

IN PROXIMITY
Episode 1: Michael B. Jordan and Ryan Coogler
Final Transcript

[Music/Old Radio Sounds by Ken Nana]

[VOICEOVER]

Paola Mardo: You're listening to P-R-O-X.

[VOICEOVER ENDS]

[MUSIC STOPS]

Michael B. Jordan: You know what you said to me? You said, "Hey man, look. I wrote this for you. I believe you're a star. I know you're a star. Let's go show the world."

Ryan Coogler: That's crazy.

Michael B. Jordan: And I don't know if that was Director Coog coming through and just giving me the gem that I needed in that moment. You know what I'm saying? Because who would have known? But I carried that with me because I was like, "Man, this dude who just met me believed that I was a star, you know what I'm saying, and believed I could do it." And that kind of gave me that first initial like, "I belong here" type of a feeling, you know what I'm saying, in the industry.

[Music/Old Radio Sounds by Ken Nana]

[In Proximity Theme Music by Ludwig Göransson]

[VOICEOVER]

Paola Mardo: You're listening to In Proximity. On this episode, actually hang on a sec.

[MUSIC STOPS]

Since this is our first episode, let me set the scene before we start the show.

[KN 9 to 5 by Ludwig Göransson]

At Proximity Media, we're a production company of creatives and executives making movies, TV shows, music, and podcasts. Our credits include films like Judas and the Black Messiah, Space Jam: A New Legacy, and, most recently, Creed III. We also made Wakanda Forever: The Official Black Panther podcast and soundtrack, and we have a bunch of other projects on the way. You can check all that out on our website ProximityMedia.com.

This show you're listening to right now, In Proximity, is a podcast about craft and career between friends and collaborators in Proximity's creative community.

I'm Paola Mardo, producer and head of audio here. And I'll kick off every episode with a quick introduction before handing it off to a Proximity colleague and a guest, and they'll take it away

from there with stories about first projects, major inflection points, creating with purpose and intention, and so much more.

So, thanks for pressing play, and be sure to follow In Proximity on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or your favorite podcast app so you get notified when a new episode drops every Sunday.

Now, let's get into it.

[In Proximity Theme Music by Ludwig Göransson]

For our first episode, we brought together one of our company founders, Ryan Coogler, and his longtime collaborator, Michael B. Jordan. Ryan and Michael's cinematic partnership has shaped culture and broken box-office records through groundbreaking movies like Fruitvale Station, Creed, and Black Panther.

On this episode, they reflect on when they first met to talk about Fruitvale Station, Ryan's first feature film, going to their first boxing match to prep for Creed, and what they've learned from building and running their own production companies.

This episode was recorded while Michael was in post-production for his directorial debut, Creed III.

[MUSIC STOPS]

Michael B. Jordan: Hey, what's going on, everybody? It's Michael B Jordan, actor, producer, most recently director, founder of Outlier Society production company. And we're sitting in the screening room here in L.A. in the edit for Creed III.

Ryan Coogler: I'm Ryan Coogler, writer, director, producer, and co-founder of Proximity Media. I'm here with my good friend and frequent collaborator who I'm very proud of, sitting here in a luxurious screening room. Much nicer than anything I had on my directorial debut.

[LAUGHTER]

Ryan Coogler: But it's great. And we talking about how we been in proximity with each other for the better part of a decade now in our professional careers.

Michael B. Jordan: Yup.

Ryan Coogler: I'm really excited. So I remember when we first met.

Michael B. Jordan: Yup.

Ryan Coogler: Very clearly. Didn't know it was going to be as big a deal professionally or, or personally for me, but I knew it was a big deal. I was excited. It was, like, not far from where we are now, kind of like by Universal Studios area. It was Significant Productions.

Michael B. Jordan: Yup. Nina Yang Bongiovi, Forest Whitaker's producing partner, and one of the producers on Fruitvale Station, we were at her office with our casting director Twinkie Byrd.

Ryan Coogler: Right. We met there. And then I remember we walked across the street to the Starbucks.

Michael B. Jordan: Yep.

Ryan Coogler: And sat down and talked. It's crazy to think that it's been about 10 years.

Michael B. Jordan: Yep.

Ryan Coogler: I remember how you walked across the street.

Michael B. Jordan: Why you say that?

[LAUGHTER]

Ryan Coogler: Because it was a busy street, one of them wide Valley streets. And then you just walked out in front of the car. It was our first time meeting, too, and I didn't want you to think I was a punk.

Michael B. Jordan: Yeah.

