

**In Proximity**  
**Season 3 Episode 34**  
**Ryan Coogler, Sev Ohanian, Jocelyn Yates**  
**Final Transcript**

**Ryan Coogler:** We grew up going to Blockbuster Video. I don't know how y'all—some of y'all—

[APPLAUSE AND CHEERS]

**Paola Mardo:** Shout out Blockbuster!

**Ryan Coogler:** And who, who has no idea what I'm talking about?

[LAUGHTER]

Some of y'all look pretty young. Y'all don't fake the funk. Who's never been inside a Blockbuster? Raise your hand. Don't, don't—okay.

**Paola Mardo:** It's okay. Safe space.

**Ryan Coogler:** Some of y'all are lying!

[LAUGHTER]

[0:21 - “In Proximity Theme” by Ludwig Göransson]

**Paola Mardo:** You're watching and listening to In Proximity. I'm Paola Mardo, and today we're starting a two-part series about fandoms, creators, marketing movies straight from the Sinners Symposium. The day before the Oscars, the Proximity team was invited to something special, the Sinners Symposium, hosted by TikTok, Gold House, and Sinners. The filmmakers like Ryan Coogler and Sev Ohanian, the studio Warner Bros. and the creators who helped make Sinners the most talked-about movie of 2025 and beyond were all together in one room the day before Hollywood's biggest night.

Now, Sinners was all over social media in 2025: the Irish dance scene, the juke joint surreal montage, Smoke, Stack. Fans and creators could not stop talking about the film. The marketing, in part, was fueled and supported by that energy. So this event brought some of the key players to talk about all of that. I got to host one of those conversations, and they were so good that we're sharing them with you here on the pod In Proximity as a two-part series.

Today, in Part 1, I sit down with Ryan Coogler, Proximity founder and Sinners writer, director, and producer; Sev Ohanian, screenwriter, producer, and Sinners producer; and Jocelyn Yates, TikTok creator also known as @jocwatchlist. We get into viral Sinners moments, why Ryan became a creator himself with that viral aspect ratio video, how Sev went from uploading videos

to YouTube to making movies, how they each think about audience, and the importance of fans and creators in the release of a major motion picture.

In Part 2, dropping next week, we'll have Proximity's own Chief Marketing and Operations Officer Terra Potts and executives from TikTok, Gold House, and Warner Bros. on the lessons from Sinners marketing and creator conversations around the film.

By the way, Ryan won the Academy Award for Screenwriting the day after this event, so excuse someone for saying he's nominated. Enjoy.

[02:24 - "KN 9 to 5" by Ludwig Göransson]

**Paola Mardo:** When you make your movies, how do you think about the audience?

**Ryan Coogler:** With respect and, and I think love because, like, you know, and I know Sev and, and our counterpart, Zinzi, is not here. She would love it. Like, she would. She would not like being up here, but she would love meeting you.

But, yeah, we grew up in the theater, you know? Like, we grew up in the theater. We grew up going to Blockbuster Video. I don't know how y'all—some of y'all—

[APPLAUSE AND CHEERS]

**Paola Mardo:** Shout out Blockbuster!

**Ryan Coogler:** And who, who has no idea what I'm talking about when I say Blockbuster?

[LAUGHTER]

Some of y'all look pretty young. Y'all fake the funk. Who's never been inside a Blockbuster? Raise your hand. Don't, don't—okay.

**Paola Mardo:** It's okay. Safe space.

**Ryan Coogler:** Some of y'all are lying!

[LAUGHTER]

When I think about the audience, I think about, like, my younger self, you know, and, and I'm thinking about my mom, who loved going to the movies, and my cousins, my uncles, you know what I mean? I mean, my Uncle James, who I made the movie for, he stopped going to the movies. Like, he didn't—he didn't like the movies.

**Paola Mardo:** Why?

**Ryan Coogler:** I think—he's from Mississippi. Where he was from, they—it wasn't a theater. So he didn't have—he didn't have the rhythm of it. And I think, like, he didn't like what he saw when he went as a older—as a older, you know, Black man from the South. So, yeah, like, like, when we premiered Fruitvale, that was, like, his first time going to a movie—to the movies in decades, you know? And I think about him. I think about that, like, he would—he wouldn't go because of what he was—because what he saw a few times that he did.

So, yeah, and, and, like, the weirdest thing about movies for me is—me and Sev, like, talk about this all the time—the weirdest thing about movies is, like, people are buying something, and they dedicating two hours of time to something that they haven't seen yet. You know, they've seen snippets or, like, heard something about it, or they maybe read a thing or heard a—you know? And that's like a—you know, as an adult, when you got kids and a job, it's just a big commitment, you know what—you know what I mean? So, so I want to—I want to deliver for them, you know, something exciting, something that's worth their time.

**Sev Ohanian:** Yeah. I mean, I was going to speak about that, too, because in the course of making—I mean, I would say thinking about the audience is genuinely like 90 percent of our job, right? Because, because once we read the script, like, we've seen the movie already, and we just have to, now, deliver that to someone who's never read it and never experienced it.

And on this film in particular, Ryan would literally talk to us about that vision. Like, we would have meetings where we're trying to sort out a scene or a challenge, and our, our aim was never like, "Well, maybe if we do this, we'll get an Oscar nomination." It was literally never that. It was always Ryan saying, like, "Imagine it's, like, date night, and, like, there's a teenager who's nervous about, you know, whether or not they're going to hold the hand of their—of the boy or girl they were with. Like, he would really paint this picture to us. And, and, like, there's the newborn parents who, like, have got the babysitter, they're here. They spent the money. And imagine, in 70mm, catfish frying on that—in the— IMAX screen.

