

LOOK OUT FOR... PAULA PATTON

The old joke is that every actor wants to direct. But Paula Patton, who stars in Outkast's musical drama "Idlewild," opening Friday, and this fall's "Deja Vu" with Denzel Washington, flipped it around.

The Los Angeles-born Patton had been working as a young filmmaker, with her work featured on the Discovery Health Channel's documentary series "Medical Diaries." When that show ended, "I didn't know if what I really wanted to do was become a director," says Patton. "I remember sitting at my desk, trying to think of something to write. Then I thought,

since I was a little girl, I've loved to act."

She followed through with acting lessons and a cameo in "Hitch." But now Patton has landed plum parts: as Andre Benjamin's love in "Idlewild" and the woman Washington travels back in time for in "Deja Vu."

Her lack of experience was a plus when she auditioned for "Idlewild." "I just went in and had fun," she says. "I didn't feel pressure because I didn't think I had a chance. So I had a blast." And the Prohibition-era-set movie from Benjamin and Antwan (Big Boi) Patton (no relation) lived up to the fun.

"Everything in the movie revolves around a speakeasy, so there are great performance numbers, although there are times when Andre and Big Boi just sing to express a feeling," she says. "It's part musical and part drama, part crime story and part love story. It mixes a lot of emotions together."

So her decision to abandon life behind the camera to go in front of one has paid off.

"When you choose your destiny in life, it's amazing how the world helps you get it," she says. "When I became unafraid, good things happened."

Michael Giltz



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8/20/06 Daily News