation for sleeping around. And as she processes the assault, details are fuzzy. While good intentioned, the cops, her brother, even her best friend call her story into question, forcing her to decide not to prosecute, and instead, internalize her trauma and suffer in secrecy.

Believe Her was shot in Brooklyn with an all female crew in October 2017, coincidentally, just two weeks after the Weinstein story broke and launched the #MeToo movement.



Filmmaking Team



ERIN DOYLE COOPER

Director/Writer/EP

Erin Doyle Cooper is a writer, director, and creative director, who focuses on telling character-driven stories that foster diversity of thought. This passion has been reflected in her decade-long career in the creative industries, which has spanned indie film, experiential production design, and advertising. She worked on several independent projects from music videos to pilot presentations before making her first short film, a comedy called *Vlog*, in 2009. That same year, she recorded an EP of indie rock for kids to compliment her pilot *Princess Eleanora and the Muddy Sneakers*, projects that served as entry points into branded content. As Vaynermedia's first Creative Director, she helped to grow a fledgling creative team from 7 to 200 in just under four years, and pioneered some of the agency's first major video projects, including award winning pieces for MasterCard and Budweiser. From summer 2016-2018, she served as an in house director and creative director at Pepsi's Creator's League Studio, where she concepted and directed the first installment of the Pepsi City Tour docu-series and led creative for the promotion of Lady Gaga's Halftime Show and Pepsi's 2018 campaign *This is the Pepsi*, including the Super Bowl spot, with her design partner. Erin holds a BFA in Acting from the University at Buffalo, a post-graduate certificate in classical acting from the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts (LAMDA), and a totally official completion certificate from UCB's improv and sketch comedy programs. Her instincts as a writer and director are informed by her classical training, and rooted in a profound respect for the actor and the text. She currently resides in Brooklyn with her bearded actor husband and their travel-sized Norwich Terrier, Mimsy.

View more of her work at erindoylecooper.com



SARAH WOLFF

Producer

Sarah Wolff picked up her first camera at age 11 and hasn't been able to put it down since. Seeing an idea take shape and executing it to the highest quality is what drives her. Sarah spent the first few years out of college running her own production company, Peace Belt Productions,

which specialized in managing bands, touring, and producing music videos. She owned a non-profit theater company and produced an Off Broadway Play, *The Love Letter You've Been Meaning to Write* New York. Sarah helped build a production company for Vaynermedia, and produced over thirty television commercials while there. From there she became Executive Producer at 247 Laundry Service and Cycle Media, overseeing the execution of authentic story telling. Currently, she is the Vice President of the Creative Studio at iHeart Media. Her love of music, culture, and making awesome content is what drives her every day!

When she's not producing amazing art you can find her taking photos of her awesome rescue dog, Ella Fitzgerald, seeing live music, and hunting for rare vinyl.



IDIL SUKAN

Director of Photography

Idil Sukan is a cinematographer, photographer and creative director based in London.

Most recently she has worked in the art departments of Julian Fellowes' feature adaptation of Agatha Christie's *Crooked House* and the Amazon/Channel 4 adaptation of Philip K Dick's short stories, *Electric Dreams*, created photographic work for London's West End and videographic work for the National Poetry Society.

Her retrospective exhibition of her photographic portraiture of comedians in 2015 gained rave reviews and her work has been acquired by The National Portrait Gallery in the UK. She has worked with Disney, Universal, Sony, Penguin Random House and many more.

Her passions lie in empathetic visual story-telling and the representation of women in the media.

"The Sukan style is distinctive, gorgeously lit, intimately composed and atmospheric" - The Independent newspaper, UK.

She is a prolific speaker and teacher in improvisation, feminism and creative direction and has herself studied at the London Film Academy & the London College of Printing (now Communication).

Filmmaking Team



GISELLE MURILLO

Editor

Whether it's short form or long form, Giselle is an editor with a sharp eye for story whose experience runs the gambit from tv and features to music videos and commercials. She's currently an editor for *Modern Family*. Other credits include *New Girl*, *Alone Together*, *Fear the Walking Dead*, and *Assassins Run*. She lives in Los Angeles with her wife and their adorable son.



JESSICA RAE HUBER

Composer

Jessica Rae Huber is a film and television composer who has written music for projects such as *The Walking Dead*, *Marvel's Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*, *Outlander*, *Black Sails*, *60 Days In*, and *Constantine*. She is an in-demand independent film composer and is frequently recruited to write additional music for other composers.

