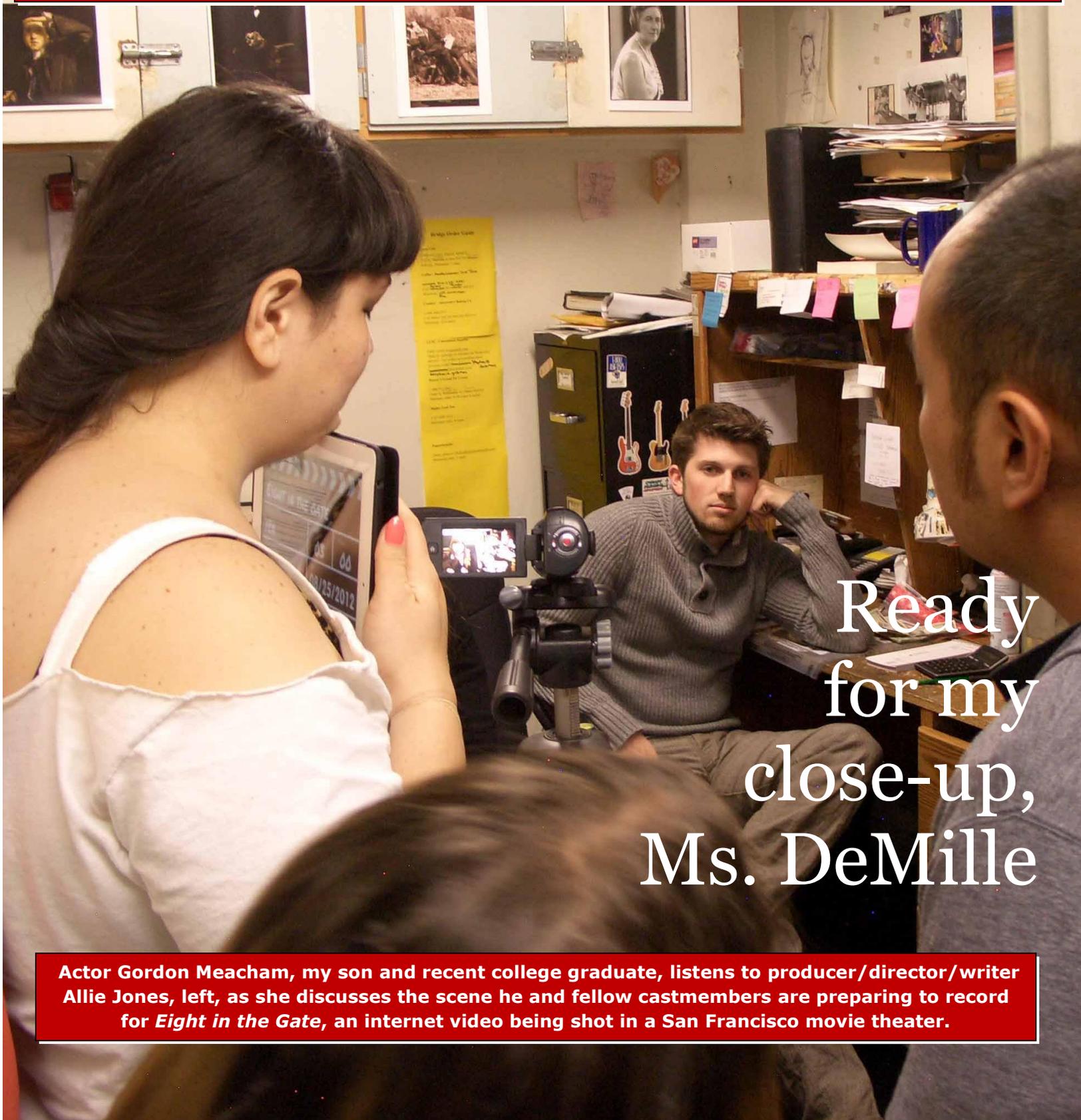


# SCREEN GEMS

August 24-25, 2012

San Francisco, California



Ready  
for my  
close-up,  
Ms. DeMille

**Actor Gordon Meacham, my son and recent college graduate, listens to producer/director/writer Allie Jones, left, as she discusses the scene he and fellow castmembers are preparing to record for *Eight in the Gate*, an internet video being shot in a San Francisco movie theater.**

# Ready for my close-up, Ms. DeMille

The title of the internet video *Eight in the Gate*, now in production, comes from the instructions given to a projectionist-trainee in the comedy about young people who work together at a San Francisco movie theater.

