

After pauses for Covid and Hollywood strikes, movie and TV production has resumed on the streets of the city.



By Dodai Stewart

Feb. 15, 2024

At first glance, there was nothing unusual about the small park in Sunnyside, Queens. A kid sailed back and forth on a swing. Other children scampered over a jungle gym and played basketball.

But upon closer inspection, the streetlamp lying on its side turned out to be a prop. So was the police car on the corner and the candlelit memorial at the playground entrance. The woman rushing up the steps crying “My baby!” was an actor.

The cast and crew of the CBS police drama “Blue Bloods” had infiltrated the park on a recent afternoon and converted it into a film set. Donnie Wahlberg and Marisa Ramirez, actors who star as New York City police detectives, stood at the ready. Authoritative voices were amplified over multiple walkie-talkies.

“Quiet please. Rolling. Background. And ... *action.*”

After a pause during the coronavirus pandemic beginning in 2020 and disruptions caused by the writers’ and actors’ strikes last year, motion picture production has returned to New York City.

In the weeks since the strikes ended, the number of permits issued by the city for projects being filmed on public property has quickly rebounded — doubling between November and December and continuing to increase since then. Last month, the city issued 389 permits for 88 different projects, including television series like “Daredevil,” “Law & Order,” “Elsbeth” and “FBI,” as well as major feature films like “Friendship” and “The Penguin.”

“It’s revving up,” said Pat Kaufman, the commissioner of the Mayor’s Office of Media and Entertainment. “It’s happening.”



“Law & Order: Special Victims Unit” is among the shows that resumed filming in New York after the writers’ and actors’ strikes ended last year. Jose Perez/Bauer-Griffin/GC Images

Across the city, several large-scale studios are under construction by developers hoping to attract a steady stream of film projects.

And efforts to encourage movie and television productions to choose New York over other cities and states recently got a boost from a measure that expanded the state’s decades-old film tax credit, a program supported by the industry but panned by critics who argue that it is a bad deal for taxpayers. A new report, commissioned by the state government, found that the tax credit was “at best a break-even proposition and more likely a net cost to the state.”

Still, motion picture production in New York generates an estimated 185,000 jobs, \$18 billion in wages and \$81 billion in revenue, according to the city. And officials say the industry’s recuperation after a monthslong work stoppage is an important part of New York City’s overall economic health.

Sign up for the New York Today Newsletter Each morning, get the latest on New York businesses, arts, sports, dining, style and more. [Get it sent to your inbox.](#)

For some film industry workers across New York, the forced hiatuses during the pandemic and strikes were devastating.

“I was out of work for six months,” said Alan Pierce, an experienced camera operator who has worked behind the lens on several TV shows set in New York, including “Succession” and “Billions.”

“It’s not like a vacation,” Mr. Pierce said. “It was very nerve-racking.”



If your neighborhood is papered with brightly colored fliers, it may soon become a film set. Mimi d'Autremont for The New York Times

Rossana Rizzo, a camera operator who has worked in the industry for more than two decades, said she was heartbroken to see her colleagues suffer. “I noticed that people were selling things,” like film equipment, she said.

Ms. Rizzo, who was born and raised in Brooklyn, has worked on several New York-centric shows, including “Pose,” “And Just Like That ...” and “Russian Doll.” The strikes made her hometown seem different. “It’s funny how depressed the city feels without the film industry,” she said.

Ms. Rizzo and Mr. Pierce noted that motion picture production supports many other businesses. When the film industry is busy, “everybody gets busy,” Mr. Pierce said. “The restaurants, the delis, the hotels, shops of all kinds, schools, churches, car rentals, dry cleaners and lumber yards and many more.”

It’s easy to appreciate why New York City — with its striking skyscrapers, distinctive bridges, stately brownstones, quirky tenements and unique cast of characters — has inspired creatives with cameras for over a century.

“Pick any corner of New York, and every single angle that you shoot is going to be interesting,” said Anastasia Puglisi, executive vice president and co-executive producer at Wolf Entertainment, the juggernaut behind several television shows shot in the city, including the “Law & Order” franchise and “FBI.”

