

In Proximity

Season 3 Episode 18

Prox Gems: Filmmaking 101

Final Transcript

Justin Tipping: Yeah, Busta Rhymes' "Gimme Some More" is—he sampled Hitchcock's Psycho and sped up the "da-na-na-na." Now we have the chance to do it in real time. You're trying to seduce Tyriq's character even though it's horrific.

Todd Harris: I would stress kind of doing different things. If you're gonna work in movies, touch as many departments as you can.

Azie Tesfai: I heard one of the producers—a room full of producers—and I heard one of the producers say, "Ugh, I don't know why everyone thinks they can act," out loud. Those kind of people are not why we make art.

[00:28 - "In Proximity Theme" by Ludwig Göransson]

Paola Mardo: You're watching and listening to In Proximity. I'm Paola Mardo, and today we're bringing back Prox Gems since today is a holiday in the U.S. Today's Prox Gems will be all about filmmaking. So you'll hear from artists, filmmakers, creatives, sharing bits of advice that have to do with films! It's the new year and you're probably starting a new project very soon if you aren't already. So we figured filmmaking tips could be helpful this time of year.

So enjoy, take some notes, and we'll be back next week with a regular episode on our YouTube channel and the podcast feed. Thanks for watching and listening.

[1:10 - "KN 9 to 5" 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.

[3:44 - 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.

[4:14 - 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?"

[6:06 - AIGHT? by Carl 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.

[7:19 - "In Proximity '90s" by Ludwig Göransson]

Todd Harris: It's interesting, 'cause now we're in an era where people come up wanting to be that thing.

I want to be an artist, I want to be a storyboard artist, I want to be a director. I want to be—name it, I want to be a hairdresser, I want to be a lawyer. All of that stuff. I would stress kind of doing different things. If you're going to work in movies, try to work above the line and below the line—well above the line is always difficult, but in many departments, touch as many departments as you can. So if your goal is to eventually direct, you are aware of what you're asking the people who work for you.

And so because you want to create an environment that you would like to work under. And so being informed about what you ask of people and what people's duties are, what their tasks are and how they contribute, you know, so you don't ask the impossible on a regular basis and you don't—you know, you want to respect everybody's expertise. So kind of filling up your cup about what everybody does around you I think is the best advice I can give any aspiring director.

Paola Mardo: I think that's really great advice. Because, also, like, you might think—because I feel like this is a trend, I've interviewed several people now for this podcast and some people come into the industry knowing what they want to do already, but some people have one idea, but then it sort of morphs and twists and turns in your career, take you somewhere else.

But I love the advice you give because you won't really know if you want to do the thing unless you try the thing and why not try a couple different things so that you can learn what works and what doesn't for you?

Todd Harris: Absolutely. And usually if you do it right, all those other things will feed into the thing you might eventually do.

Paola Mardo: Exactly.

Todd Harris: I have plenty of lessons I've learned that have come into a greater focus once I learn other things.

Paola Mardo: Can you give one example of that?

Todd Harris: Man that is—that's a big one. Because I've had the fortune to work on a lot of different movies. I've worked on the better part of 70 or 80 of 'em, something like that. And so, you know, you learn what to do and what not to do. One interesting thing, context matters. So when you're presenting an idea, even if it's the best idea in your mind, if it's only one, it's also the worst idea.

So always deliver—try to deliver a minimum of three because choice is important and people like to contribute to the decision-making process. And I've seen that fall flat when presenting to

directors or department heads. So that was a—that was a big lesson because I would scrutinize things and go, "Here you go, here's the best one." And think, "But that's not my job." It's their job to make the last decision. So it's my job to give them informed choices.

Paola Mardo: Yeah, I like that. And there's also the order of which you present the ideas. Do you pick your—present your best idea first or last or, I dunno, if you have a strategy for that, for presenting?

Todd Harris: Usually by the time I present ideas, the last thing you want to do is present an idea you don't want to do. So I'm pretty married to all my options because, you know, historically I've had plenty of times where they'll pick the thing you don't want to do. That was something I learned in my youth. So the solution to that is never present ideas you don't want to do. And so that will get you out of a lot of trouble.

[10:50 - "Good Times" by Ludwig Göransson]

Azie Tesfai: I have this audition story that is so awful. I went in for—we'll just call it a franchise procedural show that doesn't exist anymore.

Paola Mardo: Okay.

Azie Tesfai: And I had a—like, such a good audition in the morning with the casting directors, it felt like, "Ooh, I feel good." It was like a—not even a big role. It's to play, like, Nurse #2, right? But Nurse #2 had a lot of medical things to say. And then they were like, "Oh, you're—this was great. Like, you're going to get this. Come back in for the producers, just a formality."

And I came in, and it was, like, there was something wrong with the lot and the—all the things. And then they were like, "No, you have to park in this lot this time," which was like a 10-extra-minute walk. Whatever, things that got me a bit flustered. I came in, and then I had to go straight in. I thought I had a minute. And I went in, and I flubbed the first take.

And casting was like, "It's fine. Let's do it again." And I heard one of the producers, a room full of producers, and I heard one of the producers say, "Ugh, I don't know why everyone thinks they can act," out loud.

Paola Mardo: Whew! Whew.

Azie Tesfai: And let's just say I never got the take right. Like, I think I did it like three or four more times, and I couldn't. And I think I said, "I'm just going to go." And it was so degrading and embarrassing, and I took in someone else's—do you know what? I never saw their face. It's, like, you're in this room doing an audition, and it's, like, dark, and then the light's on you. But I could hear them clear as day. And that was probably the—and I just remember going in the car and crying and being like, what am I—what am I doing this for?

And—and, you know, those kind of people are not why we make art, the critical and the cruel at the end of the day because I was like a—just a kid trying to get a guest star. But that was definitely a moment where I'm like, I don't—I love the art of it, but I don't know if I like the business of it.

Paola Mardo: Man, that's a—I'm sorry that happened to you.

Azie Tesfai: It's okay.

Paola Mardo: And that's—

Azie Tesfai: It made me better.

Paola Mardo: Yeah, but the business sucks, or can suck, you know?

Azie Tesfai: Yeah. Yeah. And I think people don't ever talk about, like, the embarrassing moments along the journey. And everybody has them, and I think the more that we can kind of normalize that it's hard, and in those moments, you're not the one that should be feeling shameful. For anyone that is auditioning and has had someone be rude to them in moments where you, like, did all this work and prepared it, and you're kind of going in to be vulnerable, like, don't let them take that away from you. And I'm, like, speaking this as if I wish I had told myself that then, you know?

[13:19 - "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, 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.

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[VOICEOVER ENDS]