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Breaking down the walls

By Jason Gabak / Special to The Citizen

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Jerico DeAngelo, of Auburn, was recognized with a Pill Award for his work producing a documentary, "Octavia St. Laurent: Queen of the Underworld," on Sunday, Jan. 24, in New York City.

This honor is the most recent in what has been a long career in the entertainment industry for DeAngelo. Nonetheless, the award left him a little taken aback.

"It felt amazing," DeAngelo said. "Octavia was a good friend and regardless of what happened, I was going to go there and represent her and that spirit. I had no ideas I was going to win. And that is what I went there and did - winning is something extra."

Growing up, DeAngelo displayed a gift for music, one that his parents nurtured, and DeAngelo dedicated much of his young life to developing it.

"I had a great music teacher," DeAngelo said. "He told my parents that I had a real gift and they really encouraged that. I learned to play five different instruments. While a lot of other kids were out playing, I would be inside practicing. But I loved it, I knew that I wanted to dedicate my life to this."

DeAngelo said that he would often spend his free periods and lunch times in the school music room working at his piano, playing. It was a dedication that paid off. By the time he was 8, DeAngelo was composing, and he had his first copyrighted piece published when he was 11.

DeAngelo felt a love of theater and performance.

"I was in a lot of school plays," DeAngelo said. "And I was in shows with the Auburn players. I did musical theatre with the Merry-Go-Round, and I was with the Salt City Theatre when I lived in Syracuse. I just had a love of being on stage and singing and performing."

DeAngelo would go on to SUNY Purchase, well-known for its arts and performing arts programs. After finishing his opera major, DeAngelo moved to Syracuse for a time before deciding to move to Los Angeles. It was there that his career began to take shape.

While in L.A., DeAngelo befriended Denise Rich, a socialite and songwriter. Through this acquaintance, DeAngelo was able to begin his songwriting and recording career. He also began to write for other artists.

DeAngelo would go on to write the Grammy-nominated "Aim Your Arrow High," which appeared on an album by Tremaine Hawkins. During this period in the '90s, DeAngelo would also release his own album, "Into Infinity."

It was in the studio where he first met St. Laurent, a transsexual performer featured in the documentary "Paris is Burning," which focused on the underground lesbian, gay and transgender communities in New York City.

"I didn't believe she was a man," DeAngelo said. "I sat in the studio while she was recording and then she dropped her voice to her male voice and I was shocked."


After this first meeting, a close friendship was built and DeAngelo began to write for St. Laurent's musical efforts.

While working in music, DeAngelo also began working in the film industry, both on the small and large screen.

"I had a lot of walk-on parts," DeAngelo said. "For a period in the '90s, anything you saw that was shot in New York City I was there: 'Sex in the City,' 'Law and Order,' I was in a lot of things."



After years of slugging away, DeAngelo briefly became frustrated with the entertainment industry and decided to return to Auburn, where he currently lives. Since then, he has gone on to establish his own successful business of buying and selling antiques and art. But the entertainment world was never far off his radar.

DeAngelo had always talked to St. Laurent about doing a documentary about her life, and he had gathered some footage that he eventually edited and posted on YouTube. The piece caught the attention of ADD-TV, a Web site that features visual art "for people with a short attention span," its description says.

 Sam Tenney / The Citizen Jerico DeAngelo, of Auburn, recently received an award for a documentary he produced called "Octavia St. Laurent: Queen of the Underworld."



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DeAngelo was contacted about the piece and it was broadcast on ADD-TV, which in turn led to its nomination for the Pill Award. The awards recognize the work of underground gay artists in and around New York.

St. Laurent passed away in 2009, and DeAngelo said the time seemed right.

"I wanted to represent her," DeAngelo said. "I wanted to represent her spirit and share that with other people."

The nomination has also reignited DeAngelo's creative passion. DeAngelo said that he has begun writing and recording music again. In the spring, he will release a new techno single, "Flow Affair," to coincide with a documentary by filmmaker Wolfgang Busch.

"I played the song for Wolf," DeAngelo said. "And he really liked it and wanted to use it in his movie. I want to return to acting too. Later this year I plan to go out to L.A. and get that going again. I believe in myself and know what I want to do."

Jerico DeAngelo: A selected resume

- "Shock 'Em Dead" - DeAngelo's first film appearance. DeAngelo appeared in the film under the pseudonym Anthony Christian.
- "Unsolved Mysteries" - DeAngelo appeared as himself in a New York goth scene reenactment
- "I Would Walk Through Fire" by Lisa Molina - Songwriter
- "Into Infinity" - Songwriter, performer
- "Hot Planet" by Manequeen - Songwriter

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