

**In Proximity**  
**Maggie Kang and Chris Appelhans**  
**Season 3 Episode 22**  
**Final Transcript**

**Maggie Kang:** Adding K-pop to this concept, which was originally just kind of, like, a demon hunter, Korean demon hunter concept, when I saw the kind of rise of K-content and K-pop and K-music, that's when I was like, "I want to take this opportunity and just showcase so many aspects of Korean culture and our history and how Korean music evolved to become K-pop." So.

**Paola Mardo:** Where did the ab eyes and the corn eyes with the popcorn—where did that come from?

**Chris Appelhans:** Yeah!

[0:29 - "KN 9 to 5" by Ludwig Göransson]

[VOICEOVER]

**Paola Mardo:** You're watching and listening to In Proximity. I'm Paola Mardo, and today, we're talking K-pop and demon hunters. Maggie Kang and Chris Appelhans are the co-directors of the hit animated film, KPop Demon Hunters, which, if you haven't seen yet, you might be living under a rock without a Netflix subscription. I got to speak with Maggie and Chris about what it takes to make a hit animated movie including their seven-year production process, what it's like to screenwrite for animation, how Maggie pitched this idea on her personal experiences growing up with Korean heritage and also loving K-pop music before it was cool, and the silly fun they had with the crew and the cast making a movie full of music, magic, and corn and ab eyes.

Maggie and Chris have an extensive background in animation. They both are directors at Sony Pictures Animation. Maggie got her start as a story artist working on films such as the classic Puss in Boots franchise as well as Kung Fu Panda 3 and Minions: The Rise of Gru, among many others. And Chris is the writer and director of Wish Dragon. He was also a concept artist and production designer for films like The Fantastic Mr. Fox, The Princess and the Frog, and Coraline. It's all about animation today on In Proximity. Here's my conversation with Maggie Kang and Chris Appelhans.

[VOICEOVER ENDS]

[2:01 - "KN 9 to 5" by Ludwig Göransson]

**Paola Mardo:** Well, Maggie Kang and Chris Appelhans, welcome to In Proximity.

**Maggie Kang:** Thank you.

**Chris Appelhans:** Thank you.

**Maggie Kang:** We're so excited to be here.

**Paola Mardo:** Yay! Very excited to have you and just really dig into your work. I want to start, though, with the reaction to your film because it's been several months now since your movie's come out, and I have to say—and we talked a little bit about this right before—but it really did remind me a lot of Sinners, like the reaction to your movie.

**Maggie Kang:** Yes.

**Paola Mardo:** The movie itself also, in a lot of ways, has connections, but the just global reactions of fans, of audience, of viewers—you know, you had people making Tik-Tok videos, like digging deep into, like, the mythology, the music, all this discourse on the internet. You had the number one Halloween costume of 2025. I guess I just want to ask you guys: what were some of the fun, unexpected videos or reactions online?

**Maggie Kang:** Ooh, so many. What's a good one?

**Chris Appelhans:** The first one that I think blew my mind was people playing our songs in a club wherever, Seoul or—

**Maggie Kang:** At raves or something, like—

**Chris Appelhans:** Yeah, and then—

**Maggie Kang:** Yeah, DJ remixes.

**Chris Appelhans:** And the DJs had remixed it, and the crowd went nuts because, like, they knew it. I'm like, "Oh, my gosh! They know it."

**Maggie Kang:** Yes. And they're like, "The Honmoon is sealed!" And we're like, what the heck?

**Chris Appelhans:** They're using the word "Honmoon."

**Maggie Kang:** Yeah.

**Chris Appelhans:** We're like, "What?!"

**Maggie Kang:** I know.

**Chris Appelhans:** So that was mind-blowing.

**Maggie Kang:** Because that word was, like, just made up. I just—I literally just wrote down a bunch of Korean words that would kind of, you know, describe what this shield/barrier was. And it plays such a critical role in the movie. It was like a character, and so it needed a name. It didn't feel right for it to have an English name. So I wrote down all these Korean words, and they were all, like, too difficult to say, like as an English-speaking—you know, if you're an English-speaking person. So I just picked, like, "hon," which means "spirit" in Korean, and "moon," which is "door," but it could also kind of imply like "entryway" or something. So that's how we got Honmoon.

