

ALUM
PROFILE

COM Alums Launch Film Studio

Auspicious Phoenix Productions has made eight films since 2015

By Amy Laskowski

Independent filmmakers face the same hurdles that all directors do—casting, location scouting, and shooting schedules, to name a few. But without a studio to underwrite the costs, they also have to figure out how to finance their films.

One group of alum filmmakers, tired of launching Kickstarter campaigns to fund their work, think they've found a solution to the problem: forming their own movie studio.

"We didn't want to do hat-in-hand fundraising anymore; we wanted to create a framework to fund our film projects on a repeatable basis," says Joseph Dwyer (COM'14), cofounder and co-owner of Auspicious Phoenix Productions, which he and former classmates Oleg Bolotov (COM'14) and Jim DanDee (COM'13) started in 2015. "We saw too many filmmakers put all of their eggs in one basket. They'll attract a lot of attention to do one film and then by the next one, it's hard to go back and ask people for more money."

The Somerville-based company specializes in art, documentary, and narrative films, and rents out its Union Square studio for commercial shoots, photography, and use by other filmmakers. And while the company lost upwards of \$16,000 their first year, DanDee says, they have since turned the ship around. "In 2017, we made over \$40,000, and in 2018, we are on pace to

hopefully break \$100,000," he says.

"That's all bootstrapping, no loans," Dwyer says. "Working with a small business association mentor, we set up a bunch of different revenue streams in terms of using our space as a studio, taking the films that are made in the studio, and exhibiting them to make money. We want to stabilize and diversify our company."

The company has made eight films so far, all funded and produced under the Auspicious Phoenix umbrella. They include five original short works the team took on the road for three weeks in August 2017: *Blood Highway*, directed by Dwyer, a throwback to '70s grindhouse cinema; *Quietus*, directed by Joy Song (COM'15), a story about rebirth; *Ladia*, directed by Álvaro Congosto (COM'12), about a female athlete; *Craniac!*, directed by Paul Villanova (COM'13), about a young filmmaker who discovers a Martian living in his brain; and *The Literal Lens*, directed by

DanDee, a narrative documentary about a journey in Japan. The tour, which stopped in New York City, Houston, Los Angeles, and other cities, was so successful the team plans to repeat it in 2019. A composer is working on a piece of music, and the filmmakers will be challenged to make separate short films to accompany it, according to DanDee.

This approach might be more difficult to pull off if Auspicious Phoenix Productions had to answer to a larger outside presence, like a financier or an executive producer, Dwyer says.

Three more films are in the works. One of them, DanDee's feature-length, fixed-perspective thriller, *The Experiment*, about the rapid psychological decline of a medical test subject, is in preproduction. And a narrative documentary feature, directed by Song, is seeking distribution.

"We're excited for the next few years," Dwyer says. "The landscape is changing, and we consider ourselves to be at the forefront of that."

ONLINE:
Watch
trailers
for five
Auspicious
Phoenix
films at
[bu.edu/
bostonia](http://bu.edu/bostonia).



Auspicious Phoenix cofounders Oleg Bolotov (COM'14) (from left), Jim DanDee (COM'13), and Joseph Dwyer (COM'14) on the set of Dwyer's film *Blood Highway*.