[LAUGHTER]

Like, this is true! Am I lying? Like, this is—and that—and that would be, like, our thought. Like, literally, we'd be like, "Okay, catfish, got it. Got it, got it." And so we—that would motivate us to want to do the best we could all do, and, bro, that came true, man. The catfish was on the IMAX screen.

**Ryan Coogler:** Yeah. Yeah, yeah. No, we would say crazy shit like—we would go, like, "Hey"—we'd be in a boardroom, and we'd be like, "Hey, I want—I want, like, somebody to see catfish and say, 'All right, I'm going to take a bathroom break,' and they come back to somebody getting bit in the fucking neck, you know what I mean?"

[LAUGHTER]

Like, they like, "Oh, what is this movie?!" you know? Like, we would—we would talk about—you know, we would talk about all of that like, like what the full experience would be. And, and our editor, Mike Shawver—funny to be starting off with a editor, but Mike, who we know from film school, we've been working—we've been working with—I've been working with Mike since 2010.

Like, I think the editor has to really, really have the audience, audience in mind. And, like, you would think that editorial should come from, like, a place of pessimism, like you finding what won't work and you pulling it out. But what—but what Shawver has done, like, since I've known him, and he's become, like, a more experienced editor, he actually like, like, edits from a place of optimism, you know? "Oh, man, the audience is going to love this," you know?

And, and that idea was, like, really—this movie was really driven by, by that. Like, we would talk about it with the endings because we had a—we had a lot of thought about just, just, you know, what was the appropriate way to end the movie? And, and this got, like, post-credits, which for us is like a concert encore, we would talk about. And then—and then we was debating whether or not to put another scene up on the—you know, on the end of that. And we were going up on it like, "Man, like, hope people don't think it's too much or this is weird."

And Shawver was like, "Yo," like, he was like, "Hey, some people are going to see the end of the movie, and they going to get up, and they going to go home. And, like, that's good. Like, you know, that's good enough for them. They decided that's enough. They go home and, and that's the movie. And some people will stick around, and for them, that'll be enough. You know, there's some people crazy enough, if they want to read all of the credits, they get a little surprise gift at the end of the cereal box, you know what I mean?"

And when we took that philosophy, it was really—it was really rewarding on this one. I would definitely encourage, like, editors—because y'all have—you know, y'all do that yourselves, as editors, like, to definitely, like, find the bits that don't work. Definitely take those out. But also, like, come from a—from a place of—from a place of optimism and excitement, too, you know, when you delivering for people who going to—who going to stomp on y'all feet, you know what I mean?

**Paola Mardo:** You guys, it's been almost a year since Sinners came out, and we're still talking about it. People are literally creating content as we speak, and there's so many fun videos. But I want to ask you guys as the filmmakers and also as a creator on TikTok, what were some of the standout moments on TikTok that you guys saw and that stick with you?

**Jocelyn Yates:** I know, for me, as a creator—I know, for me, one of the most exciting things was just seeing how happy people were to give flowers. Like, the cast of this movie was so exciting. Like, Michael B. Jordan and Ryan Coogler together are already exciting, but then when you saw Delroy Lindo and Hailee Steinfeld even, like, there were just so many characters, and online, I know the creators were excited to see them. Like, we were—everyone is rooting for Michael B. Jordan. Like, that is a big deal for us. So the fact that creators came out and were

like, "Hey, he played this role so exceptionally well. Let's keep talking about it. Let's, let's see what else we can put out there. Let's see where else we can talk about this. This actor deserves his flowers here, so let's keep talking about it."

**Ryan Coogler:** I think, for me, it was seeing people put up pictures of they ancestors and, and, you know, seeing all those—seeing all those photos, a lot of them black-and-white, was really—was really cool because that's what, you know, we were thinking about when we made the film. And some other people kind of caught on to it and saw themselves in it. And, and I think, like, seeing a lot of the creators from the South, you know, like, kind of take ownership of the movie and, and really, like, call out the cities that were named and, and kind of mobilize around, around that. I thought—I thought it was really awesome to see, especially, like, in this—it's a trip how, like—how emotional, you know, emotional some of those—some of those little short films can be. And it's—it's just, you know, set—it's set to the music that we composed, you know?

**Paola Mardo:** Yeah.

**Ryan Coogler:** But it, like, becomes they own—it becomes they own movie, you know? And that's, that's always incredibly heartwarming. In the—in the conference before, just now, it was like—you know, we work with Terra every day and obviously a dear—a dear friend and ally, but it's just great to, to just hear how much—just how much talent is just out there in the world and sometimes right next to you. But with, with social, it's very interesting to see, like, people just in they rooms making killer art, you know what I mean?

**Sev Ohanian:** I mean, the only thing I'll add is, you know, in the process of making any movie, we, we live with it for so long, especially in the edit, where we just naturally—we start making memes about our own movie before anyone's even seen it.

[LAUGHTER]

Like, literally, we'll be kind of quoting the lines to each other and, and all that.

**Ryan Coogler:** Yeah, yeah.

**Sev Ohanian:** So the fact that the global community of creators—it felt like we were all one team suddenly because—I mean, credit to Ryan for being an Oscar-nominated screenwriter, but I've never—I've never read a script or seen a movie that's had every single line as a meme. Like even—

[LAUGHTER]

Even, even just Remmick saying, "Sammy!" like, that is a meme. So, so, like—

**Ryan Coogler:** That's Jack, though, bro.

**Sev Ohanian:** That's Jack, too, but the inventiveness, the creativity and the just—for me, the last thing I wanted to shout out is, is the protectiveness that the community had about our film because, I mean, it was—it was seen by us. It was felt by us, you know, me; Ryan; Zinzi, our partner.