And every time we would talk to Korean artists or, or talent that came in, they were like, "What is this word?" And I had to be like, "Well," and, like, explain it to them. And so now, to see it be, like, used in—like,

**Chris Appelhans:** Pop culture.

**Maggie Kang:** Yeah, pop culture, K-pop, like, canon...

**Paola Mardo:** Yeah.

**Maggie Kang:** It's so wild.

**Paola Mardo:** That's really cool. I mean, it just speaks to, I mean, the work that you guys, you know, made. And, like, having worked on this film for seven years, it must be really exciting and thrilling and maybe even rewarding to see that kind of reaction.

**Maggie Kang:** Yes. Yes.

**Chris Appelhans:** The most emotional one for me was—I've told this to Maggie before, but my son is five, and he's half Korean, but he's been like a little wary of speaking Korean. There's not, like, a lot of Korean kids in his school. And his grandparents are like, "You will speak Korean." So they're teaching him all these words, and he just won't say it at our house. And then he finally saw the movie, and he kind of knew it was a big deal so he wanted to watch it. He was scared, but he's like, "Okay." And then he watched it, and then I came home from one of these trips, and this is the first time in five years, he sees me at the top of the driveway, and he goes, "Appa!" And I was like, "Come on!"

**Paola Mardo:** Wow.

**Maggie Kang:** The reactions I love is, like, where people are—become friends with through this journey, have, like, sent me videos of, like, their Korean daughters or nieces, like, watching the movie, and the mom's or the aunt's telling me, "I've never had this when I was growing up, and I love that my nieces and my daughters have this now." And that's like, oof.

I guess that's the thing that I didn't expect, is, like, I made this movie—I, I was like, "I want to make a movie like this because I just want to see it. Like, I"—but then I actually never realized

how much other people wanted to see a movie like this. And so hearing that from the AAPI community has been—I don't know. It's just—I was like, "Whoa! I didn't expect that, guys." But I guess we all need movies like this, you know?

**Paola Mardo:** Yeah. Can I ask a little—I'd love to ask a little bit more about that because you said that you were into K-pop before it was cool, and, you know, and before, I guess, Korean culture was quote/unquote "cool" or even global, right?

**Maggie Kang:** Yes. Yeah.

**Paola Mardo:** So can you talk about—and you created the story. So can you just talk about what it was like growing up? And then, at what point were you like, "Hmm, my culture, K-pop, there's something, like, brewing here. Maybe I can finally tell a story about this or with these elements?"

**Maggie Kang:** Well, so I was born in Seoul, and my family moved to Toronto when I was five. But Korean is my first language. I had a Korean name before I had an English name, you know? And when I was in like second or third grade, my teacher said, "Where are you from?" and I said South Korea. And she said—I forget which teacher it was, and they tried to find it on a map and couldn't find it. And that just shocked me. I was like—and when I found it, it was colored as, like, a second-world country, not a first-world country, and that, like—I don't know. That just made such an impact on, like, me and how—I didn't—I didn't think the world thought of Korea that way because I didn't see it that way. And even as a young kid, like, I think I was like 9 or 10, and I remembered that, carried that through my whole career. And growing up in Toronto, all my friends were Chinese. There's a huge Chinese community in Canada. And so I felt like the inferior Asian, you know? And I didn't feel like our culture was as widely known as Chinese culture or Japanese culture. And, and so when I saw the kind of rise of K-content and K-pop and K-music and all—and K-food and K-beauty, I'm like, "Whoa, this is crazy!" And that's when I was like—I guess, in a way, I was like, "I want to take this opportunity and, and bring something that is going to kind of showcase Korean culture and ride this wave, really." Like, I—I mean, I'll admit I did that. It was—and, and adding K-pop to this concept, which was originally just kind of, like, a demon hunter/Korean demon hunter concept—it didn't feel like it was enough. And adding K-pop to it, I knew would be—would help sell it and get it made because, you know, it's popular and people know about it. So, when Chris came on and we figured out the mythology and rooted it into a Korean mudang tradition, which is like shamanism, it really opened up the possibility for this movie to be something that could be more than just K-pop and just showcase so many aspects of Korean culture and our history and how it—how Korean music evolved to become K-pop. So it's cool. I was like, "I'm going to make this the most Korean movie that I can make it."

