

In Proximity
Episode 10: Inside Proximity: Working in Film & TV
Final Transcript

[Music/Old Radio Sounds by Ken Nana]

[VOICEOVER]

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

[VOICEOVER ENDS]

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D'Angelo Louis: Me neither.

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Dezi Gallegos: Yeah? Dude, let's go.

[In Proximity Theme Music by Ludwig Göransson]

[VOICEOVER]

Paola Mardo: You're listening to In Proximity.

And this is a very special episode of our show. It's a new kind of episode we're calling Inside Proximity where colleagues at Proximity Media will sit down with me, Paola Mardo, head of audio here, and we'll talk a little bit about what they do and answer some questions sent in by you, our listeners.

A few weeks ago, we put out a call on our @ProximityMedia Instagram and asked folks to send in their questions about working in the film and television industry. So we'll talk about that today, specifically about working at a production company.

Thank you, by the way, to everyone who sent in questions through voicemails and by sending us audio files. We couldn't answer everything, but I listened to them all and we tried to pick questions that covered most of what you all were asking about.

Quick update before we start—In Proximity is going to take a short break for about two weeks. More about this at the end of our episode. So be sure to listen to the end

And now, here is our Inside Proximity episode with my colleagues who've worked in both of our film and TV departments, D'Angelo "D'Lo" Louis and Dezi Gallegos.

[VOICEOVER ENDS]

Paola Mardo: Hi everyone, I'm Paola Mardo, head of audio at Proximity Media, and I'm super excited to be hosting our first Inside Proximity episode with two of my fabulous, amazing colleagues here. And I'll let them introduce themselves. Let's start with Dezi.

Dezi Gallegos: Hi, everybody. My name is Dezi Gallegos. I am a director of development in television here at Proximity. I've been with the company since it was founded five years ago. I started off as an assistant to Sev Ohanian, who is one of the founders of the company and was promoted to creative executive working in both film and in television a few years ago. And then, most recently, following the release of Creed III, was promoted to director of development, and I'm working right now exclusively in television.

Paola Mardo: Perfect. And then, to my other side, I have D'Lo. Introduce yourself, please.

D'Angelo Louis: All right. My name is D'Angelo "D'Lo" Louis. I'm a creative exec in television at Proximity Media. I also started off with the company about five years ago. Started off as an assistant to Ryan Coogler and Zinzi Coogler. Got promoted to creative exec, what, last year? I started off, actually, with music, TV, and film, but the focus became narrowed. And now, basically, I'm all TV.

Paola Mardo: Awesome. So Proximity Media, for those who don't know, is a multimedia production company. And we basically tell stories in various mediums, right? There's the film side, television. We have a great music division that works on our soundtracks and other music projects, a nonfiction team that works in our documentary film and television projects, and then my audio division that produces this podcast you're listening to right now and other audio projects. Thank you.

Listeners, you can't see what I see right now, but D'Lo did a little applause on his mic. But yeah, I think that's what's so cool about this company, is that, you know, we're all creatives in different fields, and yet we still find time to come together and, you know, find ways to work together when we can or at least exchange ideas. And these Inside Proximity episodes are sort of a way to do that with our listeners, too.

And for today's episode, we'll be focusing on film and television, which is why I wanted to speak with both of you. And just to kick things off, you know, you guys have been here since basically the beginning of this company, right, the very, very early days with our founders, Ryan Coogler,

Zinzi Coogler, and Sev Ohanian. Can you talk about just, first of all, what your roles were at the time, and how did you even get started in that role?

Dezi Gallegos: Absolutely. I started working with Sev Ohanian, one of the founders of Proximity, when I was still in film school. I was a senior in college doing my undergrad at USC, and he was a part-time professor there. And I knew pretty much right away. I think I knew from the way that he interviewed me for the TA job that, oh, this is somebody that's going to take over the world because I was just interviewing to be a teaching assistant, and he was like, you know, "Pull up Google spreadsheets on your computer. Share a document with me. I want to see you problem-solve live," and then giving me things to do live in the moment. You know, "Pitch me a movie. You have two minutes, go."

