

In Proximity
Season 3, Episode 40
Terra Potts & Sev Ohanian
Final Transcript

Paola Mardo: You're watching and listening to In Proximity. I'm Paola Mardo, and today we're talking about film festivals and answering your questions about them.

[0:13 - "In Proximity Theme" by Ludwig Göransson]

Paola Mardo: Here at Proximity Media, we've been talking about how to have more in-house conversations on this podcast about industry issues or topics that are important or relevant to our community. We have a lot of filmmakers who listen to the show who are maybe early in their career or starting to navigate challenges or changes within the industry, so we wanted to start with something that is kind of at the beginning of a filmmaker's journey: film festivals.

So, with film festival submission deadlines for next year starting to open up this summer and as folks prepare for the fall festival season, we wanted to talk about film festivals, how to prepare for them and how to make the most out of your experience attending them as a filmmaker. So I prepared some questions and topics to discuss. We also asked our listeners and viewers to send us questions through social media. We got a lot of notes and questions from you guys. Thank you so much for taking the time to send them.

And now I've brought in some film festival veterans and experts here at Proximity: Sev Ohanian, Proximity Media founder, Sinners producer, and a writer/producer who has sold four independent films at festivals. Notably, you brought your film Searching to Sundance where it not only premiered, but it won several awards and was the subject of a bidding war, which we'll potentially talk about here. And please fact-check me if I get any of this wrong.

The film was made for under \$1 million. You sold it/Sony Pictures acquired it for \$5 million, and it went on to gross over \$75 million worldwide. Was that right?

Sev Ohanian: That is correct. Yeah.

Paola Mardo: Amazing. Welcome, Sev.

Sev Ohanian: Thank you.

Paola Mardo: And then we also have Terra Potts, Proximity Media Chief Marketing and Operations Officer. Terra is a veteran executive who has worked on both the independent and studio side of movie marketing. Prior to Proximity, she spent more than a decade at Warner Bros. where she rose to EVP of Worldwide Marketing, leading campaigns for Judas and the Black Messiah, Crazy Rich Asians, and more. She also brought the 2007 documentary In Prison My Whole Life to Sundance. It has attended festivals including Toronto, Venice, South by

Southwest, Austin Film Festival, Mill Valley, and many more in various capacities and with films tied to awards campaigns or work at Warner Bros. Did I miss anything?

Terra Potts: Nope, that's it.

Paola Mardo: Fabulous. Okay. Well, welcome, you guys. I also do want to acknowledge that it has been a while since either of you have gone to a festival with a more independent project or even, like, a short film project.

Sev Ohanian: True.

Paola Mardo: So a lot of the questions we got are about short films or, like, filmmakers very early in their journey. That's where I come in.

Sev Ohanian: Hey!

Paola Mardo: Because besides moderating this conversation, I hope to speak, as well, as a first-time filmmaker, very new to the film festival game. I recently produced my first short film, *Veterano*, and started my film festival run just a few weeks ago. So I have questions but also hopefully some insights that I can share based on what I've learned so far. So, between the three of us, I think we will have a lot to share.

Terra Potts: We can do this.

Paola Mardo: We can do this! But just a little bit of housekeeping. So, first, we got a lot of questions, and we're going to try to answer as many as we can. We asked for questions through social media, so if you asked on YouTube, Instagram, LinkedIn, I'll mention you and what platform you sent it through. If you filled out our Google form, you guys gave us your full names and where you're from so I will call that out, too. Very exciting, although please excuse me if I mess up your names. We should have asked for a pronouncer. We'll ask for that next time. I'll do my best.

We also got a lot of similar questions. So what I tried to do is sort of ask the one that best represented most of them. And then there are questions—I'm curious if you guys have thoughts on this—there are questions we may not get to for a few different reasons. One is time. You know, maybe we'll save others for another episode. Another is expertise because there are some questions we got that are maybe more for, like, for example, a film programmer to answer. We are a production company. We're sort of more coming, I guess, from the filmmaker/marketer perspective because, for example, we got a lot of, like, "What are the best film festivals to submit to?" I think that's something that really depends on your film, and maybe you need to do the research on that.

Terra Potts: Yeah, I think that's—you know, specific to your film, there are some film festivals that are a little bit more broad, but there are some film festivals that are very focused on women

films or on diverse stories or, you know, local to their community and they only want things within a specific region. So there's hundreds of festivals out there, so that's not a one-size-fits-all, in my opinion.

Paola Mardo: Exactly.

Terra Potts: But what has your experience been, Sev?

Sev Ohanian: I mean, coming up in the business, there was, like, this understanding that Sundance had, like, the hottest market that you often see year-after-year like the biggest deals, the most competitive deals happening that particular week in Park City, probably fairly closely followed by TIFF and then South By and then Tribeca and then Onward. But you're 100 percent right, Terra, that, like, if you have a really fun, messy horror film, you might be better served premiering it at South by, and so forth and so forth. But, at the same time, the landscape has changed. Things have candidly gone probably a bit harder. So I don't think there's any, you know, objective rule anymore as to what makes the most sense, and every festival has got much more going on than just the sales, anyway.

Terra Potts: Yeah.

Sev Ohanian: Like, filmmakers are discovered at every festival, all four of those and far more beyond.

Paola Mardo: Agree. Man, I think the listeners are in for a real treat to have this conversation with the two of you. But is there anything you wanted to share about festivals or any, any top-of-mind topics or things you want to discuss today?

Sev Ohanian: I got a small one, which is: Do not wait to go to a festival until you have a film there.

Terra Potts: That's one of the questions that someone asked.

Sev Ohanian: Oh, really?

Paola Mardo: Yeah. We did get that.

Sev Ohanian: Amazing. Great question.

Terra Potts: Yeah. So you'll answer it.

Sev Ohanian: I know, like, coming up in the business, people would often say, like, "Oh, I can't wait to go to Sundance, but I want to wait until I have a film or a short." I will say that is 1,000 percent not the right mentality. I encourage you to go to a festival. It could be any festival, whether it's Sundance, South By, anywhere, to go as a film lover to kind of get the lay of the

land and see what you're going to get into. And once you have a film there, when you are now arriving to this festival, you kind of know what to expect on the other side. And, even beyond just going to a festival for preparing to have a film there, hopefully, it's just a good place to be. There's probably not a single better physical space you can be if you want to be in this business than a film festival. So don't wait. Go.

Paola Mardo: I think that's great advice. And I just want to shout out @latishanharrison, who had that question. So I'm glad you—she asked that on YouTube. So thanks for answering that. Did you have anything to add on that?

Terra Potts: No. I just completely agree. I think as a—you know, just a film lover or, you know, someone who enjoys the theatrical experience, there is nothing better than a film festival. It can open your eyes up to so many different genres, filmmakers. You know, I took my daughter to Sundance one year and took her to see a foreign-language film, and she fell in love with the story. She loved the idea of having earphones with a translator in it. And it was—you know, I underestimated her capacity to enjoy storytelling in that type of way, and it was—it was such a wonderful experience. So I've never gone to, like, a Sundance or a film festival and saw a bad film. There's always something about it that I love.

Paola Mardo: That's awesome. And I will say, because I know some folks have asked about, like, budget and, like, you know, maybe not having the finances to go to, like, a Sundance or South by, for me, like, I just go to, like, a local festival. That's how I started here in L.A., whatever the closest one was. So, if you don't have the budget to go to Sundance yet, you could just go to your community festival. There's definitely—there's probably one in your neighborhood.

