



CASTILLE LANDON:

Succeeding In The Saddle and Behind The Camera

BY SARA PIZZUTO

At horse shows across the country, you might find Castille Landon directing her equine partners to victory. However, outside the horse industry, Landon is participating in a different type of directing - controlling the operations on set of a movie. She is currently focused on a new film, "Summer Camp," which boasts a star-studded cast. Landon, the director and writer of this film, balances her time working in her thriving movie career and cheering for her string of top Saddlebreds.

Castille Landon was introduced to horses through her mother and grandmother who were both invested in the equine world. Her grandmother, Ginny Dorris, jumped in the Olympic Trials in Madison Square Garden when she was young; later raising her family on a small horse farm in Florida while founding and serving as CEO at NELCO. She and Landon's mother, Dori Rath, eventually got heavily involved in the

Arabian breed and had a sizeable show string and breeding program.

"My mom got me an ornery Miniature Horse, Stormin' Norman, when I was a toddler, and he taught me to be tough," Landon said. "Eventually, she took me to start formal lessons at Ruth Gimpel's barn in Tampa, and we ended up moving over from Arabians to Saddlebreds."

Landon enjoyed a stellar junior exhibitor career in the show ring. Some of her most cherished memories during her childhood include getting Sultan's Snapchat, affectionately tagged as "Snappy," wrapped in a giant bow for her seventh birthday and spending her summers at horse camp with Sarah Byers. She also was quick to mention receiving her first ever five-gaited mount, Small Packages or "Peanut," following her then idol Tate Bennett's win with the entry in Louisville's Five-Gaited Pony class. However, despite Landon's success and love for the breed,

she was ultimately pulled away from the equine world and took a hiatus from the show ring.

"Everything behind the scenes-barn drama, the desire and pressure to win, the expense, the politics- became too stressful and instead of being something that bonded my family, it bred tension and resentment," she said. "It took me a while to separate all of that interpersonal messiness from the horses themselves, and once I did, I started yearning for a horse again."

It wasn't until 2013 when Landon returned to the saddle aboard a gaited competitor.

"I was doing a movie in Florida and David Chretien asked me to catch ride Wrapped in Chocolate for Zoe Schaffel, and I fell in love with that horse," she said. "It became my goal to have a five-gaited horse that gave me that feeling again. I found myself essentially stalking the horse world, watching the shows online, and getting the lowdown from my childhood friend Morgan King."



Castille Landon was introduced to horses at a young age through her mother and grandmother. She directed Sultan's Snapshot to many victories in the walk/trot 8 and under equitation ranks, among other top ribbons throughout her junior exhibitor career.



Van Halen is proudly owned by Landon, along with her mother and grandmother. The spitting image of his sire, CH It's Aerosmith, Van Halen made a spectacular show ring debut with Sarah MacKenna to win the Two-Year-Old Three-Gaited class in Shelbyville.

After 12 years of living in Los Angeles, Landon decided to sell her condo and use the profit to buy a horse. She made careful attention in selecting a new barn.

"I researched barns and wanted to be very intentional about that decision, as I knew it would form the fabric of my new community," she said. "In 2020, my mom and I did a road trip to Kentucky landing at Monnington Farm. We wound up buying three horses and a house in Louisville."

Landon explained that she grew up watching Monnington Farm head trainer Lionel Ferreira and was in awe of his ability with gaited horses and the obvious passion he had for what he did. She and her mother sat down with Ferreira and his wife Georgia and instantly clicked.

"We loved their opposite, but complementary personalities, and that the environment they'd created felt familial and welcoming while also being clear that there was a bigger picture as far as focusing on starting young horses and making sure that each horse has its own program, suited to its needs," Landon said. "There's definitely a quality over quantity approach and because there are only a handful of clients, Lionel, Sarah, and the team are able to give most of their attention to the horses."

While Landon was resuming her equine career at Monnington Farm on the back of gaited competitor Hart's Cinematic, she was also excelling in her professional career in the film industry. She explained that she initially wanted to be an actor but eventually focused on writing and directing.

"I started doing small spots on TV shows and in films and really focused on becoming involved in the independent film scene as I desperately wanted to have a film at Sundance," she said. "After forming relationships with producers and getting involved in film finance, I wound up pivoting to writing and directing."

Castille Landon began gaining recognition in the film community. "Albion" was her first feature film as both a writer and director. She also starred in this film opposite a Friesian stallion along with actors John Cleese and Debra Messing. Landon additionally garnered attention for her work, specifically on the movie, "Fear Of Rain", and with the After film series, including "After We Fell," "After Ever Happy," and "After Everything."

"I love that I get to imagine scenarios and fun characters and then create them on the page, and then on screen," Landon said. "I very much live vicariously through them and sort of have my own bonds with them as if they're friends or extensions of myself. I also love collaborating with talented artists-my cinematographer, actors, editor, etc. And with the After franchise, it has been really special to connect with the passionate fanbase comprised of mostly young women."