Jessica is one of the original composers chosen for *The Future Is Female: a Concert for Women in Film* where she conducted her original piece for a sold-out crowd.

She previously worked as an Assistant Composer and Scoring Manager for a major music production company and has become a highly sought-after consultant who has recruited, built, and maintained scoring teams and workflows for multiple composers.

She holds a degree in film and video game scoring from Berklee College of Music. During this period she also learned the art of not freezing to death and being the only woman in a room.



PENNY HAROLD

Re Recording Mixer

Penny Harold is an Emmy Nominated sound editor and mixer with over a decade of experience in film and TV. Select tv credits include *Arrested Development*, *Fresh Off the Boat*, *American Princess*, and every season of *Modern Family*. Select film credits include *Band Aid*, *White Rabbit*, and *Blueprint*. She lives in Los Angeles.

CAST



ALLISON TOLMAN

Monica

Allison Tolman was discovered in Chicago and cast as a series regular on the first season of the hit FX crime dramedy *Fargo* co-starring with Billy Bob Thornton. For her work on the show, she won the 2014 Critics' Choice Award and she was nominated for an Emmy and a Golden Globe for best supporting Actress in a Movie or Mini-series.

Tolman played the lead role in the ABC single-camera series *Downward Dog*, which premiered at Sundance; the only half-hour series to ever premiere at the film festival. She is upcoming on HBO's *Curb Your Enthusiasm*. Other TV credits include recurring roles on Hulu's *Castle Rock*; HBO's *Mosaic*; NBC's *Good Girls*; *Brooklyn Nine Nine*; *I'm Sorry with Andrea Savage*; and FX's *Archer*.

She is upcoming in the features *Sisters Brothers*, with John C. Reilly and Joaquin Phoenix, as well as the indie dramedy *FAM-I-LY* with Taylor Schilling. Other feature credits include *Killing Gunther* (with Taran Killam and Arnold Schwarzenegger); *The House* (with Amy Poehler and Will Ferrell); *Fresno* (with Natasha Lyonne, Judy Greer and Fred Armisen); *Krampus* (with Toni Collette and Adam Scott); and *The Gift* (with Jason Bateman, Rebecca Hall and Joel Edgerton).



RYAN PATRICK WELSH

Matt

Ryan was a series regular for two seasons on the Lionsgate series, *Bite Me*. His recent credits include playing Joey in *A Steady Rain* with Player King Productions. He originated the role of Paul Murray in the world premiere of *The Good Book of Pedantry and Wonder*, at The Boston Court Theatre. Ryan's notable stage work includes playing Dan in *Closer*, Greg in *Reasons to be Pretty*, and Finkelbaum in *The Puppetmaster of Lodz*.

Ryan received his MFA in Acting from UC Irvine.