Ryan Coogler: But, like, I'm also from Cali, like, where we kind of respect cars pretty good, you know what I mean? And you was like, "No, they'll stop." And I was like, "This got to be a East Coast dude." You know, like, "This got to be a East Coast thing," because I've seen the New Yorkers, like, walk out in front of the cab, bang on the cab or whatever, you know?

Michael B. Jordan: "Hey, I'm walking here!"

Ryan Coogler: Yeah, but you were right. You walked out there, the cars stopped, you know, and I was like, okay, maybe this, maybe this is a...

Michael B. Jordan: Something to this.

Ryan Coogler: Yeah, something to this.

Michael B. Jordan: That's pretty accurate.

Ryan Coogler: Yeah, I remember that, and we sat down in, you know, your little Starbucks seating section and what have you.

Michael B. Jordan: Yup, yup, little outdoor seating section.

Ryan Coogler: Yeah. But, I mean, I got to keep it real with you. I was nervous for a lot of reasons. Like, the biggest thing was we had just got our script accepted into Sundance Labs, and we were coming out and had a little bit of momentum. But we hadn't shared the screenplay with talent yet. I remember talking with your agents about, you know, we would sit down and meet first and then share the script.

Michael B. Jordan: Yup.

Ryan Coogler: And I had made up my mind already that I wanted to cast you. And I just was hoping that we would get along a little bit, you know? I was fresh out of school, you know, so, like, I'm working with professional actors but none that were, you know, really established. And I had just seen you in a couple movies. Like, it was *Red Tails* and *Chronicle*. You had a big year at that time. You want to talk a little bit about, like, where you were at professionally at that time?

Michael B. Jordan: Yeah, and the craziest thing was, for me, as much as you were nervous, I was nervous, too, but I couldn't tell you were nervous at all. You know? Let me start off by saying that because you had a certain sense of confidence to you. You know, I trusted what you were saying, and I felt comfortable, which is crazy because usually, as an actor up to that point, never has it been, "Oh, no, this role was for me." So, going into it, you know, I didn't know that you were like... I already had the job, you know what I'm saying? I'm still going into it like, "Man, I hope I'm right for it," or, "I hope he thinks that I'm the one for the role."

And, yeah, at that time of my career, coming off of *Chronicle*, one of my first bigger studio films—you know, it was still an ensemble cast, but I felt, like, a real lead role for me. And, at that time, it was a lot of stuff swirling around in my head. You know, Trayvon Martin murder had happened, and feeling frustrated as a young Black man and not really having an outlet to really express myself, being quote/unquote "known" from shows or whatever like that but not really feeling like I have any real power or impact on the world in that type of way, you know?

Ryan Coogler: Wow.

Michael B. Jordan: And then there was this thirst and this want to be a leading man. I didn't know if I was a leading man or not.

Ryan Coogler: I remember that. I remember asking you that in that meeting because I'd imagined, in my own, like, naivete—there was a film that you had done where you were the lead or a short film, and you were like, "Yeah, I've never been number one on a call sheet before."

[LAUGHTER]

Ryan Coogler: I was like... I didn't really know that call sheets were numbered at the time.

Michael B. Jordan: Yeah.

Ryan Coogler: And then, it was a show, I think a pilot you were getting ready for. And I was like, "Well, are you the lead in that?" And you were like, "Well, that's kind of an ensemble piece, too." And I remember thinking in my head, "This is crazy. Like, you know, like, obviously this guy is really talented." I didn't know how to feel about that. It was a part of me where I was, like, really excited that I wasn't going to be working with somebody who, like, been there, done that.

Michael B. Jordan: Yeah. You know what you said to me? You said, "Hey, man, look, I wrote this for you. I believe you a star. I know you a star. Let's go show the world."

Ryan Coogler: That's crazy.

Michael B. Jordan: And it was coming off the heels of this leading man conversation that we had.

Ryan Coogler: Wow.

Michael B. Jordan: And not feeling like—I've never been number one on the call sheet. You were like, "Hey, man, look..." And I don't know if that was director, you know, Coog coming through and just giving me the gem that I needed in that moment, you know what I'm saying? Because who would have known? But I carried that with me because I was like, "Man, this dude who just met me believed that I was a star and believed that I could do it," and that was the agenda. That was the goal, to go do that. Obviously, you know, with everything else around the movie, as well, but that's something that kind of stuck with me moving forward of, like, yeah, I am, and I could do that, too. And we continue to do that.

Ryan Coogler: Yeah, totally.

Michael B. Jordan: Project after project. So that kind of gave me that first initial, like, "I belong here," type of a feeling, you know what I'm saying, in the industry.

Ryan Coogler: That's deep, man. I was really struck, also, by your story. Up until that point, I don't think I'd ever met anybody else from Newark.

