

In Proximity
Justin Tipping
Season 3 Episode 1
Final Transcript

Paola Mardo: Trigger warning, a lot of body horror in this film.

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[0:19 - KN 9 to 5 by Ludwig Göransson]

[VOICEOVER]

Paola Mardo: You're watching and listening to In Proximity. I'm Paola Mardo, and today is our Season 3 premiere. First down. Listeners, I just caught a football. On the show today, we have Justin Tipping, the writer and director of the new film Him, a new sports horror film produced by Jordan Peele about a rising star quarterback, Cameron Cade, played by Tyriq Withers, who trains with his hero, Isaiah White, played by Marlon Wayans, and learns very quickly and disturbingly that being the greatest of all time, the GOAT, comes at a very steep price.

[GOAT BLEATING]

Justin is a writer and director from the Bay Area, El Cerrito/Berkeley to be exact. His debut feature Kicks, also set in the Bay, is about a young man who goes to great lengths to take back his stolen sneakers. I remember seeing Kicks in a theater back in 2016 when it first came out, and I was in awe of the storytelling, its lyricism, and the beauty of the film itself. And learning that the filmmaker was Filipino American and from the Bay like me was just equally inspiring and moving.

Justin has directed for TV on shows like The Chi, Twenties, Joe vs. Carole, and Black Monday. Him is his first feature since Kicks and the untimely passing of his father in 2017. Steven Tipping was an athlete and a movie-lover, and he got Justin his first camera. We get into all that and his craft as a director, writer, and editor on today's show.

By the way, we talk about Him quite a bit on the show. Not a ton of spoilers, but we do talk about stuff, and we'll do our best to flag. Here's my conversation with Justin Tipping.

[VOICEOVER ENDS]

Paola Mardo: Justin Tipping, excited to be In Proximity with you.

Justin Tipping: I'm excited to be here.

Paola Mardo: Yeah. Thanks for coming to our office and looking to camera.

Justin Tipping: It's a good—it's a good office.

Paola Mardo: Excited to speak with you about your film. Congratulations.

Justin Tipping: Thank you.

Paola Mardo: First of all, I really enjoyed it. It is a sports movie, but it's also a horror movie. I don't know if I'm allowed to say this, but I felt like, for at least the first 20 minutes, I was in this, like, drug-induced state of athleticism, euphoria. I was, like, confused, concerned, horrified, shocked, but I also really enjoyed it. It was just a wild ride. But it also really made me think about, like, what I would do to sort of push myself to be the greatest. Do you think about being the GOAT at what you do?

[LAUGHTER]

Justin Tipping: Yeah, all the time. Well, I guess people have different definitions of what that is, but I see it as, like, passionately pursuing your craft and pushing yourself. If you're passionate about something and you're practicing—I mean, just like sports, but, like, practicing and honing in, and reaching, like, something that you define as great, then, yes, I think about that a lot.

Paola Mardo: Where does that come from? Is that—you were an athlete, right, played sports growing up?

Justin Tipping: I was, yeah. I think that definitely translates. I don't know if any was already done, like an essayistic take on, like, the sports-to-filmmaking pipeline, but I feel like it's—

Paola Mardo: There's something there.

Justin Tipping: There's something there.

Paola Mardo: Yeah.

Justin Tipping: I think because of the—the habits and, like, the consistency that's required.

Paola Mardo: You have sort of a—not exactly the same but similar to Ryan Coogler, our founder here at Proximity.

Justin Tipping: Yeah, shout out. Shout out, Ryan.

Paola Mardo: Yeah, shout out. The film is based on a Black List script written by—

Justin Tipping: Yeah, Black List script. It was called GOAT originally.

Paola Mardo: Yes, called GOAT written by Skip Bronkie and Zack Akers.

Justin Tipping: Yeah. What had happened was I actually met Jordan Peele in, like, 2017. So he just—

Paola Mardo: So just after Kicks-ish?