CAST



KEISHA ZOLLAR

Sara

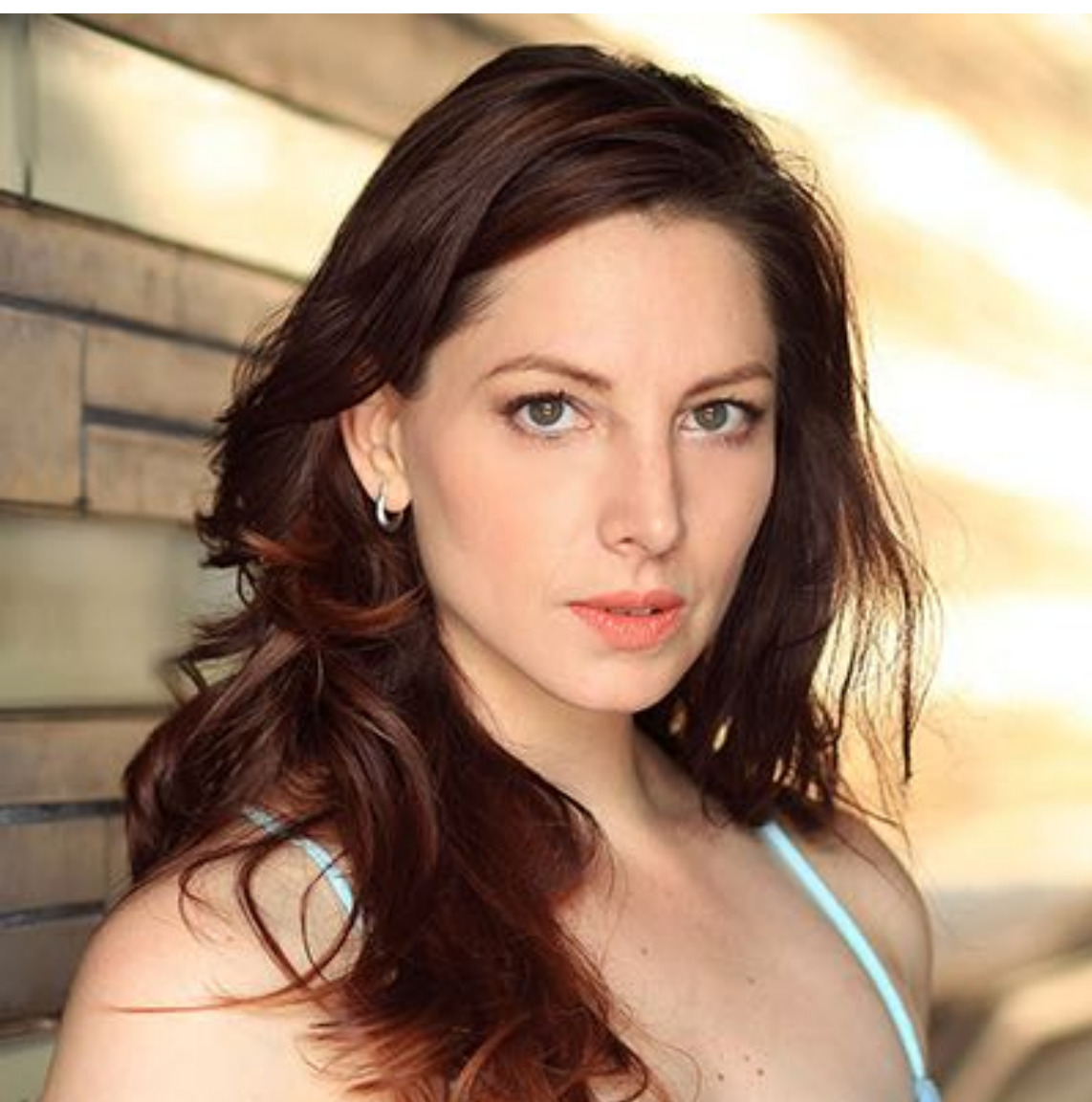
Keisha Zollar is an actress-comedienne who was a staff writer on *The Opposition* with Jordan Klepper and in 2017 wrapped on her third Comedy Central digital series as an actor and writer. She has been seen on Netflix's *Orange is the New Black*, Comedy Central, *Nightcap*, *Middle of the Night*, *The Today Show*, *CollegeHumor*, *TVLand*, *Funny or Die*, *IAF.tv*, *Above Average*, *MSNBC*, *MTV*, and *UCBComedy*. She is also in the TriBeCa Film Festival award winning film *Women Who Kill*, the documentary *Thank You Del* that premiered at SXSW, and the Emmy award winning online series {THE AND}. Keisha is currently a recurring character on the new HBO show, *Divorce*, starring Sarah Jessica Parker, Molly Shannon, Tracy Letts, Thomas Hayden Church and more. She has been featured by *Glamour* magazine, *Fast Company*, *Paste* magazine, etc, and has written for *Bitch Flicks*, *FemSplain*, and more. She recently finished writing on the first season of the new shows *Blissful Thinking* and *Halem Code*. More at Keishazollar.com



ALEXIS SUAREZ

Male Cop

Alexis Suarez is an actor and producer known for *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Out of The Shadows* (2016), *Weiner-Dog* (2016), and *Home* (2013). He has appeared in numerous prime time and cable television roles, including IFC's comedy series "Benders", "Gotham" (FX), "Shades of Blue" (NBC), and HBO's drama series, "The Night Of". Born and raised in NYC, Alexis has been actively performing for 15+ years and producing for more than a decade. He is represented by BLOC and is a member of SAG-AFTRA.



HILARY WALKER

Female Cop

Hilary is a New York City based performer who has held a recurring role on the comedic web series *Failed First Dates*, as well as acted in various Netflix thrillers, *Mercy* (James Wolk, Caitlin Fitzgerald) and *Emelie* (Sarah Bolger). Her recent credits include playing Myra Ayrundel (a playful and notorious vamp) in *Hay Fever* with the Irish Classical Theatre and a leading role in the short "The Daughter"- *A Click Chamber Buffalo Noir Series*, which recently debuted at the Buffalo/Niagara International Film Festival. She also originated the role of Miriam, a Jewish resistance fighter the Off-Broadway premiere of *When Yellow Were the Starts on Earth* at the Hudson Guild Theatre. Notable stage work includes playing Miss Forsythe in *Death of A Salesman*, Olivia in *Twelfth Night*, and Gwendolen Fairfax in *The Importance of Being Earnest*. She studied classical acting at The London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art (LAMDA) and holds a BFA from the University at Buffalo.



