

In Proximity
Season 3 Episode 12
Armen and Mary Karaoghlanian
Final Transcript

Paola Mardo: You had Ryan Coogler, our other founder, with Sev onstage in conversation.

[VIDEO CLIP: ARMENIAN FILM FESTIVAL: SEV OHANIAN IN PROXIMITY WITH RYAN COOGLER]

Ryan Coogler: No matter how busy you are, you should always make time for people.

Sev Ohanian: Yeah, I think especially with the Armenian community, I feel like we just haven't had as much visibility in the industry. Special shout-out to Armen and Mary for AFS, which is helping to recognize that in a big way. Armenian Film Society hosted the L.A. premiere of Sinners. Isn't that crazy?

Ryan Coogler: What?!

Sev Ohanian: Thank you, Armen and Mary. Yes!

Ryan Coogler: Thank y'all!

[AUDIENCE APPLAUSE]

[VIDEO CLIP ENDS]

Armen Karaoghlanian: If I had to pick a single day that sort of speaks to everything AFS stands for and everything we've been working towards, it was probably that day. It was a dream come true.

["In Proximity Theme" by Ludwig Göransson]

[VOICEOVER]

Paola Mardo: You're watching and listening to In Proximity. I'm Paola Mardo, and today we're talking community. How does a tiny bookstore meetup in Glendale, California turn into a giant gala event with hundreds of attendees and Ryan Coogler and Sev Ohanian onstage?

Armenian Film Society is a nonprofit organization that spotlights Armenian films and filmmakers. They hold events, screenings, premieres, film festivals, and most recently, a Ten-Year Anniversary Gala, an event that had our Proximity founders, Ryan Coogler and Sev Ohanian onstage talking about their longtime collaboration, and Sev Ohanian was inducted into the Armenian Film Hall of Fame.

Building community and an audience is an important part of making movies or making any art, really, that you want to share with the world, and Armen and Mary Karaoghlanian, the founders of Armenian Film Society, essentially built a community from scratch that does just that. They promote indie films all the way to big Hollywood productions like Sinners and Anora.

On this episode, Armen and Mary will share the tips and tools and tricks of the trade in building a truly authentic community, how their meet-cute turned into a longtime creative and business partnership, and how they plan to continue growing their film society for filmmakers in the Armenian community and beyond. Here's my conversation with Armen and Mary Karaoghlanian.

[VOICEOVER ENDS]

[Interstitial Music by Ludwig Göransson]

Paola Mardo: Thank you, guys, for being here—

Mary Karaoghlanian: Thank you.

Paola Mardo: Armen and Mary Karaoghlanian.

Mary Karaoghlanian: Perfect. Thank you for having us.

Armen Karaoghlanian: Beautifully said.

Paola Mardo: Cool. The founders of Armenian Film Society, very excited to have you here. We have lots to talk about, but first, a member of your community has phoned in and sent us a question. I'll play it, and you'll guess who it is, and then you'll answer. You guys ready?

[VOICE MEMO: SURPRISE QUESTION]

Sona Movsesian: Hi, Armen and Mary! It's Sona Movsesian, your pal. I'm recording this right after I got home from the first ever Armenian Film Society Gala. It's why I'm slurring my words. I'm a couple martinis deep. But I wanted to ask you, and this is probably a question you've gotten before, but if you could have an AFS event with any famous Armenian, living or dead, who would it be, and what project would you help them promote?

I know no one asked me. This isn't—I'm not being interviewed for this podcast, but if the question were for me, the answer would be Cher, and, I mean, I don't even know which event. So why is your answer Cher, and why is that the only correct response?

[VOICE MEMO ENDS]

[LAUGHTER]

Paola Mardo: So good.

Armen Karaoghlanian: I love that. She's great.

Paola Mardo: For those who don't know, can you say who Sona is?

Armen Karaoghlanian: Sona Movsesian is the cohost of the Conan O'Brien Needs a Friend podcast, and she's incredible. She's been such a big supporter of what we do and has become such a great friend, and we're just endlessly inspired by her. She's so lovely.