And I knew pretty much right away. I was like, "Oh, this person expects a lot of the people around him, and he also leads with decency." So I started working with him and knew pretty early on, like, "I want to find a way to make myself indispensable to this person. I want to find a way to get him to rely on me and really prove that I can work at the level that he expects of his colleagues and of the people that report to him." And so, you know, after I graduated from film school, Sev brought me on board to a movie called *Run* and then, you know, I worked under Sev and his producing partner, Natalie Qasabian. Or course, if you haven't listened to their podcast episode, run and listen to that right now.

And then, all the while that we were working on *Run*, I was hearing these whispers of Sev teaming up with Ryan and Zinzi to found Proximity. And, for me, it was just, like, an absolute dream. I, of course, like so many, I'm sure, of the listeners, have been a fan of Ryan's work since he started making films. And the opportunity to play a small part of building this company that could bring more movies like *Fruitvale* and *Creed* and *Black Panther* into the world was just the most exciting thing in the world. And then also to be able to continue to work with Sev, who was my boss at the time—of course, I was his assistant, but was also an extraordinary mentor to me.

Those opening days at Proximity were wild because, you know, Ryan, Zinzi, and Sev are brilliant creatives, brilliant leaders, and also had never founded a company before. And so it was a lot of figuring it out as we went along. We dove in right away on our first two film projects, *Space Jam: A New Legacy* and *Judas and the Black Messiah*. So it was giving notes in those projects. It was getting settled in the Warner Brothers lot, starting to work on *Space Jam*. It was really all collaborating to lay the foundation for I think what we all knew from the beginning could be something pretty tremendous and impactful in our industry.

Paola Mardo: D'Lo, your episode with Pete Nicks, our head of non-fiction, is really great. So I know you've shared your background on there already and how you knew Ryan and met him and all that. But, yeah, can you just talk about what it was like to jump into this right, like as your first job at Proximity or how that came about?

D'Angelo Louis: Yeah, so how it happened was we had the idea of me coming on as Ryan's assistant because his younger brother, Keenan Coogler, had kind of moved on and started writing. And he told me, "All right, be ready." And this was like maybe—took maybe four months, but one day he was like, "Hey, we better go get a laptop. Hey, I need you to go to the Warner Brothers lot." I'm like, all right.

I remember parking, walked into the lot, and I'm walking, and I'm just looking because there's so much going on. It's like a movie in itself. You got teams moving furniture, sets moving, just all

type of stuff going on. I'm walking around with my backpack like it's the first day of high school. And as I get to the building that we're supposed to be, I meet Dezi. Introduces himself. I'm like, "What's up?" not knowing this will be one of the best friendships I ever have in my life.

He introduced me to Sev, Sev Ohanian, and Sev pulls me straight in. And I don't know what happened. He clicked it on, and it just turned into a job interview. I thought—I was like, "I thought I already had the job." And he's just asking me questions about what I wanted to do, what I was thinking about, did I have any experience? He knew what experience I had. He was just asking me.

I don't know if he was just giving me the third degree just, you know, as a formality or something, but he was like, "All right, I'll show you where your desk is at." And, all of a sudden, Sev slams the Space Jam script on the desk. He was like, "I heard you've been doing coverage. Need you to take notes on that," or whatever. Instantly start sweating, but it was one of those moments where I was like, "Okay, sink or swim."

Paola Mardo: Right. So this was the script for Space Jam: A New Legacy?

D'Angelo Louis: Legacy, yeah.

Paola Mardo: Long before the project was going to get made.

D'Angelo Louis: Yeah, yeah. This was—

Paola Mardo: It was just literally a paper script, and they gave it to you and... Can you just, you know, for listeners who may not know, what is coverage, and why is it so important?

D'Angelo Louis: Well, coverage is when you take a script or a piece of writing or whatever, a book, anything, you read it, you give your synopsis on it, tell, you know—basically, you'll tell everybody what it's about in a short form. And then you go into detail about the theme, the tone, the characters, the storyline. You know, you just critique it in ways that would give somebody that's reading this coverage a idea of what's going on in this script without them having to read the entire book or the entire script.

And then you give, basically, what you think about it. And is it possibly a Proximity project? Or whatever company you're working for. I think I first seen Dezi's coverage because I think I asked you for, like, an example of coverage. And when I—when I seen his, I was like, "Oh, shit."

