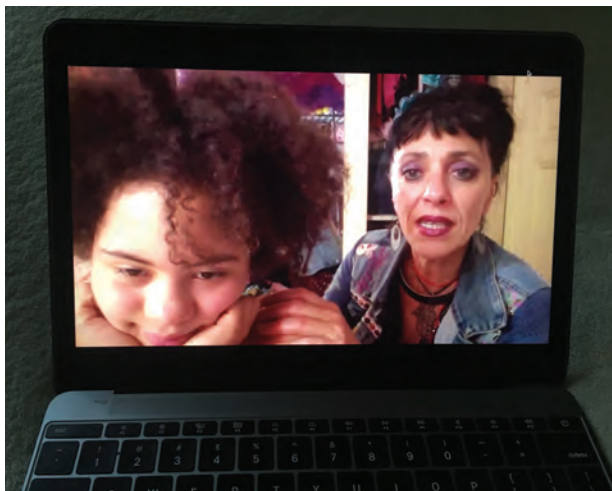




A publication of

SUMMER 2020 | VOL 28 #4 | \$5.95 US | \$7.95 CANADA | filmmakermagazine.com

Garrett Bradley's *Time*
Michael Almereyda's *Tesla*
Spike Lee's *Da 5 Bloods*
Filmmakers and the Pandemic
Film School Guide



Véronique N. Doumbé

My name is Véronique N. Doumbé, and my COVID story starts early this year. I have been wearing a mask inside airports for a while now, a habit I have developed because I travel often, and I know that many hours inside airports and planes can't be healthy. In Southeast Asia last January, almost everyone was wearing a mask inside airports, on planes, in the streets, really everywhere. There was a sign at JFK airport asking travelers returning from Asia to monitor their temperature for 15 days. By January 30, no symptoms. I was in the clear.

I have been working on my documentary *Raising Zuly* since 2014. It is the story of renowned French tap dancer Roxane Butterfly and her daughter Zuly, who happens to have Down syndrome. They live in Paris, where I record their daily life over a short period of time several times a year. I sometimes follow them on the road. Mid-February, I met them in Athens, where Roxane was teaching. A few days later, we flew to Pisa, where Roxane was hired to create a show in a circus. Arriving from Athens, we were greeted by airport staff in white overalls and a thermometer. We were cleared and did not think much of it, as we were too busy with the upcoming show Roxane had been commissioned to produce. We spent a week at Bolli Circus in Sarzana, a small town near Pisa, where Roxane prepared Bolli, 17, a young man with Down syndrome who had

never tap-danced and Zuly, 10, who has been dancing since she first stood on her feet. After a week of rehearsals, the show went on and was a success. At the end of the week, we returned to Pisa and mingled among tourists before our flight to Paris. Our guide pointed out the small number of people in the streets for fear of the coronavirus. We had unknowingly been sheltered inside the circus.

It was February 24, and there was no social distancing required at the airport in Pisa. But the next day, all the borders in Italy were closed, and within a few days, France announced its first death in a nursing home. A week later, on March 1st, on the flight back from Paris, an Italian man told me he had paid a premium to switch from Alitalia to Air France. At JFK, the sign about health warnings made no mention of Europe. People were scared of travelers from Asia, not from Europe yet. Since COVID, I lost a cousin who harbored two people who had taken refuge in Douala, Cameroon, fleeing the virus in Paris. He had to be buried within 24 hours. If you knew how long funerals last in Cameroon, you would understand the trauma the family is still going through. Many people in Douala have resorted to herbal remedies to shield them from COVID-19 with good results. My family in Cameroon is shocked by the numbers of deaths in New York from COVID. The other night, my elderly father called me to

tell me he had just watched George Floyd's funeral. The violence on Black bodies has finally entered the psyche of some of my very dear friends. I have gone from anger to sadness and renewed purpose. I understand that my health is my best capital, so self-care is crucial at this point in time.

On March 13, I delivered the hard drive with a short comedy I edited for director Rhonda Hansome. Two days later, the city was on a lockdown. It's been three months now. I guess my editing process will not change. I have been working remotely for almost a decade. I'm awaiting notes on a documentary from French director Claire Chauvat and getting ready to give the last touches to a romantic comedy directed by Nicole Sylvester. But no upcoming filming

means no more editing for others for a while.

Roxane, Zuly and I communicate through Zoom now. France has reopened. Zuly has returned to school. Roxane continues her battle to insure meaningful inclusion of her daughter at school. For now, I walk around the Lower East Side taking pictures of stores boarded up. So many may not reopen.

As I listen to the interview of Marina, the owner of Bolli circus where I spent a week filming recently, I ponder on her words: "Enjoy the little things... and don't worry about things which may never occur."—New York City, Tuesday June 16, 2020

Véronique N. Doumbé is a Cameroonian and West Indian filmmaker.