Terra Potts: They need—and they need the support.

Paola Mardo: Exactly.

Terra Potts: They need the support. They need the patrons, and, like, it's best to meet people who will be in your community in your community.

[LAUGHTER]

Paola Mardo: And you can make films—you know, that's where you start your local network of filmmakers, too, at your local festival. So great advice. I think we're off to a great start.

Terra Potts: Yeah.

Paola Mardo: What's a fun memory from your very first or maybe your earliest film festival experiences.

Terra Potts: I mean, I have so many, and mine—ours are going to be so different because, I mean, I'm sure yours is the thrill of, like, selling a film or being in that first hot thing. But mine was—you know, as a marketer or a publicist at the time, sometimes, you know, you run into a friend on the street, and they give you a ticket to a screening that they can't go to. And I ended up at the premiere of *Sorry to Bother You*. Someone was like, "Hey, I have this premiere ticket. You want to go?" And it was, like, the world premiere, and I was like, "Oh, my god, this is amazing!" So it was just, like, moments like that that's so unexpected that were my favorite moments.

Paola Mardo: That's awesome. How about you, Sev?

Sev Ohanian: So my first memory, my first festival was Sundance when we went there with our film *Fruitvale Station*.

Terra Potts: Yeah.

[LAUGHTER]

Sev Ohanian: So I definitely broke my own rule. Man, it was—it was a crazy whirlwind of a week, but I think—because you remind me—I think it might have been the thrill of selling the film to a distributor. And, like, for us, it was kind of a bittersweet thing, too, because it was really, like, our first real movie we made, especially at film school, and for like a year of us making a film, it felt like it was a secret. Like, it was quite literally like our child our baby that we were nurturing. And the idea of going to a festival and showing it to the world is one thing, but now the idea that a distributor is going to now take it and, obviously, like, hopefully to our benefit, but releasing it to the world. It was oddly like kind of a sad feeling, too.

But I remember we got to bed that night after the sale. It was, like, an all-night thing—like, at 4:00, 5:00 a.m.—

Paola Mardo: This is you, Ryan, Zinzi?

Sev Ohanian: Ryan, myself, Zinzi, bunch of other filmmakers from that movie, as well. And, like, we were, like, trying to sleep, but we couldn't, you know?

Terra Potts: Yeah.

Sev Ohanian: We had not been asleep for, like, over 24 hours, but we were just so jazzed about that experience. So that will always be very clear in my mind, for sure.

Terra Potts: So cool.

Paola Mardo: I have one. I don't know if this is the most fun, but definitely memorable. I was an intern at the L.A. Asian Pacific Film Festival. This is my local film festival. And I was helping out

with the red carpet, and I introduced—I was introducing talent to the photographers or something, and I got to walk George Takei, the actor—

Terra Potts: Yeah!

Sev Ohanian: Cool!

Paola Mardo:—but I mispronounced his name.

Terra Potts: Oh.

Paola Mardo: And so I said, "George Takei," and he looks at me, and everyone's like, "Uh-oh." All the photographers were, like, "Ooh!" And he's like, "It's George Takei." And I was like, "Noted. Thank you." But he was very sweet and super—just amazing.

Sev Ohanian: Dude, what a legend.

Paola Mardo: He was there for a documentary about himself, I think, but it was cool. Super legend.

Sev Ohanian: That's a—that's a great festival, by the way.

Paola Mardo: You've been there with *Searching*, actually.

Sev Ohanian: Yeah, yeah.

Paola Mardo: I remember that. I was there. Okay. So how important are film festivals today, and how should filmmakers approach them?

Sev Ohanian: Yeah. I mean, I can speak about it. Like, just—I'll speak specifically from, like, a sales point of view, right? You make an independent film. What is—what is an independent film? It's a film that does not have distribution at the outset of making it. The goal is you will raise money to shoot the film, and when it's a completed product, you can then show that to distributors who will then, hopefully, want to take it on and then spend the money and use their resources to get it to the world. The benefit of a film festival is it's a single place and time that a lot of distributors or their reps will be present looking at potential films that they have a budget, ideally, to spend on. So it's to your benefit as a filmmaker to get into a prestige festival and do whatever you can so that the right buyer takes note of it and can take it. And the benefit of that is because you're at a film festival, there is competition, not only other films but rather other buyers. It's one thing to, like, mail or email or walk in the door of a distributor saying, "Hey, will you buy my movie?" They—you know, they may want to take a look at it, but they have all the time in the world. When your movie premieres at a festival, we were told—like, and *Fruitvale* was our first movie. We were told, "Hey heads-up. You might see, you know, 30 minutes into the screening at a premiere, people getting up and leaving, and that's okay." And I was kind of like,

"Oh, okay, I guess if they don't like the movie, I guess that's okay." And they were like, "No, no, no. They might be buyers because they might have already known 30 minutes into the film, "We're buying this movie." Or at least they're going to make an offer.

Paola Mardo: Got it. Wow.

Sev Ohanian: And the sooner they can get out of that screening, the sooner they can call their BA or whoever, their business affairs, start drumming up a deal because they want to bring it to you as soon as possible. And what happens at a festival is that, like, urgency is real. It's, it's like they have to buy that film a.s.a.p. or someone else might buy it. And that's what kind of becomes an all-night bidding war. And people often joke at Park City, it's because of the altitude, too.

Terra Potts: Yeah!

[LAUGHTER]

Sev Ohanian: Like, people are not making the best decisions, for whatever reason. So those are all the reasons why film festivals are often to the benefit of a filmmaker if we were to get a movie in the festival. Not to say it's the only way you can get a competitive, you know, sale for your movie, but it's certainly historically been a good one. And, yes, in recent times, if you're just looking at purely the—like, the analytics of how many sales are being announced to what numbers and what degrees, they have fluctuated. They've been kind of trending downward, if I'm being honest.

A lot of it, you can argue, is because there was kind of a boom of, like, streaming happening in the late 2010s where all the new streamers were launching, and they all needed content. So they were spending, spending, spending, but after a couple years of that, you know, the Wall Street kind of demonstrated that the value of a film may not be a streaming platform, that maybe there is more traditional value and revenue from a theatrical run and then DVD run and so forth. So that kind of made indie film go up and down, but, but every now and then, a movie comes out that's an independent film that just blows up. And I think, most recently, we're seeing that with *Obsession*, which is just breaking insane records on what a theatrical run can look like. It sounds like, like, you know, you get that every now and then.

You know, we just had a movie that just—the directorial debut of Jordan Firstman, who's a great influencer online, which had another sale for about \$17 million. My friend Alex Coco produced that. So you will have some of these now and then, but it's not the sales that will dictate, I think, future sales. It's how the movies perform. So *Obsession* performing as well as it's doing, the theatrical business, I bet you're going to start seeing more hunger for those kind of films. Now, I mean, this is going to be a long lecture if I get into theatrical performance, but I will leave it at that. They're still very, very important, I would argue, for independent filmmakers.

Terra Potts: Yeah.

Paola Mardo: I guess, maybe from a marketing perspective, Terra, is there anything? Like, what do you think filmmakers—how should filmmakers approach festivals from that side of the business?

