

TAKE TWO

ROBIN CLOUD HAS BEEN CALLED "A FRESH NEW VOICE IN LGBT CINEMA"

by Refinery29, and the comedian has now written, directed, and starred in her first short film.

Out Again is a touching dark comedy about a lesbian's struggle to introduce her new wife to her mother, who is battling Alzheimer's disease.

The film addresses the universal LGBT experience of coming out, often repeatedly, throughout our lives. Noire spoke with Robin about the inspiration for the film, and her upcoming projects.

WRITER, DIRECTOR,
COMEDIAN ROBIN CLOUD

PHOTO: AMES BECKMAN PHOTOGRAPHY

NOIRE: Tell our readers a little about your background and what made you start writing, producing, and directing films.

CLOUD: I feel like I am one of those people who was an artist from the get go. I started in children's theatre when I was 9 years old I loved performing. After children's theatre, I went on to a performing arts high school where I

about 13 years ago. As a 24-year-old at the time, I can't say that this leap was logical, but I did it!

I had been working at a production company in Washington, D.C. and we were making women's health videos and it was boring. I was a production assistant, which the lowest of the low. I was doing a lot of transcribing which is what you must do when you are mak-

I was going down to visit SCAD (Savannah College of Art and Design) I knew I wanted to get a degree is design or something, I wasn't sure what, but I went there and was walking around and ran into the head of the preservation department. He was a very nice guy who sat down and talked to me and introduced the subject to me which I never really knew existed.

wanted to be freelance, so I could travel. I really wanted to explore my artistic side in a serious way and I haven't looked back.

NOIRE: What fueled your motivation to pursue comedy?

CLOUD: I just felt that being up there on stage making people laugh made the most sense to me. I wanted to have my own voice and at that

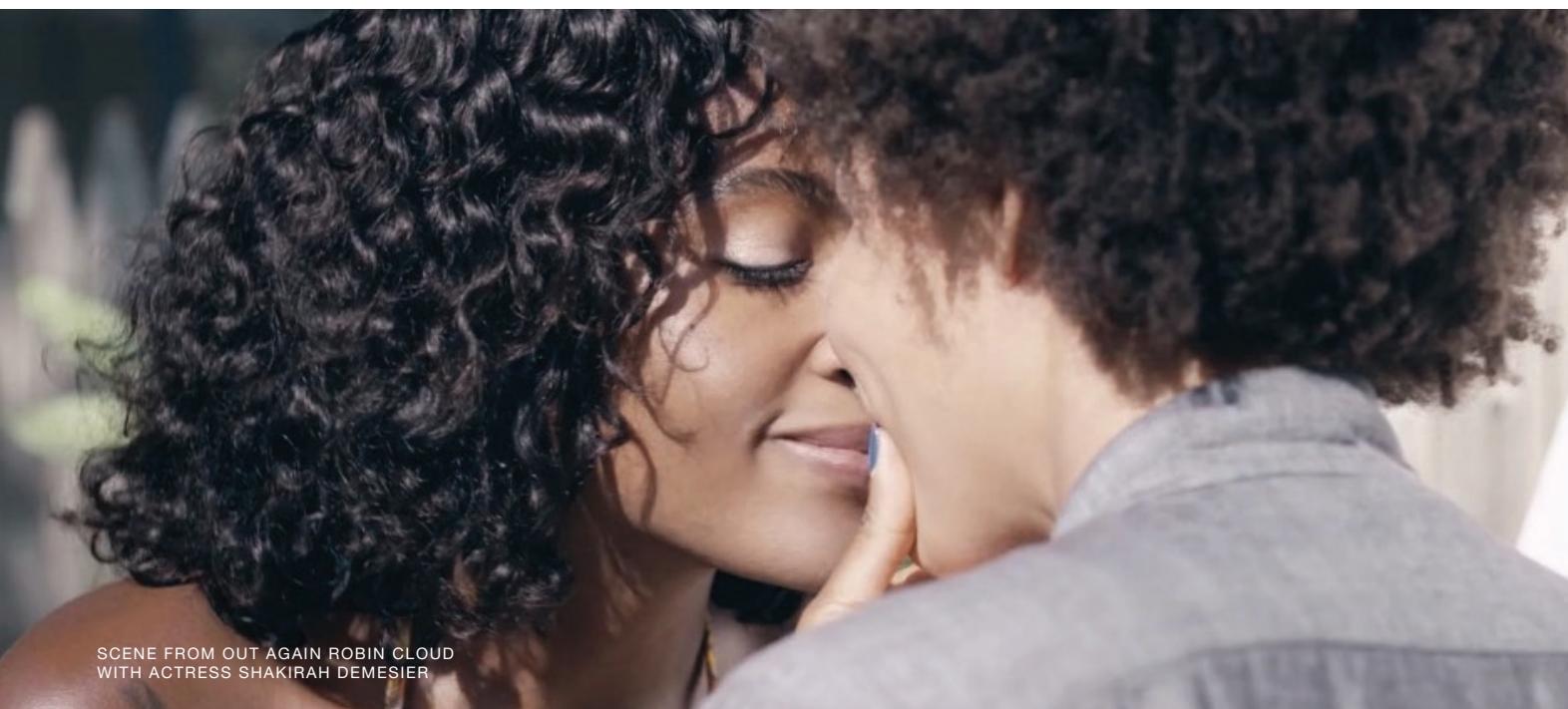
the best thing on the earth! Now people want to hear what I have to say, it's amazing! It only took 13 years, but I stuck it out!