Paola Mardo: Yeah. She's also an author of, I think—

Armen Karaoghlanian: And an author.

Paola Mardo:—bestselling book.

Mary Karaoghlanian: Yeah.

Paola Mardo: World's Worst Assistant.

Armen Karaoghlanian: Yeah.

Paola Mardo: Which is fantastic, and hosted your gala, which we'll get into. But, yeah, do you guys want to answer her question?

Armen Karaoghlanian: I mean, Cher is just iconic, and I think is one of the most influential celebrities and personalities. I think, for me, though, it'd probably have to be Charles Aznavour, French Armenian singer who made music that touched the hearts of millions around the world.

Paola Mardo: Can you name some of his songs, maybe some of the ones that people may not know?

Armen Karaoghlanian: Yeah. I mean, there's La Boheme and—

Mary Karaoghlanian: She.

Armen Karaoghlanian: She.

Paola Mardo: Okay.

Armen Karaoghlanian: But there's a Dr. Dre song, What's the Difference between me and you, is sampled by a Charles Aznavour song. It's actually in the film that we showed.

Paola Mardo: Wow.

Armen Karaoghlanian: So his music, I think everybody's heard at least one Charles Aznavour song. But it's great.

[04:41 - "In Proximity '90s" by Ludwig Göransson]

Paola Mardo: Take me to September 11, 2015.

Armen Karaoghlanian: Yeah.

Paola Mardo: This was your first Armenian Film Society event, I believe.

Armen Karaoghlanian: Yeah.

Paola Mardo: And it was at a bookstore in Glendale.

Armen Karaoghlanian: Yeah. Yeah.

Paola Mardo: Can you talk about why the bookstore and why in Glendale?

Armen Karaoghlanian: This was an Armenian bookstore called Abril Books, and it was a place where I would go to as a child. You know, my parents would take me there. My dad would take me there. Mary and I were talking about some of the original ideas that we had. We were collaborating with Arno Yeretian, who's the owner of the bookstore, and we just felt like, you know, we want to build something for the community, first and foremost.

And I think one of the things that's been consistent with us is it's important for us to—you know, even if we're starting small, to build the foundation first and then build from there. And it felt like the perfect place for us to at least get started, at least try some of our ideas, see what works, see what doesn't, and see how the community responds.

Mary Karaoghlanian: He has this unique detached area where it was a gallery space. So it was nice for us to not only bring our community in there, as far as, like, the film community, but we were also introducing people to these new artists, as well. So it was a nice way for us to collaborate on these events, whether it was for artists, musicians, or film lovers.

Paola Mardo: That's awesome. Beyond the idea of, like, bringing people together, were there certain stories, filmmakers, films that you guys wanted to program and share with people?

Armen Karaoghlanian: Yeah. I mean, I went to film school, and I was a filmmaker before all of that, right? And so I would firsthand see how difficult and challenging it was to have a space

where you can screen your work, you know, if you were lucky to get into a film festival and maybe have one screening of your work. It really felt like it was such a big challenge after that.

And so, for us, I think the important thing was, well, let's start with the filmmakers that need it the most, need the platform and are looking to be able to share their work with a wider audience. But then, I think just as a young Armenian creative at the time, I was always asking myself, well, there's a lot of Armenians working in this industry, some really well-known ones; there hasn't really been an opportunity for me to go hear them speak or get a chance to meet them. And so we also took it upon ourselves, well, maybe we could become that space where we are at once highlighting independent filmmakers who really would benefit from the platform that we'll hopefully be offering them but also bring in some filmmakers who are, you know, a little bit more well-known and inspirational.

But I think the biggest part of this whole equation was, I think, this idea that it's not just Armenian filmmakers. It's this desire to show work that has this Armenian connection, but that could be vast, right? I mean, one of the first events we had was Sean Baker's film, *Tangerine*. And I remember, at the time, you know, I didn't know a lot of people who had seen that film, and, you know, Mary and I kind of went into that a little blind. We didn't really know how much Armenian dialogue was in that film and—

Paola Mardo: Oh! Well...

