



needle

it's her turn

*First Love*



# logline:

"How do we embrace our legacy when it's rife with conflict?"

Maya Benson aspires to win a DJ competition to escape her troubled home, but overcoming the legacy of her father's addiction proves the greater challenge.





# project summary:

At the crossroads of celebration and tragedy, Maya's high school diploma is pending, and her father's exceptional downfall as a one-hit wonder breeds fear and desperation. A prodigy from his past returns and shows Maya the tricks of the DJ trade, but she needs her father to be healthy and invested so she can truly thrive out in the world.







'Needle' questions whether or not we can choose what we inherit from our parents - in Maya's case, her father's musical talent or his habit of losing and addiction. Maya doesn't know she has a choice until an outsider comes to show her another way. Her struggle is between loyalty to her father and resilience to overcome what's negative about his influence, and ultimately to prove she is her own hero.







# casting/performance



## maya

The film celebrates new, young talent for the role of MAYA. She will have fire onscreen similar to Michelle Rodriguez in 'Girlfight' and the ability to command a crowd as an artist and entertainer like Eminem in '8 Mile'. Performers like Jean Grae and Miss Prissy, from 'Rize', are the real life role models - young, talented African-American women who have something to fight for and who use their art to make that statement. Her eyes and gestures must communicate the struggle between wanting to excel and the fear of failure, commanding the attention of the camera even in the quietest moments.





# nate

Casting established actors and musicians in the roles of the adults will bring weight and depth to the overall story.

Maya's father, NATE, is a romantic hero, talented and flawed, an inspiration and a disappointment. He's the king of his corner with the gift of storytelling. Fifteen years earlier, he recorded a platinum soul/R&B album, made hundreds of thousands of dollars, and out of fear and insecurity, lost it all – including his wife – to a newfound heroin addiction. The actor who plays Nate will have incredible musical talent and will be able to reveal the duality of hope and fear, beauty and ugliness.







## julius

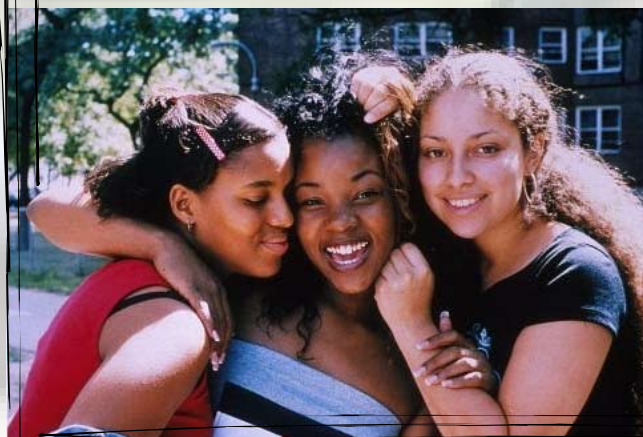
JULIUS is now a famous DJ and music producer who came up under Nate. He was by his side when he broke and when he fell, but had to cut himself loose when he felt the undertow of his mentor's self-inflicted demise. In the position to create an opportunity for someone like himself, he returns to Baltimore to find the next great talent. Maya becomes his project and his mirror, as he wants to save her from Nate's influence.







MS. BAXTER, the passionate veteran homeroom teacher, is another mentor figure for Maya. She's been trying to help her with school and preparing for college, but is so overwhelmed by the large number of students that she loses the thread. When Maya doesn't graduate, Ms. Baxter steps out of the classroom to pull her back up.



The girls in Maya's posse – KALIKA, SHAKWON, and LATITIA – each has her own dream. Kalika wants to go to Harvard business, and Shakwon and Latitia want to accompany Maya to the top. As these dreams become real decisions, the girls learn to grow up while growing apart and still keep that electricity of great friendship.





# the music

Also a character.

The film lends itself to a great original soundtrack based on the montage-style music Maya creates and the hip-hop scratch and sampled music played at the underground parties.



Maya embarks on a music genre journey with "The Angels" she works with at the record warehouse, taking her to heavy metal clubs, punk rock venues, and gospel choir rehearsals. This music begins to work in to her own.