Terra Potts: Yeah. I think, you know, a few things, and, you know, marketing also encompasses communications, PR. So I think, from a PR perspective, it's super important, one, to, you know, meet local journalists in a lot of those places because those become your champions as your career grows. And, Sev, you can probably attest to this because, you know, you've—you have relationships with so many journalists, as well. So I think it's important to always be present, meet the journalists, meet the programmers, meet your colleagues because, again, that's your community, and as you grow, having that network to depend on becomes super important.

And sometimes, if your film is really well—does really well or, you know, you're just a great person, even though it might not sell at this festival—and I'm talking, like, small little local festivals like Mill Valley or like Savannah, it does become more about just pure awareness that your film exists. And, again, even if this isn't the one that goes on to sell, it's the fact that it existed in this world, and it's something that people can look at and know to keep an eye on you, know that you have talent or that someone in the film is a great actor or writer. So I still think there's a lot of value in participating.

Paola Mardo: Agree. So let's talk strategy then. How should filmmakers plan out their strategy when it comes to film festival planning? Maybe—I don't know if you guys can talk about experiences with projects that you've brought to fests or just talk generally.

Sev Ohanian: This is kind of a cliché answer, but I do think the strategy for planning a film festival debut for your movie really starts with you even ideating on your movie at all. You want to be aware of, like, market trends and what's selling and what's not. I'm not saying that you should only write movies you think are going to sell. Of course not. Write something that's original to you and that's specific to you. But it is going to help if you—it is going to be helpful for you to be aware of trends.

And beyond that, you know, you really want to be as prepared as you can be when you go into a festival. Like, one thing that will be very helpful is having a sales agent. The way that works is, usually, if you're making a movie that—a feature film, especially—that has actors or a writer or a director or even a producer who are represented by one of the big agencies, for example WME or CAA, there are lit agents who represent writer/directors; there are talent agents who represent actors; but there's also sales agents who represent films and, kind of, producers. They are the folks that you might want to activate, and especially if there's a piece of talent in your project that's from that agency, they'll usually be very inclined to want to help you. And they often take over a lot of, like, : "Hey, we'll submit it to the festival." I don't believe for a second that they have any sway into getting into festivals. I really firmly believe, and I've seen the festivals are extremely high integrity. They only go for the films they want, but the sales agents kind of help facilitate a lot of that. And they will help kind of set you up for buyers, saying, "Hey, our film

is going to be premiering at this time on this day, you know, let's have—you know, which attendants from your distributor will be there? We want to schedule meetings right away." And if you're lucky enough to get people who want to talk about buying your movie, they will coach you guys. In fact, I remember when we were selling Fruitvale, it was my first time having a Sundance, like, bidding war situation. The layout of the room—I remember this so clearly—we, like, met at the WME—because it was WME Sales at the time—their cabin, and there was, you know, two couches opposite each other. We sat on the one couch, and this is Ryan, myself, Zinzi, our other filmmakers, and opposite us, that couch was empty. And on the side were the WME Sales agents who were acting like referees in, like, a basketball game.

And one by one over the course of the evening, the distributors would come in and sit on the couch and kind of give their spiel for what they liked about the film, what they imagined they could do for us with the movie, whether that was their distribution ideas or their marketing ideas. They talked about previous movies of theirs that were maybe good fits for ours. And then they would leave, we would all consult together, and the sales agents really kind of help guide you over the process, and when it comes to actually deal-making, they, along with your attorneys, would be the ones facilitating that side of it.

So you—I would say, in other words, you want to get a good sales agent. And if you don't have a piece of talent who's from an agency, you could still reach out to those sales agents, and, you know, they take a commission, and there's ways that you got to just prove to them, "Hey, this movie's worth seeing." And a lot of that goes back to the original idea. Is this something that could potentially have a market? Is there an audience for this? Could you imagine this being in theaters and making a profit? And if all those things are yeses or maybes, it's—you know, it's your responsibility as a filmmaker to try and get the right person who could then sell it to the right buyer.

Paola Mardo: I have some follow-up questions on that. So, actually, @hiitsguang on Instagram asked, "Aside from money, what makes a great distribution pitch in your opinion, especially during film festivals?"

Sev Ohanian: Man. To me, there's no shortage of words a potential partner on your movie can say to you that can win you over. It's not the words. It's really the passion. I mean this sincerely. I've been lucky enough to have sat in a lot of rooms like this where people have come and really advocated for why they're the right people. The thing that always wins us over is passion. You could just feel from—whether it's the head of the studio or it's one of the executives, or even if it's, like, a junior person who's like, "I will fight for your movie!" because what happens is, even if you get distributed by a great distributor, they have budgets, they have funds, they have competing projects. You're still going to fighting for resources. So you really want an advocate, a champion, and you will feel that more than you can almost, you know, hear that.

Terra Potts: Yeah, completely.

Sev Ohanian: So that would be my biggest thing. But, you know, in the—the bullet points are, you know, what—do they have actual ideas? Like, for example, do they have ideas that are very tailored to your film. "Hey, your movie seems like X, Y, Z, so we will do the following, which is a little bit different. And you're like, "Oh, interesting." Like, they have cool ideas or, again, proving that, "Hey, we did"—"We took on another movie five years ago, and this is what we did, and this is the result." So you want to, like, you know, analyze what they're saying, but, again, it will still come down to, more than anything, like, do they love your movie as much as you do?

Paola Mardo: How about this? Esai Alvarez on LinkedIn: "If your film gets accepted at multiple festivals, and you can't afford to attend all of them, how do you decide which ones to attend?" This is maybe, like, a short film or a really independent project. Do you guys have any thoughts?

Terra Potts: I mean, I would just say whatever's the most practical for you and works within what you're able to do. You know, you could do your homework on what success looks like with other films, but also, like, what competitions are available within the festival because, again, outside of selling your film, what the point is of going to the film festival is not only sharing it and having the experience of it being up on a big screen, but it's also if you can enter any of those competitions and potentially win. You know, there's people in our universe who have won with shorts, and it's been, you know, game-changing.

Paola Mardo: Yeah, agree.

Sev Ohanian: I'm curious what you think, too, Paola, because you must be going through this right now.

Paola Mardo: Yeah!

Terra Potts: Yeah, what do—

Paola Mardo: Deep into it. I would say—well, first of all, just in terms of strategy for me, definitely thinking about your goals is the first thing. Like, for a short film specifically, is this a calling card? Is it a proof of concept? And it sort of ties to what you were saying, like, if you can think about what the purpose of the short is, you can think of what the plan is for festivals and even the movie itself, in a lot of ways.

Terra Potts: Yeah.

Paola Mardo: And even marketing in a lot of ways.

Terra Potts: Yeah.

Paola Mardo: And from there, you know, we started picking what festivals to go to, what to submit to. There's obviously, like, the top-tier ones, but then there's also community. The films are genre films so we looked—I started to learn a lot about the genre film festival world, which I

did not know anything about going into this. But, you know, you made that list, and you just apply, and honestly, you have to start with a budget. I know, and I'm in the Reddit forums, I'm online, I read all the things, some people apply to everything and spend thousands and thousands of dollars. I do not recommend that. Set a budget and work from there.

And also, you want to target your—I think it's kind of like applying to college—your reach schools, your dream schools, your dream festivals and see where you land because once you do get in, and maybe you guys know more about this than me, once you get into, like, a really big festival or, like, whether it's a prestige one or even a genre film, other festivals will start watching you. Like, programmers go to those festivals, start hearing about you.