**Paola Mardo:** That's awesome.

**Chris Appelhans:** I think it actually, kind of—we noticed in all of our pitches to Korean talent like Black Label or different songwriters, we'd always start with a slide of, like, there are these awesome K-pop girls that are demon fighters. And everyone was like—

**Maggie Kang:** "Okay, okay, okay." Yeah.

**Chris Appelhans:** "Okay, cool. Mm-hmm." And then our next slide would be, like, the mudang, like the ancient hunters. We'd be like, "The cool thing is it's all rooted in this secret tradition." And everybody, at that point, was like, "Wait," and they leaned in, from the Korean talent, because they felt like, "Oh, you guys are going somewhere a little deeper than, like, let's exploit K-pop because it's the hot thing!"

**Maggie Kang:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Chris Appelhans:** And I felt like, with Teddy, with everybody—

**Maggie Kang:** Yeah, Lee Byung Hun.

**Chris Appelhans:** Lee Byung Hun, yeah. They totally understood that ambition, and I think that got them on board.

[9:56 - "Good Times" by Ludwig Göransson]

**Paola Mardo:** How did you get on the project, Chris? How did you finally come aboard? Because before this, you had directed a film, Wish Dragon.

**Chris Appelhans:** Yeah, yeah.

**Paola Mardo:** I think you were looking for your next thing. So how did you and Maggie join forces?

**Chris Appelhans:** I had—yeah, I had finished, and SONY was really happy, and it had done really well. And they said, "What do you want to do next?" And I thought, okay, I've got to go make my list of things I want to do. And then—

**Maggie Kang:** Sleep!

**Chris Appelhans:** Yeah.

[LAUGHTER]

**Paola Mardo:** Take a break.

**Maggie Kang:** Yeah.

**Chris Appelhans:** Sleep was tough. And really, I was going to take it slow, and then I heard about Maggie's thing through Aron Warner. So he was my producer on Wish Dragon. And SONY said, "Can you go find some more interesting international animated projects?" And that brought him—

**Maggie Kang:** Like Wish Dragon, yeah.

**Chris Appelhans:** Yeah, and that brought him to Maggie, and Maggie came up with her genius idea. And as soon as I heard the words, I was like, "Oh, my god!" So they said, "What do you want to do next?" and I said, "I want to do Kpop Demon Hunters." And everyone was very confused.

And the movie is very personal to me in a lot of ways, which we understood right away.

**Maggie Kang:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Chris Appelhans:** Just—my wife of 20 years is Korean. I've been watching K-content since My Sassy Girl, 2001. So, like, I, I really—and I'm a musician, and I always dreamed of making a very music-centered film. And so when we met up and started talking about it, I was like, "Oh, there's such a—such a perfect match."

[11:19 - "Good Times" by Ludwig Göransson]

**Paola Mardo:** I mean, that's just really cool to hear because, you know, the industry is always changing, and to create an original work these days is so hard.

**Maggie Kang:** Yeah.

**Chris Appelhans:** Yeah.

**Paola Mardo:** And to get it made is even harder, and then bring it to, like, the world is like, you guys crossed so many milestones to make this thing, and it was a huge hit. So I want to just go back to—so you're on the project now. You guys are co-directing. What was it like to pitch this totally unique process? It sounds like you went to some Korean, I don't know, artists, I guess, and they were leaning in. Was it easy to pitch this to people?

**Chris Appelhans:** We started by developing that, pitching it to Netflix. That was kind of the first big green light, so to speak. And by the time we had that—by the time we'd done that pitch, we'd spent, what, like six to eight months, written a draft, done tons of artwork.

**Maggie Kang:** Yeah.

**Chris Appelhans:** An amazing—Helen Chen and Ami Thompson were our first two people on the art crew, amazing character designer and production designer. And then we had found Ejae, who wrote...

**Maggie Kang:** I think, at that point, like three demos.

**Chris Appelhans:** Three demos, yeah.

**Maggie Kang:** Yeah. And so they were like, "Okay, this pitch is great, you know, but how are you going to do the music?" And we were like, play demo.

