



Nicole Oliver (above), Michelle Lovratta (above right), and Ammon Buchbinder (right) are York stand-outs at the Toronto International Film Festival

NICOLE OLIVER

Picture yourself at 16. Ballet dancing is your all-consuming love. You're whole life is ahead of you; you can't be stopped. It doesn't get any better than this. KaBam! Your hopes and dreams of being the next Karen Kain blow up with your injured left knee. All hope seems lost. Then a saviour appears in the form of the high school play. "Audition," your friends say. "It will be fun." You land the lead role and life begins anew.

This is life today for Nicole Oliver. After landing the role of Sandy in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* for her high school, Lisgar Collegiate Institute in Ottawa, Oliver found herself dreaming of life under the lights. "I was bitten by the (acting) bug," she says.

With unconditional support from her parents, Oliver found herself auditioning and landing roles in professional theatre. After graduating high school she left her hometown of Ottawa behind for the professional and educational opportunities in Toronto. "Education is important to me," she says. "And it is important to my parents. (By attending York's theatre program) I had the best of both worlds."

She graduated from York in 1991 with an Honours Bachelor of Fine Arts in performance. It didn't matter to her what medium she worked in as long as she was performing. "I just wanted to act," she says.

Within 10 months of graduating she found her way as a professional actress, landing roles in musical theatre and children's shows. She found an agent, and most importantly to her, moved out on her own. "That was a big step," she says. "Becoming an adult."

As a student at York, Oliver was known to be talented and willing risk-taker. "She had a very good stage presence," says Phil Silver, dean of Fine Arts. "She was very

promising and very brave."

Silver is quick to point out that Oliver was only one of a group of talented students in her class, but adds many obstacles can stand in the way of even the most talented student. Fortunately for Oliver, she was able to overcome the hiccups along the way, he says.

Her perseverance and talent paid off when she landed recurring roles on *Kung Fu: The Legend Continues* and *FX The Series*.

In the fall of last year, she moved to the west coast and now splits her time between Toronto and Vancouver. It was in B.C. where she auditioned for and filmed the role of Karis in *The Falling*, her first feature. "It was exciting to be doing an independent film," she says. "I originally couldn't audition for it because I was contracted out on another project. But that fell through and here I am."

The Falling, one of the Perspective Canada films at this year's Toronto International Film Festival, explores perceptions of reality, memory, truth, lies, and justice. Oliver liked the film because it allowed her to grow as an actress and try things she had never done before.

"The film is told in three different perspectives," she says. "It's not often you get to opportunity to play both sides of the coin."

Oliver hopes exposure in the festival might help her career. "It certainly couldn't hurt," she says. "Lots more people will see me on film so maybe I'll be able to knock on a few more doors than yesterday." She is hoping to try her hand one day at producing and directing.

While Oliver is willing to take any opportunity offered, she prefers the slower pace of film shoots over the hectic daily grind of episodic television. And although the commercialism and big bucks of Hollywood are tempting, Canada remains her top choice of settings. "Of course I want to work in my own country," she says. "There are so many opportunities in Canada if you've got a story to tell."

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Feature

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