And, and just on a funny note, bro, like, no matter what social media platform, anytime somebody had a criticism of the movie, even if it was, like, a nuanced, academic, like—even if it was, like, actually right, you know that first comment was going to be that meme, "Y'all Klan?"

[LAUGHTER]

So, like—so, like, seriously, even if it was right!

[LAUGHTER]

**Ryan Coogler:** Hey, hey. Hey, bro we would laugh at this movie so much while we was making it. We would laugh at this movie so much, man. I always wondered if people was going to, like—was going to get, like, our sick humor.

[LAUGHTER]

And like, yeah, like, like, yeah, so we would talk—like, I would talk with Mike about, like, in prep for that scene, if he would be like—he would be like, "Hey, yo, is Smoke the type of person to, like, ask a white person to they face if they was in the Klan?" I'm like—I'm like, "Yo, I think he is." So he plays—he plays it so earnestly, like, like, he's, like, literally, like—they literally having a—like, in the middle of the conversation, he's like, "Hey, are y'all in the Klan?" And then it became a meme.

**Paola Mardo:** Well, let's talk about that. You just talked about thinking about the audience while making the film. As filmmakers, yeah, what do you think about when you think about audience, when you're making something, when it's a movie? And then, for Jocelyn, when you're making a video, how do you think about the audience too?

**Jocelyn Yates:** I guess when I'm looking at my audience, my biggest thing is, like, I want people—I want to convince you to stop on this, right? Like, I think a lot of people are missing out on shows and movies just because it doesn't look like something you'd want. So, when I approach a video for a movie, I want to tell you everything you need to know going in to convince you to, like, give it a shot even if that's like one episode or the first 10 minutes. Like, sometimes a story just needs a little bit of time to cook. So, like, give it a second, and I want to tell you and convince you, like, stop what you're doing, this is actually worth your watch, and see what happens. So I think that's where the creativity gets to come in because I'm watching so many different things because, like, you can't approach Sinners the way you do a docuseries,

you know? So it's like, how do you—how do I convince somebody to watch this and stop what they're doing, you know, and see.

**Paola Mardo:** So you went viral a few times on this movie. But early on, it was for a video you did about aspect ratios and sort of telling the audience the very—you know, the different theaters they could watch this—the different formats and things. And that went viral for a lot of reasons. One, it was amazing to see you up there talking to the audience about your passion, and, two, it's just a really helpful resource. Like, I gave that video to my parents so they knew where to go, so they could find out. But the passion really came through, and you brought your authentic self to that video and shared your love of film with the audience. And I think a lot of creators in this room do the same thing in their mediums.

So I want to ask about the idea behind this video, how that came about, why you wanted to do it, and why you—as the director, writer, and producer—wanted to be the one to speak to the audience about all the formats?

**Ryan Coogler:** That's a great—that's a great question. You know, I talked with my producers on this, Sevak and Zinzi, all the time. And we run a company together, so we constantly, you know, thinking about how to best position what we making for success. And success looks like, for us, people engaging with what we putting out there. And, and so we went through a lot of difficulties, like with the decision to make the film the way we made it. You know, it did not make it easy, and it was a more expensive way to make a—make a movie with these different formats that we were choosing.

And, and each—and each time we made the decision, we had to convince ourselves that it was right, we had to convince the studio that was paying for it that it was the right—that it was the right thing to do. And, and, you know, I think we were just getting to—getting closer to release and, and there was pressure on us to, you know, put something out there that would help the audience contextualize these decisions that we made. And more than anything, we just wanted the audience to know we were thinking about them, you know what—you know what I'm saying?

And, and, you know, we worked with Terra Potts, who runs marketing for us, and we worked with Warner Bros. marketing and publicity team and figured that that was the right way to do it. And, yeah, and Zinzi and Sev were there that day. Our post-production supervisor, Tina Anderson, was there—was there that day. It was like a group—it was like a group effort, you know? And it was—it was great that we was able to—that we was able to get it done.

**Paola Mardo:** Did you script it out? Or was that just on-the-fly, you were talking about the different pieces of film?

**Ryan Coogler:** No, I wrote it.

**Paola Mardo:** Okay.

**Ryan Coogler:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. I wrote it. I wrote it as a little script and then gave it to, to, yeah, Sev and Zinz for notes. Normal process. And then they—and then Terra and Tina Anderson, our post-production supervisor was there in case I messed up one of the formats, she we just call it off. She the—she the sweetest lady, man, from Minnesota nice. You know, she was like—she's like, "You got to—you know, fix that one!" And, and I'd go back. But it was—it was great, man. Like, like, it was great to have the support of everybody to do it and have Terra's support to think about doing it with Kodak and putting—you know, putting it out the way it did. I thought maybe if—maybe if I would have even a few thousand people watching it. But it, it did—

**Paola Mardo:** It's, like, almost at 1 million just on that one platform alone, right? I think on everything else, it really blew up.

**Ryan Coogler:** Yeah.

**Paola Mardo:** Jocelyn, I want to ask you, you know, from your perspective—you, you're, like, a fan of the movie, but also you make videos and content. At one point, were you like, "Oh, I should do something about Sinners"? And, like, what did you decide to kind of focus on in your—in your platform?

