

Elaine Del Valle

Writer, Actor, Director, Casting Director, Powerhouse

By Christine Steele

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Photo By Zalo Castillo

Elaine Del Valle is a powerhouse. The writer, actor, director, and casting director has so much going on these days, it's hard to keep track.

Del Valle the actor just had a guest star recurring role in the ABC hit drama series *Queens*, which premiered in October. She spent six weeks in Atlanta, shooting episodes in which she plays a mysterious beautiful Latina stranger who first appears in episode five. (No spoilers!)

For Del Valle the writer, a one-hour original drama she wrote called *The System*, about a compassionate but jaded social worker who navigates the same broken New

York City system she grew up in, is in development with Sutton Street Productions.

And Del Valle the casting director is currently head of casting for *Alma's Way*, a new animated series from Fred Rogers Productions, launched in October on PBS Kids. The show features a Puerto Rican family from the Bronx and their multicultural neighborhood.

But most recently, Del Valle wrapped directing the first act of the screenplay adaptation of her highly lauded, one-woman play *Brownsville Bred*.

But it wasn't always this way for the multi-talented Brooklyn-born Puerto Rican. She's had to forge her own way, creating opportunities for herself, and carving out a path in the entertainment industry.

Del Valle has been acting regularly since her early 20s, with roles in films and television and steady commercial work, particularly Spanish language—everything from Easy Off Oven Cleaner to the sexy girl next to John Leguizamo in the Budweiser commercial.

"I was this quintessential Latina face," she says. "I studied acting at Carnegie Hall under a legendary acting teacher (Wynn Handman), but what I was finding is that I wasn't getting the opportunity to play great parts because there just weren't any... great parts for Latinos out there. That prompted me to really want to make the change. I began a writer's group, and I ended up writing what would become an award-winning one-woman

off-Broadway show—and what I wrote about was what I know—which is my true coming-of-age story in Brownsville, Brooklyn, New York, where I grew up in the welfare projects during the height of the crack and crime epidemics. I just felt like I had a great story to tell about people who weren't authentically represented."

Del Valle took the play to festivals, underground artist stages in Manhattan, and then regional theaters, performing it widely for sold out houses and rave reviews. It landed off-Broadway and then was selected to be performed as part of New York City Theater in the Park. While performing, Del Valle got the attention of people in the entertainment industry who began to champion her work. A publisher was interested in turning her one-woman show into a young adult novel but when she sent sample chapters, the publisher said it was too dark.

But where she couldn't find opportunities, Del Valle created them. "I had to write my own play and write my own stories, because people aren't used to hearing them."

In addition to opening the door to more diverse acting roles, the success of *Brownsville Bred* spurred Del Valle to write and produce more stories. Her next, *Reasons Y I'm Single*, would launch her into the world of directing and producing comedy web series. With her production of *Gran'pa Knows Best*, Del Valle became the first person to ever license an interstitial web series to HBO.

"I fell in love with creating content and directing," Del Valle says. "I found that it was the only place that I could wholly express my vision."

Her next two short films, *Me 3.769* and *Princess Cut*, were both licensed by the HBO network. And now, with seed money from WarnerMedia OneFifty, a grant from the Sundance institute, and money she raised, Del Valle has just finished directing the first act of her screenplay adaptation of her play *Brownsville Bred*, with plans to launch it on the festival circuit under the "pilot" category.

Things have come full circle.

"It wasn't until my play that I felt the legit space was letting me in," she says, speaking of the world of film and television. "It wasn't until I took control of my own career by writing my autobiographical story as a stage play that I understood the power that I had to make my career what I wanted it to be. I understood the power of the pen and the thirst of Latino audiences for real Latino stories. Once I got to understand that I was so impassioned."

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