NOIRE: You are right, being bi-sexual or a lesbian is in vogue now and the belief is some people in the industry are trying to use their sexuality – in some cases manufactured sexuality – to gain access to opportunities that call for it.

director. How did that happen?

CLOUD: Well, as I stated before, I was a film major at Howard, so I have always loved film. After doing lots of stand-up, I directed a few web series that were mainly short 2-3-minute comedies.

Then there was a moment where Ava DuVernay was nominated for a Golden Globe for Best Director and I



SCENE FROM OUT AGAIN ROBIN CLOUD WITH ACTRESS SHAKIRAH DEMESIER



SCENE FROM OUT AGAIN ROBIN CLOUD WITH ACTRESSES SHAKIRAH DEMESIER AND MADELINE MCCRAY.

was an acting major. After high school, I went to Howard University where I studied film and I was in the industry for a little bit once I graduated, but then I took a sharp turn and studied historic preservation. I love history and architecture which is another side of my personality which sometimes comes out in my work.

Moving to New York, and as much as I love working in preservation, and I focused mainly on African American history, I started doing stand-up

ing documentaries. You must watch the footage and I had to keep rewinding it, so I would literally spend 8 hours a day, for months, transcribing tapes for this documentary and I wound up getting carpal tunnel syndrome. I was literally in braces and the doctor said I couldn't type for 6 months. After hearing I couldn't type anymore, my boss fired me! I was young and stupid, so I had no idea that it was illegal to do that. Eventually I had to find something else to do.

I liked the fact that it combined so many of my interests. It's architecture, it's working with your hands. It included all the things I liked to do, so I decided to go and pursue that, and I did that for almost 8 years.

While I was doing that, I started doing stand-up and I studied improv. I also started taking writing classes. You can't make money doing stand-up when you are first starting out and you not very good – so you need a day job. Eventually I got to the point where I

time, there were hardly any performers who were out. I got a lot of advice from various people to not be out in my sets. One of my managers at the time thought that it would limit my career. Honestly, I can't talk about what I really want to talk about unless I am openly out. I'm not willing to sacrifice that, and if that means that I'll be slightly less successfully until the world catches up then fine. I think it affected my career then, but now, being a black, out, lesbian is like

What do you think of this phenomenon?

CLOUD: I can't be the sexuality police. If someone says that they identify as queer, I would be like, okay, great! I can't really be like, well, how queer are you? How many women have you slept with? There is no barometer for that! I just try to embrace everyone who is willing to be out and be on the team. We always need more players.

NOIRE: Talk about how you transitioned from stand-up to being a film

remember her being the first African American woman to ever be nominated and I distinctly remember saying, "I want to do that!" I wanted to be a trailblazer on that level. That's when I started thinking seriously about returning to film and television and taking *Out Again* – which was originally written as a one-act play, and turning it in to a short film.

NOIRE: Talk a little about *Out Again*. Is it true that this was something that happened in your life?



“To me, the film is about examining life transitions for all the characters. All four of them were going through a transition of some sort that were unique to their characters.”