**Jocelyn Yates:** Yeah. I feel when everyone heard that it was coming, we were excited. And then that trailer came, it was, like, super excited. And when the movie came, it was, like, another level of excitement. So it definitely kept building. For me, I just wanted to convince people to, like, I said, watch the movie. I think—I'm a huge fan of Michael B. Jordan, and I'm a huge fan of Ryan Coogler's other films, but I think I was really behind this. I just was excited to see something different. I'm also not a big horror person. That's, like, the one genre on my channel that I don't watch. So, when I saw this, and I was like, okay, I'm going to give it a shot. I got to watch it in the daytime, but, like—

[LAUGHTER]

— it was still great. Like, it was—it wasn't—it did not necessarily—like I said, it's not necessarily something that I would naturally be attracted to, but I know other people who stay away from horror, too. So I'm like, okay, I know there's a bunch of people who would do well here. They just might not think they would do well here. But it's a really good movie. So it just—it was something easy to kind of click on to. And I think that because there was so many different just excitement—exciting moments coming from it, it was easy to kind of pull where you wanted to pull. Like, I was able to pull from TV. You could pull if you were dancing on TikTok. You could pull if you wanted to do super deep dives into movies, into characters. So there was just so many opportunities and resources for us, it was hard not to jump in somewhere, like anywhere.

**Paola Mardo:** I love that. Sev, you actually found early success on social media. It's part of your lore. And I guess we'll age ourselves, too, by talking about YouTube, but you did. You made videos on that other platform that went viral as well. But then you made a movie sort of based

on those videos called My Big Fat Armenian Family. And what I love about your story is you brought your online kind of fans and followers and viewers to a theater to actually support you and your movie that you made. I feel like a lot of folks in this room, they're content creators but also may be future filmmakers. Can you talk a little bit about how you, as a filmmaker, use social media and how you made the jump from social to filmmaking?

**Sev Ohanian:** Yeah, totally. And it was—I mean, I feel like a dinosaur. This was—this was like 2007. I think the biggest hit song was Soulja Boy's Superman at the time. Like, so it's just to put you guys back there. I mean—yeah, the good old days. I made a—I made a short film with my friend pretending to be an Armenian dad, you know, berating his younger Armenian—his son for coming home late and his report card and crashing the family car. It was maybe a little bit autobiographical.

[LAUGHTER]

And it was in Armenian, and, like, I just—I was holding the camera. The camera's shaking the entire time because I'm just laughing so hard. And I put it on YouTube for, like, my 20 friends to watch. And this is before Instagram. This is before TikTok, clearly. There was no intention of anything beyond, "Hey, look at this thing I made," to, like, my 20 friends, and it went, like, viral. Like, I don't even know if that word applied to social media at the time, but it was what happened, and it was specifically to the global Armenian American community who loved the video. They related to it.

I mean, today that absolutely would've been a TikTok, though. You're right. And I could've maybe monetized it. I could've been you guys. It would've been nice. But at the time, I just made another video and—again with my friends only. And then that also was so good that I ended up naturally thinking, "Well, okay, I guess the next step is to make a movie now."

So I took those same characters, made a really, really tiny movie with like no money. And when that was done, I was able to get my—I, I come from a city called Glendale, California, a lot of Armenians there. And I got Glendale High School to let us screen the movie there. We got the word out for all the Armenians in the area to come see it, and I kept using social media as a way to, like, drive people to buy tickets and to come see it. And thankfully, so many people came, and it helped launch my career, and I got to USC. Fun fact: Ryan is the first non-Armenian to ever watch that movie.

[LAUGHTER]

I was so nervous because I was like, "Man, is he going to get it?" Like, it's in Armenian. My friend—oh, another fun fact, my friend Ajmin played the Armenian dad and the Armenian mom.

[LAUGHTER]

And, like, fake wig—that was really the inspiration for *Smoke and Stack for Sinners*. No, I'm totally kidding. But, like, it's so interesting because today, like, social media is obviously not the means to the end. That is the end, and I think that's so powerful because especially if your community is not a local one like mine happened to be, you can—you reach out to people all across the world. I think that's incredible. I think it's amazing, and honestly, we are constantly watching it, being awed by what everyone is doing online. Was there a question at the end of it. I can't remember, Paola.

**Paola Mardo:** Well, actually, what's interesting is you're still active on social, right? You engage in different communities, Reddit and all that.

**Sev Ohanian:** Yeah.

**Paola Mardo:** I guess, as a filmmaker now, you're not making those videos with your friends. You're making movies now, but you're still using social. What are ways you use social now as you work on bigger projects?

**Sev Ohanian:** I think, for me, it's still about community building, you know? Like, there's no better way to find your people, whoever—however you identify, whether it's ethnic, religious, you know, whatever that may be or, like, certain fandoms you're a part of. And, yeah, I mean, I think it's absolutely—like, I've made relationships with people, like you said, on Reddit that, to this day, I've made movies with them. We work together. So my encouragement—I mean, I feel like you guys should be teaching me how to use this stuff at this point, but absolutely use it as a way to connect.

**Paola Mardo:** Cool. Well, a lot of you folks here—you know, you guys all have your own channels and platforms. I make podcasts at Proximity. And when I started out, it could—it was a lonely experience because I was literally recording things in my little closet, putting it out into the world on my own, and then started—you know, started networking and working with other people and started to grow my community. You guys famously met in film school and built your lasting relationships both in life but also in work there. Just to name a few: Michael B. Jordan; Proximity founder Zinzi Coogler, who you met before film school; Ruth E. Carter, you met along the way. Can you talk a little bit about community building? Like, how do you guys develop these lasting friendships, and also how they—you turn them into filmmaking collaborations as well?

**Ryan Coogler:** Well, what we do, it requires a lot of people. It's, it's maybe—yeah, it's maybe the most communal major art form, you know, just because it takes so much to make it happen from preproduction to production to post. You know, hundreds of people. On the Panther films—there was a few movies where you have like—man, you could have 1,000 people working on a movie, with all those VFX crews and vendors all over the world. So it just demands it, you know, in a way that, that maybe what you guys can do at some times, you know, you know, it doesn't. And it's, it's very necessary to engage with folks.