Michael B. Jordan: Okay.

Ryan Coogler: But I heard about it. It reminded me quite a bit of like where I'm from.

Michael B. Jordan: Yup.

Ryan Coogler: Especially like Newark's relationship with New York City and, at that point, I think I'd only been to New York one time. When you were talking about it, it seemed a lot like the Bay Area, like it's a lot of other other cities that are in relationship to San Francisco and Oakland. But you got cultural differences, but the vibe is similar there. And it felt like, "Oh, yeah, I understand this guy." You know?

Michael B. Jordan: Yup. If we would have been in the same school, we would have been best friends. We would've played ball together. You're literally the West Coast bookend, I think, to me and my story. I feel like, you know, obviously different paths and different things along the way but a shit-ton of similarities.

Ryan Coogler: Yeah.

Michael B. Jordan: And going to Oakland and you bringing me into that community, and I can't go anywhere now. People think I'm from Oakland, you know what I'm saying? They're like, "Hey, man, you know, what part of Oakland you from?" And I'm like, "Oh, I'm from Newark. I'm from Jersey."

"Well, where do I get that from?" It's like, yeah, probably because, like, you know, first three roles I ever played majorly were all from Oakland, you know what I'm saying? And, you know, Oscar Grant, that was my way into that world and that community that really took me in as one of their own, you know what I'm saying? And I really love that, man.

Ryan Coogler: I remember riding around with you. People would recognize you.

Michael B. Jordan: Yup.

Ryan Coogler: People who you wouldn't think...

Michael B. Jordan: 1000%.

Ryan Coogler: "Hey, there goes..."

Michael B. Jordan: "What's his name," you know what I'm saying, "Wallace!" or this or that. "Reggie, where Reggie at?" You know what I'm saying? And then we found out, got wind that, you know, we were telling that story in the community...

Ryan Coogler: Oh, yeah, yeah.

Michael B. Jordan: I mean, hometown hero to a whole other level, man. Like, the city was such a warm embrace to, like, get that story told the right way and...

Ryan Coogler: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, no, that's a unique place. They definitely put their arms around.

Michael B. Jordan: For sure.

Ryan Coogler: Yeah, I saw it happening. That's not a guarantee.

Michael B. Jordan: No, no, no, no, no. Not at all. I'll put it like this. The Wire definitely gave me a lot of goodwill in communities all over the world, you know what I'm saying?

Ryan Coogler: Yeah, a lot of --- a lot of street credibility.

Michael B. Jordan: Lot of street cred, you know what I'm saying? Even to, like, you know, Osc's family and stuff was like, "Hey, you know what, it's you? All right, cool. You can tell the story."

Ryan Coogler: Totally, yeah.

Michael B. Jordan: It's like, thanks.

Ryan Coogler: Yeah, yeah. Shouts out to David Simon.

Michael B. Jordan: Yeah, for sure.

Ryan Coogler: Yeah, and Alexa Fogel, right?

Michael B. Jordan: And Alexa. Yeah, man.

[Interstitial Music by Ludwig Göransson]

Michael B. Jordan: Honestly, I knew you were, you know, fresh out of SC, so I knew you were close around my age at the time. And my first impression was like, "Oh, he just like me." You know, as a director and writer, you know, I had this idea in my head of, like, just, you know, authority figures and being above the actor in the hierarchy of onset dynamics. And to see somebody who looked like me, who talked different but still had a lot of things in common

on just a personal level, on a human level, it just kind of, like, put in perspective what's possible. You kind of raise the ceiling of, like, capabilities of what I could do at my age, you know, and what I thought was possible.

But the more I was talking to you through the movie and just the process, you know, all the other—like, the business side of the creativity that we were doing as far as making the film, it was like, "This guy is way more mature than me." I was like—I mean, I was like, "Oh, this dude is responsible, like, like really responsible. Like, I thought I was disciplined and, like, dedicated from the acting side, but this is a whole other level. Like, this dude is, like, way more mature than me." Like, "How many kids you got?" At that time, he ain't got no kids. You know, I was like, "This is a dude with responsibilities, man. This dude live life." So I think that was...

[LAUGHTER]

Ryan Coogler: Bro, I'm going to fuck the track up, bro, from laughing. "How many kids you got?"

Michael B. Jordan: I was like—no, at that point, it was like you was a dad and my mom...

Ryan Coogler: "I got five kids."