RACHEL ROSENTHAL

911 Operator

Rachel Rosenthal is a comedian, improviser, and improv instructor with over 15 years' experience. She is also a free-style rapper. Once called an "improv whirlwind" by The Huffington Post, Rachel performs twice weekly in NYC and she tours nationally and internationally teaching and performing with many groups including, free-style rapping Hip Hop comedy team, North Coast, who was named one of the "Top 10 Comedy Shows in NYC" by Time Out NY. Rachel is also a writer, storyteller and actress and has been featured on VH1, MTV, and on several podcasts and radio shows including "This American Life," "Risk!," Slate's "The Gist," and WBUR's "You're the Expert." More at www.theraeroshow.com or on social media at @raeroshow.

FULL CREDIT LIST

Written & Directed by Erin Doyle Cooper

Executive Producer Erin Doyle Cooper
Executive Producer Lee Stein

Producer Sarah Wolff

Cast

Monica Allison Tolman
Matt Ryan Patrick Welsh
Sara Keisha Zollar
Male Cop Alexis Suarez
Female Cop Hilary Walker
Nick Matt Cutler
911 Operator Rachel Rosenthal

Director of Photography Idil Sukan

Steadicam Operator Megan Masur
First Assistant Camera Alexandra Bock
Phoenix Flixx
Second Assistant Camera Olivia Booker
DIT Jen Aceituno

Production Sound Mixer Deanna Williams
Boom OP Imoni Cole-Palmer
Gaffer Ariel Nehorayoff
Key Grip Natalia Majette
Swing Anna Cucuzzo

Production Assistants Shirley Arrieta
Clara Peterson

Costume Designer Jess Mederos
Hair and Make Up Angela Boswell



Editor Giselle Murillo

Music By Jessica Rae Huber
Soloist Ro Rowan

Colorist Jenny Montgomery

Re Recording Mixer Penny Harold

Title Design Lauren Fahey

Logo Design Amber Vittoria

Payroll Accountant Caroline Creaghead

Filmed on Location in Brooklyn, NY

Special Thanks to SAG-AFTRA

Special Thanks:

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And everybody who helped fund the film on [Seed & Spark](#)

Q&A WITH THE DIRECTOR

Q: Is *Believe Her* a reaction to the #MeToo Movement?

EDC: No, *Believe Her* was in the works a year before the #MeToo movement started.

I had just left a full time Creative Director job to go freelance and focus on filmmaking, and I was planning to make a comedy. But then the Brock Turner ruling happened, along with a scandal in the New York comedy community, and like a lot of women, I felt outraged and helpless. So I decided to put the comedy on hold, and make a film that would put the viewer in the shoes of an assault victim, with the goal of creating more empathy for victims.

It took me a few months to start pre production after writing the script. Partially because I took on a big work contract, but mostly it was fear. I knew the material would draw some strong reactions, and honestly, I was afraid. I also wasn't sure anybody would want to watch it. And then, Bill Cosby got acquitted. And I was like, "f— this, I'm making the film." Things moved very quickly from there.

As soon as I started talking about the film, I got an incredible amount of support. People were reaching out asking where they could donate before I even set up a crowdfunding campaign, and women started reaching out to me, unprompted, to share their stories and thank me for telling their side. That was a little overwhelming, but it quickly became clear to me that a film like this was way overdue, and it sharpened my resolve. And then two weeks before our shoot, the Weinstein story broke.



"Believe Her" created for the film by Artist Amber Vittoria

Q: What was it like making *Believe Her* as #MeToo started?

EDC: It was crazy. I went from being an activist making a film that I wasn't sure anybody would want to see, to suddenly having people be very interested in what I was doing. Everybody involved in the project was passionate about what we were making and what we had to say, but going into production as the #MeToo movement was taking off definitely lent an even stronger sense of urgency to get it right.

Q: Is *Believe Her* still relevant now that #MeToo happened?

Absolutely, and in some ways I think it's even more relevant. #MeToo created awareness around the rampant problem of sexual assault and harassment, but it didn't solve it. I think people are more open to the story

now than they were before the #MeToo movement began, which means it could have a bigger impact on somebody who might have written it off before.