When threading film into the projector, the frame with the countdown numeral "8" is centered in the aperture, or film gate, so that the on-screen action is synchronized when switching projectors at the end of each movie reel.

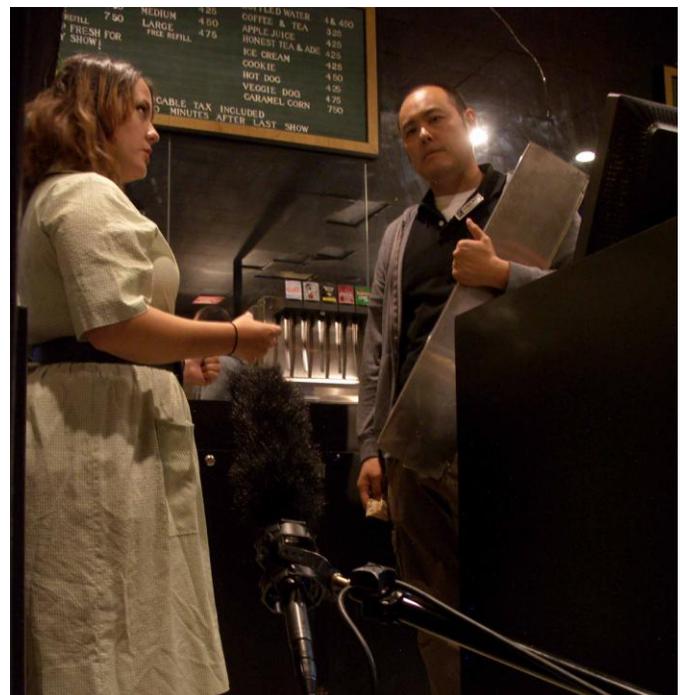
The eight-member cast, including my new college grad son Gordon (he plays James, who hopes to be promoted to assistant theater manager) are starting out in the movie business by putting sweat equity into a non-paying project they hope will expose their talent in ways that pay off down the road. They are learning moviemaking by making a video about the movie business.

That goes for everyone in the project, beginning with Allie Jones, who has been writing and revising *Eight in the Gate* for four years, in the process turning what began as a movie script into a series of half-hour stories. Her paid job is working for the movie chain that owns San Francisco's Bridge Theatre, where the cast and crew meet each Friday to begin their work.

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***Eight in the Gate's* iPad slate for the popcorn scene below**



**Nadia (Bruna Palmeira) tells Tobias (Jeff Sun) that she plans to play matchmaker for two of their co-workers at the theater.**



**Clockwise from bottom left: Gordon, Allie, Jeff and Bruna discuss a scene before going downstairs to shoot.**

## Ready for my close-up, Ms. DeMille

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At 10 p.m., while the audience for the Bridge's last showing of the evening is just getting to the plot twist of this week's indie film, the *Eight in the Gate* actors called for this week's scenes gather upstairs in a small storeroom next to the projection booth. There they review the half-dozen or so script pages that are the night's work, and rehearse and discuss with Allie the how she wants various aspects of the scenes played.

When the customers downstairs file out after their movie, *Eight in the Gate's* volunteer crew arrives, and Allie and the cast move downstairs to block out where each person will stand and how he or she

will move during the night's scenes. This night's two scenes were shot behind the popcorn stand and in the tiny theater office.

Actual shooting begins sometime after midnight with the digital camera Allie's mother gave her for Christmas. That camera and her laptop – in which the sound is recorded, to which the video is downloaded and on which everything is edited – are what make this sort of movie-making possible.