Armen Karaoghlanian:—you know, a lot of Armenian—

Mary Karaoghlanian: Yeah.

Armen Karaoghlanian: Yeah, and a lot of Armenian actors in that film. And so that also became a part of the identity that we were building because we wanted to show a film like that and Alexander Payne's *Sideways*, which that film has Armenian characters in that, and, you know, it's shot at an Armenian church.

So I think it was a way for us to even introduce some audiences who might kind of maybe be there for the film screening to learn a little bit more about the Armenian culture that's around them in L.A. But it was also, let's just—you know, let's just host events that are fun and meaningful to anyone who loves movies.

Paola Mardo: How would you describe Armenian Film Society? What is it to you guys, and, also, what is it to—you know, if you were going to explain it to someone who is just hearing about it for the first time?

Armen Karaoghlanian: Yeah, Armenian Film Society is a creative and cultural hub. For us, we focus a lot on programming throughout the year in terms of screenings and events, and conversations with filmmakers. So AFS has become this sense of community for the film world in L.A., and it's been really great to be able to platform, you know, Armenian filmmakers as part

of that. But really, our focus has always been to have a space where we can have really great events, and that's obviously grown over the years and has led into a film festival, but just creating this, like, creative space for filmmakers and film lovers, first and foremost.

[09:22 - "In Proximity '90s" by Ludwig Göransson]

[VIDEO CLIP: ARMENIAN FILM FESTIVAL: SEV OHANIAN IN PROXIMITY WITH RYAN COOGLER]

Ryan Coogler: Something that's always been really amazing about you and how you work, you—no matter how busy you are, you seem to always make time for people. Can we talk a little bit about mentorship and why it's so important to you and why you continue to make time to do it?

Sev Ohanian: I'm certainly the product of incredible mentors, you know, professors we've had, older classmates, people that we met along the way. I think if I'm being, like, selfish, like, I think especially with the Armenian community, I feel like we just haven't had as much visibility in the industry, although, in reality, Armenians have been making incredible impact in this art form for 100 years. And—

[APPLAUSE]

— you know, special shout-out to Armen and Mary for AFS, which is helping to recognize that in a big way. Yeah.

[APPLAUSE AND CHEERS]

Armenian Film Society hosted the L.A. premiere of Sinners. Isn't that crazy?

Ryan Coogler: What?!

Sev Ohanian: Thank you, Armen and Mary. Yes!

[APPLAUSE AND CHEERS]

Ryan Coogler: Thank y'all.

[VIDEO CLIP ENDS]

Paola Mardo: I went to your gala that you just had, and, yeah, it was just really inspiring to see, like, the community come and support, but there were also other people. I mean, you had Ryan Coogler, our other founder, with Sev onstage in conversation. How did it feel, like, building this thing that you guys, the two of you, literally started from scratch?

Armen Karaoghlanian: I get emotional talking about it, honestly, because—

Mary Karaoghlanian: It's surreal.

Armen Karaoghlanian: Yeah. I feel like, if I had to pick a single day that sort of speaks to everything AFS sort of stands for and everything we've been working towards, it was probably that day because of the talk with Sev and Ryan, who are both so incredibly generous with their time and their support. It was a dream come true. And we talked about what—in a perfect world where everybody's going to say yes, and their schedules align, and they're available, and all the stars align, what is the dream version of what that day would look like? And that was literally it.

I had a lot of people come up to me and say things like, "When I talked to you at the gala, it felt like you were in a dream state. You were sort of"—

Paola Mardo: A hundred percent!

Mary Karaoghlanian: He was. He was.

Paola Mardo: I talked to you, as well.

[LAUGHTER]

Armen Karaoghlanian: Yeah, and honestly, it was just elation, right, this, like, incredible feeling where it feels like we finally got to accomplish something that was—a thing that was long in the works for us. And to have everybody in that room—we'd never hosted a gala before. We'd never played dress-up and had everybody come out. And we'd never also had sort of the opportunity to celebrate some of these filmmakers and bring our community closer to them.

