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# Aniston: Thesp again tackles new roles

## Profile in Excellence: Jennifer Aniston

By TODD LONGWELL

Jennifer Aniston is well-known for being a team player, and it's her ability to be part of the ensemble -- rather than the star player -- that impressed her most recent writer-director, David Wain.

Regardless of being stalked by paparazzi on the "Wanderlust" shoot in Clarksville, Ga., Wain says, "She is surprisingly easygoing, normal and easy to talk to. Everyone in the cast hung out together like we were all normal people."

According to Paul Rudd, who plays Aniston's husband in the Universal pic, her welcoming presence didn't just make for a more pleasant set, it had a very real effect on the creative process.

"If you like the people you're working with, you can play around a little bit more with some improvisation or regular scripted dialogue," says Rudd, who first acted with Aniston in the 1998 romantic comedy "The Object of My Affection."

For real insight into the way Aniston works, one need look no farther than the way she rocked the mic at the karaoke nights Rudd hosted during the shoot.

"She didn't sit in the corner watching and playing it cool," says Rudd. "She belted it out. It's same way with her acting: She totally goes for it."

Indeed, from the time she first rose to fame as a member of the tight-knit ensemble cast of "Friends," Aniston has demonstrated a knack for working well with others, as well as willingness to go for it with risky roles in low-budget films such as "She's the One" and "The Good Girl."

"I was wonderfully fearless or ignorant," Aniston says with a laugh, "but I just really wanted to play these parts." There was also the pragmatic



Aniston achieved TV immortality with the long-running NBC series 'Friends.'



Jennifer Aniston, who receives her star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame on Feb. 22, stars in Universal's 'Wanderlust' with Paul Rudd and Justin Theroux.

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realization that "if I wanted to be around for awhile, I was going to have to sort exercise a couple other different aspects of myself, not just play the cutesy girl next door."

Aniston's career strategy certainly served writer-director Stephen Belber on his film "Management," as her commitment to topline the film not only secured added financing, it also helped land another high profile co-star, Woody Harrelson.



*'The Breakup'*

"We went to Woody Harrelson early on before Jen was on it and he passed," Belber recalls. "So we're getting down to two or three weeks before the shoot, and she and I had been discussing various ideas and she said, 'Let's try Woody again,' and she literally picked up the phone, and he was like playing poker with Willie Nelson in Hawaii. And he's like, 'Ah ... I don't know. I have some questions.' And she says, 'Look at the rewrite.' So she emailed it to Woody, he read it, he liked (it) and he came in on the film."



*'The Good Girl'*

Eager to bring her own creative visions to the screen, Aniston teamed in 2008 with longtime friend Kristin Hahn to form Echo Films, which has a development slate that includes "The Goree Girls," a fact-based tale about a group of female prison inmates in the 1940s who form a country & western group.

Aniston and Hahn met at a backyard barbeque in 1989 and lived next door to each other in Laurel Canyon for 10 years. They later partnered with Aniston's then-husband, Brad Pitt, in the prodco Plan B, through which Hahn earned an executive producer credit on "The Departed."



*'Marley & Me'*

"The agreement when we first started to work together was that the friendship would always be a priority," says Hahn. "There have only been a few times where we've gotten emotional about something that we disagreed about, and then we talk it out."

Echo's first effort "The Switch," starring Aniston and Jason Bateman, didn't perform to expectations. ("It wasn't your most conventional story and I don't think it was marketed correctly," Aniston says.) Much more satisfying was last year's "Five," a Lifetime Television anthology of short films about women coping with breast cancer, helmed by five female directors (Patty Jenkins, Alicia Keys, Demi Moore, Penelope Spheeris and Aniston).

Regarding the team of Hahn and Aniston, Spheeris (helmer on the "Cheyanne" segment) remarks on "how extremely thorough they were in making sure that each director got what she wanted and was able to put her own mark on it and do her own style."



*Jennifer Aniston got behind the camera and helmed a segment in Lifetime's 'Five.'*

For her own segment "Mia," starring Patricia Clarkson and Xander Berkeley, Aniston prepared meticulously, storyboarding every scene.



*Jennifer Aniston and Kristin Hahn screen Lifetime's 'Five' at Ronald Reagan Building in D.C. last October.*

"She was good at separating what she did and didn't need as a director," says cinematographer Eric

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- George Lucas, director of STAR WARS



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Edwards, who's also shot three of her acting vehicles ("The Break-Up," "Management," "Love Happens"). "We had roughly 20 minutes of programming to shoot in four days, and the economy of the shoot really focused her."

That doesn't mean Aniston wouldn't take time for a little improvisation.

"If there was a moment where Xander wanted to go off on how he feels the husband would react in this situation, then you let him do that," says Aniston, who executive produced alongside Hahn and "Friends" co-creator Marta Kauffman. "You always can find little pieces of magic somewhere."

As for what comes next, "It's all a big who knows," according to Aniston.

"The Goree Girls" is stalled in development and "there's a script I'd like to direct," Aniston says, "but my agent is like, please, just can we wait on that for a little bit. Basically, what they're saying is, 'Can we squeeze a couple more acting years out of you?'"

Respected film actresses such as Glenn Close and Holly Hunter have been flocking to series television in recent years. Is there any chance Aniston would consider a return to the smallscreen?

"I would never say never to anything," Aniston says.

And it wouldn't hurt if it involved an ensemble cast.

"I just had to approve an eight-minute gag reel from 'Friends,' and I was literally grinning from ear to ear," she enthuses. "How much fun we had and what a great job that was. And, my God, the schedule is supreme! And you can still do your movies in the summer."

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