"Summer Camp" is one of Landon's newest works-a film that she both wrote and directed. The film tells the story of three lifelong friends who reunite after time apart at a summer camp. It stars Diane Keaton, Kathy Bates, Alfre Woodard, and Eugene Levy. Landon explained the process of taking the movie from an initial idea and turning it into a film.

"Summer Camp is the biggest in scope and budget, and is more in line with where I want my career to go in the future, so it's not surprising that it took the longest of any of my films to go through the development process and actually get it into production," Landon said. "Seeing my producers find success with

...I just realized, you have one Oscar-nominated and two Oscar-winning actresses speaking lines you wrote right now. It's sort of surreal when you think about it.



Castille Landon explained that collaborating with the actors on set is one of her favorite parts of her job. She spent time working with Victoria Rowell, Diane Keaton, Kathy Bates, Maria Howell, Beverly D'Angelo, and Alfre Woodard.



After a hiatus from the show ring, Landon returned to the Saddlebred industry aboard five-gaited competitor, Hart's Cinematic. (photo by Howie Schatzberg)



Small Packages was Landon's first ever five-gaited teammate. She received "Peanut" following her then idol Tate Bennett's win with the entry in Louisville's Five-Gaited Pony class. (photo by Howie Schatzberg)



Saddlebred enthusiast, Castille Landon is making headlines in the film industry. She recently wrote and directed the upcoming film "Summer Camp," that boasts a star-studded cast. Landon (second from right) posed alongside actors Alfre Woodard, Kathy Bates, Diane Keaton, Dennis Haysbert, and Eugene Levy.

'Book Club,' I wanted to write a film for Diane Keaton, so I came up with an idea that was somewhat self-contained, but that also had a lot of opportunity for action and comedy. Thus, three estranged friends joining together for a summer camp reunion."

Landon mentioned the arduous process of bringing the film to life—both with the script and with the cast.

"I spent four years working on the script and then another year getting cast and financing," she said. "It's all very much a chicken or egg thing—you can't get cast if you don't have financing, but the same is true vice-versa. But because my producers had worked with Diane on several films, we were able to get her to sign on. Once you have the first notable actor, it becomes much easier to get additional attachments. We got Kathy Bates to sign on next, and at that point, the would-be financiers officially greenlit the film."

Once the film was in production, Landon greatly enjoyed working with her stellar cast of actors. She said that collaborating with actors is one of her absolute favorite parts of her job and that having this team of legendary actors was a dream come true. She thrived in her role of working alongside this talented team and guiding everyone in the right direction.

"I generally just look at everyone on set as colleagues, all working towards a common goal," she said. "A lot of my job is figuring out how to approach and communicate with different people, where to push and where to give in, staying calm and confident under pres-

sure, and making sure the talent and crew feels confident in me and my vision so that they can do their jobs. I would say the common thread between almost every actor I've ever worked with is that they all want to be told they're doing a good job. Constantly. And I get that; they're in a vulnerable position, putting themselves in front of the camera to be subjected to endless judgement, day in and day out."

Landon found herself greatly appreciating the talents of the "Summer Camp" cast even during basic scenes.

"There was one moment on set—a simple scene that Kathy, Diane, and Alfre were elevating to such an extent that everyone had tears in their eyes—where I just realized, you have one Oscar-nominated and two Oscar-winning actresses speaking lines you wrote right now. It's sort of surreal when you think about it."

"Summer Camp" will head to the silver screen with a potential release date of summer 2024. Landon will next focus on a few original projects—working to drive her career forward with continued success in the film industry. She additionally hopes to one day fuse her passions of movies and horses together in a future film.

"In my career, my goal is to keep pushing to make bigger films, with a wider reach, and featuring complex female characters," she said. "I'd also love to do something involving horses, especially if it involved Saddlebreds. It would be great if we had our own version

of 'Seabiscuit' or 'National Velvet,' to draw more interest into our corner of the equine world."

Landon's interest in the equine world is now focused on the young horses, as she explained she is passionate about watching youngsters develop. Landon and her mother Dori Rath are the proud owners of two-year-old, Van Halen. They purchased him this winter and anxiously awaited for his show ring debut this season.

"We saw him work in the barn," Rath said. "He'd only been under saddle a few weeks. He wasn't for sale but we begged Flectia Fairey, his breeder and then owner, to let us buy him and she agreed."

A carbon copy of his sire CH It's Aerosmith, Van Halen made a stunning debut at Shelbyville with Sarah McKenna to win the Two-Year-Old Three-Gaited class.

"I really love the process of watching young horses come in from the field, start their training, and over the course of a year or two, undergo a complete transformation and becoming show horses," Landon said. "So I think my goal is to have two or three babies a year and hopefully see them go on to have successful careers with their future owners and if they don't make show horses, then to find loving homes for them."

Castille Landon keeps busy whether in the saddle, watching her show string work, or behind the camera directing a film set. As her film career continues to flourish, her roots remain centered in the Saddlebred industry. She is a dominant force both in the equine community and at work writing and directing.