Justin Tipping: Yeah. So he had just won the Academy Award, and had just started Monkeypaw. And he had seen Kicks, which I was like, "What? Why? How?" So I met him then, and he was, like—we were just rapping about the movie and, like, nerding out over film. And he was like, "We really want to find something someday." So the—when that Black List script came across my desk, I think that—and they were looking for, like, a writer/director. We've always been kind of, like, hovering, but this one was the one.

Paola Mardo: Can you tell me why? Like, when it came across your desk, you read the script?

Justin Tipping: Yeah.

Paola Mardo: I mean, what is it—having not made horror before—or maybe horror in different ways, I guess—

Justin Tipping: Yeah, but, no, not—

Paola Mardo: Not this—

Justin Tipping: Not like this—this. Yeah. Some flirting around it with television work that I'd done, but nothing, like, just straight genre. Well, Jordan also—I mean, it was a thing because we had to get the studio on board to be, like—the first thing they say is, "Well, he's never done it before." But the first thing Jordan's able to say is, "Well, I had never done it before, either."

Paola Mardo: Oh. Oh, they—okay, wow.

Justin Tipping: Like, that's what is exciting.

Paola Mardo: Yeah. Shout out, by the way. He is also a former podcast guest, Jordan Peele.

Justin Tipping: Yes! Shouts out. J.P., who could be like, "Yeah, but then Get Out happened." So—but when I first read it, I think I immediately connected to it because—being an athlete, but I think there was deeper things to take from it. And I had just done, like, so much television.

Paola Mardo: Right.

Justin Tipping: And I was so burnt out.

Paola Mardo: And I guess, to backtrack, so you had Kicks come out in 2016, and you jumped right into TV.

Justin Tipping: Yeah. After I got burnt out, I definitely was, like, oh, I'm doing this thing I never thought I could do, which is make a living, and it was very—almost cliché way of, like, I just made the most money I've ever made but probably the most depressed I've ever been.

Paola Mardo: Wow. So, at your highest high, you're sort of at your lowest low?

Justin Tipping: Yeah. Yeah.

Paola Mardo: Wow.

Justin Tipping: So I actively just took like a year off, was taking whatever classes, was like, "What brings me joy? Let's rediscover that."

Paola Mardo: What'd you take?

Justin Tipping: Took shoemaking classes, actually.

Paola Mardo: Shoemaking?

Justin Tipping: Yeah.

Paola Mardo: Like sneakers or—

Justin Tipping: Yeah. I can make you some one of ones.

Paola Mardo: Very cool.

Justin Tipping: So then I'm, like, looking at material, and because it is about what we were talking about, what does it take—the fundamental question is, "What does it take to be the greatest of all time?"

Paola Mardo: Yeah.

Justin Tipping: And what are you willing to do? I think that was a universal feeling that I had also experienced with the work where the last TV show I did, I think I missed my brother's wedding, one of my best friends' wedding, the birth of, like, a nephew. And it was COVID, and I decided to, like, go to Australia, so I was actually landlocked. And, like, how many weddings did I miss, how many birthdays?

Paola Mardo: Yeah, the sacrifice.

Justin Tipping: The sacrifices you make to get to where you want to get. So I immediately felt connected to that. I immediately felt connected to that feeling of accepting, like, that you're athletes, like you retire—like, you're hanging your cleats up.

Paola Mardo: Like, when you know it's over, done?

Justin Tipping: When you know it's over.

Paola Mardo: You have to retire, move on.

Justin Tipping: So, that. Also, emotionally and on the—on that Monkeypaw implicit level, it was—I had pitched it as, “What happens when the athlete becomes the commodity?” And if Kicks was, like, the commodity fetishism with the shoe, this was straight-up what happens when we commodify athletes.

Paola Mardo: Yeah.

Justin Tipping: And we can—if their body's their only capital, then when that's expendable, then they just get moved around and traded—whatever, and, yeah. And I had also never seen this mash-up before, so it was like, “What?!” Yeah, “I want to do that.”

