



Talent On Tap – Nicole Oliver Shares Christmas Morning

NOVEMBER 23, 2020 DARREN WIESNER INTERVIEW

It's difficult to think of holidays when Covid-19 keeps crashing the party. However, Christmas is quickly arriving and it is one holiday that brings family together like no other. Depending on the next month, we may or may not be joining a big family dinner, but it doesn't mean we still can't enjoy the Christmas movies. They bring out those emotions of happiness, kindness, joy, laughter, unity and hope. Let's all be reminded of that in the new *Good Morning Christmas* movie that launches on Wed. Nov. 25 at 8 pm on the Hallmark Channel starring Alison Sweeney (*Days of Our Lives*, *The Biggest Loser*), Marc Blucas (*Holiday for Heroes*, *The Fix*) and our favourite own local superstar – Nicole Oliver (*Wonder*, *Britney Ever After*, *My Little Pony*, *Narco Leap*).

In *Good Morning Christmas*, Melissa Merry (Sweeney) and Brian Bright (Blucas) are America's favorite hosts from the top-rated morning show, "Today with Bright & Merry." What America doesn't know is Melissa and Brian cannot stand to be in the same room with one another. Producer Jennifer (Nicole Oliver) reminds Merry & Bright they must spend the upcoming week in Mistletoe, the town that won the show's Christmas contest, where Mel and Brian will film on location. A great Christmas story with an incredible cast. It is produced by Crown Media Productions, LLC. Charles Cooper is the producer and Paul Ziller directed the script by Riley Weston.

I caught up with immensely talented and bubbly Nicole Oliver and it felt like an early Christmas gift. She was as delightful as a Christmas carol and she shared some amazing insight into the post Covid film industry, as well as providing the reindeer rundown of *Good Morning Christmas!*

HNM "I believe it's been a year since we last spoke. Certainly, so much has changed since then with Covid-19 but you've managed to remain quite busy despite it all."

NICOLE "I feel really lucky and having lots of options. As an artist living in Canada, you have to diversify. The acting all shut down but I was still able to direct and continue with voice-over work from my home – and then the acting picked up again and I was lucky enough to get cast in a few things. The only downside, is it feels like a 7-day workweek at times. Many more people are available because they're home, so there's a lot more cooks in the kitchen on some projects, so to speak. I'm still trying to figure out the boundaries between work and home time."

HNM "It must be a delicate dance, when trying to find that balance?"

NICOLE "As an artist, there's never been the reassurance of fulltime work for what we love doing. When Covid hit, we all realized that things could stop, so that anxiety of not knowing when the work will run out – you start to gather as much as you can. I feel like the squirrel gathering all the nuts (laughing) for hibernation."

HNM "How much has Covid impacted your career?"

NICOLE “A lot of us have talked about it and many of my brothers and sisters have had a really hard time. You save as much as you can and you adult as much as you can, even though you’re Peter Pan for a living. The idea of being a Peter Pan and being creative enough to imagine flowing and flying, I feel like this pandemic is squeezing the imagination out of us right now. It’s becoming a real challenge to find that spark when the opportunities come and to get your motor going. Last year we went to Mexico for Christmas and my husband needed to compose some music for a film, so he brought a portable studio rig with him. The kids and I were on the beach in the morning while Chris was writing Christmas music back in the room. He delivered it post New Years and had talked to his agent about taking some time off. He told Chris it would be fine and he could sign some more contracts in March – then Covid hit. Thankfully he’s back to work... but his first project started in September.”

HNM “When I looked at your imdb page, I counted at least 6 Christmas movies; is this just coincidence or do you gravitate toward Christmas stories?”

