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Alumna Profile: Meet Would-Be Hot Topic Influencer Vera Drew

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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 was because the digital cinema program was just starting. To me it was the way the industry was clearly heading,” Drew says. “I was 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 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.”