Paola Mardo: In the film—so Tyriq Withers plays Cameron Cade, and—college football star who goes to train with his idol, Isaiah White, who lives in this desert compound with his influencer wife, Elsie, Julia Fox. And basically, Cameron goes to extreme lengths to be the GOAT, or to train with his, really, idol. And they say, like, “Don't meet your idols,” but he meets his idol, and there's a price to be paid with that, as well. Actually, you talked about—when we spoke before this, you see a little bit of yourself in both of those characters?

Justin Tipping: Yeah.

Paola Mardo: So, when you were writing the script, what did you pull from yourself?

Justin Tipping: Even, even more—on an even more, like, myself level, like, this was, like, working out some shit.

Paola Mardo: Talk about that. Like, were you, like—

Justin Tipping: Yeah, I was.

Paola Mardo: In the highs and lows?

Justin Tipping: Yeah, I was going through it.

Paola Mardo: Okay, wow. And you were like, "I'm going to make a sports horror movie."

Justin Tipping: What we haven't talked about is my father passed away in 2017. So my first actual job on—to be hired for directing was on *The Chi*. And it was like halfway through my first day ever on, like, my first professional thing ever, at that level, I would say. *Kicks* was different—just a different, much smaller thing. But, yeah, in the middle of a scene halfway through the day, I got a call that my father died.

Paola Mardo: Wow.

Justin Tipping: And it was not—no one saw it coming. It was completely random. He quite literally went for a bike ride and just didn't come back. Like, my mom found him, like, a block away from our house. So, if you watch the movie, Tyriq's character tells that story but slightly differently. And a lot of his—his character's taken from that place of father's gone, and what do you do with that grief? And even in that one monologue he has, it's the field. He just kept playing. So I think a big reason why I was in television for so long was, after that happened, I went back to set two weeks later and never stopped—

Paola Mardo: Wow.

Justin Tipping: because I didn't want to deal with it, like actually, like, sit with it. So it took, like, my body actually, like, being burnt out and kind of just collapsing. That year off, I had also, like, herniated three discs in my neck. So I was actually, like, physically forced to stop—

Paola Mardo: Yeah, your body was telling you. Yeah, you should not keep going.

Justin Tipping: For a year, yeah. So I was recovering from that while I was writing this.

Paola Mardo: I mean, first of all, I'm really sorry to hear about your story with your father.

Justin Tipping: Well, join the club. It sucks.

Paola Mardo: Were you guys really close?

Justin Tipping: We were close. That's why I think it was—and he was, like, one of the—the biggest champions of film for me and would—like, bought me the home video camera.

Paola Mardo: I was going to ask how you got introduced to film. So it was your dad. Because your dad's also an athlete, but he wasn't a filmmaker, or was he also?

Justin Tipping: No. No, not at all. He just went to movies. He was like a—I actually think it's kind of crazy. Not crazy anymore, but at the time, I thought he was nuts. He would go to the

movies by himself, like after work. So he—it was one of the ways we—we bonded. But he's also a Vietnam War vet and had a hard childhood, so didn't—I don't think had the tools to—

Paola Mardo: Pursue an artistic—

Justin Tipping: To talk about love—like, love or any of these things.

Paola Mardo: Got you, yeah.

Justin Tipping: So a lot of that, I think is inspired—

Paola Mardo: Because in the film, his father's, like, a real—he's, like, pushing his son to get into football. Like, there's that opening—I don't know if it's an opening scene, but just the first time, I think, we see Cameron where they're watching Isaiah on screen and the game.

Justin Tipping: Exactly, yeah.

Paola Mardo: And it's like, his dad's like, "You're him." Wow, okay. So your father and your relationship with him inspired some of that.

Justin Tipping: Some of that, yeah. And—

Paola Mardo: What about the Isaiah part?

Justin Tipping: Isaiah—

[LAUGHTER]

Justin Tipping: He—there's a lot of—like, the mischief in, like, insanity, I guess, on Isaiah's part...yeah, I'm kind of weird. But that—there's definitely things that I'm like, "This is definitely me. If I had the ability to fuck with somebody, this is what I'd do," in a dark way.