NICOLE “I think it’s where we also live. Vancouver has always been a service centre. There’s a lot of Christmas movies made here but even before Hallmark was here, I’d done a few Christmas movies. I love Christmas, I love it to pieces! I decorate my home up and it’s the only time of year that I bake. I have the Christmas music going and I wear the Santa hat when I go out. When you do those movies, its so nice to be a part of something that is fun, is so pure and has so much joy once you reach the end. These movies are designed to put smiles on people’s faces and to help them escape – which we need now more than ever (laughing). With the Christmas movies, you almost feel like you’re working for a company, in a sense because you’re working with a lot of the same people over and over again. Hallmark has been wonderful at building a stable of performers; that relatability and that reliability adds a layer of comfort, fun and beauty to their productions for better viewing.”

HNM “When did you start filming the Christmas show and when did you finish?”

NICOLE “We started mid – September and finished the beginning of October. It was my second time I’ve made a film with Alison Sweeney and Marc Blucas is the lead on it – it was a lot of fun. I’m not going to lie – it was very different filming under Covid. Everyone took it very seriously and it was quite a challenge for someone that uses their face so much, to go to only half a visible face. As an actor, you realize how much you rely on those physical cues... but as an actor, as soon as you hear ‘Action’ and those Christmas lights are everywhere – its like riding a bike.”



HNM "When you're wearing the masks between scenes and waiting to shoot again, do the masks leave marks on your face and does it become a problem?"

NICOLE "Oh all time. Before this show, we shot the second season of *Narco Leap* in August – Sept. and my character wore dark lipstick. Every time I'd take the mask off it would go all over my face (laughing). The make-up team is getting creative and are putting small sponges underneath to avoid marks but once we take off our masks and get our finals, we're exposed until they yell cut. Every set I've been on, has been very respectful and has a place for us to put on our PPE, there's only essential people around you and communication has to be great. So far so good."

HNM "A lot of people are trying to work from their home. Has that ever been an option for you, to do voice work from your home?"

NICOLE "I have a fully functional studio in the house. As soon as things started shutting down, we've been setting it up, doing tests and having discussions around the process. I've done some videos games for Blizzard out of San Francisco from my basement, I've recorded a couple of documentaries for the Smithsonian Channel, I did a couple of TV campaigns from my basement, so it's been amazing. I'm able to work from home but everyone wants to see you/be near you and I miss it too. I'm directing an animation over Zoom. It's very different... so before I start, I go for a little walk around the block and before I finish, I'll go for a walk around the block the other way – to reset my brain."

Nicole continued to reiterate the importance of kindness on set and how important mental health is during this pandemic. She fears that we don't yet know the full impact it will have on mental health and stresses, that we need to stay the course.

HNM "What makes *Good Morning Christmas* different from the other Christmas stories?"

NICOLE "For me, it was the combination of the people in it. I've worked with the director Paul Ziller before, so I knew the set was going to be a great and playful environment. He's also the kind of director that won't say 'no' if you have a good idea – he's very collaborative that way. Alison and Marc were constantly trying to elevate this script and make it their own. Sometimes you just show up, say the lines and go home... but this wasn't the case. This was a team effort to take what was there and honour it while bringing our personalities into it and making it feel a little more zingy. The combination of the different personalities took it to another level and I'm confident that the viewers will see that when they watch it."

HNM "In this movie, you play a producer. How similar is this character to your own character?"

NICOLE “Well... some people will say I’m a bit of a control freak – I like things a certain way. My character has a big sense of humour and has worked hard and wants this show to be a success without any shenanigans getting in the way of that success. There are some similarities to me – I’ve worked hard for a (deep voice) very long time (laughing) to achieve my dreams and to expand on new ones. I like to believe that hard work pays off and there’s also a part of me that doesn’t have patience for BS. With all my characters, I always try to invest some of me in there, but the fun part is finding out, what the difference is between us and going there – that’s what’s exciting. She’s a little harder edge than I would be. I’m a bit of a soft touch (laughing).”

HNM “Have you ever been recognized for your voicework while out in public?”