And so I just remember that whole day, it felt like I was dreaming. I was so grateful. I was sitting there as a fan, as well, right? I was sitting there admiring the folks that were a part of all of this and just, I think, looking at this as—I think we've built something that is pretty close to what we set out to build.

Paola Mardo: Yeah. That's so exciting and very cool. And, and just some of the folks you guys honored—

Armen Karaoghlanian: Yeah.

Paola Mardo: Do you mind sharing a little bit? We had Sev, obviously, and who else was there?

Armen Karaoghlanian: Yeah. So we honored Madeline Sharafian, who's the director of this year's Pixar film, Elio. And her award was presented by Katherine Sarafian, who also works at Pixar. And we also honored Karren Karagulian, who's one of the lead actors from Anora. And his award was presented by Vache Tovmasyan, who's his costar from Anora.

And Sev is someone who's very much part of the Armenian culture and Armenian community, right?

Paola Mardo: Yeah. And Ryan had presented—I mean, they had the talk earlier, but Ryan also presented him with his award at the gala.

Armen Karaoghlanian: Ryan's participation was incredible. The goal of having Ryan there and asking him to present Sev with his honor, it was because we couldn't really think of a better person to be able to talk about that partnership aspect and that friendship aspect. And what Ryan said at the gala—I mean, you were there. It was one of the most beautiful things I've heard, and it just made everything so much more special.

Paola Mardo: Yeah. I mean, Sev, most folks know he's a founder of Proximity, a producer of Sinners and other films, writer/producer on Searching. Aneesh Chaganty is cowriter and director of that film—was there, as well.

Armen Karaoghlanian: Yeah.

Paola Mardo: But he also—and I know we've talked about this in the podcast—he also wrote, directed, produced, did makeup, costumes, hair, all the things for a film called My Big Fat Armenian Family.

Mary Karaoghlanian: Armenian Family, yeah.

Armen Karaoghlanian: Yeah.

Paola Mardo: It's just a classic film in the community and very much, like, grassroots. So you sort of honored him for his work now but also contributions to that. And it's so interesting to see how you guys have also grown with, you know, your event at a bookshop and 10 years later. I mean, you're doing the same thing you were doing as a professor and in that bookstore, but now with, like, more food and way more people.

[LAUGHTER]

Armen Karaoghlanian: But, but—yeah. I mean, but there's parallels, right? Like Sev didn't wait for the opportunity to come to him. Like, he created his own opportunity, you know, with My Big Fat Armenian Family. When we look at people like that, and there's obviously many others that we take inspiration from, we look at that and say, "Well, it can be done. And it's possible if you just believe in it."

Paola Mardo: Yeah.

[14:45 - "Good Times" by Ludwig Göransson]

Paola Mardo: There have been Armenians contributing to the film industry for 100 years. Right? For as long as the industry has been around. And, yeah, I'm just curious if there are certain folks, either present or even past, that you, I don't know, kind of look up to? Or, you know, when people talk about Armenians in the industry, are there people that you kind of talk about or want to share? Besides Cher, obviously.

[LAUGHTER]

Armen Karaoghlanian: No, for sure. I mean, one of the first heroes that I had early on was Steven Zaillian who was a screenwriter. And I remember he was one of the first people who, early on, I really registered was an Armenian working in the industry. He's worked with Martin Scorsese, and David Fincher. I think when you don't see yourself represented on screen, and you see somebody like him, it really means a lot, and it really starts making you think about doors that could potentially open up for you. So yeah, I think, you know, one of the things Sev said was that there have been all these Armenian filmmakers in the industry. Rouben Mamoulian was a film director in the Hollywood studio system.

Mary Karaoghlanian: He was a big—yeah.

Armen Karaoghlanian: And I think hopefully one of the things that we've done is we add context, you know? I think there's always been Armenians. I think what AFS does is it sort of contextualizes just how important and meaningful their work is.

[16:14 - "Good Times" by Ludwig Göransson]

Paola Mardo: So you guys are now hosting premieres, having festivals, galas, all these things. What I find really fascinating is how you built this, and it's so intentional. It—it's your 10-year anniversary this year, right? Like, what was it like Year 1, Year 2? How did you actually build it?

