

At Home With Horror

By Iris Wiener

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Kevin Arbouet in Bayside, Queens in 2018. *Photo credit: Erik Arbouet*

Hempstead-raised Kevin Arbouet Gets back to his roots after stops at the Super Bowl and TV's 'Match Game'

Filmmaker Kevin Arbouet returns to his Long Island roots this summer with “The Last Xmas,” a horror film starring Wyandanch rapper Rakim (who will also be composing the score and soundtrack). It marks the fourth film for Arbouet, 41, whom eagle-eyed game show viewers may recognize from a September episode of “Match Game,” where, as a contestant, he won \$2,000 and rified with host Alec Baldwin and actor Oliver Hudson.

Arbouet grew up in Hempstead making amateur movies with his older brother, Michael, so it comes as no surprise that both developed a passion for film. Michael majored in film at C.W. Post, while Kevin took a different route. At 23 he was named vice president of Academy Award-nominated producer Lee Daniels’ company. Arbouet followed that by directing a Super Bowl commercial in 2016 for Icelandic Glacial water and a number of his own films that were partially shot in Mineola, Glen Cove and Huntington, among other Long Island towns.

Arbouet recently spoke with Long Island Living about his childhood in Hempstead, his extensive career as a writer, producer and director, and his upcoming film shoot.

Long Island Living: This summer you will be directing “The Last Xmas,” a movie that you also wrote. Tell us about the film and the decision to hire Rakim, a Long Island Music Hall of Famer, to star in it and create the original soundtrack and score.

Kevin Arbouet: It's a horror movie that takes place in 1986 in the Bronx on Christmas Eve. Underworld demons seize an abandoned building filled with drugs and arms; they're trying to kill a 14-year-old boy who is supposed to be the second coming of Christ. I want original music that sounds true to the '80s, and I want to make a new Christmas ballad. The talent that Rakim is going to be able to get on the soundtrack will be phenomenal.

LIL: *"I Got a Crush on Obama," a music video that you co-directed with Larry Strong, was released in 2007 on YouTube and became a viral sensation. How did that change your life?*

KA: We had no idea what would become of the video. Every network was talking about and playing it. I couldn't believe "SNL" was doing a parody of something I did and that Jay Leno was mentioning it on "The Tonight Show."

LIL: *"Match Game" marks your third time as a contestant on a game show (after "Let's Ask America" and "Chain Reaction"). How did the ABC show "match" up?*

KA: It was a pretty amazing experience. For a network show, the production of it is shockingly rinky-dink. On the positive side, it was a reaffirmation of Alec Baldwin. He is a comedic writer trapped in an actor. He is so funny and quick, it's shocking that he is also like that on set.

LIL: *How did growing up on Long Island inspire a passion for film?*

KA: Because it is a suburb, that means it's constantly looking for new entertainment. When I was a kid and I would see a film I would be like, "Oh my god I would love to do that." It would have been more realistic to say that I wanted to be an astronaut than to have said I wanted to be a filmmaker.

LIL: *Your brother, Michael, recently shot "They Stole a House," a documentary about the zombie-house issue in New York State, which will be shown in July at the Long Island International Film Expo. Your son, Erik, 19, is a model and actor, and your two young daughters are models as well. Describe your family dynamic.*

KA: It's supportive. As a kid I was inspired by what my teenage brother was doing with his friends. He had an ingenious comedy troupe and went all out with it. He is the person that made me think it was possible to work in this business. My son, Erik, is impossibly good-looking — I am so happy he got none of my DNA! I have always said I hit the lottery when it comes to family.

LIL: *Being that you did not go to film school, how did you learn to direct?*

KA: A lot of it was on-the-job training. The vast majority of crews will be more experienced than the producer and/or director. My biggest rule is: I cannot, under any circumstances, be the smartest person in the room. I believe this to be true with business and romantic relationships.

LIL: *Scenes from 2007's "Serial," which you directed and wrote, were shot in Glen Cove, Westbury and East Meadow, and 2009's "Last Day of Summer," which you produced, was shot in Westbury. How do you scout Long Island locations for your films?*

KA: Long Island is one of the few places where it can be something else and also be itself, depending on where you shoot. I'm usually looking for the opposite of a Long Island landmark, something that's pretty nondescript. For example, when we were shooting the film "Police State" we used a courthouse in Mineola that subbed for a place on Centre Street in Manhattan. It was a beautiful and grand location. It's why I keep going back.

This interview has been edited and condensed

Iris Wiener is an entertainment writer and theater critic. Visit her at IrisWiener.com or on Twitter @Iris_Wiener.

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