Sev Ohanian: So true.

Paola Mardo: And then they contact you to submit to their festival. So it's sort of like you have to have a strategy to begin with and then adjust from there based on your acceptances. And I guess, to answer that question about how to decide which to attend to, kind of what like you're saying, what's realistic in terms of your budget? I chose to go local first, and then we may have an international premiere in our future.

Terra Potts: Wow!

Sev Ohanian: Let's go!

Paola Mardo: So we're trying to prioritize that, as well, but we're not going to go to all of them. It's just physically impossible.

Terra Potts: Yeah.

Paola Mardo: But, you know, we'll see how it goes. From Cameron Boyd on LinkedIn: "What are the most effective film festivals to apply to that studio heads pay attention to?" And I bring this up, but they said "studio heads." I would say even, like, producers or, like, industry folks. What do you think are the festivals that people are paying attention to? You kind of mentioned it's changing.

Sev Ohanian: Yeah.

Paola Mardo: But is there any right now that you might want to mention?

Sev Ohanian: I mean, I would say the studios historically have had the most presence at Sundance, TIFF, South By, Tribeca, and then that's domestic. Internationally, you know, you got Cannes. You know, you got a bunch of them, mostly in Europe. But I would say, in America, at least, it's those four.

Paola Mardo: Are there any local ones? You mentioned Mill Valley, which I know is a big local, like, Bay Area one; SFFILM. Like, are people paying attention to those festivals, as well?

Terra Potts: I think during awards season, which, you know, I hate to say—during awards season, but, yeah, I think because it's, again, local press, local film community, there's a lot of voters in various guilds all across the country. So if you look at any of the award contenders, they're screening at all the local film festivals because it's the best way to get eyes on the film and get those voters potentially in. So, yeah, I would say during the fall seasons, if you can find yourself at the Savannah Film Festival, Charlotte, you know, any major—Chicago—any major city, it would be a good time to be there because you'll be, you know, alongside award contenders.

Paola Mardo: Yeah, there will be industry folks. And I'll also mention, for genre, there's Fantasia, Fantastic, Sitges, I believe. So those are big ones.

Terra Potts: Yeah. And a lot—and I was just going to say that when you were talking about your film and looking at genre fests, I think if that—if you're a genre filmmaker, those festivals are so important because there are—those are some serious fans. Like, genre fans, superhero fans—not to say—you know, superheroes have their own space, but when you talk about the longevity of your career, starting going to those festivals, building those relationships, you know, making yourself a regular fixture in those spaces is a very good long-term idea. I would highly recommend it.

Paola Mardo: Highly rec. Cool. Okay. What about submitting or preparing for film festivals? What are some dos and don'ts? And I'll start with a do, and maybe this will help bring up some other ideas. Number one, make sure you take photos during production, behind-the-scenes photos. Very important because you are going to need those materials. Get your logline or synopsis, whatever written materials for your press kit ready way in advance.

Terra Potts: Yep.

Paola Mardo: Ideally, way before you submit because you will need those.

Terra Potts: Yep.

Paola Mardo: So those are my tips right now for dos. Any other dos either for features or marketing or anything?

Sev Ohanian: I just got to double down on your idea. Like, we learned that very late in my independent career, that we just literally bought, like, a white psych thingy. Like, it's, like, you put it on a tripod and then you bring it down, and it looks almost like a DMV, you know, thingy like you take photos at to get—

Terra Potts: Oh!

Sev Ohanian:—to get your new license. And we just took it to set and, like, on certain days, we'd be like, "Okay, this actor's got an hour between scenes. Hey, we're going to shoot some poster pictures of you." And it's even, like, promotional, poster, whatever it is. And you just—you know, you have your photographer, even if it's you, on a DSLR, just snap some really cool pictures and—of all your actors, sometimes together. You get some pictures of the director, the writer, the producers. Have that ready. I have found it to be incredible. Like, distributors actually would get beyond excited—"Oh, you have all of this?" We're like, "Yeah." We were like—it, it presents that you're professional and that you're thinking about marketing and the audience. For sure, I think it's a fantastic idea.

What's—when we got into Sundance with Fruitvale Station, they say when you—when we got accepted, like, "Oh, like, please—we have this deadline to submit your poster." And we were like, "Oh, we didn't come up with our poster." And we quickly got Michael B. to come while we were shooting ADR. We shot a picture of him. I personally photoshopped this poster.

Paola Mardo: Dope.

Sev Ohanian: That was our budget at the time.

Terra Potts: Wow.

Sev Ohanian: I have literally—I have, like—

Terra Potts: Breaking news.

Paola Mardo: You need to find this.

Terra Potts: Yeah!

[LAUGHTER]

Sev Ohanian: I have a—it exists. It exists. It was, like, a shot of Michael B.'s face with the, you know, trademark beanie, Fruitvale Station. And we showed up with all of our posters ready only to kind of learn, at least at the time, no one does that. Like, the festival would ask you to do it, but, like, the people knew that you're not supposed to make your own poster. Like, let that be the thing that the distributors make or whatever. So...

Paola Mardo: I think—I think it's changed. People make posters all the time now.

Sev Ohanian: I agree. That's great.

Paola Mardo: Like, and they look really good. You can do it on, like, Canva.

Sev Ohanian: Yeah.

Terra Potts: Yeah. I think you always need a one sheet.

Paola Mardo: Yes.

Terra Potts: You know, I think, visually, it's a good idea to have something where—you know, and it's hard as the filmmaker, probably, to do this, but just, like, what do you want the audience to know about your film, or what's the question you want them to ask themselves? And just have that prepared. But I really want to double down on your logline and synopsis. There's—you know, in this world of AI, there's so much lost appreciation for the written word, and for a filmmaker to be able to articulate what their film is about, you know, quickly, you want to be the one to do that instead of putting it in the hands of someone else to do. And so I would just say—and that takes iterations, you know?

Paola Mardo: Oh, yes.

Terra Potts: And leaving it alone, coming back to it two days later, imagine how many stakeholders are involved and passing it around and the notes. So I would say, you know, get ahead of that and have something that you guys all feel confident about and, you know, you feel like, in three to five sentences, will make someone ask—want to go see that movie or want to know more.

Paola Mardo: I love that.

Terra Potts: Yeah.

Paola Mardo: Any don'ts?

Terra Potts: I have a ton of don'ts.

Sev Ohanian: Ooh!

Paola Mardo: Please, let's go.

[LAUGHTER]

Terra Potts: No. I mean, just because I have so many friends who are, you know, in your position, who are doing their first or second rounds as—you know, in film festivals. And the question I get all the time that pains me is when they say, "We want to start this really cool viral campaign." And I'm like, "Okay," like they think they got their next Straight Outta Compton or whatever, name that viral campaign. And, first of all, it's like lightning in a bottle. You never know what's going to go viral or what's not. So, like, getting in that game when you're trying to make a movie, like, just worry about making a good movie.

