Where do we go from here? Festivals, films and the future of entertainment

An interview with Gregory Elias, an entertainment entrepreneur and visionary by Dr. Ray Eddy

A society without any form of entertainment is one that does not have a soul.

Ernest Dickerson, the Director of the Walking Dead. How did you come up with this cast? What was the process and your experience?

Working on Double Play was a novel experience for me, and incredibly educational. I was able to see, in a much more in-depth manner, all the layers of movie-making. For Double Play, the cast was assembled by the casting director, the producers, and of course, nothing would have happened without the approval of the director. The late Timothy DeBaets, my entertainment lawyer, introduced me to the professionals that I worked with on this project. Even though I had already co-produced and co-financed an American movie, Happy Tears, with a well-known director and actors, I was far more involved in the Double Play project.

The movie is based on a very popular book in the Dutch language. Why this book? There are so many elements to the movie, so many ways to react. How would you describe the movie and what is the most exciting part?

Frank Arion’s book, Dubbelspel, is a brilliant portrayal of Curaçaoan society in the 50s, 60s and 70s, and explores a number of very sensitive social issues that were plaguing Curaçao at the time. We knew that we had to be respectful in our approach to making the movie as we would have to deal with issues of racism, discrimination and all the intricacies inherent in the relationship between the individual and their community; issues that still haunt us today. It was a complex venture, but I believe that we did the story justice.

You recently produced a movie called Double Play. The movie hosted some very high-profile characters such as Louis Gossett Jr., and was directed by Gregory Elias.

A scene from Double Play, produced by Gregory Elias.

Do you think that the streaming is a threat to movies and theaters, or is the foreseeable future going to be streaming?

No, I don’t believe that streaming platforms are a threat to movies and theaters. It has become a part of our everyday lives, but it cannot replace the ‘experience’ of visiting a theater. Going to see a movie will stay popular for as long as moviegoers enjoy it, and are tempted to keep returning.

Of course, we cannot discount streaming as a phenomenon, but we can instead view it as an opportunity. Streaming opens new
THOUSANDS OF CONCERT GOERS.

IN CUBA, DRAWING HUNDREDS OF INTERNATIONAL ROCK BAND TO PLAY

THOUGHT LEADER

Most exciting part of the concert was to watch the expression of joy and freedom on the faces of the 1.2 million visitors who attended the event. That was very rewarding.

Most people are not aware of the market constraints of operating high-quality large-scale entertainment events. How did you manage big ideas and creativity with entertainment events in a small island setting? Small islands often lack the capacity and infrastructure required to organize a festival of the magnitude and quality that I envisaged. The solution was quite simple in the end—collaborate with the world's best indoor and outdoor organizer of internationally acclaimed music festivals, Mojo Concerts from Holland, who have been in this business since 1967. Since 2006, Mojo Concerts have been a wholly owned subsidiary of Live Nation LLC.

Working with Mojo allowed me to make my vision a reality—Mojo are experts in large-scale entertainment events, and I was able to rely on their advice and judgement without reservation. They attended to every detail with so much care and attention, that there was no other possibility than for the festival to be a success.

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES IN EMERGING TRENDS, AND HOW DO YOU THINK THAT ENTERTAINMENT WILL MANIFEST ITSELF IN THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE? WHAT WOULD BE THE OPPORTUNITIES THAT WE SHOULD LOOK FOR?

Everyone employed in or associated with the entertainment industry knows that they have to adjust to an ever-changing consumer marketplace and adopt the latest trends. It’s a challenging industry to work in, you never have a stable footing from one week to the next, but it’s incredibly rewarding to be able to position yourself front and centre of the next new movement.

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In fact, i have another program in the pipeline that was presented to me by Prof. Dr. Robertoico Croes, which starts in 2024.

How do you feel about collaboration between the entertainment industry and academia?

It's a no-brainer, in my mind. The entertainment industry and academia complement each other in all aspects. Entertainment has become so important that it can only thrive if it accepts the value of academic knowledge and knowhow, without losing sight of the human driving force behind it. By that I mean the creative minds who can make dreams come true.

Collaboration and what has been your experience? Do you also collaborate with the Rosen College on research projects? And why?

UCF Rosen College has provided me with both an opportunity and a platform to engage with the next generation of creative minds who want to be involved in the entertainment industry. By working with UCF, we have created something longlasting and sustainable, that will adapt to the new ideas that are sweeping the sector.

My experience so far has been incredibly encouraging. You never know how an idea will turn out, even when you have all the tools at hand to implement it. However, the collaboration with UCF Rosen College came at exactly the right time, in the right place, and with an absolutely superb team of educators. I am very grateful for all the support UCF has given to the program.

How do you come up with the idea, and why this concert? What was the most exciting part of the concert?

The idea was born out of the desire to pay tribute to Cuba, an island with an immensely rich cultural heritage, and an expansive musical legacy. It was also meant to be somewhat of a ‘present’—a free concert—for the Cuban people who lack so many things we ‘Westerners’ take for granted. Similar to the old explorers who would set their sails to discover new lands, the aim was to embark on an exploration through music. I also wanted to relive the British invasion of the 60s, when bands like The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, and The Kinks—to name but a few—conquered the American music scene.

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