Armen Karaoghlanian: When we started, I think there was a lot of naysayers and people who didn't really understand or believe in what we were doing. But to build that while, you know, at the time, we both had full-time jobs, you have to work with what you have. And, like I said earlier, you have to start small. I think sometimes people just really dream big. They might even think, "Well, I want to launch a film festival," but we knew that building a community first and foremost was going to be the most valuable tool for success because once you cultivate that community and engage them and provide value to them, then they will show up when you do have the ability to do something on a larger scale.

It's been a lot of work, especially those early couple of years. Very discouraging at times when people just don't really know why you're doing this, and you're not, maybe, making money off of it, either, right? So you don't have the financial support, and it's not really a profitable endeavor, either.

Paola Mardo: Yeah. What kept you guys going? It's like, you're getting all these noes, you've got full-time jobs. At some point, you became new parents.

Mary Karaoghlanian: Yeah. I think we were very consistent. It's very challenging to market events when you're very limited with what you have to work with, as far as, like, you know, how do we get the reach? How do we get the word out to the community outside of the community that this bookstore has? We just kept going, and, you know, Instagram came out, and we—you know, well, our Instagram, we started that.

And we were like, "All right, a few followers, a couple hundred here, 1,000, 2,000, but just keep posting. Keep at it." And we—whether you have 100 likes, 2,000 likes, I mean, that was never an issue for us. So we said, "Just keep posting. The community will follow."

Armen Karaoghlanian: I would even tell people honestly, if, if the Armenian Film Society Instagram had no followers, I think we would still be putting out content.

Mary Karaoghlanian: We would still be posting, yeah.

Armen Karaoghlanian: Because, for us in those early stages, it was about archiving and documenting what was going on.

Paola Mardo: It sounds like the goal at the time was just build this community and just see how far you could take it.

Mary Karaoghlanian: Yeah.

Paola Mardo: Ten years later, what is the goal now?

Armen Karaoghlanian: I think the goal for us is to be a film society first and foremost. We want to put on the best programming that L.A. can offer. And even beyond that, as we've now started expanding, but also create opportunities for filmmakers. I think these are all—a lot of these goals were there when we started. We just had no resources. We didn't really have the ability. We might have had them as goals, but we didn't really have actionable ways to make them a reality.

So I think the goal is to build a film society that's open to anyone and everyone who loves movies. Whether you're just starting out and are deeply passionate about movies or you're a filmmaker, we want to be the home for you.

Paola Mardo: That's awesome. Do you guys remember like the first time, maybe, you guys had a conversation about, "oh, maybe we should start this group," or organization or whatever you were calling it at the time?

Armen Karaoghlanian: Yeah, well I was teaching film at a university in Burbank and had a class where I would screen a film and bring in filmmakers to talk about their work, and Mary and I at that time in 2012, we talked about, “well, this is great, but wouldn’t it be great if we could open it up to the public?”

Mary Karaoghlanian: At school when he was teaching, he pretty much was doing what AFS had started to do there, where he was bringing in guest speakers and he was bringing in people from the film world to introduce to the students, and that’s something that this campus wasn’t doing, and that was something new for them as well, because the film school was also new for them.

And he introduced this new world and this new idea to the campus. We talked about it, and, like he said, we were just, like, “this is something we can take beyond just the school and open it up to everybody within the community, not just the students. You know, not everybody has the opportunity to go to a film school and attend these things. So, I think that’s what drew us to this idea of opening the space up to everybody.

Paola Mardo: And were you bringing in Armenian filmmakers? Or was it a variety of folks?

Mary Karaoghlanian: No.

Armen Karaoghlanian: No. And what’s really funny about it was that we ended up screening a lot of films that were at Sundance that year. Right? And then we would bring in the filmmakers to come and talk about their works that had just screened at the festival. And so, it just became this place where we had these sort of young, independent filmmakers coming in, and then we got some filmmakers that were a little bit more advanced in their careers and had made, you know, films for studios.