But also, even with big studios, you know, it's really hard to catch fire in that way because we're so overloaded with content that I would highly encourage you not to start a new social page that's only going to have 300 followers including your barista and your mom. Like, not to have—you know, start some big, elaborate viral campaign to promote your film that you think is a cool idea because there's not enough awareness out in the world yet for people to understand and want to engage in that kind of way when you have big brands spending millions of dollars now to do that kind of work. And then what ends up happening is your page ends up sitting there with only a few hundred likes, if even, very little engagement, and then, eventually, when hopefully buyers are googling you, when people are googling you, that's one of the first things that will pop up. And it looks like it's not performing when that might not be the truth.

So, unless you, like, already have momentum, I would say use your existing social page, you know, have friends repost you, tag you in posts, and try to use those platforms that already exist and have more followers and more engagement than starting your own thing from scratch. Like, that, that's a big undertaking. It's so difficult these days, and we all know this, dealing with social.

Paola Mardo: Yeah, agree. I would say save the maybe handle if your film's name is available on Instagram.

Terra Potts: Yep, that's smart.

Sev Ohanian: That's cool.

Paola Mardo: Save that.

Terra Potts: Yeah.

Paola Mardo: So that you can use it for later. But I concur with you. You don't have to start an Instagram account for every short film or every project. Like, use what resources and strengths you have, if it's your own page or one of your—you know, someone else on the team or something like—or your production company, actually.

Terra Potts: Yeah. It's, like, one of the biggest marketing myths, and I think even now, like, with regular film—with, you know, regular films, big studio films, or just, like, in the creator economy is, like, people almost anticipate the marketing before they anticipate the success of the thing. And they're working towards a marketing campaign because that's what we all recognize, and it has a lot of sexiness to it. But it's like, let the thing be the thing, and the marketing will come later. So I would say concentrate on your film.

Paola Mardo: I do want to follow up on that because—I hope I do not butcher this—@emacbreezy asks, "Is marketing important prior to a festival? Or does the festival handle it itself?"

Terra Potts: A lot of festivals do handle it, and I highly encourage people to call the publicity departments or the marketing departments and make sure that, you know, they have the right materials, they have the one sheets, they have their, their behind-the-scenes stuff because they are the ones who are also, at least in my experience in the past, like, putting it up on their website, you know, putting it for download and press kits.

If there are still, hopefully, any journalists left, they're the ones who are sending it out, and they're doing—you know, there's not a lot of pieces on one specific film, but there could be a trend piece that they could be talking to someone about, which is like, "You know, we have a bunch of female-led films." And then your film can get lumped in with that depending on, you know, what the themes of it are.

So I would say, you know, stay in contact with the festival publicity office and marketing office, and make sure that they have all of your materials. Check in appropriately. Don't check in every day, don't check in every five minutes, but, you know, make sure that they know who you are. You know, express a lot of gratitude for the work they're doing because they are doing a lot of work. There's a lot of volume, and those offices work really tight. And I think that's a good idea, and I think, before that, again, like, using your own handles and your own brand. Let people know what you're working on, and be proud of it, and kind of take it from there.

Paola Mardo: I like that.

Sev Ohanian: All right.

Paola Mardo: Do you have anything?

Sev Ohanian: I got something for you guys.

Paola Mardo: Yeah.

Terra Potts: Sure.

Sev Ohanian: In my heyday, right, the 2010s, every festival would have, like, that one movie going into the festival that had all the buzz.

Terra Potts: Yep.

Sev Ohanian: People dying to get the tickets, a lot of, like, think pieces being released about them. Almost without exception, those are the movies that kind of, like, were known to be fizzling out. Like, they didn't have the big buys, they didn't have splashy, maybe good reviews, and maybe didn't have the best life after the festival. And, like, the analysis that I remember my friends and I would talk about is that I think the magic of a festival—like you were saying, like,

there's no—you go to a festival, you see any movie, it's going to be a good time—is I think people want to go to film festivals to discover films.

Terra Potts: Yes!

Sev Ohanian: Like, I think the idea of, like, you were trying to get any ticket you could get, or you got the one, this one ticket to this one movie at this one screening, let's go.

Terra Potts: Yep.

Sev Ohanian: And you go, and you're like, "This movie was incredible!" And that, I think, applies to distributors and people who are from studios and agencies who see movies, too. So I think there is, to your point of not having an Instagram account, like, there is a lot of charm to your movie being, like, this undercover thing that, like, no one saw coming. And that was my experience with Fruitvale, that was my experience with Searching. I remember—like, I remember so vividly, again, back with Fruitvale because it was my first festival, like, going to, like, a public restroom and, like, overhearing in the stalls, people being like, "That movie Fruitvale was crazy!" And I'm like, "Wait, what? They're talking about my movie," and, like, they were talking about it in the sense of, like, this thing, "Who is this Ryan Coogler guy?"

Terra Potts: Yeah.

Sev Ohanian: Like, that, I think, will always benefit you, too. So I would say don't worry if you do have a film in a festival and you don't feel a lot of publicity going into it. That's totally still massive advantage, too.

Terra Potts: Well, yeah, and I think you hit it because, I mean, just thinking back to our conversations, like, when you went to the Armenian Film Festival recently, you went in blindly, remember? And you saw the film about the musician, and you were like, "Oh, it was that beat," and it was such a discovery.

Sev Ohanian: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

Terra Potts: And it's like, when you go to these—like, I'm getting chills right now because it's like I've—I don't think I've ever gone into a festival with, like, a set plan. Like, I've had dreams of, like, "Oh, I'm going to see this film, this film, and this film," but if you've ever been to, like, Sundance or any of those, like, by the time your name comes up in the ticket, like, they're all gone.

Sev Ohanian: Yeah.

[LAUGHTER]

Terra Potts: So, at that point, it's like, I'll take whatever I can get. Like—and so I just go. I, you know, have gone to the box office that day and been like, "Has anyone, you know, not picked up their tickets or whatever?" And every film has been great or some discovery, and I—and, again, especially films from other countries where I've come back and talked to production execs. I'm like, "Yo, you got to go look at this film because it could either inspire something else, or you need to work with that filmmaker to make a version of that for—domestically."

But, you know, at Warners', too, we used to be on a committee where marketing would go, and we'd split the films and see it, and then talk to our head of the studio about what we thought of the marketing potential for any of those films.

Paola Mardo: And I guess what I'll add to that is, you know, definitely, like, word of mouth and, let, the festival magic kind of work itself, I think those are two good things to always keep in mind. But if you're new or if you have a short film, try to make easy for people to find out more about your film.

Sev Ohanian: Yeah.

Paola Mardo: Like, have a website. If it's not an Instagram handle for the film, maybe it's yours where you're posting about what you're doing.

Terra Potts: Absolutely.

Paola Mardo: Just, like, keep people updated, keep your community updated because, for example, for us, we premiered at the L.A. Asian Film Festival. We have called our—we're not even calling it a film festival run. We're calling it a film tour because we want to do the festivals, but we also want to do screenings. We're sort of trying to drum up our own noise because it's so crowded out there. It's a short film. We just want to get it out.

And the amazing thing that happened through that—we were posting videos, photos, all of that—people showed up to the festival who I didn't even know. Like, someone found me on LinkedIn, came up to me and was like, "I was so inspired by what you're doing, I wanted to see this film." There was someone from the California Film Commission who saw a video we made and showed up—

Sev Ohanian: Wow.

Paola Mardo:—and was like, "When you guys get funding for the feature, call us."

Terra Potts: Oh, cool.

Paola Mardo: So that stuff, I think if we hadn't posted on social, those people would have never known about us.