Michael B. Jordan: Bro, without a doubt, you was a dad and my mom when I first met you. That also kind of gave me confidence that I was in good hands. Fruitvale was your baby. That was a project you were extremely passionate about, you know what I'm saying? You wrote it. Anybody that's that passionate and cares that much about this one thing, I knew you were going to do any and everything to, like, make sure it was done the right way and done at the highest level. And that's the type of project I wanted to be involved in. That's the type of director I wanted to work for. That's the type of collaborator I wanted to be partnered with.

So I walked away from the meeting—like, immediately, like, walking across the street from Starbucks, going back to the office, there was no doubt in my mind that this was a project that I was going to do. And I was so excited for it because, yeah, I'll run through a brick wall for Coog. Literally, from day one, that's what kind of, like, connection I kind of felt. And, yeah, that's one of the reasons why I ended up doing that movie.

Ryan Coogler: What's crazy about what you saying, I think I was sleeping on Ludwig's couch...

Michael B. Jordan: Okay.

Ryan Coogler: ... while I was down here in L.A. I think I was sleeping on Ludwig, one of our Proximity partner's couch taking the meetings in L.A. and working. I didn't have it together at all, man, but, you know, was super excited about the project and the opportunity to meet you.

I wanted to ask you, bruh, when's the last time you sat in a Starbucks like that, and can you even do it now?

Michael B. Jordan: I'm not going to say that was the last time, but I think that was one of the last times I think I sat in a Starbucks. And I can't sit in a Starbucks right now.

Ryan Coogler: You can't do that no more, can you?

Michael B. Jordan: No.

Ryan Coogler: Straight up, you can't. You would get mobbed.

Michael B. Jordan: No. I'd get mobbed. Yeah, yeah. Yeah, like, no.

Ryan Coogler: When I was thinking about us sitting there in that Starbucks, and I compared and contrasted that when we went to that fight in 2014, I think it was. We went to a Mayweather fight together. We went to see him fight when he fought Maidana, the second time.

Michael B. Jordan: Yeah. Okay.

Ryan Coogler: We went as prep for Creed I, just to go to a pro fight together, you know, kind of feel it and see. And I remember, bro. When we left that fight, and people realized you were there, it took us like two hours...

Michael B. Jordan: To get out.

Ryan Coogler: ... to get, to get out because people kept grabbing you and taking pictures with you. Remember this?

Michael B. Jordan: Yup. Yup.

Ryan Coogler: And I realized you was famous. You had blown up. But going to that fight with you, we hadn't even shot Creed yet.

Michael B. Jordan: Nope.

Ryan Coogler: There was no Black Panther. There was no... none of the other stuff you've done since then, like the stuff we've done together, the stuff you've done on your own and with other filmmakers.

Michael B. Jordan: Mm-mm.

Ryan Coogler: It gave me, like, a front row seat to what it must be like. I felt bad for you, bruh. Like, honestly, I felt awful because, like, people were grabbing you and forcing you into selfies. It was mostly women, you know what I mean?

Michael B. Jordan: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Ryan Coogler: Like, I couldn't believe. I was like, "Man." You know, like, you know, they was handing me the camera to take pictures of you. And, for like five minutes, I'm like, "Man, this is awesome. My boy blew up." And then, for the next like hour and a half, I was like, "Holy shit."

Michael B. Jordan: "How do I get him out of here?"

Ryan Coogler: I was—but I was like, "If Creed is a halfway decent movie, it's over for this dude."

Michael B. Jordan: Man.

Ryan Coogler: You know?

Michael B. Jordan: That's exactly what happened. You actually saw me go from, "Oh, that guy looks familiar," to, "Oh, that's Michael B," you know what I'm saying?

Ryan Coogler: Yeah, totally.

Michael B. Jordan: It was a lot, man, to realize I couldn't go places that I normally could or relax or, you know, somebody's always staring, you know, because I'm from Newark. You know, I'm from certain places where, like...

Ryan Coogler: Yeah, somebody staring at you is not a good thing.

Michael B. Jordan: ... someone staring at you is not a good thing.

Ryan Coogler: Yeah.

Michael B. Jordan: You know what I'm saying? So to get used to people are staring at you in a different type of way and be able to differentiate between the two.

Ryan Coogler: And you can't forget that anxiety, like that inherited muscle memory of, "Hey, this person across the room is staring, I got to get out of here."

Michael B. Jordan: Yup. Or that might be a threat or whatever it is. And take that, "Oh, I'm not there anymore, and this is different things. And it could mean a term of endearment, or somebody might be wanting to, you know, come up," so to understand my responsibility as a public figure, as somebody—whatever it is now, to be able to be open and be welcoming and approachable in a certain type of way.

Ryan Coogler: I got to tell you something else, too, you know, we never talked about. The women that was grabbing you, taking pictures with you, not all of them were single, you know what I'm saying?