And I come from, like, a—I got a very locally concentrated family, you know what I mean? Like, I grew up with, like, two cousins on this block and cousins down the street and homies that, that—you know, I grew up—the way I grew up, like, I would be like 20 years old and thinking about a auntie that was in my life the entire time I was alive. And I would be like, "Wait. Hey, so how is this person my auntie?" And my mom would be like, "Oh, she actually isn't," you know what I mean? And she—she went to high school with her or whatever, you know what I'm saying? Like, what? But, like, a—like, a mad tight-knit community, you know, like where family is not just dictated by blood, you know, and I played team sports.

So, when I got to film school, it was very natural to, to want to find your tribe, so to speak. And the—and the industry is—you know, you can—it can be a mode of protection, you know, to have, you know, long-lasting working relationships, you know what I mean? You guys can have each other's backs through all of the adversity that comes with—comes with the industry. So that's—I've been fortunate to find folks, and it makes it—you know, it makes it—it makes it easier, you know?

**Sev Ohanian:** Just to add to that, like, Ryan literally is Samuel L. Jackson. He's Nick Fury. Like, he really brought everyone together.

[LAUGHTER]

Have you guys seen Iron Man where it's like, "I want to talk to you about the, like, Avengers Initiative"? Like, Ryan was going to talk to you about the Proximity Initiative. The—I mean, like, Michael Shawver is our editor since film school with Ryan, and one of the things that I will say on top of everything that Ryan's saying is, like, it obviously gives you a shorthand. And you get to reference, like, "Remember that time that—three movies ago when that happened? Let's do it differently this time."

But it also gives us perspective, man, because when we were making Fruitvale Station, very low-budget indie film, Michael Shawver—we had him in a—in, like, an Airbnb in Oakland, like, quite literally felt like he was living and editing in a closet because it actually was a closet. And it was just that budget of that thing. And we would talk about, "Well, one day, maybe if all goes well, we'll have—you know, you'll have a whole office. You'll have a staff!" Because he was doing everything himself. And now we're there. We, like—so, like, when you, like, have that experience with the same people, you have that shared perspective, and it—I think it adds this intangible quality to everything we're doing, and you just want to show up for each other in the best possible way.

**Paola Mardo:** That's incredible. Jocelyn, I want to ask you—you know, you're making videos constantly. Every day, I think you told me.

**Jocelyn Yates:** Yeah.

**Paola Mardo:** What's your production process? And also, how do you keep things consistent but also creative?

**Jocelyn Yates:** Production process? Like you said, I do make videos every day. That surprises people. I'm constantly watching something. So that helps because I am actively watching things. I'm trying to keep up like everybody else. Something new comes out, I have to finish it. So it's even more, like, a necessary thing for me. But it just involves a lot of taking notes. I'm—like I said, I'm watching like 10 things at one time, so I like to take notes as I'm going through, like, "Okay, this was really important to me," or, "I really like this person," or just different things I want to make sure I want to point out in the video as, like, like I said, ideas of ways to make people—like, convince them to watch something. So I definitely have notebooks everywhere in my house to write things down.

And then I make videos every day, and at first, I was really big on making videos as soon as I watched a show or movie. That way, it was super fresh, and I, like, still felt the same emotions. Like, if I was excited, I'm like, oh, I got to run and do it right now. Or if I was like, oh, I hated that, like, okay, let me figure out how to say this correctly. So I think that really helps, the fact that I'm just, like, constantly active and constantly pushing things and just constantly looking for more stories. Like, I don't—horror's not my favorite, but, like, I'll try it, you know? I want to see what else is out there. I want to see all the stories. So I think that helps, and just being curious and, like, trying to always get more.

**Paola Mardo:** So inspiring. I know we're going to open it up to questions in a bit. But my last question for you guys—we do this thing on our podcast, In Proximity. We ask for Prox Recs, or recommendations for our audience. Usually, it has something to do with what you guys do. Since we're in a room of creators, I want to ask about creativity. So do you guys have recs for creativity, your creative process? It could be a book, movie, podcast, or literally a habit that you guys have before you get your creative juices flowing.

**Sev Ohanian:** I just—I just finished a book that was recommended to Ryan and Zinzi and I from a colleague in the film industry called Unreasonable Hospitality. [TO AUDIENCE MEMBER] You've read this?

**Audience Member:** Yeah!

**Sev Ohanian:** Isn't that great?

**Audience Member:** I read it for work. It's really good.

**Sev Ohanian:** Amazing. Like, and I remember—it's a story about a restaurateur who had this big—or I guess the restaurant still exists in New York. It's called Eleven Madison Square Park or something. It's a huge fancy restaurant. And I was like, how does this apply to filmmaking? But it is incredible. The book really walks you through, like, how to do something and overdo it, like to be beyond excellent. And I think that is extremely applicable to what everyone in this room is

trying to do, is how to overdeliver when it comes to your creativity and, and giving something to people to experience in the absolute most ridiculously amazing way possible. So I definitely recommend that book.

**Ryan Coogler:** I listen to a lot of music when I'm—when I'm writing. That's the thing I—that's the thing that's, like—writing is the thing I've done the longest out of all the—all of the facets of filmmaking. And it—and it still—it still can be—like, there are times when it can be still the most difficult thing, you know, especially, like, when life complicates more, you know? So I got to do, like, a few, like, rituals to get myself in writing mode. And one of them is just, like, finding what the soundtrack is for, like, what I'm—what I'm writing, you know? And, and I find music to be, like, a really great—really great utility there.

