

ZACK WEINER

MANHATTAN MOVIE STUDIO

BY LEXI WOLF

A NATIVE NEW YORKER

Inspired by one of Andy Warhol's most iconic quotes, "In the future, everyone will be world-famous for 15 minutes," Zack Weiner now asks, "Everyone got their 15 minutes, but who made the money?" Whether through his much-talked-about political career or his up-and-coming movie studio, Weiner has made it his life's mission to challenge the status quo.

He first came into the public eye in 2021, as a 26-year-old city council candidate for the Upper West Side, his native neighborhood. "I had been following politics since I left school, and I found it so frustrating. Nothing was getting done, and we had no impact. So I wanted to get hyper-local and try to actually make a difference in my neighborhood," he explained.

However, in the midst of his campaign, a private video of him was leaked by a former girlfriend, capturing the public's attention. Despite his nonchalant response, famously saying on Twitter, "Whoops, I didn't want anyone to see that," he had certain concerns about the reaction of his Conservative Jewish community. In 2021, he told the *New York Post* he was pleasantly surprised by the positive public response, but he had not returned to his synagogue at the time. Two years after the fact, he has since reconnected with his roots and found the community to be more accepting than expected. Some even finding humor in the situation. "There was definitely a reaction," he said. "It took a while to get that one under the rug, but not in a bad way. People were surprisingly understanding, and in the realm of public displays of affection, that one seemed to bother them the least."

A NEW INDUSTRY

Despite his enduring interest in politics, Weiner has always been drawn to the entertainment industry. One could even argue his career was predestined by genetics, as his father is the co-creator of the internationally renowned children's show *Dora the Explorer*. The show's success had a resounding impact on his and his family's life. "We used to live in government-supported housing, but after *Dora* came out in the early 2000s, we were able to buy a nice apartment. Things were going really well for a while," he said. However, with the rise of streaming platforms, "Dora money," as he affectionately calls it, stopped flowing in. Perhaps sparking his

disdain for streaming conglomerates, and Big Hollywood in general. Weiner's grievances about streaming platforms, such as Netflix and Hulu, cut deeper than just his familial situation. In his eyes, the promise of social media and streaming was accessibility, or a way to "bring more eyeballs to the content," as he explains. Although this new age does offer more accessibility, there are obvious downsides. "With streaming, the companies don't disclose how many people see it. They don't reward based on viewership. It's not as lucrative as it used to be, which is a problem for everybody," he said.

MANHATTAN MOVIE STUDIO

Weiner's Manhattan Movie Studio was created in rebellion against the traditional Hollywood machine and the new age of streaming. Having worked at the now disgraced Weinstein Company, he found the structure to be troubling for creative processes. "It wasn't such a fair system at all," he said. "I wanted to make a decentralized studio, but with a familiar infrastructure, where people have a place to make the movies they want to make and get them released, without having to recreate the bureaucratic processes of traditional studios."



Faith Hill, Stephanie Matto, Zack Weiner, Sophia Ventrone



Manhattan Movie Studio has also embraced cryptocurrency to distribute ownership of images and producer credits in his films, further dispersing and disrupting power. "Filmmaking is over 100 years old. In a century everything about the movies has changed. Except the money. We're using cryptocurrency to change that," he said. In his approach, he aims to challenge the closed system, where only wealthy individuals can provide funding and attach their names to movies showcased at festivals like Cannes. Instead, with Weiner's films, all can become a part of the production process. "Anyone with a phone can be a producer. You can make a legally binding purchase and get a legally binding contract to have your name featured in the credits," he says.

UP AND COMING

Weiner's studio has a wide breadth of films, spanning in genre and tone, in its repertoire. His most recent release is *Cuddly Toys*, directed by Kansas Bowling, the youngest working female director in the United States. They recently wrapped a new Jewish comedy, *Bad Shabbos*, starring Kyra Sedgwick and Method Man. His upcoming slate also includes a film starring NBA player Evan Mobley, titled *Magic Money*, about a multi-million-dollar Nike sneaker deal gone awry as well as a documentary called *Citizen Weiner*, which tells the story of his city council run against Gale Brewer.

Manhattan Movie Studio
manhattanmoviestudio.com

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