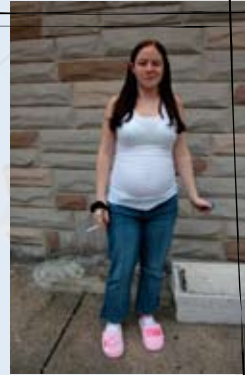


# mise en scene/ location:



Baltimore is a rich background for a movie like 'Needle'. Much of the story comes from growing up and going to high school there. The story was written for the world that already exists, so the art direction would be about finding those visual and aesthetic opportunities and tailoring them for the shoot.

This story lives in Baltimore.







# film style

The film look should be fluid and immersed in the world of the characters and locations. No locked off cameras or large, overly rehearsed dance scenes, this film is personal and should have the pace of a rhythmic journey.

The creative approach leans toward the spontaneity in David LaChapelle's 'Rize' or Doug Pray's 'Scratch' together with dramatic elements of HBO's 'The Wire' and 'The Corner'. The film will have an artful look, with strong photographic compositions, while keeping a loose, fluid quality of movement.

References next page...



# clips

'The Corner'. HBO/Charles S. Dutton



[click to view](#)

'Rize'. David LaChapelle



[click to view](#)

'BBC Radio 1/promo'. Alex Barber DP



[click to view](#)

'Scratch'. Doug Pray



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## related articles:



DJ Beverly Bond

Spin: 'Booty and the Beat. Dance The Pain Away' (2005)



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DJ Samantha Ronson

Scratch: 'We Used To Love Her' (2006)



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NYTimes: 'Setting the Beat, And the Style' (2007)

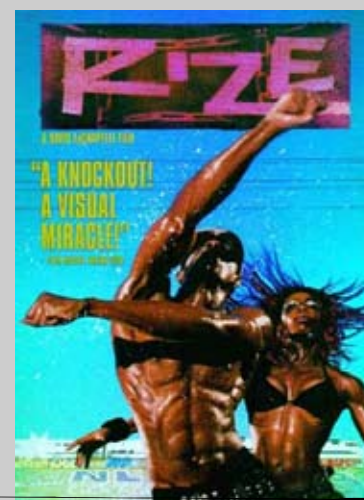
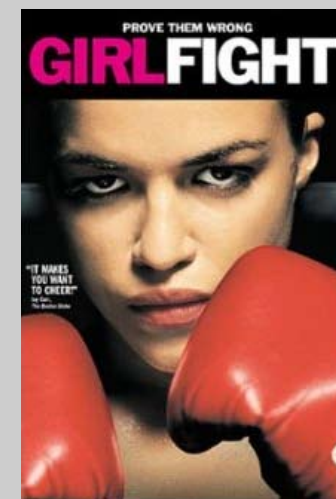


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# production scale/scope

An urban musical drama with the right talent behind and in front of the camera, the film can be shot within a low budget framework of \$2.5 - \$6M. The film fits into the commercial niche of dance and music movies ('Step Up', 'How She Move', 'Stomp the Yard', 'You Got Served', etc), so it's guaranteed a certain return in theatre, cable, and DVD sales and rentals. With the care and attention paid towards the story and performances, the film can stand in the ranks dramatically with others like 'Girlfight', 'Hysterical Blindness', 'Requiem for a Dream', '8 Mile' and 'Hustle and Flow'.







# artistic statement

'Needle' explores father-daughter relationships, friends choosing different paths, and the dilemma of out-succeeding our parents and mentors. Maya's process of gathering influences outside of her immediate world, as well as being resourceful and making use of whatever technology she has access to, should be an inspiration in creativity. These complex performances and conflicted characters elevate 'Needle' out of the expected teen musical genre, while still engaging the audience with a great original soundtrack and intense dance sequences.



## writer/director bio:

Michelle Cutler took the path from Baltimore to Los Angeles via Berlin and New York. With an MFA in film from NYU, she was an IFP/Project Involve Honoree in the narrative division. She is a writer for hire for commercial directors and has directed several short films and New York theatre productions. She's recently acquired rights to adapt an award-winning short story into film, and has signed on to co-write a studio feature with a DGA-award winning director. 'Needle' will be her first feature directing project.

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