NICOLE “That’s happened a couple of times actually. I was on a plane and a woman walked past me and looked at me, then came back and looked at me again. Wonder was playing on the screen, which I was in and she asked if it was me in the movie. It was one of those weird moments at 35,000 feet. Another time, I was also on a plane and *My Little Pony* was playing. I was talking to someone and the person in front of me turned around and asked if I was so and so and such and such, and that they were watching me right now. It’s so fun when you get to see the joy/impact that your work has on other people. I don’t take any of it for granted and it’s really nice to see that something I’ve done can make other people smile.”

HNM “What draws you to a story that makes you want to be a part of it?”

NICOLE “As a Canadian performer, the reality is – we want to work. It’s nice to think that we can go – I want to do that, I don’t want to do that. I’m thrilled when a casting agent tells me they want to see me for a part, they think I’ll be great. However, there are times, where I don’t want to be part of a project like that or maybe that part doesn’t speak to me. I know in the Christmas movies, I’d like to play a character that is directly involved in moving the story forward – I want to be a part of the main action, as well as someone that has their own emotional arc and own emotional journey. Because I do the voice work and the directing, I feel like I can be a little choosy about – how I want to show my face to the world. My choices start when the auditions come in – is this something I want to be part of, is it something I can fit into my schedule? I want to keep doing things that are going to broaden my horizons, because that’s going to impact what I do and make me better at it.”



HNM “It’s almost been a year since we last spoke. There was a shift in the film industry, where they have said they will become more diverse and more inclusive. Have you seen any changes in the past year?”

NICOLE “Where I have seen the biggest leaps and bounds and changes, has been in animation – in terms of casting; diversity casting has exploded. One of the shows I direct is *Molly of Denali*; we won a Peabody Award last year. I’m also directing a show for DreamWorks and one of the characters in the animation is mobility challenged, and the actor playing him is also mobility challenged. He’s an inspiring 11 yr. old boy with auto immune issues and is in the wheelchair quite a bit, but he has one of the brightest spirits I’ve ever met. Some stories need to be told by certain people and I’ve seen the biggest evolution in animation in terms of the stories they’re telling and the people they’re casting. In terms of women – the biggest growth has been behind

the scenes. I wanted to direct animation and that's now happening. My next goal is to direct live action, so I'm working on that. There's been actresses in town that have done short films but have been doing it a long time, that are now directing their first feature. I do see more of that –its exciting and I look forward to when that becomes normalized."

HNM "Do you have a unique talent/party trick that you can share with us?"

NICOLE "I love karaoke and my favourite moment came with Backstreet Boys – Everybody... and I actually do the dance, so my karaoke is very interactive (laughing). People might think of me being serious... but I love karaoke, it's so much fun!! My other party trick is, I love hosting party's and I'm jonesing for when I can do that again. My dad, who's been dead for 25 years, could pull his underwear off without taking off his pants first. Unfortunately, he passed away before he could pass on the party trick. It was pretty epic."

HNM "Do you have any rituals you might use to unwind after a difficult shoot/production?"

NICOLE "Yes, a lot – I'm the ritual queen. I always have a diffuser and essential oils going in my trailer all the time. Another part of my ritual after filming is, I never leave set without taking off my character's face. I'll go into the make-up trailer with my lotions, and they'll give me a hot towel with some lavender. It's not a long ritual but it's the act of taking off the day, taking off the character before I get in my car and drive home, so I can be me, I can be mom and I can deal with whatever comes up. I've also tried to make Saturday my self-care Saturday. I'll work out a couple times per week with my trainer over Zoom and then soak in the hot tub. Sometimes I'll get into my garden and putter around outside... and maybe add a glass of wine a little later too. Rituals are important; they help anchor your day/week and self-care is essential – so you can get onto the next week."



What a terrific and fun interview. Nicole Oliver is so genuine, so creative and 1st class! Please watch *Good Morning Christmas*, so we can appreciate a warming story and Nicole Oliver.