Michael B. Jordan: Yes, yes.

Ryan Coogler: Like, I was seeing, like, some of they dates.

Michael B. Jordan: That was with them.

Ryan Coogler: That was with them, you know what I'm saying? And, like, how they was looking at you, I was also like, "Wait a second. We might, you know..."

Michael B. Jordan: "We might have to throw down."

Ryan Coogler: Yeah, throw down. I was on my Ps and Qs, bro. I was like...

Michael B. Jordan: And we at a boxing fight, so you know everybody...

Ryan Coogler: Yeah, everybody a little...

Michael B. Jordan: Everybody got hands.

Ryan Coogler: Everybody a little sauced-up, and everybody a boxing fan.

Michael B. Jordan: Everybody took one boxing class, at least, in their...

Ryan Coogler: I'm like, "Man, we might have to fight our way out of here." There was a couple fights in the lobby.

Michael B. Jordan: 1000%, it was a huge fight.

Ryan Coogler: Yeah, it was a couple times when it was like, "Are we going to make it home?"

[Interstitial Music by Ludwig Göransson]

Ryan Coogler: So fast-forward a decade later after we met, and we have production companies now. We business owners, you know, leaders of companies that make things and make products. And I've found that it's incredibly challenging. It's incredibly rewarding. I use different muscles doing that job than I do as a writer/director. And I wanted to talk a little bit about it, you know, with you. And like, why did you choose—after your success as an actor, you know, why did you choose to found Outlier Society?

Michael B. Jordan: That's a great question. I think one of the reasons why I wanted to start my own production company, that kernel of an idea stemmed from Peter Berg with my time on Friday Night Lights, and, you know, Jason Katims and being in that creative circle, how they created that show and how Pete navigated the industry. He was like, "Mike, one day you're going to want to stop waiting for incoming phone calls, and you're going to want to take control of your own destiny. So start writing and start owning stuff."

Ryan Coogler: And this is Peter Berg, the director.

Michael B. Jordan: Peter Berg.

Ryan Coogler: He directed the pilot of Friday Night Lights.

Michael B. Jordan: Friday Night Lights.

Ryan Coogler: Executive producer.

Michael B. Jordan: Executive producer. He came in and directed the pilot of seasons four and five, which my character, Vince Howard, starred on. And that was my first introduction to Pete in a personal way. You know, I was thirsty, man. I wanted to know what everybody did from the DP to the camera operators to, you know, the boom, the grips. How can I make everybody else's job easier?

And I started asking Pete questions, and he kind of took to me a little bit. I started developing this basketball show while I was on Friday Night Lights, and I was sending him drafts, and he's giving me notes on it and etc., etc.. And then, from that idea, the constant want to create and own and build and, "Oh, you got a production company. Oh, so that means you could do what? What do you do with a production company? Okay. It does this. Okay." And then I just started to, like, stack bricks on top of bricks and pieces on top of pieces and wanted to keep building

something to do exactly what he said, to control my own destiny, you know? I saw a lack of representation, you know, which now it seems like a cliché thing to say. But at the time...

Ryan Coogler: This was over 10 years ago.

Michael B. Jordan: Over a decade ago, you know, from actor to understanding the usual suspects that would only go out for the same role and the disappointment on everybody that didn't get it knowing that there wasn't a lot of roles out there that had the level of elevation that you needed in order to become a leading man, to actually get significant roles that really made a difference in your career. That's kind of how it started, from wanting more than just an actor kind of perspective. Then the creation and ownership piece. Then it was like, "All right, well, what do I need to start a production company? All right, cool. I need some money, I need overhead. I need this. I need that. All right." So I started stacking jobs, identifying people, having internal conversations with, like, my team.

Ryan Coogler: Right.

Michael B. Jordan: I knew this production company was the way to go for me because I can create multiple things at one time. The satisfaction I get as an artist that I had to wait so long for as an actor, to go from, like, you know, shooting a movie to editing the movie to it comes out, I can see that in a smaller step process when it comes to producing other things, you know?

Ryan Coogler: Right, right.

Michael B. Jordan: For other people. That's another thing. I like seeing other people win, man. So I like to build projects for people and talent. If I created more roles and more projects, it would be more for everybody to eat.

Ryan Coogler: Like a form of paying it forward almost.

Michael B. Jordan: Exactly.

Ryan Coogler: I mean, it's interesting. Like, sitting down talking with you, there's one name that we haven't brought up enough, and that's Forest Whitaker.

Michael B. Jordan: Forest Whitaker.

Ryan Coogler: African American leading man kind of guy. There's only a few of them, especially at that time, and...

Michael B. Jordan: Yeah.