So I think about, like, what the driving conflict is or, or what I want the thing to feel like, not necessarily for the audience but, like, for me. And I'll find some music that gets me in that—that gets me in that mood, gets me in that zone. And I'll listen to it, you know, kind of on repeat and then go. For *Sinners*, it was easy because it was, like—it was, like, Delta Blues music. So that's kind of what—kind of what got me through. And then I'm working on this—I'm working on this, this other thing that's, like, science fiction, but it's—but it's kind of, like—it's kind of sexy. And then—so I was like, man, what can I—what can I do? And then I got the *Blade Runner* soundtrack of, of *Angelis*, and then that was—that was very helpful, very sexy soundtrack. Yeah.

**Paola Mardo:** You heard it here first. Go ahead.

**Jocelyn Yates:** Okay. So, when it comes to creativity, I think a habit I like to throw out there is just letting it out, I guess. I feel like a lot of times, we sit on things for a while, and you're, like, overthinking it. And that could just go to as simply as, like, making a whole video and then letting it sit in your drops. But, like, it's that sense of creativity that I think just comes naturally sometimes, and you just think on it. I've literally posted things where I'm like, I don't know if anyone's going to agree with this, I don't know if anyone's going to like this, but, like, I just want you to see what I—I came here to say what I wanted to say about it, and I think that's what people appreciate, like that authenticity and just, like, post what you have to say. They want to hear what you have to say. They want to know about the show. They want to know about the movie. And not overthink it, I think, is a big—really good habit to have as a creative because you can quickly talk yourself out of some things that people would probably really love. So why not just post it and see?

**Ryan Coogler:** Where's your favorite place to record?

**Jocelyn Yates:** I actually do all my recording on my living room couch right in front of that TV. I literally push pause and then get on my green screen so I can immediately just go for it. But that's, like, the beauty of TikTok, I think, is, like, they've made it so easy to create wherever you are, and I try to take full advantage of that, like—

**Ryan Coogler:** Can you still, like, relax on your couch even though you work there?

**Jocelyn Yates:** Oh, yeah. I relax. I relax to Housewives. And I will watch my next show after that.

[LAUGHTER]

Like, I definitely break it up. A TV for me has always been really fun. Like, even though it's a job now, I enjoy watching TV. Like, I have a show every, every day that I'm probably watching just because that's, like, what I like. So it's super easy and fun still.

**Ryan Coogler:** That's dope.

**Paola Mardo:** Yeah, it's awesome.

**Ryan Coogler:** I always wonder, like, where people are.

[LAUGHTER]

**Jocelyn Yates:** Most of us in our house.

**Ryan Coogler:** Sometimes I'm like, "Oh, I think he's in his car."

[LAUGHTER]

And then, like, you know, but I don't—if you don't use that—with the green screen, you know, you never—

**Jocelyn Yates:** Yeah, you never know with a green screen. That's very helpful.

**Ryan Coogler:** It's like—it's, like, text behind or, like, you—

**Jocelyn Yates:** Yeah, definitely videos in the car. I've made videos with my friends upstairs like, "Okay, need you guys to be quiet for five minutes."

**Paola Mardo:** Okay, cool. Well, we have some time for some questions. We asked for them ahead of time. I think we have time for three or four. The first one is from Sara.

**Sara:** Hi, Mr. Coogler.

**Ryan Coogler:** Hey, Sara.

**Sara:** Hi. Did we just become best friends?

[LAUGHTER]

Sinners sparked a lot of online discourse. Was there a take a creator had that surprised you like, "Wow, I didn't think of it that way"? If so, what was it?

**Ryan Coogler:** I've seen people with, with—I've seen people have theories about, about Jayme's character, about Pearlina. I've seen where somebody was like, "Hey, yo, was she really married?"

[LAUGHTER]

That one was—that one was wild. Yeah. Like, they all—that one—that one surprised me. It surprised me quite a bit. It's interesting, man, like, the takes on the female characters, I think, where I'm like—I'm like—you know, I mean, people are, like, harsher and more unforgiving on women, like, just in society and in life, you know, but it was, like—it was like—where I was seeing, like, some of these reactions to, like—to, like, the female characters, you know? It still is—you know, it still—it teaches you about that. I don't know if they would classify it as, like, misogyny or misogynoir or what have you, but, yeah, like, it's—it was interesting, interesting perspectives there.

And, for us—for me, the—you know, like, the characters of Grace, I think, Pearlina, and Mary, and Annie, some of the—some of the reactions people will have to these characters, both in a positive way but also in a more—in a more harshly judgmental way where I feel like they would let the Smoke/Stack twins who was—you know, who are, like, crazy characters, you know what I mean? Like, off the hook, you know what I mean? You know, so I thought that was—I thought that was—that was really enlightening for me.

**Sara:** Thank you so much.

**Paola Mardo:** Cool. Our next question is from Matt, matcrackz.

**Matt:** Hey, Ryan. Huge fan, bro. You're the GOAT.

**Ryan Coogler:** What?

**Matt:** You're the GOAT, bro.

**Ryan Coogler:** You tripping, bro, but I appreciate the kind words. What's your name, bro?

**Matt:** My name's Matt.

**Ryan Coogler:** Matt. Nice to meet you, Matt.

**Matt:** Nice to meet you, brother. So I had a question. As content creators, we never really hear from, like, the filmmakers behind the movies that we're always talking about. Like, we're always

making videos, whether it's reacting or just promoting. I just wanted to know, from your perspective, how important content creators are for marketing of movies? Yeah, and just, like, when you started in 2013—like, how has it changed to now? You know, it's changed so much.