CLOUD: Well, it wasn't an actual experience. My grandmother did have dementia and I would call her once a week and we would have the same conversation repeatedly for about 15 minutes. That inspired me to think about what if she forgot I was gay and I had to come out again and again every time I talked to her. That would be terrible.

So, the actual moment didn't happen, but it was certainly inspired by my conversations with her in dealing with her dementia.

NOIRE: You screen *Out Again* at the Urbanworld Film Festival. Talk about the whole experience of shopping a film through the festival circuit. What was that like for you?

CLOUD: I got lucky. I was introduced to my producer Jessica Devaney through a mutual friend and she submitted the film to Refinery 29 be-

cause she knew they were doing a series called The Shadowbox Anthology which highlighted 12 up and coming female directors and executive producing their films.

So, she submitted it to them and they accepted *Out Again* as one of their 12 projects. That was amazing for someone like me who was a first-time filmmaker to getting launched with 1.42 million views and all that craziness.

As a filmmaker, part of making and promoting a film is submitting it to different festivals. Generally, you can apply online now, which is great and you either get accepted or you don't. It's straight-forward.

I hadn't been to Urbanworld before, and it was one of the festivals that I knew I really wanted to attend because of the previous films that they

have supported, it's in New York City, and your screening at the AMC on 42nd Street which is great. I just really wanted to become a part of the community that Urbanworld supports. The alumni of this festival are just incredible. Because of all of this, I was extremely honored to be a part of this year's festival.

This festival season was great for me. I was at the Provincetown film festival which was amazing. I was at the Martha's Vineyard African American Film Festival, I was Out Fest in Los Angeles, I had a wonderful festival season.

NOIRE: There are so many dynamics going on with the film. What is it really about what do you want the audience to take away from it?

CLOUD: My goal as an artist is to always try to create connections be-

tween people. I am really into examining the human condition in all shapes and forms. Whether it involves sexuality, racism, ageism, or family dynamics. Those are the things that are very important to me and the things that I tend to write about.

With this film, although people think it's about coming out, it's not about the initial coming out process. I wanted to show a different take on the concept of coming out because a lot of LGBT films are about that.

I also wanted to explore that phase beyond being a teenager or a young adult and look at what it means to be in your 30's and have to deal with an aging parent and explore the shift in that relationship. I wanted to highlight what that means and what that feels like.

I want people to think about

performance and people would just go on for about an hour and a half talking about it and sharing their experiences. That really was an indicator that this was a subject that was very moving to people of all ages.

I often receive random emails from people who thank me for making the film and sharing their experiences and telling me how they appreciate my comedic approach to a difficult subject.

It has also been able to cross demographics because it's been able to go on the African American circuit, the LGBTQ circuit, and that's been great because there is intersectionality there which is good for me and my community that I care deeply about and what to be a part of. It makes me happy to know that they are getting it and I'm connecting the dots for them.

their own lives and the transitions that they might be going through. To me, the film is about examining life transitions for all the characters. All four of them were going through a transition of some sort that were unique to their characters.

NOIRE: What has been the response to the film and are there expansion plans to make it into a full-length feature film?

CLOUD: The response has been great. One reason why I decided to turn it into a film from the one-act play was because of the response I got when I did talk-backs after the

NOIRE: What's on the horizon for you?

CLOUD: In 2016, I created a company called Cloud Creative Media, so that the umbrella company for all my creative projects. I want to turn *Out Again* into a scripted series, so I am working on that now and my management team and I will be pitching that very soon.

I am also in the development phase of a docuseries that takes a more serious turn about family members of mine who have been passing for white unbeknownst to them. So, it's about me meeting them, and bringing the black and white sides of my family back together.

I also just wrote a new short that I will hopefully be shooting this spring about a young woman who is going through a self-actualization phase. She is trying to find her path. It's a dark comedy called *Two Dollars*. It's a story about a woman who works at a property management office doing a job that she hates, and she refuses to put \$2.00 into the daily office lotto pool and her life unravels because of that decision. I am praying that we get it shot and edited in time to put it on the festival circuit in the summer.

I am also looking for writing, directing, and producing jobs as well. I am moving to Los Angeles in January and I am looking to take on cool projects. I would love to work with Ava DuVernay and be on her roster of female directors working on *Queen Sugar*. I would love that!