As in the case of self-publishing, which I have some experience with, technology has enabled thousands of writers,

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# Ready for my close-up, Ms. DeMille

– *Continued*

directors, actors and others aiming for show biz careers to create and exhibit work without the financing a Hollywood production requires or depending on the minuscule number of opportunities Hollywood provides.

*Eight in the Gate's* ultimate destination is to be uploaded to the web, where everyone involved hopes it will find an audience among the growing number of internet television series like *Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog*, *I Kissed A Vampire* or *Seth MacFarlane's Cavalcade of Cartoon Comedy*.

These productions compete for the young audiences who stream their entertainment over high-speed internet connections and smart phones. Perhaps it will even win a Streamy Award (*Between Two Ferns with Zach Galifianakis* won a Streamy two years ago for Best Comedy Web Series).

By 5 or 6 a.m., another few minutes of the show will be in the can so that Allie can spend the next week editing.

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**Having only one camera multiplies the number of takes necessary to shoot a scene. These pictures are from what will be the final scene of *Eight in the Gate's* first episode, which takes place in the tiny theater office. It is shot first with the camera in the office doorway showing Liz, theater manager played by Michelle Juola, and Gordon's character inside talking with off-camera co-workers Nadia and Tobias. Then the camera is repositioned and turned to face the doorway and the entire scene is reshot. During the week between shootings, Allie will edit the best takes from each view into one coherent scene so that the audience will see everyone in the conversation.**

# Bridge Theatre and WWII

The Bridge Theatre was built in 1939 on Geary Street in San Francisco's Richmond District a couple of miles from the Golden Gate Bridge, which inspired its name.

Eleanor Zerga owned the Bridge back then and employed two neighborhood boys, Rico Lunardi and Larry McGrath.



After they were drafted in 1944, Eleanor began a correspondence with both of them that is preserved in an exhibit in the theater lobby.

Rico wrote back in April from his troop ship headed for Europe: "I left New York," he wrote in pencil. "And got to see Miss Liberty. I hope to see her [again] soon. ... Have you heard anything about McGrath? Tell him I said hello."

In July, just a month after D Day, Eleanor and her husband Attilio mailed a typewritten letter to Rico to say they had sent him a package a few days earlier containing candy from the theater and some handkerchiefs. The letter was returned unopened. Rico had been killed in action in Normandy.

McGrath's letter to Eleanor was mailed in August from where he was preparing to ship out. "I thought I'd drop you a line to let you know I heard the sad news about Rico," it said. "I couldn't believe such news. How is his mother and sisters taking it. I can imagine it's a pretty rough ordeal to go through. ... I'm sorry folks, I just can't seem to write anymore, it seems so wrong that a swell pal like Moose had to leave us."

There are no more letters to explain what happened next. Just a picture of Larry McGrath and a notation that he, too, was killed in action later that year.

## Ready for my close-up, Ms. DeMille

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For Gordon, it's time to grab the clothes he will need for the all-day modeling gig – which pays actual money – at 8 a.m. in Redwood City. An employment staffing firm needs images for its website of young people who can appear to be young high-tech workers or have a "European" look. Because he must be clean-shaven for this role, he'll have to re-grow his beard for *Eight in the Gate* next week.

At 6 p.m., or as soon as he can get there, Gordon's due in Berkeley to play a unpaid scene in a video being shot by a friend of a friend from his drama days at UC Davis. It has a flashback for a young actor to portray the geezer star in his youth.

Sunday? Sleep.

In another week, the two months of shooting required for one half-hour *Eight in the Gate* episode will be finished, and then the final product will be edited and uploaded. Then Emily – who worked one night on the lighting crew – and I can finally see the story.

# Lighting Miss Nadia

One of the projects for this evening of shooting was to get some video of Bruna, who plays Nadia, that establishes something about her character. The solution was to put a red light behind her that would be blocked from camera view but that would give a halo effect to her auburn hair ...



... Then, as Jeff helps with the foreground lighting and a volunteer waves a movie poster to create a breeze, Bruna spins and preens herself into a sexpot.