Paola Mardo: Very dark.

Justin Tipping: But, like, I do it in cinema, not in real life. But I think the other thing for that character is—it's, like, what I was afraid of, what I'd be afraid of happening because there are things he says that are valuable lessons or can be interpreted as, like, he has a good point, or that is—but then, at the same time, he takes it too far.

Paola Mardo: Right. Way too far.

Justin Tipping: Way too far. And I think, for me, one of my fears is, like, if you sacrifice so much of yourself in pursuit of perfection, at some point, you might sacrifice so much you no longer recognize yourself. And that's, like, a very chilling idea to—to hit a point where you wouldn't

even be aware that you've changed or if you weren't. You're just an entirely different person. And I think that, that was like the—you know, that underlying—

Paola Mardo: That's scary, actually.

Justin Tipping:—fear was, was inspiring him, his character.

[14:49 - In Proximity '90s by Ludwig Göransson]

[VOICEOVER]

Paola Mardo: Hey, folks, here's a part where we talk about a scene in the film, not totally spoiler-ey because it's in the trailer, but if you want to skip this part for now, fast-forward a couple minutes.

[VOICEOVER ENDS]

Paola Mardo: Trigger warning, a lot of body horror in this film. The most gripping scene for me was the—the training scene, the drills with the—I grew up partially—I was born in L.A., grew up in Manila and Kuala Lumpur before I moved to the Bay. So American football—my knowledge of that is very recent. I did not grow up with that. So I'd never seen that machine, that football passing machine, I think is what it's called.

Justin Tipping: Yeah. Yeah.

Paola Mardo: I don't think it's supposed to be used in that way, but it's like—

Justin Tipping: No. We had a—we had a—we can't call it what it was called because—yeah.

Paola Mardo: It's, like, a brand or something, right?

Justin Tipping: Yeah. It's like a—yeah.

Paola Mardo: Yeah. But so, you know, he has to do this drill, and there's, like, a time limit, and he has to pass the ball—Cameron—within seconds, and if he doesn't do it, this guy gets hit in the face—spoiler alert—multiple times. And he volunteers to do it, which is also equally disturbing. Yeah. Tell me about the graphic violence in this film and, like, what made you write it and film it in this way. It's, it's—yeah. It was the horrific part for me, honestly.

Justin Tipping: That's—that sequence in particular seems to be, like, everyone's favorite in a fucked-up way. When I was, like, pitching, even to, like, Jordan and everybody, my take was that there's inherent body horror in football itself. So it actually didn't need that much—you don't really need to do anything other than the way you lens it. So, like, the injury, and even just seeing—so, in the NFL, there's even, like, this substance, Toradol, which is a—they take like

candy. Like, you just boom, boom, boom, constant. So, like, you already have needles. You already have injuries. You already have some of the collision and the impact. That was inherent and could serve both sports and horror audiences, just depending how we lensed it. So, even if, like, you're about to throw, if you just go low angle, it could look like Mike Myers pulling a—

Paola Mardo: Like, menacing, yeah.

Justin Tipping:—like, a knife back.

Paola Mardo: Yeah.

Justin Tipping: And there's that approach. So I wanted to go more psychological horror to really get into the psychology of—of a GOAT, of someone who's, well, willing to do anything and loses themselves. So that's where the psycho-horror started coming into play. And I was pulling, really, from, like, the *Suspiria*, *Black Swan*, *The Shining*, *Jacob's Ladder*. Although—even, like, I was making Tyriq and Marlon watch, like, *Full Metal Jacket* and *Apocalypse Now*.

Paola Mardo: That was the homework?

Justin Tipping: That was their homework.

Paola Mardo: Intense.

Justin Tipping: Because the game itself also is rooted in warfare.

Paola Mardo: Yeah.

Justin Tipping: So I was approaching it as—

Paola Mardo: And the discipline and the training and just how far they take it in that film, too, *Full Metal Jacket*.