“You get more in New York in terms of neighborhoods and different kinds of people and different socioeconomic locations, and parks and skyscrapers and the water — so much more in New York than anywhere else,” Ms. Puglisi said. “Cinematically, it’s kind of a dream to film here, because it’s endless.”



Motion picture production in New York generates an estimated 185,000 jobs, \$18 billion in wages and \$81 billion in revenue, according to the city. Mimi d'Autremont for The New York Times

(An exhibit currently on view at the Museum of the City of New York titled “You Are Here” celebrates thousands of films made in New York over the last 100 years, from old classics like “Midnight Cowboy,” “Shaft” and “Ghostbusters” to newer favorites like “The Wolf of Wall Street,” “Joker” and “Hustlers.”)

Before the pandemic and the strikes, which stretched from last May through November, motion picture making was thriving in New York City.

Production peaked in 2019, according to the city’s media office: There were over 80 episodic television series and 300 feature movies filmed that year.

A collaborative push is now underway to ensure that New York can compete with Hollywood in luring TV and movie projects. A 266,000-square-foot development containing high-tech soundstages, called Sunset Pier 94 Studios, is in the works along the Hudson River in Manhattan, and the even bigger, 340,000-square-foot East End Studios is coming to Sunnyside.

In addition, several new Brooklyn studios have been announced, including two from Bungalow Projects, a real estate development firm focused on constructing production facilities.

The co-founders, Travis Feehan and Susi Yu, have worked in New York for decades and recently surveyed studio spaces in Los Angeles to ensure that their undertaking in New York would be comparable.

Many of the camera cranes and large LED screens used in feature films require extra-high ceilings, which are harder to come by in New York.

“If you look at a studio in L.A. or in Atlanta versus New York, in many cases, it’s much inferior in New York,” Mr. Feehan said.

“This is big, big, big business,” Ms. Kaufman, the commissioner, said. “The more films and TV shows that we have coming here and using our city, our iconic locations, all of that — that’s another library that gets to stay open on a Sunday.”

Seeing New York onscreen is also a draw for tourists; companies like On Location Tours take fans on outings to sites from scenes in “Sex and the City,” “Gossip Girl,” “The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel” and more.



The television series “And Just Like That ...” uses New York as a set. Fans tried to catch a glimpse of the show’s stars, Sarah Jessica Parker, Kristin Davis and Cynthia Nixon, as they filmed in Manhattan in July 2021.

Sometimes the tether to New York is thin — after the actor Matthew Perry’s death, fans placed flowers in front of the building used as the exterior shot on “Friends,” despite the fact that the sitcom was filmed in Los Angeles.

Even die-hard New Yorkers admit to a zing of pleasure when they discover that their street is being used as a set.

Christine Bord runs @oly, a social media account that tracks filming locations, generally spotted and submitted by local residents.

When film crews put up a brightly colored flier to reserve a parking space for production, “people get really excited to see it and they want to share it,” Ms. Bord said. “It’s kind of like peeking behind a curtain and seeing a little bit of like how the movie magic works and what a film set looks like.”

In December, Ella Morton was lucky enough to stumble upon a set in her neighborhood of Ditmas Park, Brooklyn. “There were a lot of police cars there, and I couldn’t tell whether they were real cops or like, TV cops,” she said. “It was sort of blending.”

Suddenly, Ms. Morton was awe-struck. “I saw a majestic woman all in black, and I was like, ‘That’s Mariska Hargitay,’” she recalled. “And I thought, Well, damn, I just walked right into this.”

Ms. Morton stood transfixed as the star of “Law & Order: Special Victims Unit” was directed into action.

Though the scene was brief, it did not disappoint. “I watched her walk authoritatively from a porch to a car. And that was the extent of it,” Ms. Morton said. “Her gold captain badge was glinting in the sunlight. It was pretty perfect.”

Dodai Stewart writes about living in New York City, with a focus on how, and where, we gather. More about Dodai Stewart