**Ryan Coogler:** How important you guys are to marketing?

**Matt:** Yes.

**Ryan Coogler:** I mean, incredibly, bro. Like, I think the—and I think it's, it's constantly shifting, right, like as technology changes, as habits change. But, yeah, you guys—you guys are—you all, I should say, are—I mean, it's the heartbeat of how people connect, I think, you know, in this information age. You know, it's the heartbeat—it's the heartbeat of how—you know, a lot of people meeting their spouses online and, and connecting with them—you know, connecting with their friends online, and I think, really, since the pandemic, bro. Like, that was, I think, the—like, such a major—such a major shift for me. I'm, I'm—you know, I was born in the '80s, bro, the late '80s, the 20th century, you know?

**Sev Ohanian:** Somebody said, "Sheesh!"

[LAUGHTER]

**Matt:** I'm very sorry.

**Ryan Coogler:** Yeah. Somebody handed me a—somebody—I was trying to film—I was trying to film Terra, and somebody handed me a iPhone tripod. I had no idea how to use it, bro. I was like—I was like, yo, do I put it this way? You know, like, so I'm ancient, as they say, bro, you know what I'm saying? But, but, yeah, like, I think that this is how people—how people connect, and it's also, like, it's just—it's just so—it's just so great, man. It's something that the industry didn't have, you know, in the—in the '90s, man. Like, you know, I go see Jurassic Park, and this was like, you know, you tell your cousin this was tight, you know what I mean? You're like—you're like—I remember watching Hook.

And I remember being, like, at summer camp, and, and one of my homies was like, "Hey, bro, Will Smith, man, he opened up the thing, and he punched the alien in the face, told him, 'Welcome to Earth,' you know what I mean? I'm like, "Damn, I got to go see this movie." But, like, it was—there was nobody who was going to, like, open up their phone and say, "Hey, man, Independence Day, man, this shit was crazy!" You know?

So I think—I think it's, like, a unique advantage that we have, you know, in this—in this day and age. The, the unique disadvantages that we have is all of the consolidation, you know, the fact that there's no VHS industry no more, there's no DVD industry anymore, you know—you know what I'm saying? Like, it's getting harder to track things for unions in terms of profit—you know, like, like that—like, that, like, it is—the way we interact now has eroded certain things that were like—that were like safeguards of the industry. But this piece is another way to make sure that

things that connect with communities can have more life. So, so it's—yo, what's the word, bro? It's essential. That's the word. It's essential for it.

**Matt:** Thank you, bro.

**Ryan Coogler:** Thank y'all.

**Paola Mardo:** Cool. All right, third question is from Gabby.

**Gabriella:** I'm going to stand up. Okay. Hi, I'm Gabriella.

**Ryan Coogler:** Hey, Gabriella.

**Gabriella:** Huge, huge fan. So I recently heard you say that *The Luck of the Irish*, the D-com *The Luck of the Irish*—whoo, yeah!—was your introduction to the Irish community when you were a kid. So I was wondering if there were any other movies you watched when you were younger that influenced you as a filmmaker?

**Ryan Coogler:** I mean, all of them. Like, but, but *Luck of the Irish* wasn't my introduction to the Irish community as much as, like, I just really like that movie. I had homies—I had homies I grew up with that was Irish. Like, my homie Patrick Finenat [ph.], his little sister, I knew them since I was like four years old, you know? And we knew they were Irish. Like, we would learn about—you know, we would learn about the Irish in schoolbooks and stuff.

But, yeah, that movie was just, like—you know, that movie was just—was a really great—Disney Channel had that run, bro, where it was—it was a lot of—a lot of movies where characters would kind of explore—American characters would explore they, they ancestral heritage, you know? And that one was a—it was a—it was a diverse movie, man. Like, like, he was—he was—you know, his homegirl I think he was in love with, she was—she was Black, and he had—he had his—you know what I mean? He played basketball and shit, and he—and he Riverdancing, right?

[LAUGHTER]

And, and, yeah, me and my little brothers used to—you know, we was—we was in love with that, you know what I mean? So, you know, Riverdance was this thing that used to be, like, telemarketing. You know, you would see the commercials, and I'm like, "I don't know about this," you know? You know, the dude got the big silk shirt and shit. And then I seen it in that movie, I was like, "Oh, this shit is kind of cool," you know? And, and that was the extent of it. And then, you know, then we made this movie, and Jack's, you know, Riverdancing. And it's like, oh, yeah, it was like *Luck of the Irish*, you know?

But, yeah, other movies, man, I don't know. Like, I watched—I watched so many, man. Another one I used to watch before, I think, *The Luck of the*—before I saw *Luck of the Irish* was *Circle of*

Friends. It's one of my mom's favorite movies. So it's got, like, Minnie Driver in it and shit, like, and, and it's a beautiful movie about—you know, you know, about these friends in Ireland. And that probably would've been, like, my biggest—you know, my biggest intro to that, you know? But, yeah, I used to travel the world through movies, man. We all—we all did, bro. Like, that's why, with Sev, he showed me his movie way back when, and, like, I got it immediately, you know what I'm saying? Because I grew up watching movies from, from everywhere. My mom would pop a movie in from, from every part of the world, man. My dad would, too. You know, and we would love it, man, identify with the characters.

And that's what I think a little bit of, like, what Bing and Terra were talking about. Like, like, we are from these communities that, that, you know, I think—I think have been pushed to the margins in terms of being behind the camera. But we grew up engaging with, with stories that came from everywhere and with characters that, that didn't look like us, and we knew we could—we could enjoy the movie. So our feeling is, like, you know, if the shoe is on the other foot, we know the audience will still—will still come along because we did, you know? So this, this perceived disadvantage is, is, I think, a constructive one, you know?