Terra Potts: Yeah.

Sev Ohanian: Totally.

Paola Mardo: There's definitely a pro to doing your own campaign, but don't, don't make that the thing, the main thing. It's just part of it.

Sev Ohanian: Yeah, especially with a short, for sure. Like, you got to get people to show up at the screening, absolutely.

Terra Potts: But I also think what you're talking about, Paola, is that those people were coming for you. Like, they were on your page. They weren't being marketed to you from a film page.

Paola Mardo: No.

Terra Potts: They were coming to you from your page, and you were clearly having fun, and, you know, you're passionate about your film. So, you know, you were speaking about it in a way that got people excited that they wanted to support you. And you can't underestimate how much people want to come out and support other people for putting themselves out there or for doing something that they love and that they're passionate about.

But I just have to ask you, so: Are you having fun?

Paola Mardo: Oh, I am!

Terra Potts: Good.

Paola Mardo: It is fun. It is fun!

[LAUGHTER]

Terra Potts: You know, you're touring your film, and I love the idea that you're calling it a festival tour because it kind of feels like a rock concert.

Paola Mardo: It's on tour, yes. We're like a band.

Terra Potts: Yeah, a film tour. So what are you finding the most fun about your experience?

Paola Mardo: Audience reactions because we, we did the L.A. Asian Film Festival. We did a veterans film festival.

Sev Ohanian: That's cool.

Paola Mardo: So we're finding different reactions with different audiences. So that's been fun. But I want to turn it to you guys. So you've been selected for a festival. Now what? Can you guys talk about how filmmakers should show up at festivals, how to make the most out of the experience? And I'll just throw this in, as well, Rachael Ogunbowale from Ireland asks, "How to network at festivals?"

Terra Potts: That's a good one. I'm—listen, I think you should show up at as many events as you can. You know, there's a lot of—especially if you're a filmmaker who's gotten into the film festival, there's mixers, like, but there's programming all throughout the festival. Go to all of that. A lot of people are there on their own. So walk—like, old school—

Paola Mardo: What do you mean by that?

Terra Potts: Meaning, like, I've shown up at South by Southwest, and I've just had a badge, and I just start walking around to see what I can find and figure out. I do—I do that a lot in life everywhere, but I do that especially at festivals. And I just sit down to people, and you start talking. You like something, you turn around, "Hey, wasn't that great?"

: "Yeah."

"What are you doing here?"

"Okay, yeah. Me, too."

And, you know, it's just if you're around people, like, you clearly have one common interest. Like, you're at a film festival so you're—there you go. Like, you just have to kind of put yourself out there, which I know is scary. But it's like, how often are you going to be in these situations? Don't squander the opportunity. Seize it.

Paola Mardo: Agree.

Terra Potts: So I would just say, you know, go for it. There is no perfect networking. I know it is probably portrayed on social by—

Paola Mardo: Oh, my gosh.

Terra Potts:—you know, corporate coaches who, for \$199, can tell you exactly how to network. But there is—

[LAUGHTER]

Paola Mardo: Please don't do that.

Terra Potts: Yeah, there's no rules to it. It's really just being outgoing, you know, saying hi, and if it hits and you guys keep talking, great. If not, move it along and next.

Sev Ohanian: I got to give massive credit to my wife, Natalie Qasabian, you know, fellow producer, obviously, because when we used to go to Sundance, I was that annoying guy being like, "All right, babe, tonight we're going to go to this party. We're going to stop by that party." And she was like, "No, we're not doing any of that." I was like, "No, I can get us in!" She's like, "No, no, no. I got us all these tickets to movies."

And I'm like, "You want to see movies at a film festival?" She's like, "Yes! That's the point." But I was like, "We got to meet people! We got to try to drum up," blah, blah, blah. And she was so right because in my experience, going to those—even those fancy parties, I don't know how much networking is really happening. But, like, I think somebody gave me the advice a long time ago of, like, "Take the bus as much as you can," because just sitting on the bus, crammed in with people, you get a chance to meet people. Oftentimes, waiting in line to see a movie when you want to buy a ticket, that stuff far trumps any party or gathering ever, especially, like, when you have that communal high of watching a really good movie together, especially knowing that you were, like, the first people ever to see that film, like, afterwards in the lobby, in the restroom, like, walking out, those are where you might make some of the most meaningful connections that will generally, I think, thrive for decades to come.

Paola Mardo: Yeah. Making friends—like, yes, you can network with industry people, sure, reps, whatever.

Terra Potts: Sure.

Paola Mardo: Other filmmakers definitely, also the programmers and the staff and the volunteers because, like you said, like, those are the people that work to get your film in here and are making this whole event happen. They can champion you now or later, and they're just great people to know. We did get some questions in about, like, "Is it important to know someone at the festival to get in?" I mean, yes and no. I mean, if you know a programmer, great, and build a real relationship with them. Don't just bug them about your submission. Like, talk to them at the festival. Be friends, and build that network early.

Terra Potts: Yeah. Well, and I think, as Sev said earlier, it's like a lot of these festivals have a lot of integrity right now. So it doesn't really matter who you know. Like, your film has to live up to, you know, to be able to be in the festival, you know? But I would say, yes, be kind and talk to everybody. I started my career as volunteering at festivals and nonprofit events because that's how I got my foot in the door. I was a waitress at The Cheesecake Factory, and it was that catch-22 of, like, you can't get an assistant job without having experience, but you can't get experience without having had a job. So I started in the industry in like '03, '04 volunteering a lot. So I was that ticket taker, I was that usher, and if you were nice to me, and we know each other now—no! Just kidding.

[LAUGHTER]

Paola Mardo: I was an intern. So I totally get it.

Terra Potts: Yeah, I'm just saying. Yeah.

Paola Mardo: What about this? Daniella B. from Atlanta, Georgia: "What is the best, most helpful answer or material to share when faced with the 'What's next?'/ 'What else do you have?' question: pitch packets, full scripts? What should I have in my back pocket after my film premieres?"

Sev Ohanian: A full script.

Paola Mardo: Like, this is a—

Terra Potts: This is a Sev one.

Sev Ohanian: Full script. Full script. So when I went to Sundance in 2018 with *Searching*—so that's a film that Aneesh Chaganty directed. I produced it along with Natalie Qasabian. Aneesh and I wrote that, wrote *Searching* together as a script. We had our goal that when we arrived to Sundance, we would have our second script ready. Like, we were just—we were so—while we were finishing the movie, we were just, like, writing all night. And there's literally a picture of us on the plane to Sundance, like, writing on our laptops. Like, Natalie took a picture of us. Like, we were trying to have that ready, and it made a massive difference because, you know, we had a really great premiere, we had a great bidding war, and all that stuff. The movie did well. But within six months, we were already greenlit to make that movie, which we shot later that year—

Paola Mardo: Wow.

Sev Ohanian:—and that came out, as well. So that is such—it's such a great question, but it's like, you have to take that seriously.

Paola Mardo: Yeah.

Sev Ohanian: You're only as good as your next thing, and I think, like, in Hollywood, they talk about, "You're only as good as your last thing." That's so not true. Like, Hollywood, I think, is still a very optimistic industry. Like, everyone wants to make good movies. They all want to find something that's going to reach a wide audience. You have to represent that best potential. So, certainly, it's not enough to have a good movie in a festival. You have to be ready with the next thing, and you want it to make it easy for people to say yes. It's like, it's ready to go. It's a moving train. Are you in, or are you not? So for sure.