Paola Mardo: But can you elaborate? Like, why? Like, what did you see in his writing?

D'Angelo Louis: Because my experience with coverage is—I didn't have a formal training of how to do coverage. It was like, read this, tell you what I think about it. Coverage is—you know, it's levels to everything.

Dezi Gallegos: I'll say about coverage—I was working for Sev for a bit as his teaching assistant. And one of the ways I knew very early on that I wanted to let this person know, like, I want to go the extra mile—so I think one of the first things that I was able to do for Sev was I was always like, "If you ever have too many scripts on your plate or anything like that, like, I would be more than happy to just, like, read them and do coverage on them. Just, like, feel free to throw me anything at any point."

And at one point, Sev finally, like, I think weeks into the semester, was like, "No pressure to read these. I got these submissions. Here's like two scripts. Like, no worries, you can take a few weeks on them." And I was like—the day that I got those, I was so excited because I was like, "This is my moment." And so I, like, canceled my day and instantly turned around coverage on those two scripts within hours and had them in Sev's inbox because I wanted to say to him right away, "If you send me something to do, I'll do it, do it well, and do it quickly."

D'Angelo Louis: When did you first have to do coverage? Was it before school?

Dezi Gallegos: It was in school. I had a few internships in college that asked me to do coverage, and I found, like, you know, it's nobody's favorite thing in the world. But I think what I appreciated about it was how to, in the summary of whatever we'd read, to challenge myself to make it as readable as possible. So rather than being clinical and corporate or trying to use too flowery language, to just have a two- to three-page summary that you could read and enjoy the story as much as you might have had you actually read the document.

And then for the comments section where I actually got to give my opinion, that, of course, was my favorite part because I could go crazy a little bit and just, like, say candidly what I felt about it. And I think that—you know, I would often challenge myself to just not hold back and keep my fingers crossed that I didn't go too far in tearing apart something.

Paola Mardo: Yeah, it's interesting because coverage is not really something in the podcast industry, but because I've seen the ways you guys have used it and how it's so helpful for you and also as a team, you know, to be able to have people review something and then have a discussion, that's super helpful. And we've actually started to implement that in our department.

D'Angelo Louis: It helps if you can type a million words per minute like Dezi.

Dezi Gallegos: I still, actually, I still finger type. Like, I never learned how to type the proper way.

D'Angelo Louis: Me neither.

Dezi Gallegos: Yeah.

Paola Mardo: No, like, the two-finger type?

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Dezi Gallegos: Yeah? Dude, let's go. That makes me so happy.

[KN 9 to 5 by Ludwig Göransson]

Paola Mardo: There's so many different ways to get into this industry, so many different ways to work at a production company. Sometimes it's, you know, as formal as apply for the job, but sometimes it's who you know or, like, you know, someone you met in film school that handed you a script. There are a lot of listeners who don't currently work in the industry or aspire to. What are different ways that people can get into a production company job, either as an assistant or something else?

Dezi Gallegos: So I think that there's a number of different ways to break into this industry. If you are, you know, deciding where you're going to go to college, film school, USC specifically, I owe so much, and I owe—you know, you can draw a direct line between USC film school and the career that I ultimately ended up having. And there's a lot of USC within Proximity. Ryan, Sev—

Paola Mardo: We do have a lot of—even on the audio side, Annenberg.

Dezi Gallegos: Exactly, yes.

Paola Mardo: But it doesn't have to be USC, obviously.

Dezi Gallegos: But it definitely does not have to be USC.

Paola Mardo: Yeah, or film school, but it is one way.

Dezi Gallegos: 100%. It doesn't have to be film school. That's one path, I think, that can at least expose you to thinking critically about films and TV shows and expose you to different internships and such. So I think that's one way of taking your first steps into the industry. I'm so proud of the internship program that we have here at Proximity. I was a big advocate for founding that a few years ago, and Ryan, Zinzi, and Sev have been so supportive in mounting that program. We do, like, weekly mentorship sessions and such.

