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Meet Would-Be Hot Topic Influencer Vera Drew

Digital cinema alumna makes her own kind of magic in L.A.



Photo by Dustyn Hiett

What does an Emmy-nominated, transgender director/writer/editor shut inside her Los Angeles home during a pandemic do to keep herself sane? She launches a YouTube series, *“Hot Topics with Vera Drew.”* by which she hopes to become a brand ambassador for clothing and accessories retailer Hot Topic through her hilarious and personal reflections on her life.

Drew, a 2011 graduate of CDM’s digital cinema program, has come a long way from her beginnings in suburban Mokena, Ill. In addition to her 2018 Emmy nomination for her work on *Sacha Baron Cohen’s “Who Is America,”* she helped launch *Tim Heidecker and Eric Wareheim’s streaming TV network Channel 5,* for which she wrote and directed four comedy series: *“I Love David,” “Tim and Eric Quiz,” “Scum”* and *“Our Bodies.”* She also has contributed her talents to YouTube channels HLPtv and Everything Is Terrible.

Her professional journey began at DePaul. “The main reason I wanted to go to DePaul,” Drew says, “was because the digital cinema program was just starting. To me it was the way the industry was clearly heading. And I just really, really loved Chicago. I was always in the city because I was doing comedy there when I was a kid.

“It’s actually really hard for me to imagine what my life would have been like had I gone somewhere else. I was a mess when I was a senior at college because I was still so deeply in the closet and miserable. Thankfully, Dan Klein, who was one of the people in charge of the L.A. program, and Shayna

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Connelly, Alexander Stewart and Josh Jones were my guardian angels. They encouraged me to get my stuff together and apply to the L.A. program. I was able to finish up school in the program.”

Now that COVID-19 has shut down most productions, Drew says, “It’s a scary time to be working in TV, but it’s given me a tremendous opportunity to focus on getting pitches together and work on labor-intensive projects that I otherwise wouldn’t be able to do if I was regularly employed.”

“Hot Topics” is one of those projects. The project Drew is most excited about is an all-new feature film that uses footage from Todd Phillips’ *“Joker”* and other films.

“When I was in college, I was trying to be an experimental filmmaker focusing on sound footage editing,” she says. In doing a re-edit of *“Joker”* for fun, Drew noticed that “there were a lot of cool themes I could play with that relate to what it’s like growing up being a comedy nerd and a trans woman working in comedy, and the isolation that comes with that.”