**Paola Mardo:** Dropped mike, literally.

**Maggie Kang:** And, and they were like, "Oh!" And I thought the music was—I mean, okay, not—the music was the—one of the hardest parts of the movie. I mean, all of it was very difficult, but, like—but once I heard Ejae's first demos, I was like, "Oh, my gosh! This is possible. Like, we can actually pull this off." So, and they, they thought that, too, so we got the green light pretty immediately.

**Paola Mardo:** And Ejae is a musician, artist, songwriter, and also the singing voice for Rumi.

**Chris Appelhans:** Yeah.

**Maggie Kang:** Yes.

**Paola Mardo:** Were any of those demos—are any of them close to any of the finished songs, or were they too rough?

**Maggie Kang:** The first demo she wrote was for the plane fight sequence. And so we tapped Black Label, which is a K-pop studio that—label that is run by Teddy Park, who is from YG, and he kind of created Blackpink. And so they were working on the demo for that, like just a few kind of flavors, and we had a few options, and, and I think, like, we really liked the kind of spirit of the first demo that Ejae had written. So they actually pulled a few elements from that original demo and, and then with the collaboration between Black Label and Ejae, they created How It's Done.

**Paola Mardo:** That's really cool.

**Maggie Kang:** Yeah.

**Paola Mardo:** I mentioned that our audience is filmmakers and creatives, and just hearing, like—you know, the pitch process can be so grueling. And here are you guys, like six to eight months, you have not only, like, your deck, your character design, you also have music. You know, that's a ton of work.

**Maggie Kang:** But I think there's so much experience between the two of us.

**Chris Appelhans:** Decades.

**Maggie Kang:** Decades, and so much experience of pitching things, as well. So I think we knew, like, what was important to prepare.

**Chris Appelhans:** Yeah. I mean, when I think about that green light pitch, it would look—it looks a lot like the movie.

**Maggie Kang:** It does, yes.

**Chris Appelhans:** Including—

**Maggie Kang:** It didn't change much.

**Chris Appelhans:** Yeah, including even the flow of information and hooking you in and then going to the past and then revealing some twists and turns.

**Maggie Kang:** And the tone.

**Chris Appelhans:** Yep.

**Maggie Kang:** And I don't know how else you can—I don't know. You can't really talk about tone. Like, you can put some comps together, but, like, it was almost impossible to, like, do that for this movie because nothing like this really exists in, you know, in a Hollywood movie. So the only way I know how to do it is to just storyboard it the way that, you know, I see it and then cut it and, and slap some music on it and be like, "Here you go!"

[15:21 - "In Proximity '90s" by Ludwig Göransson]

**Paola Mardo:** I know you just said tone is tricky to show. But can you talk about some comps or inspiration for the film?

**Maggie Kang:** Yeah. I think it's—I think it's tricky to describe. I think it's much easier to show.

**Paola Mardo:** Oh, gotcha.

**Maggie Kang:** By execution, even if it's, like, in a really rough form. But I think, like, there was a lot of, like—I don't know, just old people anime because we're old.

**Chris Appelhans:** Cowboy Bebop.

**Paola Mardo:** You're not that old.

[LAUGHTER]

**Maggie Kang:** We're Cowboy Bebop old. `

**Chris Appelhans:** Yeah, yeah.

**Maggie Kang:** Sailor Moon.

**Chris Appelhans:** Sailor Moon.

**Maggie Kang:** And I think the most mainstream thing we could think of was, like, Guardians of the Galaxy.

**Chris Appelhans:** You know what, also we did a lot of K-drama comps.

**Maggie Kang:** Yeah, we did.

**Chris Appelhans:** Which people are—it was starting to work because, like, Kristine Belson, President of Sony Animation, had seen a few.

**Maggie Kang:** Yeah.

**Chris Appelhans:** So—and they—Guardians of the Galaxy, in some ways, like, they share a—like, K-dramas do this great thing where everyone's so badass. We always talk about, like, he's so handsome, he's the CEO of the biggest company in Korea, he's a judo—taekwondo champion, and he's afraid of cats or elevators, or he doesn't know how to do his own—you know, they, they elevate, and then they poke them and deflate them a little bit. And that's—we felt like that was so necessary for these characters that are supposed to be so cool.