I had some extraordinary internships while in college that I'm so, so grateful for—David Permut, who's still a mentor to me to this day, Material Pictures. Learned a lot from those, and I think that if you want to go the production company route, internships are a great way to land at a place and prove yourself or, at minimum, just, like, learn what you want to do or what you don't want to do as much.

D'Angelo Louis: I think it's a two-part thing when you're talking about getting into this industry because, like you said, it's a million ways to get into it, who you know. Some people get lucky. Some people put all their energy into getting into this space, and when they finally get it, it's so, you know, rewarding. I think it's the step right after once you get in is what's super important, about what you do to stay here, meaning, like, people get in these spaces and drop—I won't say drop the ball. Sometimes it's like, you know, something out of their control, but the people that last kind of, like, do the work. They come to play ball. They press play every day whether they are knowledgeable of that space or not, or they went to school for it or not.

It's the people that take advantage of that opportunity after they get in the door. It's the thing about, you know, once I'm here, what am I going to do now? Because that was the question I had for myself, like, okay, my job is to learn everything I can possibly learn. I always felt like I was behind. So I was like, "Oh, I got to learn this. I got to learn that. I got to figure this out so fast." And I think that drive would help anybody.

Paola Mardo: Right. Let's fast-forward a little bit to today. So, currently, you guys have ascended from the assistant role—D'Lo as a creative executive and Dezi as a director of development. Can you just walk us through, like, what a typical day is like for you two in each of your roles?

D'Angelo Louis: So let's just start off, I came from a film production background, so to speak. So TV was a newer thing to me. And what I did, I started talking to TV execs. And one person told me one thing. He was like, "Hey, every day you need to read the trades." So I've been on Deadline every morning. Like, I'll check my emails, and then I'll go through Deadline, the articles, skim through, get familiar with the names, get familiar with the agency, what the moves are being made.

After that, usually the day is full of general meetings, not necessarily production meetings, but creative meetings for potential projects, reading a bunch of pilots, and you're trying to find writers to put with them. That's, like, the simplest way to put it as of right now.

Paola Mardo: So as a creative executive, you're sort of evaluating material that comes in, but also when we have projects coming up or that we're sort of interested in, finding the right talent, I guess, to match up with that.

D'Angelo Louis: Yeah, yeah, of course.

Paola Mardo: Is that right?

D'Angelo Louis: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So—but I thought I was done reading, but I wasn't.

Paola Mardo: The reading never stops.

D'Angelo Louis: The reading never stops. It never stops. But it's just exercising that muscle to, you know, be able to filter through projects that we don't want and projects that we potentially might do and things that we—you know, have to do. That's a skill in itself, you know? Because the thing is, it's like—it's a lot of things that I actually like, but is this a Proximity project? And that's when you rely on your colleagues, be like, "Hey, I like this. I think this." And even me and Dezi disagreed on things, but at the end of the day, is it a Proximity project, you know what I'm saying?

Dezi Gallegos: I think that a lot of this job is reading scripts, taking meetings to find the people that you want to fight for. And then, when the time comes to fight for them, really going to bat. And that is, honestly, one of the best parts of the job of being an executive or a producer, finding talent that you're like, "Yes, I believe in your voice. And I'm going to use all of the connections and the creative power that we have here at this extraordinary production company to try and realize your vision and something that can speak to many, many people."

I live a very similar day to D'Lo. You know, it's so interesting because the job of executives or—you know, here at Proximity, specifically—I think can also straddle with being basically junior

producers. By that, I mean, you know, D'Lo and I were on set every single day for Creed III. He was an associate producer on that project. I was a co producer on it. Those weren't our guaranteed titles when we were actually on set every single day. We were just doing the job of working to support our amazing director, Michael B. Jordan, and the other producers on the project to make the best movie that we possibly could.

And as a, you know, executive or a producer on that project, that can entail just about anything. Our life as executives, producers on the set of Creed looked so crazy different than our life does right now, where we're not in production on anything. We're in development on a number of projects right now. Now, you know, the days, of course, are still packed, but I feel like we are living the life more of, like, day-to-day executive living, which is, like, you wake up, you read a few scripts, you take a few general meetings, you take a few project meetings.