Justin Tipping: Sergeants, soldiers, rookies, recruits.

Paola Mardo: Hierarchy. I mean, that's so football.

Justin Tipping: Yeah.

Paola Mardo: Sports in general, but football has that sort of system. That's crazy.

Justin Tipping: So that was the approach to horror for that sequence. You know what inspired that?

Paola Mardo: What?

Justin Tipping: Was—I was thinking about two moments in two films that I love. One is Cache. It's a Michael Haneke film. It's all very voyeuristic. Like, nothing really happens except for this one thing, and then this film Dogtooth, which is Yorgos's first—like, first feature.

Paola Mardo: Oh, I see that. Yes.

Justin Tipping: Remember that scene where it's just the locked off camera, and she looks in the mirror, and she just starts hitting her tooth out?

Paola Mardo: Yes, yes.

Justin Tipping: That was like—thinking about that kind of violence when I was writing that sequence.

[19:04 - Good Times by Ludwig Göransson]

Paola Mardo: Can I ask you about the—is it x-ray sort of effect?

Justin Tipping: Yeah. That's what people—yeah. That's right.

Paola Mardo: Okay. Well, because, like, I mean, football, obviously controversy around, like, what happens to the players' heads, CTE, concussions, that trauma inflicted upon their brains that some people don't want to talk about, but you, like, literally show it. Can you talk about that choice? And was that something you knew you were gonna do when you were shooting, or was that—did that come in the edit?

Justin Tipping: I—I had—that's something, like, I wrote in.

Paola Mardo: Okay.

Justin Tipping: It's—CTE is also called, like, "the invisible killer." So I was thinking, like—and there's so many things. Like, you talk to pro football players, it's like, essentially, you're getting into a car accident every week, like with the collision. Like, the impacts are that hard on your body, but no one's like—no one sees the internal bleeding or a ligament or something torn or something, and you definitely don't see a concussion. So, for this, it was coming from a place of: "How do you show the invisible killer?" And how do you—but then it also was serving—so it was serving that idea, but it was also serving the sports/horror mash-up and the promise of that because now, suddenly, I could have a skeletal, demonic thing in a football helmet. And it started—we started just assigning it to Tyriq's character's journey. So, as he descends and he becomes better at football, that thing starts to take over.

Paola Mardo: Yeah. From the moment he's injured, you start seeing his brain when you're monitoring it after. Going back really quick to the Black List screenplay, the first page calls what was then called GOAT an "anti-sports horror film." Is Him an anti-sports horror film?

Justin Tipping: That's a good question because I feel like it depends who you ask. Like, I feel like Jordan might even have a different answer than me. But I actually don't think it's an anti-sports horror film because there's the game. And a game is a game. Like, there's a lot of amazing memories I have of going to Warriors games with my dad or playing football with friends or—the game can be as beautiful and can have a positive effect on the world, I feel like. And I guess it's the institutional—it's the business of sports that I think is where it gets dark.

Paola Mardo: Yeah, when money's involved.

Justin Tipping: Yeah.

Paola Mardo: He's got that agent.

Justin Tipping: When one puts profit over people. I think it's more of a cautionary tale of the, the institution of sports—

Paola Mardo: I hear that.

Justin Tipping:—when it no longer cares about the athletes.

[22:16 - In Proximity '90s by Ludwig Göransson]

Paola Mardo: Can you talk about the music? Because I feel like the music plays a big role in this, and I feel like, even in your prior films like your short film, Nani, and Kicks, music was also kind of like the beat to the storytelling. Yeah. What was the scoring process?

Justin Tipping: Yeah. So we—Bobby—Bobby Krlic, shout out—met, and, yeah, we—we knew we were going to do something really immersive with our character and score. So a lot of the sound design is from score. You know, like the first thing he did was go get samples from UCLA's library of CAT scans and MRIs. So there's actually like—he's running those through his magical synths and those are—those are in there. And we were recording things on set. Even the goalpost is, like, shaking, and that's baked into the—

Paola Mardo: Oh, that sound?