**Maggie Kang:** Yes.

**Chris Appelhans:** I think you—it—say the thing you say about they are not mutually exclusive. I forget. It was very articulate but—

**Maggie Kang:** It doesn't sound like something I said, articulate.

[LAUGHTER]

**Chris Appelhans:** No, it's basically like there's—they are not—they're not—they shouldn't be exclusive of one another.

**Maggie Kang:** Yeah, yeah.

**Chris Appelhans:** You can be incredibly silly and goofy—

**Maggie Kang:** Oh, totally.

**Chris Appelhans:**—and vulnerable and also a complete beautiful badass. Why not?

**Maggie Kang:** Oh, yeah. Like, I love comedy, and, I mean, I try to be funny all the time, if you haven't noticed. But I think there's like—comedy takes so much courage, and, and you have to have so much confidence to tell jokes and be funny in a room. And I think that is so empowering for women. And so I really wanted to show that, and I also think it's such a—it's a huge sign of intimacy if you are your stupidest self with somebody. And so I wanted to show that kind of friendship, just that kind of relationship between women where you can be the dumbest version of yourself, and it's important to find people who embrace that about you, and you find people who are just as silly as you are, and that is the ultimate, you know, friendship that you can find. So we wanted to build that kind of trio.

[18:04 - "Good Times" by Ludwig Göransson]

**Paola Mardo:** Just hearing you guys talk about your project, I feel like you guys are so in sync, and it's shocking to me that this is your first project co-directing together. Can you talk about how that was? Like, how did this work? I mean, did—how did—was there a division of labor? I have no idea. Like, how did you guys co-direct the movie?

**Maggie Kang:** No, I'm like, is Chris a white man version of me? No, it's kind of weird.

[LAUGHTER]

**Chris Appelhans:** It's weird.

**Maggie Kang:** Like, creepy. Like, I don't think we fully realized that while we were working together because we were just in it, and we were just in the thick of it. But—

**Chris Appelhans:** Everyone wanted a division of labor.

**Maggie Kang:** Yeah.

**Chris Appelhans:** Because it's so much easier on the production to be like, "You go here, and do this and do that."

**Maggie Kang:** Yeah, "That's why there's two of you. You go like this." And then we're like—

**Chris Appelhans:** Mm-mm. And then it—

**Maggie Kang:** Especially with the writing. Like, we were both heavily—you're—in animation, you're writing till the bitter end, until those lines come out of the actor's mouth.

**Chris Appelhans:** Yeah. And there's like the—

**Maggie Kang:** And even if they don't, you could find those clips, you know, in words and other things and put them together.

**Chris Appelhans:** And you're a—in production, in animation production, you're a decision machine for the last three years. And so it felt very inefficient because I was like, every decision that comes to us, the answer to that is better and deeper and more—it's higher level when both our brains have, like, bounced it around.

**Maggie Kang:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Chris Appelhans:** So why remove that tool? Let's just try to funnel it all through this one box, and it will come out the other side pretty complete. And we had to break up on occasion for just crunch time.

**Maggie Kang:** The schedule, yeah. Right.

**Chris Appelhans:** But it always felt like—I was like, "Where's Maggie?" Even things that I'm the—like, I'm the specialist on lighting. I was like, "Yeah, this looks great. I'm really happy, but when she comes in and says she's happy, then we're done," you know?

**Maggie Kang:** So it was a true, true collaboration. And when we wrote—

[LAUGHTER]

We would—if we had like three, four scenes to write, we would divide up the scenes, and we would each take a pass and then swap and then take a pass. And then it'd be like, "Oh, my gosh, I'm stuck!" or, "Blah!" So we would meet up and live, you know, write together on one document.

**Chris Appelhans:** Yeah.

**Maggie Kang:** So that's how—that's how we did it the entire time.

**Paola Mardo:** Great.

[20:21 - "Juno Arp Stinger" by Ken Nana]

**Paola Mardo:** Well, it sounds like it's just a really great partnership.

**Maggie Kang:** Yeah, yeah.

**Paola Mardo:** And it's nice to have someone to—you said you become decision machines as directors, so it's nice to have someone else to kind of, like, you know, brainstorm or just talk it out.