And you're constantly meeting with your colleagues and all asking the questions of: how can we take the projects that we have on our slate currently and move them forward? Are any of the projects that we're reviewing right now the projects that we could spend years of our life trying to make? And I think those already probably the two core questions that are driving our days every single day, which is a lot of fun, I feel. I mean, we're super privileged to be able to do what we do and with people that we genuinely love. Like, that is—that's a gift.

[Good Times by Ludwig Göransson]

Paola Mardo: So we have listeners who've sent us voice messages. We put a call out and asked listeners, you know, to send us any questions they have about working in the film and television industry. And I'd like to play some of them for you guys and have you answer some of these questions.

Dezi Gallegos: Amazing.

D'Angelo Louis: Sure, that's what's up.

Dezi Gallegos: Yeah, I'm so excited. Let's do it.

Paola Mardo: All right, so our first question is from Ashley.

[CLIP: ASHLEY]

Ashley: Hello, my name is Ashley. I'm from the IE (Inland Empire). I'm a young director with a plethora of completed feature-length scripts, pitch decks, the whole shebang. So my question is: what advice can you give in regards to standing out amongst the crowd and getting projects sold or greenlit for production? Thank you so much for your time.

[END CLIP]

D'Angelo Louis: I mean, you got to get eyes on those scripts. I know a lot of people that hold on to a lot of material they work on, and, like, they hold on. And I guess they'll overwrite because they're always trying to fix it. But you're kind of, like, writing in this bubble. You in your own world. I feel like, for starters, get as many eyes as you can on those scripts and let people give you notes and give you those—give you that feedback so, when you do have this, you know, complete packaged product that you want to share with maybe an agent or a production company, you feel confident about it, and you didn't sit in a garage and just sit with

your thoughts and your ideas, you know? I feel like you got to let other people get their eyes on it.

Dezi Gallegos: 100%. I echo that completely, and earnestly cultivating their feedback and making sure that you have relationships with the people. And if you can build those relationships and have those people that you can send things back and forth from and know that you'll be honest with them and they'll be honest with you, those relationships are invaluable. The best advice that I can give, just given that, you know, meeting an agent or a manager—agents and managers are the people that are generally sending material to us. So, as a production company where we're primarily making movies with studios, and, on our TV side, we have a five-year exclusive TV deal with Disney, so how material comes to us, they're coming through agents and managers.

So, as an aspiring creator, like, a step in your career if you want to write, if you want to direct will be getting representation because they'll be the ones that would send your material to something like Proximity. I can't speak directly to, like, how to get an agent or a manager. Like, it is such a crapshoot and can involve just, like, getting a short in a festival and them seeing your work and then them wanting to represent you. I would not recommend just sending out a bunch of cold emails. I don't think that that's the best way to approach it.

I think what you can and should do in the meantime is just be working to make the best possible material that you can, studying other pitch decks for reference and trying to make the stuff that is succinct and just absolutely wows people, being conscious of what's being looked for in the marketplace right now. If you're making a deck for a TV show, knowing that—one of the things, I think, that's extra looked for in the TV industry right now is shows with a clear engine, a clear narrative drive where you get to the end of the episode and—sometimes we'll say at Proximity, we want to make TV shows where you're afraid to go on Twitter because you might have an episode spoiled.

Is your show that? Does it have a propulsive driving engine that can carry you throughout? If you're, you know, writing a feature film, what is the thing that the character urgently wants and the conflict that is coming up against them to—that stops them from just being able to easily get it? Does it have a clear genre? Is it personal to you? Answering those questions, though they may seem basic, is what will elevate your stuff above the pack by a mile.

[Juno Arp Stinger]

Paola Mardo: So our next question is from Chris.

[CLIP: CHRIS]

Chris: Hello, my name is Chris. I've been an educator for over 25 years in the Bay Area. Started at Dewey High School in Oakland and wrapped it up as the principal of San Francisco's Juvenile Hall. It's been a wild ride for sure. My question is: how do I take my skillset and experiences from education and transfer into the world of film and TV with a long-term goal of telling the stories of the amazing resilient students and youth that I've met along the way? Any starting points would be welcome, and I'm willing to do the work.