**Gabriella:** Yeah. Thank you so much.

**Paola Mardo:** Cool. And our last question is from Dom.

**Dom:** Hi, Ryan. Dom.

**Ryan Coogler:** Hey, Dom.

**Dom:** Nice to meet you. We met at Wakanda Forever very briefly, but—

**Ryan Coogler:** Okay.

**Dom:** Yeah, yeah.

**Ryan Coogler:** Good to see you again.

**Dom:** Good to see again. As we all know, Sinners has been so impactful in so many ways. But I wanted to ask you: At what moment did you know when you made something that was truly groundbreaking and, dare I say, has changed cinema? I believe that there's pre-Sinners films and post-Sinners films.

**Ryan Coogler:** It's not my place to say that, you know?

**Audience:** It's ours. I think we said it.

[LAUGHTER AND APPLAUSE]

**Ryan Coogler:** No, but, but also we not looking at it—we not looking at it like that. We just—we just—you know, we filmmakers. We making something that we want to affect the—to affect the audience. And we starting at the level of just, like, having a good time watching, you know, because that's actually enough, you know? And obviously, we poured our heart and soul into it, man. Like, we moved our families to New Orleans and, and got all the best people that we know to—you know, it was like making a meal with the best ingredients, you know—you know what I'm saying?

And, yeah, like, like, I knew that I liked it, you know what—you know what I mean? Like, I was like, "I think that's pretty cool," you know? I looked at—I looked at Zinzi. I'm like, "What do you—honey, what you think?" Most of the time she's like, "Yeah," like, like, look at Sev. And the actors took—you know, took hold of it. They would come with ideas and, you know, talk about their, their ancestors and why they liked the movie. Like, we had this—we had this young kid, man, who was a—who was a minor when we met him. Nah, he wasn't. He—Mozz [phonetic] was what? He was 19 when we—when we made the movie?

**Sev Ohanian:** Eighteen, nineteen, yeah.

**Ryan Coogler:** Eighteen, nineteen. And, and he would say—like, he would see something on set. He was like, "Hey, yo, hey, yo, this is my favorite movie." And I'm like, "This movie we making now?"

"It's my favorite movie, bro," you know? And, and, yeah, and I'm—you know, I'm a man of middle age, you feel me, and if this kid is liking it, you know what I'm saying? And then—and then Delroy, who, who's, you know, a young elder, you know—you know what I'm saying? Delroy was—Delroy was like, "I'm really liking this." I'm like, well, shit, maybe we got—you know, maybe we might have something.

But that's the closest that you—that you get when you making something. It's like, "Man, maybe we got something." Like, that feeling. And it's really, like, in the audience's hand to, like, decide, you know, and that decision doesn't get made a year later. Like, like for—like, for us, like, as filmmakers, like, a lot of times, it could get made—it could get—it could be decided 20 years later or, or 30 years later. You know, big example I know because when I was making this movie, I had a big poster of John Carpenter's *The Thing* behind, behind my desk, you know? It was massive. I got to—I got to find that. I think Ammar put it in storage, but a massive poster of this movie.

And if you know—if you know cinema business history, you know, that movie came out the same year as *E.T.* And it—and it got—it got—you know, it didn't get engaged with at the box office to the level that it probably—that it probably should have, you know? And so, financially, a year after it came out, folks would've looked at *The Thing* as not having worked, you know what—you know what I mean?

And, and, you know, I think that movie—I don't know if y'all ever seen it—that movie's a masterpiece. And, and everybody who would walk into my office, you know, decades after it came out, they would stop, you know, like, like, point at the poster, "Yo, how did you get this?" you know what I mean? And they have a story about the first time they saw it and, and how much they—you know, how much they love it. And they're like, "Oh, we making a movie like that?" you know what—you know what I mean? Like, it was—it was such an incredible touchpoint. And, and so, you know, I'm always thinking about, about that, too, because, like, y'all could love it right now; y'all could sour on it, you know what I mean? It's, it's—

**Dom:** We're always going to love it.

**Ryan Coogler:** I understand, yeah, but, but it's really like—it's really in y'all's—you know, in y'all's hands. As creators, I mean, you almost never know. I don't know, Sev, like, if you—if you—

**Sev Ohanian:** No, I mean, I will say, like, in the—in the challenges of making this film—like, every movie's got its challenges. But even in, like, the darkest times, we're just like, "Oh, we don't have enough time to get this scene the way we want it," and all the things, Ryan literally would say, "This is the best movie I've ever made ever."

**Ryan Coogler:** I would say that?

**Sev Ohanian:** You would say that every day, bro.

**Ryan Coogler:** Never mind then.

[LAUGHTER]

**Sev Ohanian:** And, like—and we weren't being like—we weren't being like, "This movie?!" But we were just being like, "Okay, cool, yeah." Like, and that—the fact that you were so steadfast in your belief in the whole team and what we were doing, like, that gave—that gave everyone, like, the feel we needed to just get through it and, and thank God we did. But—

**Ryan Coogler:** I played a lot of football, so sometimes I don't remember shit. I took a lot of headshots. I don't remember shit. But, yeah, Sev wouldn't lie. Yeah, so maybe I did know.

[LAUGHTER AND APPLAUSE]

**Paola Mardo:** Thank you, guys. Thank you to everybody. Thank you, Sev. Thank you, Ryan, and Jocelyn.

[APPLAUSE AND CHEERS]

**Ryan Coogler:** Thank you all—to all of you.

[48:01 - In Proximity Theme Music 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 is by Ludwig Göransson.

Patrick Epino is our co-director and director of photography.

Ken Nana is our sound designer and mix engineer.

Our editors are Patrick Epino, Ken Nana, and Ben Caloza

The production team includes Celine Mendiola, Joy Woo, and Alexandria Santana.

Follow us on social media @proximitymedia.

For transcripts and more information, head to [proximitymedia.com](https://proximitymedia.com).

[VOICEOVER ENDS]