**Maggie Kang:** Yes. And then, on the—and that's great on the creative front, but you're going through a lot while you're directing, and—

**Chris Appelhans:** Yeah, and I think, also, great animated films, once you dig under the hood, there's usually like, you know, somewhere around 10 people who are just elemental to it. And we had people like Ejae and Ian Eisendrath and—

**Maggie Kang:** He's the executive music producer. Production designer.

**Chris Appelhans:** Yeah, David Bleich, production designer. Just in that fork of decisions, you need the top 10 or 12 people to be all-in and incredible and bringing all their gifts. This is—that's kind of the joy of it, also, is, like, this—I compare it to, like, an orchestra except everyone's also kind of writing the music, too. So it's just a crazy artistic undertaking.

**Maggie Kang:** And everybody was. All our leadership was, but also, like, all the other artists were, too.

**Chris Appelhans:** Down to the—

**Maggie Kang:** They were so inspired.

**Chris Appelhans:** Yeah.

**Maggie Kang:** They were just like, "Yes! I've been waiting for a movie like this." So it was really cool.

**Paola Mardo:** Yeah. Did you guys assemble the team, or did your producer help you find folks, or was it a mix?

**Chris Appelhans:** Both.

**Maggie Kang:** Both.

**Chris Appelhans:** Yeah. Usually, early on, when you're building your leadership team, it's a lot of the—your personal networks.

**Maggie Kang:** Yeah.

**Chris Appelhans:** We both knew Helen from working together. And then, as you get deeper into it, it becomes about, like, the Imageworks structure, which is incredible.

**Paola Mardo:** Within Sony.

**Maggie Kang:** Yes.

**Chris Appelhans:** They have just recruited and cultivated a really high level of expectation in their animation teams, their lighting teams, and so that team comes up—they show up sort of gametime, ready to be like—which was so great. We're like, "We're going to do some—we're going to do ab eyes that turn into corn and then popcorn comes out. And then also we're going to do this other scene where this girl asks her surrogate mother to kill her."

And they'd be like, "Okay, let's do it!" Like, they were ready to embrace that tone. Yeah, it's—

**Maggie Kang:** But also, we had—so the studio made sure, and I think our producer, Michelle Wong, too, made sure that we had Korean artists in every single department. And we had a lot of Korean leadership as well. And so credit to them for, like, the—just making sure that everything stayed authentic and—because I could not do it on my own. There was a lot of people who were like—who had their like eyes on every single thing where, you know, if a thing, a label on packaging was flipped or, you know, the Korean was wrong, then, then we would just go back and fix everything and—because everybody pointed it out.

**Chris Appelhans:** It was also like, literally, a mentoring within the production team. Like, some of our animation leads that were Korean were like—

**Maggie Kang:** Yeah, Sophia Lee was a—

**Chris Appelhans:** Because we could do the—we did not have time sometimes. So all we could say is, like, "Sophia, do you remember the scene in Crash Landing On You when so-and-so, his eye twitches, and that's how you know he's in love?" And she's like, "Yep, I'll go find it on YouTube," and then coached her animation team in, like, that nuance and that way of acting. So there was kind of this delegation of, like, understanding our influences to all these people, and they just ate it up. It was amazing.

**Maggie Kang:** It took a while, like, to really kind of create a formula for an Asian face because we don't—we've never really seen Asian faces in animation before. And so we talked a lot about, like, how do we create the right eye shapes when they emote? We found out—we figured out, like, I don't know, maybe a third way into production, that if we rounded the corners of the mouth, it just made them more Korean. And, and so there were these little tricks that our animator, lead animator Sophia Lee, who was the lead on the character of Rumi, just figured out. Like, she solved a lot of those problems.

And then, even in lighting, we're not used to lighting an Asian face. It just looks different. And so it took us quite a bit of time to, like, figure that out, like, while in production.

**Chris Appelhans:** Yeah.

**Maggie Kang:** Which is incredible because—

**Chris Appelhans:** Terrifying.

**Maggie Kang:** Terrifying. And I think Sony Pictures and Imageworks is, like, a very rare place where you could do R&D as you're in production.