Paola Mardo: I guess to follow up on that, let's talk post-festival. Zakhee Williams, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, asks, "Best steps after going through the film festival circuit? How to best

capitalize on the exposure? I guess you just gave a pro tip: Have a script ready to go. Is there anything else that filmmakers should be thinking about after, maybe, their festival run or after their film premiere that they should—

Terra Potts: Well, I'm going to turn it back to you. What are you thinking after your festival tour?

Paola Mardo: Oh, gosh. I mean, I'm in the same boat as you, as your advice, which is we're preparing our next thing. It's a proof-of-concept for a feature, so we have a script ready that we're working on and sharpening. But, like, I guess from marketing or, or someone who's made many films, how do you capitalize on the attention you've gotten at a festival?

Sev Ohanian: I think, for me, it's like there's no experience that should be considered, like, not meaningful and positive, and that is, every festival, you met one or two people, you made one or two impressions, and I think, like especially when you're thinking about the next project, think very specifically: What do you need? And I remember, in my indie days, we were trying to be connected with a particular distributor, who I think is still around—I hope they are—and I remember every time, we were like, "Oh, yeah, I mean, you know, I'd love to meet somebody from that place!" And I would just mention that to everyone I would meet with, and over time, people were like, "Oh, by the way, I was just at a thing. I know you want to meet so-and-so. They're going to be at this party tomorrow night. Would you—I'd love to introduce you guys." And that literally happened. So I think it's giving people, like, actionable nuggets that they can hopefully fulfill for you. I think that was a big one.

And I would also just really encourage, like, the connections that you make thrive—you know, keep them going. Like, check in with people regularly, not only when you need something, ideally when you have something to report or something you want to ask about. And I can't stress enough, it shouldn't feel like a Machiavellian thing that you're doing, like you have a grid ready to follow up with people. But it's like, ideally, you've met people in a really meaningful way because I imagine, as thriving as our industry can be, it's also kind of lonely. Like, a lot of us, we're the artist in our friend group or in our classes growing up. So now you've met all these like-minded folks often from around the world. Those are relationships you probably want to keep going, period.

Terra Potts: Yeah.

Paola Mardo: 100 percent.

Sev Ohanian: And the last thing I will say is, like, the inverse of that first piece of advice is like: How can you help others?

Terra Potts: Yeah.

Sev Ohanian: Like, I've made more connections in this industry by just connecting other people, like being the person who goes, "Oh, my god, you and you would really dig"—or, "Your

project sounds, like, right up her alley." And the more you do that, obviously with permission and all that, you could just find that coming back to pay off to you in so many ways. And, like you mentioned, like, certain movies that have gotten made only happened because of that one person remembered me from that one thing, and you can trace it all the way back.

Paola Mardo: That, I think, is my advice for after a festival, is follow up, say thank you, send those thank you notes, again not in a creepy, like, too strategic or Network-y with a capital N kind of way but just an organic and, you know, professional way. I'll share a really short story. We went to the GI Film Festival. It's a military, like, veterans festival in San Diego, very small. It's not a festival that we went to thinking, "Oh, we're going to meet our agent," or whatever it is. It's really like the film has a veteran component to it. We wanted to show the film to veterans and see what they thought.

And going into it, because it is San Diego, and the film has a Filipino sort of storyline, I was like, "Oh, we need Filipinos in San Diego to come. Where do I find these people?" And I tried to hit up schools. I tried to hit all these things.

Sev Ohanian: Smart!

Paola Mardo: Did it very last-minute so didn't get a lot of bites. Literally googled "filipinos in san diego." There is a website, of that.

Sev Ohanian: No way!

Paola Mardo: Like, a community one, and they had, like, a phone number. It was literally the day before the screening. I called them. Someone actually picked up, and I said, "Hey, we have this film festival screening for our film," blah, blah, blah. She's like, "Oh, my god! Send us the info. We'll try and get some members," and some members did show up.

Terra Potts: Oh, that's great.

Sev Ohanian: Yay!

Paola Mardo: And we just met community people. And there's—like, no, they don't work in Hollywood or anything, but it's just people who, you know, were interested in the film, actually had ties to veterans organizations for Filipino Americans. And we're like, "Hey, we want to share this. Send—like, let us know where else it's screening.

Sev Ohanian: That's so cool.

Paola Mardo: So that was a cool, like, we met people, made friendships, and also just got more people who might actually want to see the film see the film.

Sev Ohanian: That's awesome, Paola.

[47:25 - "KN 9 to 5" by Ludwig Göransson]

Paola Mardo: So, yes, there's the pathway to film festivals where you get accepted, and you have a great time, and you do the whole festival circuit. There's also the rejection side of things where you don't get into the film festivals you want. Maybe you don't get into any at all, you know? What to do? And, actually, Vincent M. from Columbus, Ohio, asks, "For the whole team, what is everyone's estimate submission acceptance to rejection ratio? Because it can get rough. And how do you handle the anxiety once you hit "Submit" or if you get rejected?"

For me, it's just, like, just adjusting strategy as we go, you know what I mean? You're going to get rejected, especially if it's a short film. Like, you never know. You kind of dwell in the sadness and melancholy for a little bit but then move on and keep going and adjust your strategy. And also think about where else besides festivals your film can go.

Terra Potts: Well, you had a guest, Luke Matheny, right?

Paola Mardo: Yes.

Terra Potts: Who came on, and his whole strategy, which was perfect, was he had, you know, submitted to tons of film festivals, been rejected, ended up putting it through the Student Academy Awards and won.

Paola Mardo: Yes. Local, regional student film festival.

Terra Potts: Yeah!

Paola Mardo: And won and then kept winning. Like, he—I can't remember all the fests but definitely Sundance, South by. He got rejected from all the big ones.

Terra Potts: Yeah.

Paola Mardo: And ended up winning an Oscar for his short film. So.

Terra Potts: Yeah, yeah.

Sev Ohanian: That's amazing.

Terra Potts: Yeah, and which was, you know, one of your guests. So, I mean, my advice, as with anything in life, would be, like, what I always tell my daughter, "Chin up, shoulders back, and keep going." And you got to just keep going, and if it's not this project, it's another one. And, you know, I've also been on the side where I've reviewed films for film festivals to choose what was programmed in the film festival, and there are a lot of really good filmmakers out there, like a lot of really—like, it was impossible, some years, to choose films. I did it for the American

Black Film Festival, and I always do documentaries or shorts, and you usually just love all of them. So it's usually not about whether it's good or not. It's just it's such a competitive year. So, you know, keep going, keep going, find—discover different avenues. But also, like, at a certain point, then—you know, and I would defer to you on this, Sev—like, chin up, shoulders back, keep going, and it's the next project. And not every project's going to be a hit.

But I love what you said earlier, too, about, you know, looking at the experience and just proof of concept. Like, at the end of the day, you made a film. Ninety-nine percent of people who want to be filmmakers don't do that. So that, in itself, is something to be proud of.

Paola Mardo: Cool. I think that's great advice. Sev, anything?