[END CLIP]

D'Angelo Louis: I think I kind of addressed that in a previous podcast with Pete Nicks about where your creativity comes from. I'm pretty sure he has a million stories about just all type of aspects of that element of life or where he's been and the people he came in contact with. I think you start there. You use that as a source, like whether it's a short script or a pilot or—you get those stories down on paper, and then you start building those stories from there. Everybody has different backgrounds, comes from different places or whatever, but it's a way that you tell your story, and you tell your story, and you tell your story that I'll be able to relate to it. You'll put me in the passenger seat and take me on a ride in your neighborhood or wherever.

I think he has to get those stories down on paper. No matter how, you know, rough they might seem or sound, just write them down. Get them down on paper. That's when you start googling and the YouTube of how to write a script or how to write a pilot, or even just a outline so you can figure out: what's your premise? What are you trying to tell with this story? What genre is it, you know? You start at the bottom, and you just get them out on paper, and you go step-by-step.

Paola Mardo: So first thing, first step is really just write it down.

D'Angelo Louis: Getting it out on paper. You got to get it out. You got to get it out.

Dezi Gallegos: I agree with that 100%. My dad was a teacher and then an elementary school principal in the Bay Area, and so education and all that, of course, was just tremendously valued in my household. And thank you of course for—Chris, for all of the work that you've done over these years with these kids.

First and foremost, yes, it is just writing. It is—it is writing even on the days where it feels excruciating. I love that the way that you approached your question was drawing on your personal experience, your experience as an educator for—I think you may have said 25 years. The thing that is said to writers so much that it becomes a cliché, but it doesn't become any less true, is write what you know. Write from a place that is personal to you.

When I mentioned earlier about, like, how we're making stories that I think are—in many ways, are vehicles for emotion, I think that one of the ways that you can tap into that is just by tapping into what makes you feel emotional. What makes you laugh when you think back about your time teaching these kids? What makes you feel that, like, you know, wrenching feeling that any of us can tap into when we think about the more trying parts of our lives? And then, whether it's something that is a true story or something that is fictionalized and fit more cleanly into a genre, I think that you can start to find something that you can then show to people that you can then submit to competitions and all the stuff that we said in the last question.

I think my advice in terms of breaking into the industry, if you do want to write on that subject matter, just given that there has been so much content around education and such, and there are, of course, like, you know, some movies that have slipped into clichés, is to really know the genre that you want to write within. Like, is it—is it a thriller? Is it a heist project? Is it—you know, like, what is the way that you want to tell this story that you think is not only interesting and personal to you but also has real narrative drive and could potentially connect with an audience? That, I think is essential.

Paola Mardo: Yeah, I think all of that is so helpful. And you know, you guys are the experts here, but I will say—you know, because this is also in my side of the industry, in audio—just always be learning. Read books about writing. If you, you know, haven't written a script yet, there's tons of screenwriting books. Listen to podcasts.

We have, obviously, some great conversations about writing and specifically one with Sev Ohanian and Aneesh Chaganty, who are writing partners on films like *Searching* and *Missing and Run*. And, you know, there's a great—John August, a great screenwriter, and Craig Mazin have a very popular, legendary podcast about screenwriting called *Scriptnotes*. I mean, there's just so much information out there now that, you know, you don't have to—even if you are—you have a day job as a teacher or whatever it is, there are ways you can start practicing your craft, writing your ideas down, and then start turning them into whatever it is, a movie or a TV show.

Did I get that right? You guys are the pros.

Dezi Gallegos: 100% You stole my Prox Rec.

[LAUGHTER]

Dezi Gallegos: I was going to—

Paola Mardo: Darn it.

Dezi Gallegos: I was going to recommend a couple screenwriting books and *Scriptnotes*, but it's all good.

Paola Mardo: We'll get to that.

Dezi Gallegos: It's all good. We'll get to it.

Paola Mardo: No, I love that. I love that. It means we're on the same page.

Dezi Gallegos: Yes, 100% on the same page.

Paola Mardo: Cool. And, okay, so we have time for one more question. So this one is from Latora.

[CLIP: LATORA]

Latora Godwin: My name is Latora Godwin. I grew up in the Bay Area. I grew up in Oakland and Berkeley, and I have a question about short films. What do you think is a great approach to making a really good complete short film? And for those of us who are looking to go into the film festival circuit, what should we be looking to get out of going to film festivals for those of us who are creating short films?