**Chris Appelhans:** Yeah.

**Paola Mardo:** Wow. Pretty cool.

[24:59 - "Good Times" by Ludwig Göransson]

**Paola Mardo:** Where did the, the ab eyes and, like, the corn eyes with the popcorn—where did that come from?

**Chris Appelhans:** Yeah!

**Maggie Kang:** Oh, my gosh.

**Chris Appelhans:** I mean, that was one of our—one of the joys of making this movie was going to every department through the years and being like, "Guys"—

**Maggie Kang:** Explaining corn eyes.

**Chris Appelhans:** "We are going to objectify the shit out of these men," and everyone was like, "Yeah!"

[LAUGHTER]

**Maggie Kang:** Yeah.

**Chris Appelhans:** And it's so overdue. That one is such a fun—I mean, again, it's this very organic...

**Maggie Kang:** Yeah, it came very organically. It was—so we had always talked about, like, the girls emoting in a funny way. And there's a term called chibi where—in anime, where people turn into, like, a baby character, and it's cute, like the cutesy version. And you could have, like, hearts in their eyes or, like, you know, just very exaggerated expressions. And so we talked

about doing that when the girls saw the boys, like heart eyes. And then our—one of our art directors who was also art-directing the characters, Scott Watanabe, did a drawing of Rumi with heart eyes but then also put abs in the eyes. And then another artist, Jeannie Lee, said—we were all laughing, and she said, "It looks like corn!"

And so I was like, "Well, what if it did turn into corn?" And then it just kept going, like—well, and then—it's—she's—you know, she's so—it's so hot. It gets so hot that it starts to, like, bubble and then turn into dry corn, and then the dry corn explodes into popcorn. And everyone's like, "Ha, ha!" and then the butter. And I was like, "Let's just do this. Let's just do this, guys!"

So we launched a board artist and Jessie Wong, an incredible board artist, we were just explaining it to her, and I was like, "It's kind of crazy, right?" And she's like, "No, no, no, that's good. I got it." And so we boarded it and put it up, and it was fun.

**Chris Appelhans:** Worked right away.

**Maggie Kang:** And it worked right away.

**Chris Appelhans:** Yeah.

**Maggie Kang:** And it was like our second scene in production.

**Chris Appelhans:** Yeah.

**Maggie Kang:** Yeah, that we animated, yeah.

**Paola Mardo:** So fun.

**Chris Appelhans:** So it's a good—

**Maggie Kang:** So that's the journey of corn eyes.

**Chris Appelhans:** It's a good way to kick up every department, like animation department. "So what is this movie we're working on?" And they're like, "Okay."

**Maggie Kang:** Yeah. "Hey, nice to meet you. Okay, so we're doing this."

**Paola Mardo:** "So ab eyes..."

**Chris Appelhans:** Yeah.

[27:13 - "Good Times" by Ludwig Göransson]

**Paola Mardo:** I just wanted to wrap it up with one more segment and—before we go to our recommendations, which we'll get to. So we got a surprise voice memo from one of your collaborators.

**Maggie Kang:** Ooh!

**Paola Mardo:** And I'm just going to play it, and you're going to find out who it is and respond to the question. Here we go.

[VOICE MEMO]

**Ejae:** Hi, Maggie. Hi, Chris. It's your girl Ejae. So my question is, you know, as a filmmaker, I'm curious: when you guys have writer's block, what helps you get out of that, you know, to help you keep pushing forward? Yeah. Love you guys!

[VOICE MEMO ENDS]

[LAUGHTER]

**Chris Appelhans:** Good energy. Jeez.

**Maggie Kang:** I don't think I ever, like, ran out of ideas. I just kept trying to come up with more even though they were bad. I would just get the bad ideas, kind of, out. And I think that just helped me, like, eventually get to the good one. There was—there was a skill that I tried to develop, and I feel like I did, during this movie, which was—and Hannah and Daniel, our first writers, like, there was—there were times when I would just give them something, like, to solve. And I'd be like, "Good luck! This is really hard." And I couldn't come up with like one or two ideas, but they would always come back with like five or six, and every one of them was hilarious. And I was like, "Wow, they're so good at it! Like, I need to be—I need to get on this. Like, I need to up my game."