Justin Tipping: Yeah, that was real.

Paola Mardo: Wow.

Justin Tipping: I didn't plan for that. No one planned for that. It was just windy, and there was—that's how the football things were actually just shaking. So we—we did that, and there was also very classical, big feelings to make it—give it more of a divine, mythic journey. And what we would do—something I've always wanted to do was basically take those stems, for all you music-heads, take the stems of our score that Bobby composed and then send that pack, party pack, to, like, Guapdad and let him flip it.

Paola Mardo: He's a Bay Area rapper/musician but also an actor in your film.

Justin Tipping: Yes, yes.

Paola Mardo: Shout out.

Justin Tipping: Shout out. He took it, made a beat out of it. So he's basically—we basically did this with several—several rappers, and they would remix—you know, flip the score into a beat and rap over it, send it back, and then myself and Bobby would, you know, go, like, "Okay, this is what it needs," so that the language of the movie—he might not notice it, but say when he goes down the escalator at the combine, there's this big, sweeping orchestra, symphonic thing that's just like—also, that's like the first gate of Hell. It's like the descent to the first gate.

[24:40 - Combine by Bobby Krlic]

Justin Tipping: That same score comes back when he's then descended down a hill and driving to the Saviors party only it's flipped into a beat. And so we just kept sampling ourself, basically.

[25:19 - Combine Flip by Bobby Krlic]

Paola Mardo: And why was that important to you, to keep doing that and to flip the music?

Justin Tipping: Because it's so cool.

[LAUGHTER]

Paola Mardo: What does it do for the narrative? Because you said you had—you were inspired by something, right? An artist who'd done this with a horror film?

Justin Tipping: Yeah, Busta Rhymes' "Gimme Some More" is—he sampled Hitchcock's Psycho and sped up the "da-na-na-na." And I find—I mean, just sampling and hip-hop period, but what I love about that was, like, now we have the chance to do it in real time, and it essentially is one of those hypnotic things where you're trying to seduce Tyriq's character as well as an audience and make everything, like, "This feels great," even though it's horrific. And having the ability to go from classical into, like, a seamless handoff to a beat. So, like, the needle drops feel more—it feels like one long mixtape that doesn't stop.

Paola Mardo: It does. I was going to say that's what—when I was saying I was in this, like, drug-induced state, like, it felt like I was in this, like, trippy music video.

Justin Tipping: Yes.

Paola Mardo: Yeah, and then, I think the music had a lot—it was the visuals and the way you cut it, but then the music. I am Filipino, so I did—I told you before this, I did hear the Tagalog on the—on the score. If it's still in there.

Justin Tipping: Yeah, it is.

Paola Mardo: Can you talk—like, who is that artist, and what was the choice to add that?

Justin Tipping: Shout out Angelo. He's a brand new rapper from Southern California.

Paola Mardo: Oh, cool.

Justin Tipping: The track is called "AIGHT?"

[27:13 - AIGHT? by Angelo]

Justin Tipping: I have the translation of the Tagalog, but it's somewhere.

Paola Mardo: Okay.

Justin Tipping: But it is thematically also on point. So hopefully, anyone who speaks Tagalog will be like—

[RAISES ARM AND POINTS]

Paola Mardo: I mean, it sounded cool. Yeah. No, I was. I was like—

Justin Tipping: Because, yeah—because I heard that track was like, "Oh, shit, this is, like, perfect for this moment and transition," because it is—also has a duality where, like, yeah, it sounds like an Aswang is about to, like, jump out of nowhere. But also, at the same time, it's about liberation. So it was doing the thing that the whole movie was hopefully doing of holding both those things.

Paola Mardo: Yeah. It was. I feel like it set the tone for that particular scene.

[28:27 - In Proximity '90s by Ludwig Göransson]

Paola Mardo: Yeah. So there's this fun thing we do on the show where we find someone in your community to send a little voice memo—

Justin Tipping: Oh, my gosh.