I think the most important piece of *Believe Her* is that it's about an everywoman. Monica could be your best friend, your coworker, your sister. The hope is that by sharing one specific story in great detail, we create a universality that many people can relate to. And in turn, create more empathy for assault victims, both male and female.

Q: Believe Her is based on true stories. Can you talk about the writing process?

EDC: Yeah. I think that's what ultimately sells people on this film: it's all true. A lot of the most horrifying details in the story happened to women I know. It's built from a combination of true survivor stories and a lot of research about the treatment of rape victims by the police, and the effects of trauma and PTSD.

Being assaulted is traumatic. But the secondary trauma that occurs when you try to report the crime to the cops or a loved one, and you're not believed, can be more damaging in the long term than the assault itself. Women know this, and it's a big part of the reason that approximately two out of three rapes go unreported. That secondary trauma is what I wanted to capture on screen. I wanted to put viewers in a victims shoes as she endures that trauma, to create more empathy for the women who have to deal with this for the rest of their lives. And since it's a short, I wanted to have it all take place in one night, so it was clean and digestible for an audience, and also realistic to shoot on an indie budget.

Q: The film relies on flashbacks to reveal the details of the assault. Why did you choose this storytelling device?

EDC: Two reasons. The first is that it created a far more engaging story. The first draft was chronological, and started at the end of the date. And it was fine, and there's something to be said for that version of the film, but once I rewrote it to start in the immediate aftermath of the assault, it was like "BAM!" You're right in it.

The second reason is the flashbacks allowed us to more accurately portray the experience of trauma. Monica re-lives certain details as she processes what happened to her, and she's fuzzy on some details as she's being questioned by the cops. I shared the script with a sexual assault counselor before shooting to make sure we got that right.

Q: Why did you choose to shoot Believe Her with an all female crew?

EDC: As a former actor I knew I'd prefer a woman behind the camera if I were filming a rape scene, so it started with "we need a female DP and camera team." But I'd always wanted to work with an all female crew, and the more I thought about it, I realized that if I was ever going to do it, this was the film to do it on. It was the right move, and I know the actors appreciated it. There was an atmosphere of understanding and compassion on set that absolutely came from it being all female.



The all female crew

As a side note, it was unexpectedly emotional for me to walk onto set the first day. Even though Sarah (Wolff, the producer) and I had hired everybody, I don't think I was prepared for what an all female set would look like. Of course, I pulled it together quickly... with only two days to shoot we had a packed schedule!

Q: This is heavy subject matter. What was the atmosphere like on set?

EDC: I have to give serious props to my cast, and Allison Tolman especially. She is the most talented and generous actor, both on screen and off, that I've ever had the privilege of working with. This shoot could have been a slog, but she really set the tone for the rest of the cast and made it a joy. This was especially true in the assault scene, which was the first sequence we shot. She and Ryan (Patrick Welsh, who played Matt) managed to joke around between takes, which diffused so much potential tension and awkwardness. And then she could just turn it on when the cameras were ready to roll. I've never seen anything like it. I would have been respectful of whatever process she or the other actors needed to handle this material, but it was incredible.



Allison Tolman, Alexis Suarez, and Hilary Walker keeping it light on set

Q: What was the editing process like?

I can't imagine making this film without my editor Giselle Murillo. Honestly, it became her baby almost as much as mine. It's rare for an editor of her caliber to take on an unknown director's short film, and she put so many more hours of love into this project than I could ever have expected. And she was critical in helping me assemble the rest of the post team, including the re-recording mixer, Penny Harold, who works with her on *Modern Family* and is brilliant, and Jessica Rae Huber, whose haunting score is just perfection.

The flashbacks were the hardest thing to get right. It's so easy to get into "80's after school special" territory, and I think we tried every sound and flash effect available before settling on a frame of black before and after each flashback. We knew that final color and sound mix would bring them to life, but the timing had to be right, and the hours Giselle spent perfecting that are so apparent in the final film.