And so, I think the goal for us at the time—the goal for me at the time was to allow my students to have proximity—

Mary Karaoghlanian: There you go.

[LAUGHTER]

Armen Karaoghlanian: With some of these filmmakers. Because I saw first hand that those conversations and those networking aspects would lead to internships and jobs. And I—you know, I would say that’s probably a very important part of film school is to be able to have access to filmmakers like that.

[21:43 - “Good Times” by Ludwig Göransson]

Paola Mardo: I want to get to know more about you guys and how you two started working, working with each other but also how you met. You guys met at 19 years old?

Mary Karaoghlanian: Yes.

Paola Mardo: Can you talk about, like, you met before college, but, like, what—was this, like, romcom in, like, a library or in high school.

Mary Karaoghlanian: Sort of. We both had mutual friends. And back then, there was AOL Messenger, AIM.

Paola Mardo: Oh, yes. Very familiar.

Mary Karaoghlanian: You know, very dinosaur, like—

Paola Mardo: What were your screen names?

Mary Karaoghlanian: Oh, man.

Paola Mardo: Can you—

Armen Karaoghlanian: I'll tell you mine. It's embarrassing.

Mary Karaoghlanian: Mine was “xoxohazeleyes.”

Paola Mardo: Love it. Good one, good one.

Mary Karaoghlanian: And his was—

Armen Karaoghlanian: Mine was “dreminem2001”, which I thought was a great—I thought it was a really great username. And nobody really thought so.

[LAUGHTER]

Mary Karaoghlanian: We chatted for a while, and then we were like, “Hey, you know, why don't we just exchange numbers,” and we just became really good friends. Like, we would talk a lot.

Armen Karaoghlanian: I remember one of the first things I told Mary was—I said, “Hey, how about Friday nights, we go out together. Saturday, you can spend with your friends. Sunday, you can spend with your family. And that way we can all have, you know—

Mary Karaoghlanian: Balance.

Armen Karaoghlanian:—a balance in our lives. And then, very quickly, I was like, “Hey, do you mind if I also get Saturdays from you?” And then it was sort of like, “Can I also get Saturdays

and Sundays?" We just wanted to spend time together and just sort of grow up together, right? At that age.

Paola Mardo: I love this, like, healthy boundaries and communication at 19.

[LAUGHTER]

[23:15 - "Good Times" by Ludwig Göransson]

Paola Mardo: Now is the part where we talk about a little bit of your process or inspiration, and we've asked you guys to bring something meaningful to you. So you guys are both holding very interesting pieces of physical media. Armen, do you want to start?

Armen Karaoghlanian: Sure. So this is something that means a great deal to me. This is AIM magazine, Armenian International Magazine, and it's the March 1992 issue. So my dad was a contractor and had built his own business. But one of the things that he did was he was the founder, one of the founders, of this magazine. And it was a Armenian magazine that covered a variety of products, and it was the first of its kind. This literally didn't exist before.

Paola Mardo: Wow.

Armen Karaoghlanian: And it was incredibly difficult, I think, to create a publication like this and be able to source all this material, you know, pre-internet and all of that. And it's something that I grew up always knowing about and hearing about, but it was much later when I really understood, like, the incredible sacrifices he made to build something that he believed in.

And, I mean, again, I wasn't really thinking about all of this when we were building AFS, but it's hard not to see the parallels now. You know, I just remember him spending late nights, you know, after his work, you know, had ended to be in community meetings and conferences and, you know, to roll out this publication.

But the reason why I also brought this is because—I found this out later—but in this issue, my dad was interviewed when he was 37, and in it, he talks about his four-year-old son.

Paola Mardo: Oh, stop it!

Armen Karaoghlanian: And, and I had only found a digital copy of this. My dad passed away in 2012, and one of the last things I talked to him was about this magazine and just the work that he had put into building it. And so I had come across this issue, a digital file of it, and read the interview of my dad sort of speaking about his four-year-old-son, but I wanted the print copy of it so badly.

[LAUGHTER]

Paola Mardo: Yeah. Where did you find this?