And so, I don't know, I've probably drove everybody nuts because sometimes I'll be like, "Okay, what about this, or like this? Or like that? That?" and I just keep pitching ideas. And—

**Chris Appelhans:** It's great. It's great.

**Maggie Kang:** So, yeah, I just kind of developed that skill.

**Paola Mardo:** Yeah. It's like a muscle that you've created led to ab eyes and corn eyes and all those things.

**Maggie Kang:** Yes, yep. Which was like, "Let's do all of it!"

**Paola Mardo:** That's great.

**Chris Appelhans:** I go for walks. I need to move around or else—somehow it helps me focus on a single problem if I'm moving. And then, if I'm really stuck, I'll kind of clear everything out, and I'll go watch some stuff that I find inspiring. And it just reminds me, like, damn, you can do really cool stuff. Like, it just is to reinflate the, like—to try and stay away from the "I give up" zone, just try to go—whatever, watch something really—and it just motivates you. Those are my tricks.

**Paola Mardo:** Good tips.

[29:46 - "Prox Recs Theme" with Ludwig Göransson and Ken Nana]

**Paola Mardo:** Cool. And so, for every episode, we do ask our guests to recommend something. We call it our Prox Recs. It could be anything. It could be something related to what you do as directors or working in animation or, honestly, self-care, you know?

**Maggie Kang:** Oh.

**Paola Mardo:** Usually, it's an object, a thing, a movie, a book. Yeah, what would your Prox Recs be for our listeners and viewers?

**Maggie Kang:** Oh, my gosh.

**Chris Appelhans:** So much pressure.

**Maggie Kang:** So much pressure.

**Chris Appelhans:** I can't say Sinners.

[LAUGHTER]

**Maggie Kang:** Or can we?

**Paola Mardo:** Or can you?

**Chris Appelhans:** Ooh!

**Paola Mardo:** No one's recommended that yet, actually, so...

**Chris Appelhans:** Go watch Sinners again.

**Maggie Kang:** I had a really—we had—we both had very long commutes to Sony working on this movie. It would be like an hour each way. And I really valued my, like, alone time. As a parent, as a wife, and, like, as a director, you're always, like, around people. And so I really

valued my alone time on my commute where I could just put on a podcast or, like, just drive in silence.

**Chris Appelhans:** Yeah.

**Maggie Kang:** I think that was so valuable to me. And I actually kind of, like, enjoyed my grueling, hour commute through, like, L.A. traffic. But I would just recommend, like, having alone time. It's just important. And self-care.

**Paola Mardo:** Yeah. Self-care.

**Maggie Kang:** Put on a face mask or, like, an LED mask, you know?

**Paola Mardo:** Or a spa. Or a spa day.

**Maggie Kang:** Spa, yeah, spa day. Yeah.

**Chris Appelhans:** One of my favorite movies that I—it's called *The Tale of the Princess Kaguya*. It's from the other Ghibli director. It's different, much slower and more slice-of-life. But I, I found it very moving, and it struck me when I had finished watching it that, like, if you wanted to understand what was happening here on Earth with some—with humans, this would be a pretty interesting—it would say something. And I always thought, well, if you could make a movie that also managed to do that, that had some lasting thing to say about how we are, how we try to be, that's pretty cool, you know, if you're going to go to all this work. So I, I love that movie. It's—sometimes it's a little slow. It might get boring, but it's really beautiful. The ending's lovely, so give it a watch.

**Paola Mardo:** Cool. Great rec. Well, thank you both. Thank you for joining me on *In Proximity*. It was really cool to learn about your movie and your process. And congratulations on everything!

**Maggie Kang:** Thank you.

**Chris Appelhans:** Thank you.

**Maggie Kang:** It's so fun to talk about—

**Chris Appelhans:** We're so lucky to be here.

**Maggie Kang:**—yeah, in depth because we rarely get to do that. So thank you.

**Paola Mardo:** We're fans over here, so really appreciate it.

**Chris Appelhans:** Thank you.

[32:29 - "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](https://proximitymedia.com).

[VOICEOVER ENDS]