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With 'Second Act,' Jennifer Lopez makes her own opportunity

Jennifer Lopez learned a long time ago that in the entertainment business you can't just sit around waiting for opportunities, you have to make them for yourself. It's the simple reason "Second Act," her first film in three years and her long-awaited return to the glossy, modern-day fairy tale, exists. "I'm quite particular," Lopez said on a recent afternoon in Los Angeles. "I've been offered a couple of movies over the past couple of years but unless it's the right thing and I get the right types of opportunities, I'd rather create them. That's mine and Elaine's mantra. We don't force things, but we don't wait around either ... If no one is giving us the stories that we want to tell, then we'll create them ourselves."

Elaine is Elaine Goldsmith-Thomas, Lopez's longtime friend and producing partner who've worked together on projects like "The Boy Next Door" and "Shades of Blue." "Second Act," which hits theaters nationwide Friday, was her idea. She thought that Lopez would be the right woman to play the 40-year-old big box store worker with business savvy but no degree who gets a chance to prove herself to Madison Avenue's elite. A little bit "Working Girl," a little bit "It's a Wonderful Life," it was right up Lopez's alley.

"We're stuck on these movies because we know, we grew up on them and we know. They're necessary. People need inspiration. They need to believe in a fairy tale," Lopez said. "I think that is the evolution of the romantic comedy. It's not so much about falling in love with Prince Charming, it's about falling in love with yourself and your life and realizing that you have to be the love of your life." Lopez, 49, said she even cried describing the story in a pitch meeting to STXfilms Chairman Adam Fogelson ("Our great champion," she said), who agreed on the spot to make the movie.

"(He) believes in these types of movies and believes in women producers," she said. They signed on a director, Peter Segal ("50 First Dates"), carved out some time in Lopez's busy schedule ("I literally think she's the busiest person on the planet earth," Segal laughed) and got to filming in New York City, which proved to be its own kind of challenge. "It was crazy shooting in New York with her," Segal said. "I remember one scene we're in Central Park, going down the mall, the promenade with her, you know the same one of 'Kramer vs Kramer' and 'When Harry Met Sally' and there are all the vendors who are selling caricatures, and their sketches are like Michael Jackson and Barack Obama and Jennifer Lopez! It's like, 'Hey can we turn those around?' She's everywhere."

Then there were the ever present looky-loos and paparazzi, some of whom they had to digitally erase from shots in post-production. It's just part of doing business with Lopez, an industry unto herself. She knows she is tough to pin down, but always makes sure to give her all when she's there.

Biggest contracts

"Everyone who gets in business with me has to bear with me a little bit because I do so much and I always want to be great when I'm in front of you," she said. "Once you get in the rhythm of that, you're like, ok she's going to show up. It may take her a minute for me to get her but when I get her, she's going to be 100." She hopes that people find inspiration and hope in "Second Act." One person

who already found himself quite emotional about the film is Lopez's boyfriend Alex Rodriguez, who related to being self-conscious about not having a college degree.

"He didn't get to go to college because he went into the big leagues at 18-years-old and he always missed that," Lopez said. "When he saw it he was like 'I felt inadequate because of that.' He's one of the greatest baseball players of all time who has made some of the biggest contracts, but it's not about that, you can feel inadequate being measured up to others because of their privilege and intelligence." Lopez herself only attended one year of college, but for her, that was a choice that was necessary to jump-start her performing career. Still, she remembers feeling self-conscious and not worthy of some of her successes early on, like becoming the first Latin actress to get \$1 million for a role ("Selena").



In this image released by STXfilms, Leah Remini, left, and Jennifer Lopez appear in a scene from "Second Act." — AP photos

"I probably didn't realize how important it was. I was so young at the time. And there was a lot of to-do made about that," Lopez said. "Back then you were kind of ashamed like maybe I didn't deserve this. You come from a culture where you don't ask for anything. But now I realize that it was important because our community needed that boost to say, 'Yes we are just as valuable as any other actor playing leading role in Hollywood in a big film.'" Lopez doesn't like the word "reinvention" - it implies that you have to be something different than you are - but rather she prefers "evolution." And she believes change is happening in the entertainment film industry because women are forcing it to.

"It takes time for us to believe in ourselves. I didn't believe it back then and it happened to me," she added. "Now I'm at a point in my life where I think yes, I do have worth and value and I should be compensated in this way or that way and I do deserve to have a good life and I do deserve to have love... We all are our own activists, we all are our own change, we all are our own vessel to have the life that we deserve but we have to believe that we deserve it." — AP

Crackdown on rappers 'pointless', Putin says

Russian President Vladimir Putin yesterday said he does not support concert bans and arrests of musicians, in response to a continuing crackdown on rap stars popular with Russian youth. Putin said he is not against rappers and even had a rapper on his campaign once who was covered with tattoos. "About detention of these rappers, I agree with you. That's just pointless... there is nothing good in that," Putin told an annual end-of-year press conference. "We can't just jail, ban and punish, that's wrong," Putin said. Last month popular rapper Husky was jailed after authorities dis-

rupted his concert in southern Russia. Other performers have reported concert cancellations and blockages of online videos. Some things should be off limits, like "propaganda" of drugs or suicide, according to Putin. But, he said rather than heavy-handed banning, more delicate methods should be employed to "convince (youth) of the greater attractiveness of other values".

On Saturday, Putin explained at a discussion with culture advisors that the foundation of rap consists of "sex, drugs, and protest against everything", three things of which he finds drugs the most worrying. He

hinted that some rappers actually benefit from concert cancellations. "Some artists will now be lining up to have their concert banned and then get the so-called hype," he said. In an indication of what sort of role models he suggests for modern youngsters, Putin said yesterday that whenever he is asked, he thinks of a group of 96 youth that joined the Red Army during World War II; only six of them survived. "Those are heroes, that's youth," Putin said. — AFP



Rapper Husky