Ryan Coogler: ...Forest, you know, in his success, leveraged it into founding Significant Productions, you know, hiring Nina Yang Bongiovi to help run it. My first meeting with Nina was she was like, "I'm looking for young filmmakers to help champion, to help make films with, and grow our company as well as grow their careers." Forest making that decision to form his own company was how we met each other.

Michael B. Jordan: That's deep. Yeah. I never connected those dots. That's deep.

Ryan Coogler: Yeah. So I'm super proud to see you doing that because some of the best production companies are founded by actors a lot of times. But then you got Significant, which is, like, a huge inflection point for us.

Michael B. Jordan: Yes, yes.

Ryan Coogler: You know and, and it was amazing having Forest there the whole step of the way. Like, I know y'all had your private conversations, you know what I mean? But I would talk to him. He's a director, as well.

Michael B. Jordan: Yup, and I never had those conversations with him. I was more of the acting side because, at that time, that's what my vision was.

Ryan Coogler: Totally.

Michael B. Jordan: But it was crazy. Like, I can only imagine the conversations and how influential he was with you and what you were doing at the time was, like, insane.

Ryan Coogler: Oh, man. Yeah, it was incredible. It was incredible.

Michael B. Jordan: So, like, for me, I've never been shy with the ambition of, like, taking big swings and leaps. I'm hungry. I want it, you know? If I see it, I'm going for it.

Ryan Coogler: Yup.

Michael B. Jordan: You know, you've always been a patient person. What increased your appetite or bandwidth of wanting to kind of do more and start your own production company? Because I know that was something that developed after you had some major films under your belt.

Ryan Coogler: Yeah

Michael B. Jordan: You know what I'm saying? So what made you want to kind of, like, dive into that?

Ryan Coogler: That's a great question. I grew up playing team sports. I come from a big family, you know, so I always like community and the idea of community. And it was always something that I figured would happen at some point.

Michael B. Jordan: Okay.

Ryan Coogler: You know, a production company, if I was successful as a director. But, yeah, I was taking stuff one step at a time, man, you know, and some of the greatest advice I ever got in life was being a college football player and, and I played wide receiver. I had a coach my last year.

Michael B. Jordan: Okay.

Ryan Coogler: And I rarely dropped passes, you know, in practice, but I dropped one. And he was like, "Hey man, catch first because if you don't catch it, nothing else matters. You know

what I'm saying? Like, catch it first, then turn, then see the defense." I'm actually not a patient person. You know, like, it's something that I got to work at.

Michael B. Jordan: Got you.

Ryan Coogler: You know, and making films is so difficult. And I've been blessed to have films with a lot on the line, but it also left me with, like, a slim margin of error, you know what I'm saying?

Michael B. Jordan: Got you.

Ryan Coogler: So I had to make sure the movie's good. I can't be thinking about anything else at the time. And I was blessed in that Fruitvale begot Creed, and Creed begot Panther. And then after Panther, I had a little bit of time. That was when the time was right.

Michael B. Jordan: Got you.

Ryan Coogler: The catch was making the company, you know what I'm saying—I wasn't worried about anything else but that. And we were fortunate enough that, like, right around the time, Shaka King, who's the co-writer and director of Judas and the Black Messiah, a friend of me and Zinzi's—Zinzi Evans Coogler is a co-founder of Proximity. And Shaka King, you know, told us about this project. And me and Zinzi loved the pitch. You know, and at the same time, Maverick Carter, who I met through you...

Michael B. Jordan: Yup.

Ryan Coogler: Maverick was like, "Hey, man, we got—you know, we want to do Space Jam."

Michael B. Jordan: Ah, nice.

Ryan Coogler: You know, and that was when...

Michael B. Jordan: Damn, back then? That's crazy.

Ryan Coogler: Yeah, that was when I sat down with Zinz.

Michael B. Jordan: Awesome.

Ryan Coogler: And we were like, "Yo, does it make sense to do this now? I'm actively making a movie right now." And she was like, "Oof. We need somebody else." And then we were like, "Let's see what Sev's doing." And we met with Sevak Ohanian. Sev's a writer and a producer. You know, he was on-the-ground producer for Fruitvale, you know, kind of just did Searching and, you know, won a bunch of awards at Sundance. And he was in town for a screening in San Francisco. We went to the screening, loved the movie and kind of, like, talked to Sev like, "Hey, you know, we got these two movies. Can we start to put something together?" And from there, man, it was...

Michael B. Jordan: It just kind of kept rolling.

Ryan Coogler: Yeah, and we—it was all based off relationships.

Michael B. Jordan: Yup.

Ryan Coogler: I got a love of podcasts, you knew this.