Sev Ohanian: I completely concur. Like, it shouldn't feel like failure. Like, rejection is part of the gig. So I think being ready to adapt—if you had this idea that you were going to make a—let's just say an independent feature film that was going to go to x festival and win and sell for a lot and make a ton of money, and you were going to be able to go make a Marvel movie afterwards. Adapt now, right? So it's like your next movie that you were maybe going to write or develop, maybe imagine something smaller so you can point to that last film and make it clear to investors or executives, like, "Hey, this new film is going to work because I improved on my last film." And I will just say, 100 percent, like, there's a huge success-to-failure rate for me and all of us at Proximity for rejections we've had where movies we wanted to go or actors we wanted to get or studios we wanted to team up with, it didn't work out, but that's the gig. You got to just keep going.

Paola Mardo: Yeah. You just don't hear about it on social media.

Terra Potts: May I ask you both a question? Sorry.

Paola Mardo: Sure.

Terra Potts: Because you just triggered something with you as a—having a short now and for you as a producer. If the short or your film doesn't get into any festivals, and you try the different routes, would you recommend that they put it on YouTube? Are you considering that for your film, and would you recommend that for a filmmaker today?

Paola Mardo: My take on it right now is—again, it depends on your goals, right? And there are some folks—like there's a film about to release soon, *Backrooms*, directed by a filmmaker who started on YouTube. So, yes, there is a world where you put your films online and start your career from there.

Terra Potts: After you've done the submission to all the festivals. You don't jump the shark on your premiere. Yeah.

Paola Mardo: Exactly. So that's what I was going to say. So, yes, you can go that route, but definitely think about your goals. I'm talking about shorts, specifically. And is it worth it putting on—is it worth it to you to put it on YouTube now on your channel, or would you rather try submitting to festivals first, or try to find—there are other YouTube platforms that specifically focus on shorts that you can submit to like Short of the Week, Vimeo Staff Picks, Omeleto, I believe. So there's a couple different places where it can live online, not solely your channel. So I think you should consider your goals and see which avenues you should take first before putting it on your own YouTube channel.

Sev Ohanian: My controversial pitch, if it was me—

Paola Mardo: Yeah.

Sev Ohanian:—is I would chop that baby up, 60 seconds each, put that online on Instagram, make an account. Maybe, like, do a sponsored for the first one, especially if it—pertains if it's a movie or a short, you know, if it fits the storytelling. But ideally, you're making stories that are narrative momentum and propulsive and kind of, like, would work for that. I would—I would experiment with that just because there's that—I mean, thinking outside the box. If it's a short, I would really think hard about: Is there a brand integration opportunity here?

Terra Potts: So smart.

Sev Ohanian: Life, for example, Veterano, if there is a likeminded product or service that's, like, you know, big money corporation type thing where you can take it to them, "Hey, this is something I've made. I'd love to team up with you guys and, you know, release it under your label, say, you know, "So-and-so presents Veterano." I'm open to that.

Terra Potts: That's so smart.

Sev Ohanian: Even if it's, like, to not make money just because the goal is never money. Even when we talk about bidding wars and sales, it's not about fattening your pockets or anyone's pockets. It's about finding an audience. That's why we do what we do.

Paola Mardo: Yeah.

Sev Ohanian: And if you can team up with a ready, established brand, that's another to go about it. So, to me, those are—I would try and think a little bit outside the box versus just putting it on YouTube straight because it's a very noisy platform.

Terra Potts: Yeah.

Sev Ohanian: There's so much other stuff going on there, including great podcasts like this.

[LAUGHTER]

Paola Mardo: Hey!

Sev Ohanian: So I would think so much of the job, especially if I'm going to be a producer, is like, how do you creatively get it to the audience?

Paola Mardo: Yeah. I love that. That's just—I think, to bring it all back because, yeah, film festivals, it is part of the industry. There's a business and sales side and marketing side to it, but it's also about the movies and the stories you want to tell and reaching an audience with it, as well, finding your audience. So I think that's a great suggestion. I will take that to my fellow producer and our writer/director, Patrick Epino, who works on this podcast behind the camera, and we shall discuss. Thank you for that pro tip.

[53:55 - Prox Recs Theme by Ken Nana and Ludwig Göransson]

Paola Mardo: Okay. Because it is In Proximity, I will ask you this, Sev and Terra, what is your Prox Rec? We just talked about film festivals. So, ideally, it's something to do with that. Anyone want to start?

Sev Ohanian: There's a great book called Shooting to Kill written by Christine Vachon.

Paola Mardo: It's right there behind Terra.

Sev Ohanian: Oh, my god! It's literally right there.

Terra Potts: Yeah!

Paola Mardo: OG copy.

Sev Ohanian: Wow! Did I give that copy?

Paola Mardo: No. That's my partner-in-crime Patrick Epino's copy.

Sev Ohanian: Let's go, Patrick. Come on, man.

Paola Mardo: But, yes, it's part of our production design right now.

Sev Ohanian: Well done. So—

Paola Mardo: And Natalie—that was her Prox Rec, do you know that?

Sev Ohanian: Oh, shoot.

Terra Potts: Oh, that's so funny.

Paola Mardo: But you can recommend again.

Sev Ohanian: She's going to—she's going to call me out. She's like, "You stole my idea!" It's an incredible book. It is like the bible for independent producing. So I taught producing at USC—you guys may know this—for a couple years. This was, like, my one required read. And the thing about producing, especially independent film producing, is it feels like you don't know what you're doing. It feels like there's no rulebooks for this. Like, like, what is a job? Where does it begin? Where does it end? Reading that book confirms that all of that is true.

So you get to read Christine talk about how she made these legendary movies in the '90s and kind of, like, quite literally, like, handcrafted the market as it exists today. I think it's still extremely relevant to anyone who wants to get a movie into a festival. This is how you even make those movies to begin with. It's, like, a mandatory read, in my opinion, for any producer.

Terra Potts: So I would recommend, to piggyback off of what Sev just said because I know that when you're starting off, and you want to maybe pay for travel or pay so that you're in more festivals, I have rediscovered the library, and I'm very happy about that. So there are so many resources, and we have the Libby app where you can borrow the books online to your Kindle, have them go straight to your phone. And it's more than just books. It's newspapers. It's magazines. They have, you know, like the book that Sev just recommended is probably on there. So, if you're like, "Ugh, I have to go on Amazon, and then it's another 20 bucks, and then I want to do this," like, just go onto the—go on to your local library. Go onto your library app. There's lots of books about how to pitch, how to write, you know, your own press release, you know, best practices in social media and all those kinds of things. So that's what my suggestion would be.

Paola Mardo: Great rec. So my rec would be—I will shout out a service, but it's a service I love, Criterion, because they have great films on there, yes, but they also have a lot of short films. So, if you're interested in short films, they have short films by current filmmakers but also, like, legendary filmmakers. I just watched, I believe it was about a six-and-a-half-minute short film by Guillermo del Toro—

Terra Potts: Wow.

Paola Mardo:—called Geometria. And it's a horror film, and I think, yeah, just watching shorts—you learn a lot about shorts by watching them, too.

Terra Potts: Yeah.

Paola Mardo: So you can watch it on that service. Yeah, that's the rec. Thank you, Sev. Thank you, Terra, for being In Proximity. Pleasure speaking with you, as always.

Sev Ohanian: Thank you, Paola.

Terra Potts: Thank you, Paola.

Paola Mardo: Okay. Now we're going back to work. Bye!

[57:03 - 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.

[VOICEOVER ENDS]