Paola Mardo:—with a surprise question.

Justin Tipping: Oh, god.

Paola Mardo: So I feel like now is a good time to pull that up.

Justin Tipping: I can't wait.

Paola Mardo: So we dug into your past, your recent past, I guess. And, yeah, I'm going to play it, and you're going to figure out who it is.

Justin Tipping: Like, this is so exciting.

Paola Mardo: And then you're going to answer the question. Here we go.

Justin Tipping: Wow.

Tyriq Withers: Yo, Justin, aka Him-my Neutron, aka Him-spiration. You get it? Inspiration and Him, you're Him, you get me. It's your boy Tyriq. I wanted to pop in and ask a quick question. I wanted to ask, how do you think being from the Bay sets you apart from filmmakers from other cities? Appreciate it.

Justin Tipping: Wow, what a pro.

Paola Mardo: Total pro.

Justin Tipping: Thanks for that question, Tyriq. How, how has—

Paola Mardo: Being from the Bay set you apart from other—

Justin Tipping:—being from the Bay set me apart? I feel like being from the Bay is kind of a personality trait.

Paola Mardo: For some! If you choose it.

[LAUGHTER]

Justin Tipping: Yeah.

Paola Mardo: No, I'm kidding. Keep going.

Justin Tipping: But in a positive, not a—not a negative.

Paola Mardo: Yes, true.

Justin Tipping: Because it's a—it's a majority-minority place.

Paola Mardo: Could you explain that to someone who's just never been there? Because it's very multicultural.

Justin Tipping: It's multicultural.

Paola Mardo: And you are—can I say biracial, mixed race?

Justin Tipping: Yeah.

Paola Mardo: You're part Filipino.

Justin Tipping: Yeah, part Filipino. My father's a white guy. He's Danish/Swedish. Want to get into the Filipino side, it's actually part Visayan, part Ilocano.

Paola Mardo: There you go. Okay. But being of mixed race in the Bay, it's like—it feels kind of normal or—

Justin Tipping: Yeah. It's, it's actually very—it's like—the Bay Area is hella ethnic. Let's put it that way. One of the first places, I think, like interracial marriage was, like, accepted and things of that nature, social justice movements there, "The Land of Pimps and Panthers," you know? It's like, from—I think there's just—you're exposed to a lot in various ways that I think builds empathy. I think that's what it does, really.

Paola Mardo: Yeah.

Justin Tipping: At the heart of it, it's a port city, so there's a lot of different—a lot of immigrants are coming in and out and—including my family—and so you're exposed to just different experiences and different point of views, which I think is an important tool to have as a filmmaker in any capacity.

[31:11 - Good Times by Ludwig Göransson]

Paola Mardo: You also have an editing background. So—and your film has a very interesting tone. It's horror, but there's a little bit of comedy, like a dark comedy to it, and obviously the sports-type stuff, 30 for 30 type stuff. How did you create that tone and maintain that? And I

guess, to back it up, did you have a mood board? Like, how did you get everyone on the same page, like, this is the vibe?

Justin Tipping: I make, like, very extensive lookbooks that address tone specifically. And usually—and then it gets more in depth into cinematography and camera and costume. When I meet everybody, off the bat, I already have this pretty extensive visual.

Paola Mardo: Like a deck.

Justin Tipping: Yeah. Deck, and I make—call them sizzle reels or rip reels, where I will edit—I'll rip things from different media and essentially edit a trailer for the movie.

Paola Mardo: It's almost like a proof of concept, but, like, taking from different pieces.

Justin Tipping: Yeah.

Paola Mardo: Like, you didn't shoot anything yet.