Michael B. Jordan: Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

Ryan Coogler: But that's why we're doing this right now, and want to learn television, you know, so we we hiring folks, you know, expanding, and you here doing this, and I mean, it's exhilarating, man. And I got a taste of it with you in Creed II.

[Interstitial Music by Ken Nana]

Ryan Coogler: So Steven Caple Jr. is the director of Creed II, currently directing Transformers: the Rise of the Beasts.

Michael B. Jordan: Yeah, I think it's one of the Beast Wars joints.

Ryan Coogler: I'm excited about it. But I don't know if you remember some of those conversations we would have.

Michael B. Jordan: I did.

Ryan Coogler: Yeah.

Michael B. Jordan: And I can only imagine that being difficult and new for you...

Ryan Coogler: Totally.

Michael B. Jordan: ... to, to step away or take a couple of steps back from something that's so personal to you that you created, that you built and see somebody else and help somebody else but still give them the room and space to have their own identity on it.

Ryan Coogler: Yeah. But, Mike, I loved it, man.

Michael B. Jordan: It was awesome.

Ryan Coogler: Like, I learned that about myself, you know what I'm saying? Like, when y'all were calling, I remember Caple was like, "Hey, man we need another day." You know, and he kind of, like, said it off-hand. And I was like, "Oh, shit, man. Caple and Mike need another day." So I remember going in...

Michael B. Jordan: Going in and like, "Hey, my guys need another day!"

Ryan Coogler: Yeah, like I went to Irwin's office, and y'all had like—what was y'all shooting, 50-something days?

Michael B. Jordan: Yeah.

Ryan Coogler: And I don't know if I even told you this story, bruh. I'm in Irwin's office.

Michael B. Jordan: Uh-huh.

Ryan Coogler: Irwin Winkler. He's the founder of Winkler Films. He's the original producer of Rocky with his partner, Bob Chartoff, who is no longer with us, but he also has produced a ton of other stuff. He's Martin Scorsese's go-to producer as well. But it's a Hollywood legend. And along with him and Sylvester Stallone, they were the guys who said, "All right, Coogler. All right, Mike, go." You know?

Michael B. Jordan: Yup.

Ryan Coogler: They were the only people who had the power to do that.

Michael B. Jordan: Give us the green light to just go, go run with it.

Ryan Coogler: Yeah. So, obviously, those guys hold a special place in our hearts. And, you know, you can't, can't say enough about him.

Michael B. Jordan: Nah.

Ryan Coogler: But I'm in his office...

Michael B. Jordan: Uh-huh...

Ryan Coogler: I'm like, "Irwin, man, you know, Mike and Caple, they said they need these days. They just got off the phone with me, man. They were exasperated. You know, we got to get this done." So he's, like, "All right..."

Michael B. Jordan: "He's exasperated."

Ryan Coogler: He's like—he's like, "All right. Well, that's the schedule right there on my desk." He's like, "Pick that up and kind of go through it and make sure there's nothing in there that's crazy so we don't go to MGM looking like a bunch of assholes, you know what I'm saying, when we ask for this extra day."

So I pick up the schedule that he points to. And it's like a novel, you know what I'm saying? I pick it up, and it's just massive. And I'm flipping through all these pages, and it gets to day 105, day 106, day 107.

Michael B. Jordan: What movie is that?

Ryan Coogler: Yeah. I'm like—I'm like "Wait a sec." Like, I said, "Irwin, are you sure this is the right schedule? It says 108 days." He was like, "108 days? Man, give me that thing!" He takes it. Looks at it. He said, "Oh, I'm sorry, this is The Irishman."

[LAUGHTER]

Michael B. Jordan: That's a crazy story. "Oh, my bad. It was the other one."

Ryan Coogler: "There's Creed there." And I pick it up it, but it's like—yeah it feels like one sheet of paper. You know, you know what I mean?

Michael B. Jordan: “So about this one day I need.” And I never knew that story. That's crazy. That's a great one. But the battles that you had the fight for us that we never knew, like you were showing up in a way that you couldn't show up before.

Ryan Coogler: Yeah.

Michael B. Jordan: You got us what we needed, you know what I'm saying? We got what we needed to actually kind of, like, finish the mission, which was, like, awesome.

Ryan Coogler: And I love the movie, man. It was great.

Michael B. Jordan: Thank you.

Ryan Coogler: Like, watching it was just like, man, no extra stress, you know what I'm saying? I'm just able to see it for what it is. You know, I'm like—it's like being a grandfather, you know what I mean? It's like, fantastic. Man, look at this.

Michael B. Jordan: Yeah, look at my—look at it walking and talking!