[END CLIP]

Dezi Gallegos: This isn't a mandate. Maybe I'm going to slip a little bit into personal preference with this answer, but I am more gripped by the shorts that have tension and that have real conflict and a real character journey in them. I think there are some shorts that are a little bit more slice-of-life that can be beautiful. In my estimation, I want to see something where a character has, like, a clear mini arc where there is dramatic tension. I feel like those can stand out a bit more, at least for me. Cultivating the feedback of those around you at every stage in

the process, giving them your short scripts, getting their feedback on that, cultivating a community of people around you that are willing to support you in the making of your shorts.

And then when you are about ready to start submitting to the festival circuit, the festivals cost a lot of money, and I think there is a sometimes unfair barrier to entry there although, of course, like, festivals need to pay for the amazing work that they do. Lean on the people around you for what the short actually is. And if it is not the one to send to a million festivals and to spend those hundreds of dollars, know that that's okay, that it is not a mark on you as a filmmaker and how you'll be forever, that you should feel so proud of the fact that you set out to make something, and then you made it. And then keep going.

D'Angelo Louis: Ditto. No, no, no.

[LAUGHTER]

You were right about the letting everybody read it. Let everybody give their notes. You got the option to take the notes or not. I've done a little writing myself, and I'm very—I won't say I'm good because I don't want to seem like I'm tooting my own horn, but I'm okay with somebody just tearing my script or my whatever my writing is apart because I'll go back and sit with that. I'm not saying that I think about what type of person they are, but I'll try to look—their POV, their point of view, like where they looking at this from.

And now, okay, if I plan on letting a wide audience see this, okay, people are going to look at this thing that I'm creating from different perspectives. And I want everyone to be able to relate to what I'm doing. Or unless I'm not making it for everyone, this is not for you, but I have to be okay with this not being for them and taking their notes for what it—you know, for what it's worth.

Dezi Gallegos: Creativity is an iterative process. It is made from trial and error.

Paola Mardo: Right. There's that saying, "Kill your darlings," where sometimes, like, you know, maybe you're so in love with a scene or a part of the story or whatever it is—

D'Angelo Louis: What? Tell me about it.

Paola Mardo: And you just have—you got to let it go. You got to let it go sometimes. It could come back.

D'Angelo Louis: I mean, but you pick your battles.

Paola Mardo: Yes.

D'Angelo Louis: You know? You know what to fight for because it's a collective effort. The best idea wins, right?

Paola Mardo: Yeah, and it's all in service of the story, so—

D'Angelo Louis: Yeah, 100%.

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

Paola Mardo: Well, thank you, Dezi and D'Lo for joining me on Inside Proximity. Before we wrap up our conversation, I did want to have our usual Prox Recs segment. We've shared a lot of recommendations here and there. I may have stolen something from Dezi, but let's do it anyway. I think this is a fun segment. I love hearing your guys' recommendations. Let's start with D'Lo on this one.

D'Angelo Louis: I feel like I always do quotes, quotes and shit.

[LAUGHTER]

Paola Mardo: Which is all good. I love quotes.

D'Angelo Louis: You don't have to be great when you start, but you got to start to be great, if that makes sense.

Dezi Gallegos: It makes perfect sense.

Paola Mardo: Yeah. Let that sink in.

D'Angelo Louis: You can't have any, like, apprehension about what you're trying to do. You got to go for it. Like, you know, "Hey, I'm about to suck for a month at this, but I'm about to do it every day until"—because the satisfaction comes from when—like, it's like when you're a kid, and you play this video game, and you cannot beat this level ever. And, like, you've been doing it every day after school trying to beat this level. But one day all of a sudden you like, "Oh, shit. Oh," and boom, you beat it, and you running around the house screaming. It just—I still get that feeling when I accomplish something. So that would be my Prox Rec.

Dezi Gallegos: I love that so much. You know, no matter how far you get in your career, you can still afford to learn that lesson. I think that is a lifelong thing for sure. I love that.