Justin Tipping: Nothing, no. So I'm just pulling from all kinds of—all kinds of stuff. So I present—but I edit that myself, and I present both. And the edit is like, oh, yeah, I'm using—I was using Bobby Krlic—some of Bobby Krlic's score from *Midsommar*, I think, something like that. And—so people could understand the tone with, like, clips of Nike football ads or Under Armour ads or, like—and that lookbook, that first section being tone, I think, what is important for process that helps is—it's basically a taste test. So I'll walk through each image tonally with a department head and describe why I like it, why it's working, and what feeling it's giving. So it's all, like, just feeling because—

Paola Mardo: Yeah, emotion. So why you like it, why you're drawn to it for this particular project, and then what feeling you're getting out of it but also what you want to evoke from, like, a viewer or something?

Justin Tipping: Yeah, exactly because as a director, too, like, all you do is talk about tone, and it's one of the hardest things to talk about because it's all subjective. So it's, like, a really important step.

Paola Mardo: How would you—what would you call the tone of your film? Like, how would you describe it?

Justin Tipping: Oh, man.

Paola Mardo: If this is a taste test.

Justin Tipping: We're taking, like, grounded sports imagery and the agony of defeat, the ecstasy of victory, and wrapping it in divinity and then tearing it apart with a kitchen knife.

[34:19 - Prox Recs Theme by Ludwig Göransson and Ken Nana]

Paola Mardo: Before we wrap up, we have one final segment on the show. It's called Prox Recs, and it's essentially where we have each guest recommend something for the listener, and now viewer. Usually it has something to do with your craft. So, as a director, filmmaker, is there something you want to recommend whether it's a book or a movie? It could be related to Him or just your process. Whatever.

Justin Tipping: Ooh. I would recommend watching *La Haine*, directed by Mathieu Kassovitz. Watching the director's commentary. That was one of the first—that's one of my favorite films of all time. And I remember listening to that commentary when I was just a young lad out there, just a bunso.

[LAUGHTER]

Justin Tipping: Sorry.

Paola Mardo: "Youngest child, baby." And this is the Criterion Collection Director's—

Justin Tipping: Sorry, that was an inside joke. Whatever. Not a joke. That was—whatever.

Paola Mardo: Yes. So you listened to this. I actually have never seen this film. It is on my list. I really do want to see it.

Justin Tipping: Okay, yeah.

Paola Mardo: I keep seeing—my Instagram feed keeps popping it up on my feed, so—

Justin Tipping: That's what I would say because I think that it's one of those films that—it's kind of a cult—I think it's—I guess it's a cult classic.

Paola Mardo: I guess so.

Justin Tipping: It's kind of very revered, and its style, use of style.

Paola Mardo: Shot in black-and-white.

Justin Tipping: They shot in black-and-white, but the thing is they—see, they didn't even shoot it in black-and-white. That was a choice.

Paola Mardo: Oh, interesting.

Justin Tipping: And I was just—that, like, blew my mind, and I was like, I don't understand how they even thought to do—make some of those choices. But listening to him talk about it was very freeing and, like, there are no—basically like there are no rules. There's rules, but there are no rules. It made—it made the—the idea of, like, actually doing it a little less scary, a little more freeing.

Paola Mardo: Yeah. Was it—did you watch this before you shot the film, or—

Justin Tipping: Yeah.

Paola Mardo: Oh, wow.

Justin Tipping: This was, like, film school, film school days.

Paola Mardo: Cool. Very cool. Thank you, Justin Tipping, for being In Proximity with me today. Really, really—

Justin Tipping: Thank you for having me.

Paola Mardo: Really great to speak with you. And congrats, again.

Justin Tipping: Thank you. See you on the next one.

Paola Mardo: Okay.

[36:47 - In Proximity Theme by Ludwig Göransson]

Paola Mardo: In Proximity is a production of Proximity Media.

The show is hosted, directed, and produced by Paola Mardo.

Executive Producers are Ryan Coogler, Zinzi Coogler, Sev Ohanian.

Theme Song and Additional Music by Ludwig Göransson.

Patrick Epino is our Co-Director and Director of Photography.

Ken Nana is our Sound Designer and Mix Engineer.

The production team includes Brittani Brown, Isabella Miller, and Alexandria Santana.

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