Ryan Coogler: It's all great, you know what I'm saying?

Michael B. Jordan: I love it.

Ryan Coogler: So I had that very limited experience like, you know, the few things, like the few calls, the few conversations I had with y'all. And then so it was like, “Man, let's go for real on this.” And what I've learned is just like, it's hard, bro.

Michael B. Jordan: Yeah.

Ryan Coogler: It's very, very complicated, much more political.

Michael B. Jordan: Mm-hmm.

Ryan Coogler: You know, a lot of time, conversations oftentimes got to happen so many more times than they do as a director, right?

Michael B. Jordan: Yes.

Ryan Coogler: You know, you talk to this person, and then you got to go update this other person. You got to update this other person. You got to have a postmortem, you know what I mean, and a recap. And just in terms of, like, advice, I just can't speak enough about two things. Hiring the right people, that's...

Michael B. Jordan: Yup, crucial.

Ryan Coogler: It's everything, you know.

Michael B. Jordan: Crucial.

Ryan Coogler: And taking your time doing that. For any business owners out there that's listening, make sure you're taking your time. You don't rush into hiring anybody ever.

Michael B. Jordan: And listen to your gut.

Ryan Coogler: Yeah.

Michael B. Jordan: Like, I think your instinct, let that be your North Star as much as possible. And, and there's going to be mistakes. Everything's not going to happen exactly how you want it, you know, but just stick with it and see things through.

Ryan Coogler: Yeah. When those projects finished, bro, when Judas finished and when Space Jam finished, when you work on somebody else's vision, you know what I mean, but you help them along the way, it was a whole other level of pride.

Michael B. Jordan: Yeah.

[Prox Recs Theme with Caution to the Wind by Ludwig Göransson]

Ryan Coogler: This is our Prox Recs segment, and we're going to share recommendations for anybody out there who's listening who is starting a company. One of the biggest recs I have is a book called Creativity, Inc. It's about Pixar and its founding. It's written by Ed Catmull. It's a fantastic book. Pixar is, like, right down the street from where I grew up in the Bay Area, the East Bay. And it was a exhilarating experience reading about, you know, how that company came together and created some of the greatest animated films in cinematic history, in my opinion. But it's really an illuminating, under-the-hood look of a company that is firing on all cylinders and kind of building as they go.

And, like, a day-to-day rec that I would have is, you know, try to have as many standing meetings with your entire company present as possible. That was actually advice I got from Jim Morris who actually runs Pixar now. Have as many meetings where everybody can kind of, you know, look each other in the eyes whether it's over Zoom, whether it's in person and kind of talk about what the company is and have a chance to talk about any issues that may be coming up. At Prox we meet pretty much once a week at least, sometimes more. As we've been doing that, it's been incredibly helpful.

Michael B. Jordan: That's awesome. I was going to pretty much say something similar as far as, like, having team and company meetings as much as possible when you first start up, getting in a space and talking through the company as you guys are defining it because it's going to evolve and it's going to evolve with time. So whatever you start out with, 9 times out of 10, is not going to be what you end up with a couple of months from now, you know what I'm saying, you know, a year from now. So continue to have that evolving conversation as the culture, as your company is defined, I think it's going to be extremely crucial for you as you move forward because that's going help define how you hire, who you hire, who's the right fit. It'll help quickly determine what's working for you and what's not working for you based on those core values that you guys are constantly refining as a group. So I think that's kind of like the number one recommendation I have.

[In Proximity Theme Music by Ludwig Göransson]

[VOICEOVER]

Paola Mardo: In Proximity is a production of Proximity Media. If you like the show, be sure to follow, rate, and review it on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or your favorite podcast app and tell your friends and loved ones to do the same. If you have someone in your life who you think would like this show, send them a link.

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The show is produced by me, Paola Mardo. Executive Producers are Ryan Coogler, Zinzi Coogler, Sev Ohanian, and me. Our theme song and additional music is composed by Ludwig Göransson. Ken Nana is our Sound Designer and Mix Engineer. Polina Cherezova is our Production Assistant. Audio editors for this episode are Shana Deloria and me.

Special thanks to Monica Sonand, Noah Gorelick, Ngawang Samphel, the whole Proximity Media team, and to you for listening. Meet you back here next week.

[VOICEOVER ENDS]

[MUSIC STOPS]

Michael B. Jordan: I'll go. I'll go first. Hey, it's Michael B. Jordan. I'm, you know, sitting across from Ryan Coogler. And, yeah, we're here to talk through some life experiences with my brother.

Ryan Coogler: Hey, can I—can I make him do a take two? All right.

[LAUGHTER]