My Prox Rec, I think we've already talked in this podcast about being a lifelong student, about wanting to learn as much as you can. And so I wanted to recommend, like, the first screenwriting book that I ever read, which is *Story* by Robert McKee. You know, Sev turned me on to *Save the Cat* by Blake Snyder. Read Aristotle's *Poetics*. Read everything you can about screenwriting. And the reason why I bring this up on *In Proximity*, even though I'm sure that any aspiring screenwriter out there has been given that advice over and over again, is because I also think it is essential for aspiring producers and executives. To be able to learn the vocabulary of writers and to be able to speak in that language, I think is so crucial.

And D'Lo and I are still fairly early on in our career. We're absolutely learning as executives right now. And just off what D'Lo said, I don't think we are as great right now as we're going to be down the line, although we've been privileged to have some extraordinary opportunities so far. I think if there's one thing that has helped me considerably in my, like, early career as an executive is being really familiar with Act I, Act II, Act III, these—you know, the terminology that writers might use in cracking a story.

It's liberating when you have that language because you can get even more in the trenches with somebody, and it's so exciting and energizing. There's nothing like it in this job when the writer knows there's a problem, you know there is a problem, and you're talking with them about it, and then you're like, "Oh, I think it's this." And then the writer's like, "I can't wait to write that." And

then you go off and you're like, "Wow, this is so freaking cool. If we just cracked this, that's going to be in the movie. And people all around the world are going to see that."

Paola Mardo: That's great. I want to go read a bunch of books right now. We already mentioned a great podcast, Scriptnotes, for screenwriting, but I also just want to recommend Team Deakins. It's a wonderful podcast all about literally any job in filmmaking, but also I think television, just the business of making movies and TV. It's hosted by acclaimed cinematographer Roger Deakins and his collaborator, James Deakins, and they've had everyone from, like, post supervisor to a writer, director, and even agents. So, you know, I think that would be a really nice compliment to a lot of the things we've been talking about in this episode. So, thank you D'Lo and Dezi for being on Inside Proximity.

[MUSIC FADES IN]

Dezi Gallegos: Thanks, Paola. I recommend In Proximity. I think this is the coolest podcast out there.

D'Angelo Louis: Yeah.

[APPLAUSE]

Paola Mardo: Thank you, guys. Thank you for the applause. Thanks, guys.

Dezi Gallegos: This was so fun. Thank you.

D'Angelo Louis: Thank you. Thank you.

[In Proximity Theme Music by Ludwig Göransson]

[VOICEOVER]

Paola Mardo: That was our first ever Inside Proximity episode. Thank you so much for listening. Hope that was fun and helpful. And we hope to do more of this in the future. Thank you again to everyone who sent in questions.

Now, quick housekeeping update. We're taking a short break on this show, about two weeks. We're a small team, so thanks for your understanding as we work on a few things including new episodes about upcoming Proximity films. We've got Anthem premiering at Tribeca Film Festival next month and Stephen Curry: Underrated. Both documentary films are directed by our head of nonfiction, Pete Nicks. And they're coming to you this summer.

So we'll be back in about two weeks with more In Proximity. Please stay tuned. And follow the show on your podcast app if you don't already. Leave us a rating and review on Apple Podcasts and Spotify. Those really, really help other people find the show. And most importantly, share this show with your friends and loved ones. Go on, send them a link to this episode, or one your favorites.

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In Proximity is a production of Proximity Media. 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 editing for this episode is by Judybelle Camangyan.

Special thanks to the whole Proximity Media team and to you for listening to In Proximity. See you in about two weeks.

[VOICEOVER ENDS]

[MUSIC STOPS]

Dezi Gallegos: D'Lo works out every single day. He just intimidates all of us. But you've inspired me. You've inspired me. I've been—

Paola Mardo: I love that. Let's do it!

D'Angelo Louis: For a moment, Dezi was working out with me at Warner Brothers. He was working out with me every day. We would work out after work, I think. I think we would work out after work.

Dezi Gallegos: Mm-hmm, and then a whole global pandemic happened.

Paola Mardo: And then what happened?

D'Angelo Louis: Global pandemic.

Paola Mardo: Okay, okay.

Dezi Gallegos: I slowed down a little bit. D'Lo, I feel like, sped up. D'Lo was working out more.