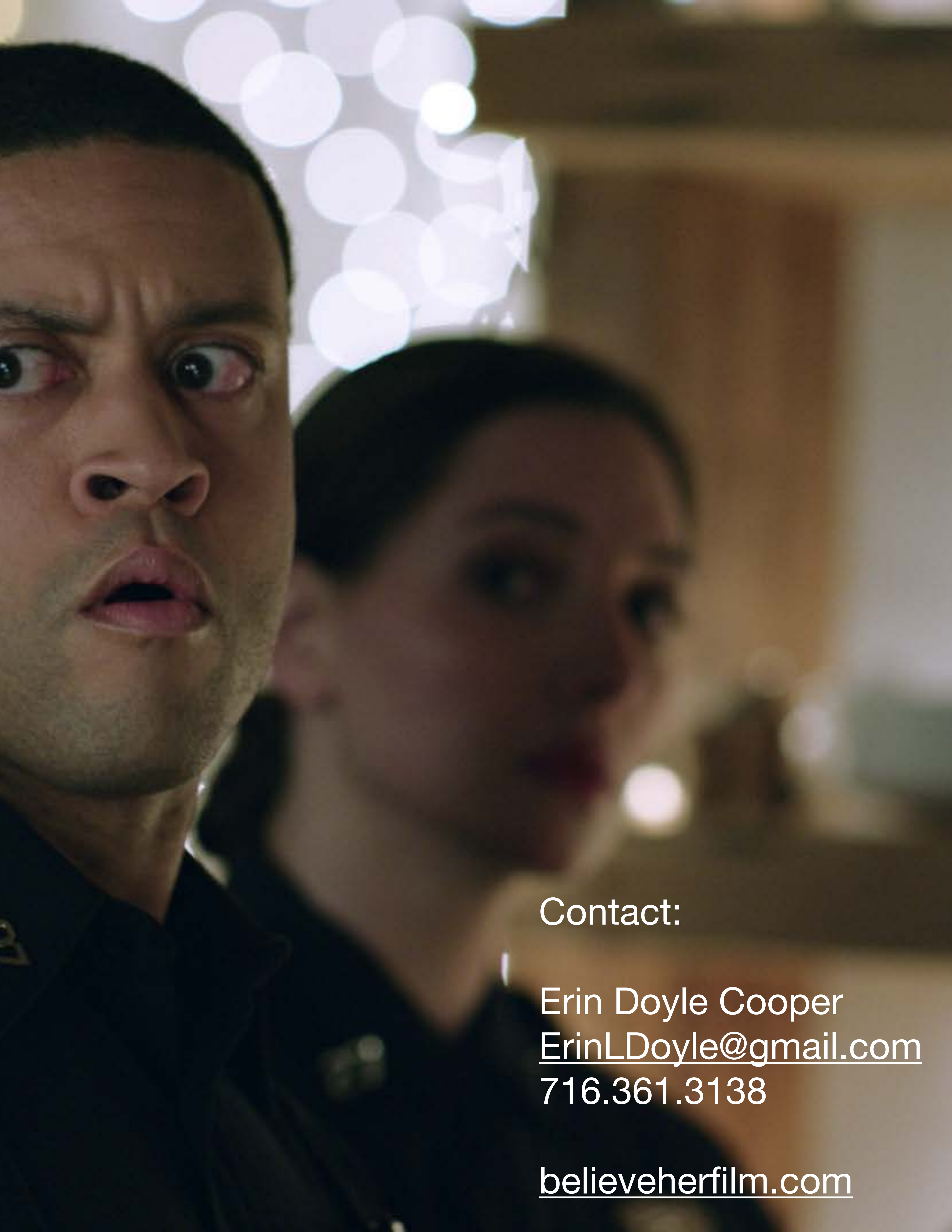
Q: You have a very specific color palette. How did you make that choice?

Yes. We used color to split Monica's experience into two sections: before and after. Before the assault, we played a lot with red, and with orange light. This peaks during the assault, when everything is very orange. And then after, it's teal. I always knew I wanted blue/green to factor strongly into the light and color palette, and teal happens to be the color of sexual assault awareness, so it worked out nicely. And that teal allowed us to play with the surreal. Immediately following the assault, Monica is struggling to process what happened. Her home is no longer a safe space, and that harsh, blue light behind her is symbolic of the bizarre new reality she's living in. What she's going through is very real, but it doesn't feel real.

Here I have to shout out my colorist Jenny Montgomery at Company 3. I sent her a ton of references and direction ahead of the color session, and she'd already brought most of my vision to life by the time I arrived. I think we were done in four hours. I've had to spend longer coloring 30 second tv spots!

Q: What do you hope audiences take away from the film?

Empathy. I've talked about it a lot, but it was the whole reason for making this film. Sexual assault is traumatic, but we can make it less traumatic for the survivors by believing them when they make the incredibly courageous decision to share, or report, what happened to them. It's not our place to judge, or tell a victim what to do. This film challenges all of us to examine ourselves, and what role we may have played in a victim's experience. But I hope that doesn't turn people away. It's not a judgment, because we can all be better. We can choose love starting right now.



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