

Sam Fremin

## Final Story

‘Scary and exciting’: Penn State student prepares for life in Hollywood

UNIVERSITY PARK, Pa. – Although many people associate ambition with being exclusively focused on one thing, current Penn State student Chaney Belle (senior – BFA acting) aims to turn that notion on its head.

Belle has dreamed of becoming an actor all her life, acting onstage since the third grade and starring in a short film as a teenager. Yet even with the high aspirations, Belle maintains the importance of saving time for herself, friends, and a future family.

“I want to make amazing films and be able to be creative every day,” Belle said. “But I also want to be around exceptional, lovely, incredible artists who will stay up late discussing films, laugh, and enjoy each other's company.”

Belle’s holistic approach to her overall life is unsurprisingly carried over to her many theatrical works. Recently working with Belle on a student film project, director Samantha Austin was impressed by the complexity and depth of her preparation.

“Chaney is one of the most hard-working actresses I’ve ever seen,” said Austin (senior – film).

“She just snaps it on, but more work goes in than just on set during the day.”

The first thing Belle does upon receiving a new script is to brainstorm off the page. Using her dialogue and stage directions, she builds a knowable character.

“When I book a role, I get the opportunity to use my imagination to create a whole new world for my character,” Belle said. “I use all the information from the script and whatever isn’t said I get to make up, so long as it doesn’t contradict with the story.”

“My character is a person. Well, usually. My character dreams, has dislikes, likes, loves [and] hates et cetera,” Belle continued. “And I get to decide all those things. It’s almost like I get to give them superpowers.”

After working together in their most recent film project, it’s clear the relationship formed between Belle and Austin is impactful – perhaps one that will have professional repercussions in the future.

“The way that [Austin’s] mind works, combined with her lovely hilarious personality, makes me want to be directed by her forever,” Belle said. “I hope one day when she’s famous she will still let me act in her projects.”

“Chaney is one of the sweetest people ever,” Austin said. “The most talented actress I’ve worked with as well.”

The duo's rapport was bolstered by their mutual understanding of Belle's process.

"Over the course of filming and pre-filming we would have long discussions about character, background, objectives, tactics, overall arcs, et cetera," Belle said. "She also allowed me the chance to voice my opinion and redraft lines - which made me feel welcomed and appreciated."

Still a student at Penn State, a majority of Belle's academic experiences focus on the stage side of theater, rather than the film.

"The biggest difference is the operations," Belle said. "With the School of Theater shows, we have a very detailed rehearsal schedule...and the main priority is the acting – the actor-director relationship."

"With student films, I do all my acting work on my own and then only have usually two to five takes for a scene," Belle continued.

Student films bring unique challenges, perhaps because of a less secure safety net. However, Belle both finds a silver lining and genuine value in the different experiences.

"It's way more limiting in the ability in terms of trying many different tactics and taking risks," Belle said. "But also, I have the ability to mess up and not be perfect because I'm not live in front of an audience. The thrill is in between the action and cut."

Belle's roots emanate from live, stage theater. And despite her recent foray into film, both academically and professionally, Belle is confident she'll find her way back to the stage at some point.

"To share one's art is to be vulnerable which is scary and exciting all wrapped in one," Belle said. "It is sacred and therefore terrifying to people because no one wants to fail. That's even more so when in front of an in-person audience."

Her learned lessons from stage theater have bled into Belle's perception of the world generally – making it more necessary of a career path in her view.

"But, how can we succeed if we did not have failures in the beginning?" Belle said. "The world needs art because the world needs empathy."

The road to Hollywood is certainly a difficult one to navigate, but planning to move to Los Angeles after graduating college, Belle sees no reason why she can't ascend the entertainment mountain.

"I know this industry is challenging and only a few people can be successful, but who says I can't be one of those people?" Belle said. "I believe it's where I meant to be, and I have the confidence and passion to never give up."

Her most recent director offered an endorsement of Belle's self-assessment.

"Of course I think she can do it. I think she will," Austin said.