Armen Karaoghlanian: And so I tracked it down after many, many years of searching online, on Facebook, on eBay, just asking people and some of the folks that were involved in this. And one of the folks that was involved in this told me that she might be able to reach out to somebody who has old copies of the magazine.

And so she tracked it down for me earlier this year, and it came into my life when I was also 37, and I have a four-year-old son. So—

Paola Mardo: Wow.

Armen Karaoghlanian: I look at this now. I keep it in my office, and I look at it, and I'm just inspired because sometimes, you know, when we're doing what we do, there's a lot of sacrifice that goes into it. And, you know, I think about him and him having a son at home and understanding how to balance your work and your family life together.

Paola Mardo: Wow. Can you just show it to camera real quick?

[ARMEN KARAOGHLANIAN HOLDS UP MAGAZINE]

That's amazing. It's in print forever, and digital now.

Armen Karaoghlanian: Yeah.

Paola Mardo: So you have two sources.

Armen Karaoghlanian: Yeah, yeah.

Paola Mardo: You got to frame that.

Armen Karaoghlanian: Yeah.

Paola Mardo: Mary, what did you bring?

Mary Karaoghlanian: I have an old film camera, a Kiev. And this was my dad's camera. It's interesting that we both just wanted to bring something of our dads'. My dad, by profession, was a dentist, not involved in the creative world at all. And this camera, he—anytime he traveled anywhere, this is the camera he took with him, and he just loved to just photograph things.

And my dad passed away in 2011, and just a few years prior to that is when he gifted this camera to me, and it was right around the time when Armen and I had just met, too. What I love most about this is that he inspires me to be able to look at things from the business aspect of everything but to also be able to pursue the creativity and to pursue that creative side. And, you

know, he's a dentist, but he had an eye for the beautiful things outside of the dental office. And anytime—like, I have this in, like, my peripheral vision, it's like it's just a reminder of, hey, it's okay, you can pause, and you can try to just reflect on it and kind of enjoy the beauty of it, too, and not just stress out about it.

[27:52 - "Prox Recs Theme" with Ludwig Göransson and Ken Nana]

Paola Mardo: So, the last part of the show, we ask our guests to recommend something, a Prox Rec. And I'm sure you've heard, but it can be anything. It could have anything to do with what you do or just something you want to recommend. Mary, why don't you go first?

Mary Karaoghlanian: Well, I actually have been listening to The Mel Robbins Podcast recently, and some of her guests have been very influential in terms of leadership and motivation and how to, you know, just balance everything as, as being, like, a leader but also a motivator for your staff and for your employees, whether we have our volunteers or just even to each other.

I love just listening to that in the background. So that would be my recommendation.

Paola Mardo: That's awesome.

Armen Karaoghlanian: My recommendation is going to be a film called The Color of Pomegranates.

Paola Mardo: Okay!

Armen Karaoghlanian: And if you haven't heard of this movie and if you haven't seen it, it might change your life a little bit. It certainly will change the way you think about what movies can be, what film can be. It's directed by an Armenian filmmaker, so there's your Armenian connection. But it is a film that is unlike anything, I think, you might have seen.

It's regarded as one of the greatest films ever made. It's on the Sight and Sound list. You know, Martin Scorsese and The Film Foundation recently restored it. But it's unbelievable. It's such a poetic film that uses sound and color and just the visual medium to—to create a tapestry of, you know, of ideas. And I think people have that sort of reaction to it of, "I've never quite seen something like this before."

So I recommend it as much as I can because it really opened up my eyes when I saw it for the first time, of just what film, as a medium, can do.

Paola Mardo: Yeah. Well, thank you, Mary, and thank you, Armen, for being In Proximity with me today. It was really great to have you.

Armen Karaoghlanian: Thank you. It was an honor.

Mary Karaoghlanian: Thank you. Thank you so much for having us.

[30:07 - "In Proximity Theme" by Ludwig Göransson]

[VOICEOVER]

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, and 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.

Follow us on social media @proximitymedia.

For transcripts and more information, head to proximitymedia.com.

[VOICEOVER ENDS]